

U.S. Special Operations Command MacDill AFB, Florida

Tip of the Spear

August 2025



**Team SOCOM wins 111 medals
through adaptive sports at
2025 DOD Warrior Games**

United States Special Operations Command



Team SOCOM wins 111 medals through adaptive sports at 2025 DoD Warrior Games ... 32

Tip of the Spear

U.S. Army Gen. Bryan P. Fenton
Commander, USSOCOM

U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Andrew J. Krogman
Command Senior Enlisted Leader, USSOCOM

U.S. Army Col. Alexandra Weiskopf
Special Operations Public Affairs Director

U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Juan Munoz
Special Operations Public Affairs Sergeant Major

Michael Bottoms

Managing Editor

Gunnery Sgt. Kayla Rivera

Staff NCOIC

U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller

Command Photographer

U.S. Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Cutler Brice

Command Photographer

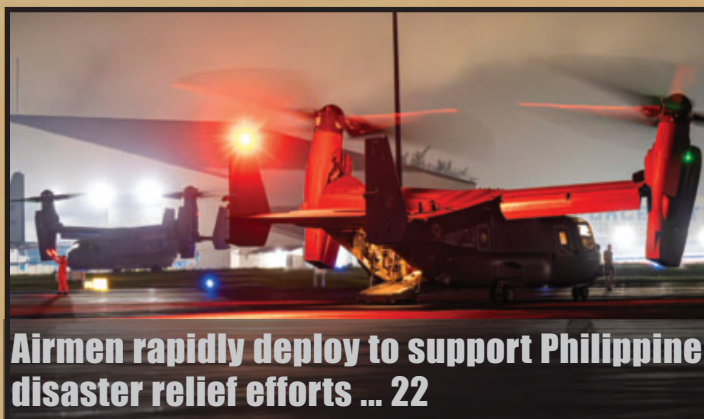
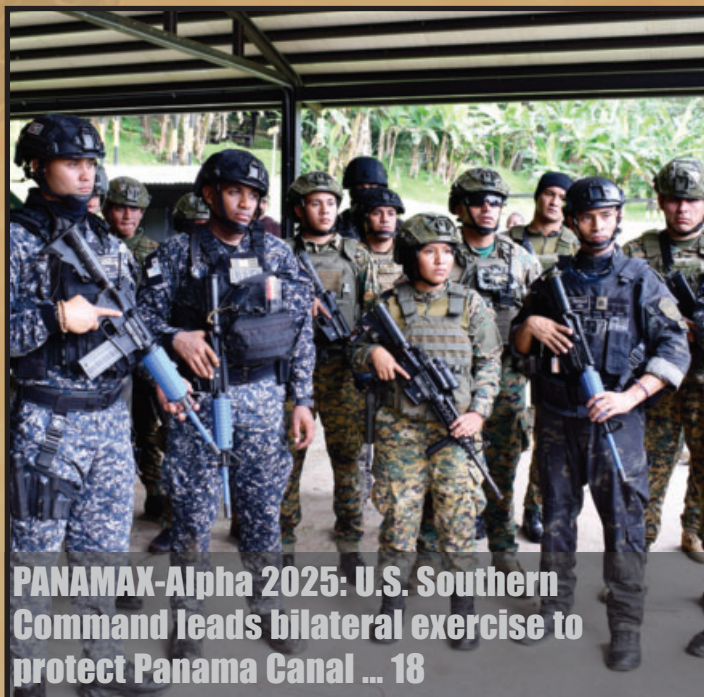
2022 Defense Media Merit Award Winner

This is a U.S. Special Operations Command publication. Contents are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, Department of Defense or USSOCOM. The content is edited, prepared and provided by the USSOCOM Communication Office, 7701 Tampa Point Blvd., MacDill AFB, Fla., 33621, phone (813) 826-8800, DSN 299-8800. An electronic copy can be found at www.socom.mil. The editor of the Tip of the Spear reserves the right to edit all copy presented for publication.

(Cover) Randi Thomas, a member of Team Special Operations Command, competes in a race during field events at the 2025 Department of Defense Warrior Games in Colorado Springs, Colorado, July 23, 2025. The DoD Warrior Games was held July 18-26, and brought hundreds of wounded, ill and injured active duty and veteran military members to compete in adaptive sports as part of their recovery journey. (Above) Michael Bradley, a member of Team Special Operations Command, participates in a road race during the 2025 Department of Defense Warrior Games in Colorado Springs, Colorado, July 19, 2025. (U.S. Air Force photos by Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller)

The Quiet Professionals

Highlights



Departments

Theater Special Operations Commands

Forging stronger bonds: U.S., Gabon complete joint exchange training ... 4

Strategic imperative: strengthening African security through partnership ... 6

USSOCENT hosts its first Israel Defense Forces SOCOM Senior Seminar ... 8

BRIGHT STAR 25 pyramid military free fall... 10

352d Special Operations Wing conduct bilateral exercise in Romania ... 12

Talisman Sabre 25: Special Tactics Airmen perform military free fall ... 16

PANAMAX-Alpha 2025: U.S. Southern Command leads bilateral exercise to protect Panama Canal ... 18

U.S. Army Special Operations Command

USASOC Best Squad Competition Ruck March... 20

Air Force Special Operations Command

Airmen rapidly deploy to support Philippine disaster relief efforts ... 22

Sleeker skies: MC-130J tests new aerodynamic enhancements ... 24

EW 25.2: AFSOC heightens warfighting readiness during landmark DLE series ... 26

Marine Forces Special Operations Command

Talisman Sabre 25: Marine Raiders enhance combat readiness ... 30

Headquarters

Team SOCOM wins 111 medals through adaptive sports at 2025 DoD Warrior Games ... 32

Quarterly 1st SOF Truth event spotlights steps being taken in mitigating blast overpressure ... 34

A bridge across the Atlantic: Italian lieutenant colonel strengthens US-Italy defense cooperation at USSOCOM ... 36

JSOU's Enlisted Academy hosts GATEWAY course for USSOCOM, USCENTCOM ... 38

U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



Forging stronger bonds: U.S., Gabon complete joint exchange training

*By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Amber Litteral
Special Operations Command Africa*

LIBREVILLE, Gabon – U.S. and Gabonese forces wrapped up a joint combined exchange training in Libreville, Gabon, following a culmination exercise held in June 2025. The event marked the end of a coordinated training engagement that began in May, aimed at strengthening tactical proficiency, interoperability and enduring partnerships.

The 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) facilitated and led the engagement, working closely with the Gabonese armed forces, including elements of the Gendarmerie Tactical Unit, the 1st Gabonese Parachute Regiment, and, for the first time, the Republican Guard Special Intervention Section (SIS).

Incorporating the SIS into the training built new ties not only between the U.S. and Gabonese forces, but also among the various Gabonese units participating in the training.

“This training has been about interoperability, leadership and trust,” said Deputy Chief of Mission David Mosby, U.S. Embassy in Gabon. “It has included small unit tactics, medical care, and the development of non-commissioned officers—those indispensable leaders who are the backbone of modern militaries.”

Throughout the exchange, both forces engaged in a variety of tactical exercises designed to expand their operational capabilities. The event also provided critical opportunities to learn from one another’s approaches to leadership and mission execution.

“The mutual benefits of this exchange include deepened relationships with the Gabonese Armed Forces,” said the 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) team lead. “Additionally, all units involved were exposed to training events we would not have been able to accomplish on our own. The detachment was exposed to a way militaries employ their NCOs other than our own.”

Looking ahead, the lessons learned during this JCET will continue to shape future readiness and highlight the enduring commitment of SOCAFRICA to build partner capacity, promote regional stability, and advance shared security objectives.

“Let us carry forward the spirit of this partnership,” said Mosby. “Because when we work together, when we respect each other’s strengths and share in each other’s successes, we can move mountains.”



Gabonese Gendarmerie Tactical Unit, Special Intervention Unit Republican Guard and 1st Gabonese Parachute Regiment lead 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) operator through tactical movement training during a Joint Combined Exchange Training in Libreville, Gabon, June 2025. JCETs bolster crisis response readiness and support regional security initiatives between U.S. and African military forces. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Amber Litteral)



A 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) operator conducts training with members of the Gendarmerie Tactical Unit, Special Intervention Unit Republican Guard and 1st Gabonese Parachute Regiment during a joint combined exchange training in Libreville, Gabon, June 2025. This JCET marked the first event of its kind where each of the specialized Gabonese units trained together under 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) guidance. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Amber Litteral)

U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



Strategic imperative: strengthening African security through partnership

*By Lt. Cdr. Joshua Belk
Special Operations Command - Africa*

As Africa faces a range of threats—ranging from terrorism across the continent to illicit activity—U.S. Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAF), in coordination with U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), continues to empower African partners to achieve operational independence. Through capacity-building initiatives, SOCAF is working to address security challenges, foster stability and protect shared interests. Former SOCAF Commander and new AFRICOM Commander, U.S. Air Force Gen. Dagvin Anderson summarized the significance of Africa’s impact on national security to Congress, “I witnessed how Africa—strategically positioned between the Atlantic and Indo-Pacific—is increasingly at the convergence of great-power rivalry and terrorism. China is expanding its approach from a focus on economic influence to greater military and information operations. Russia’s actions are frequently destabilizing and run counter to U.S. interests. Terrorist networks continue to exploit ungoverned spaces, posing a direct threat to our safety and security.”

Collaborative Exercises: Building Capability and Trust

Every year, AFRICOM hosts a series of exercises, including African Lion, Obangame Express, Justified Accord, and Flintlock, that integrate special operations forces with African and allied partners. These exercises are tailored to enhance collective capabilities, foster interoperability and strengthen relationships across the continent.

Each exercise plays a unique role in addressing African specific security challenges. African Lion 2025 (AL25), which first began in 2004, is AFRICOM’s



Ghanaian, Moroccan and U.S. Special Forces soldiers advance to board a ship during a special operations maritime exercise as part of African Lion 2025 (AL25) at the Port of Agadir, Agadir, Morocco, May 20, 2025. AL25, the largest annual military exercise in Africa, brings together over 50 nations, including seven NATO allies and 10,000 troops to conduct realistic, dynamic and collaborative training in an austere environment that intersects multiple geographic and functional combatant commands. Led by U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (SETAF-AF) on behalf of the U.S. Africa Command, AL25 takes place from April 14 to May 23, 2025, across Ghana, Morocco, Senegal, and Tunisia. This large-scale exercise will enhance our ability to work together in complex, multi-domain operations—preparing forces to deploy, fight and win. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Mallett)

largest annual exercise including forces from 41 nations and 7 NATO allies, with approximately 10,000 troops. During AL25, the exercise provided unmatched opportunities to reinforce the U.S. commitment to peace through strength and the importance allies and partners play in furthering African Partner-led strategies that enable deterrence efforts under mutual benefit.

“Working with our partners isn’t just about shaking hands. It’s about learning how each other fights, thinks, and adapts—so when real-world missions come, we’re already speaking the same language,” said U.S. Army Maj. Daniel Dreyer, an operations officer with the 173rd Airborne Brigade supporting AL25.

During Flintlock 2025, special forces units from over 30 countries and an interagency fusion cell comprised of multinational law enforcement joined efforts to increase their interoperability and emphasize the importance of tackling shared threats with shared values.

“Flintlock reinforces that our militaries must have strong relationships with our law enforcement and interagency counterparts to enable the ‘legal finish,’ thereby achieving and sustaining operational success and protecting suspects rights,” said U.S. Air Force Maj. Maurice Cheeks, Special Operations Command deputy Africa judge advocate with SOCAF.

These partnerships ensure African forces are equipped not only with tactical skills but with the strategic frameworks and rule of law needed to respond to evolving threats independently.

Targeted Security Cooperation Activities

Beyond large-scale exercises, SOCAF engages African partners through progressive, tailored security cooperation programs designed to address real-world threats. These initiatives focus on areas such as intelligence sharing, communications, medical support and command structure improvements. Advisors work directly with partner forces to enhance planning, logistics and counterterrorism operations. As China and Russia seek to expand their partnerships on the continent irregular warfare becomes increasingly important and the SOCAF partner engagements are helping build resiliency. The U.S. benefits from having capable partners across the continent who understand how American and Allied forces fight and win while learning from partners on the threats they face daily to be better prepared.

Addressing Emerging Threats

The security threats facing Africa are expansive and diverse. Africa is now the global epicenter of terrorism, a nexus theater where threats, adversaries, opportunities and allies converge. In the Sahel groups like ISIS and al-Qaida are exploiting instability across the region. Meanwhile, Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing (IUUF) costs African nations an estimated \$11 billion annually—almost half of all reported IUUF globally.

“We are seeing a steady increase in the focus given especially to the global threat of IUUF, a threat that

exists also in Africa’s coastal waters and maritime domain,” said Ambassador, Robert Scott, Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military Engagements, AFRICOM.

To counter these threats, SOCAF focuses its training programs on cultivating operational independence and threat-specific solutions.

Looking Ahead

As threats evolve, so must the strategies and partnerships designed to counter them. SOCAF’s ongoing efforts to foster resilience, adaptability, and leadership among African nations remain pivotal in shaping the security landscape across the continent.

To sustain this progress, SOCAF continues adapting its approach to meet emerging threats while prioritizing collaboration and empowerment. Enabling African forces to proactively mitigate risks, SOCAF and AFRICOM underscore their shared commitment to peace, security and stability—not just for Africa, but for the global community.



Spanish marines provide cover during a visit, board, search and seizure demonstration aboard the offshore patrol vessel Relámpago near Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, April 29, 2025. Exercise Flintlock, Africa's premier special operations exercise, unites U.S., allied and partner forces to build the readiness and lethality to achieve peace through strength. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sergeant Zachary Wright)

U.S. Special Operations Command - Central



USSOCCENT hosts its first Israel Defense Forces SOCOM Senior Seminar

By Michael Bottoms

U.S. Special Operations Command Public Affairs

TAMPA, Florida. – Special Operations Command-Central (SOCCENT) hosted the Israel Defense Forces (IDF)-SOCOM Senior Seminar (ISOSS) at the Joint Special Operations University, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, July 14 – 16, 2025. SOCCENT took ownership of the seminar from U.S. Special Operations Command in January of 2025. The change in leadership of ISOSS when Israel became part of U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

“This is the 20th anniversary of the seminar, but the first year SOCCENT has hosted,” said U.S. Army Maj. Gen Jasper Jeffers, commander of SOCCENT. “It is a great venue to talk relationships. We saw the need to work on more of an operational relationship.”

The three-day seminar held a variety of briefings discussing challenges throughout Israel’s region. Additionally, the Israeli delegation was given a tour of SOCCENT’s Spartan Forge rapid robotics fabrication facility. They were shown how the command organically manufactures drones, quadcopters and other robotics. This aligns with the current administration’s guidance on U.S. Drone Dominance.



Maj. Gen. Dan Goldfus, (center) commander of the IDF Northern Corps Reserve Force, receives a briefing of Special Operations Command-Central’s Spartan Forge robotics fabrication facility during the Israel Defense Forces-SOCOM Senior Seminar, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, held July 14-16, 2025. The three-day seminar held a variety of briefings discussing challenges throughout Israel’s region. (Photo by Michael Bottoms)



Retired U.S. Army Gen. Raymond “Tony” Thomas briefs the Israeli delegation on the importance and need for artificial intelligence to be applied to military operations during the Israel Defense Forces SOCOM Senior Seminar, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, held July 14 - 16, 2025. The 3-day seminar held a variety of briefings discussing challenges throughout Israel’s region. (Photo by Michael Bottoms)

Recently, the Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, said “We are committed to rebuild our military to match threats to capabilities. Drones are the biggest battlefield innovation in a generation, accounting for most of this year’s casualties in Ukraine. Our adversaries collectively produce millions of cheap drones each year. While global military drone production skyrocketed over the last three years, the previous administration deployed red tape.”

“Spartan Forge is a place where we are solving problems with technology by using humans with skill and passion by equipping them with the tools and resources,” said Jeffers. “Technology changes rapidly, and we need a team of dedicated and skilled people to extend the reach.”

Attending the course was 17 members of the IDF special operations forces (SOF) community led by Maj. Gen. Nimrod Aloni, Commander of the IDF Depth Command and Maj. Gen. Dan Goldfus, Commander of

Spartan Forge is a place where we are solving problems with technology by using humans with skill and passion by equipping them with the tools and resources. Technology changes rapidly, and we need a team of dedicated and skilled people to extend the reach.

— U.S. Army Maj. Gen Jasper Jeffers, commander of SOCCENT

the IDF Northern Corps Reserve Force and future Commander of IDF Depth Command.

“The strategic value of ISOSS has moved forward dramatically working with SOCCENT. This has become a venue for operational planning and a platform for future operations between the two SOF communities. ISOSS is that doorstep,” said Aloni. “The energy and enthusiasm that’s put into the relationship by the leaders [Jeffers] is phenomenal. It’s about people and relationships, and the impact they have on strengthening an organization.”

Aloni was particularly in awe with the philosophy and ability of the Spartan Forge facility.

“I was impressed that although not a robust factory it demonstrates the agility of SOCCENT. It illustrates and symbolizes the mindset of Israel as a small country but the initiative of a large one,” Aloni said. “It identifies and fills the needs of combat operators. It is a visible example of how small money can make a big change.”

Goldfus recognized that ISOSS is vital to building long lasting relationships between the two countries.

“I acknowledge the vision of using the conference as a launching pad. We are here to pick up the commitment. The strength will be in the partnerships and alliances that we will continue to forge and grow. We are about results, and we should be measured by the

results we bring. I look forward to what it holds,” said Goldfus.

The conference closed with a keynote speech from former USSOCOM Commander, U.S. Army Gen. (Retired) Raymond “Tony” Thomas, where he focused on the importance of artificial intelligence and how it needs to be integrated into military operations.

“Artificial intelligence is going to overwhelm the battlefield. We are way behind the curve when it comes to AI and military applications,” said Thomas. “We have to incorporate AI in everything we do whether it’s for the operator or the enabler.”

U.S. Special Operations Command - Central



BRIGHT STAR 25 pyramid military free fall

U.S. and Egyptian Forces practice Military Free Fall (MFF) over The Great Pyramids of Giza before the start of BRIGHT STAR 2025 in Giza, Egypt on Aug. 27, 2025. Our military-to-military partnership is vital for addressing shared security challenges, from countering terrorism to ensuring regional stability. By working together, our militaries strengthen bonds that transcend borders and foster mutual respect. (Courtesy Photo)





U.S. Special Operations Command - Europe



352d Special Operations Wing conduct bilateral exercise in Romania

*By Staff Sgt. Reece Heck
U.S. Special Operations Command Europe*

BUCHAREST, Romania — U.S. Special Operations Forces worked together with Romanian Allies during a bilateral exercise to boost NATO readiness Europe through aerial drills at Bobac Air Base, July 11-25, 2025.

Romanian special operations forces with the 53rd Commando Battalion and the U.S. Air Force 352d Special Operations Wing, RAF Mildenhall, U.K., worked to enhance joint operational capabilities through free-fall jumps, low-level flying, infiltration and exfiltration drills, and the establishment of ground refueling points.

“We’re working with their ground forces, rotary forces, and fixed-wing forces,” said the mission commander for the 352d SOW. “The big goal in this instance is helping the Romanians improve [air capabilities] and interoperability.”

Over the course of two weeks, the Allied nations executed joint airdrops and infiltration scenarios across multiple landscapes. Over 500 Romanian jumpers conducted free-fall operations, supported by American MC-130J Commando II and Romanian C-27J Spartan aircraft. Concurrently, the 100th Air Refueling Wing established and operated ground refueling points in support of Romanian IAR-330 Puma helicopters.

A combined team of 10 Romanian and 15 U.S. aircrews demonstrated formation flying, low-level approaches, and short-field landing drills during day and nighttime operations, sharpening their ability to operate side-by-side in complex environments.

“As we look at what SOCEUR, NATO, and our Allies are doing, I think we’re learning it’s good to have friends in a lot of places,” the mission commander said.



Romanian special operations forces prepare to board a MC-130J Commando II, operated by U.S. Air Force 352d Special Operations Wing, as part of a bilateral exercise in Bucharest, Romania, July 15, 2025. The 352 SOW worked alongside Romanian SOF, enhancing joint capabilities through free-fall jumps, low-level flights, infiltration and exfiltration drills, and establishing a mobile aviation refueling site. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Reece Heck)

Exercises like this continue to strengthen joint capabilities through unity, readiness, and trust, enabling Allies to respond quickly and effectively in times of crisis.

“We’ve been training, we’ve standardized our tactics. It makes it easier if a conflict ever comes up,” he said. “It makes us more effective, because then you have the might of multiple countries going at one enemy or one problem set.”

Romanian special operations forces exit an MC-130J Commando II, operated by U.S. Air Force 352d Special Operations Wing, as part of a bilateral exercise in Bucharest, Romania, July 13, 2025. The 352 SOW worked alongside Romanian SOF, enhancing joint capabilities through free-fall jumps, low-level flights, infiltration and exfiltration drills, and establishing a mobile aviation refueling site. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Reece Heck)



U.S. Special Operations Command - Europe



A U.S. Air Force refueling point specialist with the 100th Air Refueling Wing prepares to refuel an IAR-330 Puma operated by Romanian special operations forces as part of a bilateral exercise in Bucharest, Romania, July 16, 2025. The 352d Special Operations Wing worked alongside Romanian SOF, enhancing joint capabilities through free-fall jumps, low-level flights, infiltration and exfiltration drills, and establishing a mobile aviation refueling site. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Reece Heck)



U.S. Special Operations Command - Korea



U.S, South Korean Special Forces operators conduct combined training

U.S. and Republic of Korea Special Forces operators conduct combined training east of Seoul, Republic of Korea, May 7, 2025. The training strengthens bilateral interoperability and enhances combat readiness across a range of mission scenarios. (Republic of Korea Army photo by Cpl. Donghan Kim)



U.S. Special Operations Command - Pacific



Talisman Sabre 25: Special Tactics Airmen perform military free fall

U.S. Air Force Special Tactics Airmen assigned to the 24th Special Operations Wing land after performing a military free fall exercise in preparation for Talisman Sabre 2025 (TS25) in New South Wales, Australia, July 9, 2025. Held across multiple regions in Australia and Papua New Guinea, TS25 is designed to enhance multinational coordination in responding to regional crises and foster peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Gracelyn Hess)





U.S. Special Operations Command - South



PANAMAX-Alpha 2025: U.S. Southern Command leads bilateral exercise to protect Panama Canal

*By Lt. Cmdr. Amy Forsythe
Special Operations Command South*

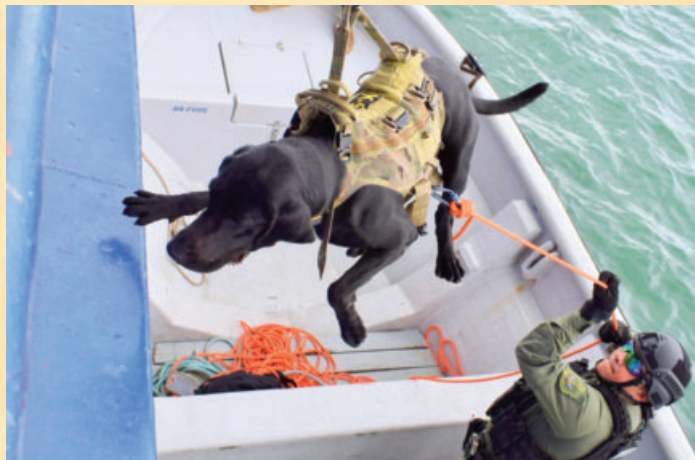
PANAMA CITY, Panama — U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) successfully concluded PANAMAX-Alpha 2025, a three-phase bilateral exercise with the Republic of Panama designed to enhance regional security, strengthen interagency cooperation and ensure the enduring protection of the Panama Canal—a linchpin of global commerce and maritime trade.

As the lead coordinating command, SOUTHCOM directed joint efforts through Joint Task Force-Bravo (JTF-Bravo), Army South, and a range of U.S. and Panamanian forces. PANAMAX-Alpha 2025 advanced SOUTHCOM's strategic goals of building partner nation capacity and promoting regional stability through a realistic and scalable training framework.

"The Panamanian Security Force's performance in terms of capability, qualifications and ownership of the exercise reflects growing professionalism, strong institutional investment and a clear assertion of national leadership" said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Innis E. Bryant, Chief, Joint Exercises Branch for SOUTHCOM based in Doral, Florida.

Phases of the Exercise

Three key phases have unfolded during 2025, each reinforcing different elements of defense cooperation and operational readiness.



Panamanian Security Force member hoists a military working dog (MWD) onto a vessel during a Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure (VBSS) tactical training event as part of the PANAMAX-ALPHA 2025 off the coast of Panama City, Panama, Aug. 7, 2025. MWDs play a critical role in enhancing both safety and effectiveness for the boarding team. Their primary uses include explosive and narcotics detection, suspect apprehension and control and force protection. Their heightened senses allow them to detect movement, concealed threats or hostile intent before human operators can, providing an early warning system during tense maritime boardings. Through combined operations, participating forces refine tactics, build trust, and strengthen regional security cooperation to safeguard the Panama Canal, one of the most strategic maritime routes in the world. ANAMAX-Alpha serves as a cornerstone of U.S. Southern Command's integrated deterrence strategy. The exercise also aligns with broader U.S. national defense objectives—building trust, enhancing readiness, and preserving freedom of navigation in the hemisphere. (Photo by U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Amy Forsythe)

• Phase 0 (March 24–April 4) focused on humanitarian assistance and disaster response, with U.S. and Panamanian forces delivering medical care, food supplies and infrastructure support to remote communities in regions like Guna Yala and Colón. These missions strengthened civil-military relations while also showcasing SOUTHCOM’s commitment to regional resilience and public health.

• Phase I - Part One: (July 13–18) emphasized tactical interoperability, featuring air mobility, maritime security operations, search-and-rescue and fast-rope insertion drills. Exercises were held at multiple locations, including Panama Pacifico and Cristóbal Colón, simulating real-world crisis scenarios that could threaten the security of the canal.

• Phase I - Part Two: (July 27–Aug. 8) culminated with a multi-day integrated response simulating threats to canal infrastructure and sovereignty. U.S. Army South and Panamanian security forces participated in joint command post exercises, testing rapid deployment, communications and contingency response protocols across air, land, and sea domains.

A Pillar of Hemispheric Defense Strategy

“The exercise simulates real-world challenges and is structured to train forces across a wide spectrum of military and humanitarian operations and one of the most important is the defense of the Panama Canal,” Bryant added.

Exercise PANAMAX Alpha—the Panama based component of the larger PANAMAX series sponsored by U.S. Southern Command—was first conducted in 2007. It was established as an annual bilateral exercise between the U.S. and Panama, distinct from the broader multinational PANAMAX training that began in 2003.

SOUTHCOM Commander U.S. Navy Adm. Alvin Holsey has emphasized the strategic partnership with Panama and the importance of strengthening the ability to train together amid growing regional concerns over illicit trafficking, cyber threats, and the influence of authoritarian regimes.

Additional personnel from outside units have augmented the training team to leverage unique capabilities.

“SOUTHCOM is fortunate to leverage expertise and specialties skills from various commands, including U.S. special operations forces to assist in delivering a top-notch training experience,” Bryant added.

Personnel from other participating units include:

- Naval Special Warfare Group ELEVEN

(NSWGRP11) (SEAL Team 17/18), Coronado, California

- Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit TWO (EODMU-2), Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, Virginia

- U.S. Army 7th Special Forces Group, Eglin Air Force Base, Florida

- U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Security Response Team EAST (MSTRE), Chesapeake, Virginia

- Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) Global Threat Department, Fort Belvoir, Virginia

- Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), Fort Benning, Georgia

PANAMAX-Alpha serves as a cornerstone of SOUTHCOM’s integrated deterrence strategy. The exercise also aligns with broader U.S. national defense objectives—building trust, enhancing readiness and preserving freedom of navigation in the hemisphere.

Looking Ahead

As global maritime dynamics evolve, SOUTHCOM continues to strengthen regional partnerships through exercises like PANAMAX-Alpha. By combining humanitarian outreach, tactical training, and strategic coordination, the U.S. and Panama reaffirm their joint commitment to safeguarding the Western Hemisphere’s most vital waterway—now and in the future.



Panamanian Security Forces use a smoke grenade to conceal their entry into a training range as part of tactical training exercise that includes a mounted patrol, close quarters engagement and illicit drug interdiction as part of PANAMAX-Alpha Phase II, at the Cerro Tigre training range in Panama, Aug. 6, 2025. (Photo by U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Amy Forsythe)

U.S. Army Special Operations Command

USASOC Best Squad Competition Ruck March



A U.S. Army Ranger from 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment runs during a 12-mile ruck as part of the United States Army Special Operations Command's (USASOC) Best Squad Competition on Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Aug. 7, 2025. The USASOC Best Squad Competition highlights the excellence of the Army's Special Operations Forces as they demonstrate grit, determination and their mastery of warfighting fundamentals, including marksmanship, physical fitness across a week of competition at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Aug. 4 – 8. The winning squad will move along to compete against the Army's best, during the U.S. Army Best Squad Competition, Oct. 2 – 12, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Marc Ramirez)



Air Force Special Operations Command



Airmen rapidly deploy to support Philippine disaster relief efforts

*By U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Cullen Drenkhahn
353rd Special Operations Wing*

CLARK AIR BASE, Philippines — Within six hours of notification, Airmen from the 353rd Special Operations Wing shifted from training operations in northern Japan to deployment for crisis response operations in the Philippines.

While participating in Resolute Force Pacific 2025 in Misawa, Japan, the 353rd SOW received orders to conduct life-saving efforts in response to severe flooding across Northern Luzon. At the request of the Government of the Philippines, and in coordination with the Armed Forces of the Philippines, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command mobilized Joint Forces to urgently respond to isolated communities.

The CV-22 Osprey served as a vital platform throughout the operation. Its ability to fly long distances at high speed, take off and land vertically, and operate in remote areas made it the ideal aircraft for reaching hard-to-access locations such as Basco, Batanes. On July 30 and 31, Ospreys transported emergency food packs from Clark Air Base to flooded communities. Thousands more are scheduled for delivery in the days ahead. This is the 353rd SOW's most significant employment of Ospreys since the loss of Gundam 22.

In addition to air operations, the 353rd SOW deployed a range of specialized forces and capabilities. Special Tactics teams were equipped and ready for missions involving swift water rescue, mass casualty response, collapsed structure recovery, and operations at austere landing zones and drop zones. The Wing also provided Special Operations Medical Element personnel and Security Forces, ensuring a full-spectrum response to humanitarian needs in the region.

The Wing's deployment was only possible thanks to the support from units across Japan. After a CV-22 Osprey conducted a precautionary landing at Iwate Hanamaki Airport on 24 July, the 374th Airlift Wing at Yokota Air Base dispatched a C-12 aircraft to deliver critical parts, enabling a swift return to mission-ready status. The 374th AW also supported by sending logistics and maintenance personnel forward with the contingent. The 35th Fighter Wing at Misawa provided ground support and personnel, including a Public Affairs specialist, to document the operation. At Kadena Air Base, the 18th Wing provided fuel to transiting CV-22s en route to the Philippines over the weekend, fully outfitted the base gym to serve as temporary lodging for deploying personnel, and provided a Public Affairs specialist to document.

"This was a true team-of-teams effort," said Col. Stewart Parker, commander of the 353rd SOW. "Special Operations Forces cannot respond to crisis without the robust support we received from our Pacific Air Forces teammates. This operation demonstrates the importance of interoperability between Special Operations Command Pacific and joint components in the Indo-Pacific."

The operation was conducted in close coordination with the Philippines' Office of Civil Defense and the Armed Forces of the Philippines, further reinforcing the strong and enduring alliance between the two countries.

"The U.S. stands shoulder to shoulder with our Filipino allies, especially in responding to disasters," said U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines MaryKay Carlson. "We are grateful to the combined relief and rescue teams who have been working tirelessly on the ground to deliver emergency assistance to affected residents."





U.S. Air Force CV-22 Ospreys assigned to the 353rd Special Operations Wing conduct tilt-rotor air-to-air refueling with an MC-130J Commando II assigned to the 353rd SOW during transit to Clark Air Base, Philippines, over international waters, July 26, 2025. The 353rd SOW is sending life-saving supplies and personnel to support the Philippine government's disaster response efforts. At the request of the Government of the Philippines, the 353rd SOW is working alongside the Armed Forces of the Philippines to provide urgent lifesaving support to communities affected by consecutive storms and the southwest monsoon. The forward presence and ready posture of United States Indo-Pacific Command in the region facilitates rapid and effective response to crisis, demonstrating the U.S.'s commitment to Allies and partners during times of need. Courtesy photo.



Tip of the Spear

Air Force Special Operations Command



Sleeker skies: MC-130J tests new aerodynamic enhancements

By Samuel King Jr.

Air Force Special Operations Command

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Florida. -- Newly-installed drag reduction devices called Finlets are currently undergoing flight testing on MC-130Js. Finlets are passive, fin-like devices attached to the rear of the aircraft which smooth airflow and reduce drag, enhancing fuel efficiency and improving operational capabilities.

The goal of the developmental flight test, conducted by the 417th Flight Test Squadron, was to determine the airworthiness of the aluminum Finlets, mounted on the aircraft's rear door and on both sides of the tail fin. The 417th FLTS's air crew and engineers will analyze the Finlets' flight and air handling qualities as well as the aircraft's airdrop compatibility with the new additions.



A MC-130J waits for its first flight with new aerodynamic Finlets attached to the aircraft at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, July 16, 2025. (U.S. Air Force photo by Michelle Gigante)



Airman 1st Class Tustin Bridges, 1st Special Operations Wing, and Bryan Jenkins, Vortex Control Technologies, install an aluminum Finlet onto the rear door of an MC-130J July 9 at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. The 417th Flight Test Squadron's air crew and engineers will analyze the Finlets' flight and air handling qualities as well as the aircraft's airdrop compatibility with the new additions. (U.S. Air Force photo by Samuel King Jr.)

“Our goal with the developmental testing is to first make sure the Finlets are safe in flight,” said Caleb Reeves, 417th FLTS engineer.

These new additions are a possible cost-saving initiative that could lead to longer C-130 flight range and better fuel efficiency. Relying on their experience with commercial airlines, Vortex Control Technologies developed Finlets, which are estimated to reduce drag by approximately six to eight percent.

The multi-year effort to bring Finlet technology to the flightline is the result of a partnership with the Air Force Operational Energy Office, Air Force Special Operations Command, the Special Operations Forces/Personnel Recovery Program Office, the Air Force Research Lab Energy Office and the Defense Innovation Unit.

“It is an exciting day for the Department of the Air Force for Finlets to reach this milestone in research, testing and development as we seek to rapidly deploy innovative technology,” said Roberto Guerrero, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Operational Energy, Safety and Occupational Health. “Drag reduction initiatives like Finlets are a tangible way we can modernize our fleet, reduce costs, and increase combat capability for the warfighter. Every gallon of fuel

saved extends our operational reach and enhances readiness in contested logistics environments, directly supporting the Department’s mission to deliver airpower anytime, anywhere.”

After the initial flight at Eglin, tests will continue at Edwards AFB, California, for multiple airdrop evaluations.

“The successful completion of this prototype install stands as a testament to the unwavering dedication and extraordinary teamwork from the multi-agency program team,” said Jackie Burns, Airframe Modernization Lead for the Air Force Operational Energy Office. “We are well-positioned to continue testing on the airframe that will allow our team to make data-driven decisions about how we can optimize our fleet.”

Although initial testing occurred on the MC-130Js, the goal is to extend Finlets to the entire C-130J fleet.



A MC-130J waits for its first flight with new aerodynamic Finlets attached to the aircraft at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, July 16, 2025. (U.S. Air Force photo by Michelle Gigante)

Air Force Special Operations Command



EW 25.2: AFSOC heightens warfighting readiness during landmark DLE series

By Air Force Special Operations Command

HURLBURT FIELD, Florida. -- Air Force Special Operations Command tested its warfighting readiness during Emerald Warrior 25.2, (EW25.) the command's premier operational exercise held across Arizona and California from July 21 – Aug. 11, 2025.

EW 25.2 was part of the first-in-a-generation Department Level Exercise series, incorporating more than 12,000 personnel and integrating various forces into joint, coalition, and multinational training. The DLE series advanced the way operations were achieved in a contested, dynamic environment to build capabilities and make a stronger, more lethal deterrent force.

“Emerald Warrior’s integration into the DLE series reinforced our critical role in preparing our forces for the scope and intensity of future operations,” said Lt. Gen. Michael Conley, AFSOC commander. “This iteration provided the opportunity to test our capabilities within a larger strategic context. The training we completed during those three weeks demonstrated the exceptional full-spectrum readiness of our Air Commandos.”

Emerald Warrior provides the venue for realistic joint, combined special operations training to prepare U.S. Special Operations Command forces, conventional enablers, partner forces, and interagency elements to respond to various threats across the spectrum of conflict.

The exercise incorporated multi-domain training designed to give Air Commandos the opportunity to find innovative solutions to tactical problems and experiment with emerging capabilities.

“Our goal is to match the speed and scale of large, real-world operations where command and the areas of



U.S. Airmen assigned to Air Force Special Operations Command provide medical care to a simulated patient on a U.S. Air Force MC-130J Commando II during Emerald Warrior 25.2 over the southwest United States, July 29, 2025. The multi-domain training is part of the Department of the Air Force's first-in-a-generation Department-Level-Exercise series, demonstrating the capacity to execute and sustain advanced operations in contested, dynamic environments. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Farnsworth)

operation are distributed,” said Conley. “Creating these dilemmas is how our teams can best learn to adapt so they can excel in future combat environments and help set conditions for the joint force to win.”

Air Commandos completed a wide range of training scenarios that validated their ability to integrate aviation, special tactics, medical and mission sustainment functions. A key objective was executing Agile Combat Employment (ACE) to demonstrate a flexible aerial advantage.

“ACE has become a requisite ability to our operations and readiness,” said Brig. Gen. Clay Freeman, AFSOC director of operations. “We must be

prepared to deploy rapidly and operate from austere environments with potentially limited resources. A contested venue does not change the need to generate airpower at any place, any time, anywhere.”

International collaboration was a key element of EW 25.2. The integration of partners in the Royal Air Force was highlighted by the RAF A400M Atlas facilitating transport and military free fall training for Special Tactics teams. Additionally, Czech Republic Special Operations Forces worked alongside special operations medical elements and surgical teams, honing collaborative abilities in humanitarian and disaster relief scenarios.

“Emerald Warrior strengthens our international relationships and interoperability”, said Freeman. “AFSOC is committed to fostering combined training opportunities with partners where we integrate our diverse skillsets and build shared capabilities to strengthen our collective security. For this iteration, we were grateful to grow our collective readiness with our RAF and Czech Republic partners.”

Along with international allies, Air Commandos trained with units from the U.S. Space Force, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Army, among other interagency partners. This collaboration strengthened AFSOC’s capacity to deliver decisive effects in alignment with future force employment requirements.



U.S. Air Force Air Commandos assigned to Air Force Special Operations Command and a Czech Republic special operations forces member prepare to depart a U.S. Marine Corps MV-22B Osprey assigned to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 362, Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, to conduct a personnel recovery mission as part of Emerald Warrior 25.2 at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona, August 3, 2025. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Johnathon King) (Portions of this image have been blurred for operational security.)

EW 25.2 solidified AFSOC’s warfighting functions and underscored its commitment to adapting to succeed in today’s dynamic strategic environment.



U.S. Air Force Air Commandos assigned to Air Force Special Operations Command establish a perimeter around a U.S. Air Force C-146A Wolfhound aircraft during Emerald Warrior 25.2, California, July 28, 2025. AFSOC fosters training and exercise opportunities with our Allies and partners to strengthen international relationships and interoperability. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Luke Hirsch)

*Marine Forces, Special
Operations Command*



Talisman Sabre 25: Marine Raiders enhance combat readiness



Marine Raiders assigned to U.S. Marine Forces Special Operations Command enter the water during joint maritime training as part of Exercise Talisman Sabre 25 in Sydney, Australia, July 11. Talisman Sabre is the largest bilateral military exercise between Australia and the United States, with multinational participation, advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific by strengthening relationships and interoperability among key allies and enhancing our collective capabilities to respond to a wide array of potential security concerns. (U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class David Rowe)



Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

Team SOCOM wins 111 medals through adaptive sports at 2025 DOD Warrior Games

By Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller
U.S. Special Operations Command

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colorado— Athletes with U.S. Special Operations Command's Warrior Care Program earned 111 medals during the 2025 Department of Defense Warrior Games, July 18-26, taking home 51 gold, 40 silver and 20 bronze medals in multiple events including cycling, wheelchair basketball, track and field, wheelchair rugby, archery and swimming.

The Warrior Care Program provides wounded, ill and injured special operations service members and veterans with resources to aid in their recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration. As part of that mission,

the program uses adaptive sports to help participants rebuild physical strength, regain confidence and reconnect with a supportive community, both during competition and in everyday life.

"We've seen people arrive at camp withdrawn and disengaged, and after 10 days, they leave with a light in their eyes again," said Kelly Ammerman, director of U.S. SOCOM's Warrior Care Program. "It pulls them back into their community and their family, and the effects go far beyond the games."

Adaptive sports and the Warrior Games provide an opportunity for athletes to compete, but successful recovery stories are seen in more than the podium finishes.



Team Special Operations Command competes against Team Army during a sitting volleyball match at the 2025 Department of Defense Warrior Games in Colorado Springs, Colorado, July 26, 2025. The DOD Warrior Games was held July 18-26, and brought hundreds of wounded, ill and injured active duty and veteran military members to compete in adaptive sports as part of their recovery journey. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller)



Anna Allison, a member of Team Special Operations Command, competes in a race during swimming events at the 2025 Department of Defense Warrior Games in Colorado Springs, Colorado, July 26, 2025. The DOD Warrior Games was held July 18-26, and brought hundreds of wounded, ill and injured active duty and veteran military members to compete in adaptive sports as part of their recovery journey. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller)

“Their mission becomes recovery,” said Ammerman. “If you give them the opportunity and create the space to do it, they will surprise you – and a lot of times they will get back to the team.”

For many of the athletes, the Games are more than just a competition against the other service branches.

“For us, as staff, the Warrior Games are not just about medals,” said Lance Wills, deputy director of the U.S. SOCOM WCP. “It’s about getting people out of that funk, getting them back in a team concept and back to the person they were before their injury or illness.”

In addition to recovery and rehabilitation, the Warrior Care Program helps service members navigate the transition from active duty to civilian life. That support can include medical care coordination, connecting families with resources, and career planning for the next chapter after military service.

The ongoing support provided by the WCP includes opportunities to stay active and engaged. Adaptive sports gives participants a way to maintain physical fitness, set personal goals and stay connected with others who share similar experiences.

“It’s given me something to look forward to and goals to set each year,” said U.S. Army Master Sgt. Jerry Millan, an athlete on Team SOCOM and

noncommissioned officer in charge of the Warrior Care Program’s East region. “It keeps me physically fit, focused on recovery and connected to a community that understands what I’m going through.”

Millan said his own path to recovery was unlike many of his peers who were injured in combat.

“When I became sick, there was no clear road map for how to navigate it,” said Millan. “The Warrior Care Program gave me that community I was missing, and now I can help others walk the path I once had to forge on my own.”

All content from this year’s games can be found here: <https://www.dvidshub.net/feature/warriorgames25>

The 2026 DoD Warrior Games will be held in San Antonio, Texas.



Team Special Operations Command plays a wheelchair rugby game against Team Army during the 2025 Department of Defense Warrior Games in Colorado Springs, Colorado, July 23, 2025. The DOD Warrior Games was held July 18-26, and brought hundreds of wounded, ill and injured active duty and veteran military members to compete in adaptive sports as part of their recovery journey. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller)

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

Quarterly 1st SOF Truth event spotlights steps being taken in mitigating blast overpressure

By Michael Bottoms
USSOCOM Public Affairs

TAMPA, Florida. – Hundreds of leaders participated in the latest 1st SOF Truth event, held July 30, 2025, where SOCOM's senior leaders and experts from the medical research and practitioner communities discussed the dangers of blast overpressure (BOP) and what SOCOM is doing to mitigate such risks to its force.

Rooted in the ethos “humans are more important than hardware,” the 1st SOF Truth Forums are quarterly events that spotlight human-related topics critical to the special operations community. These forums aim to foster awareness, drive discussion, and deliver actionable resources to the force. Gen. Bryan Fenton has led nine such events during his tenure as commander of SOCOM.

Blast overpressure (BOP) refers to the rapid changes in air pressure caused by explosions, such as those resulting from firing weapons. Unlike Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), which is a medical diagnosis with various causes, BOP specifically describes the physical shockwave and its cumulative effects on the human body.

Colby Jenkins, performing the duties of the

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict and an Army Special Forces combat veteran, opened the conference.

“We knew that exposure to blast overpressure was not good,” said Jenkins. “And, now the science has caught up to show us just how bad it can be for our operators. Injuries can be hidden. Symptoms may not appear right away. But...the long-term, cumulative effects can be debilitating.”

Throughout the event, panels of experts discussed previous and ongoing research into the effects of BOP, described the symptoms as they understand them now, and covered various mitigation factors. Included was a demonstration of nascent software being produced by the U.S. Army Medical Research and Development Command that allows service members to map the

blast overpressure zones of weapons in varying terrain to help them minimize the risk involved during training events.

Dr. Brian Edlow, a critical care neurologist and Associate Director of the Center for Neurotechnology and Neurorecovery, shared updates on ReBlast Precision, a longitudinal study aimed at establishing protocols

for early detection of repeated blast injuries. Building on a 2023 pilot study, this initiative seeks to improve diagnostics for active-duty special operations forces.

We knew that exposure to blast overpressure was not good. And, now the science has caught up to show us just how bad it can be for our operators. Injuries can be hidden. Symptoms may not appear right away. But...the long-term, cumulative effects can be debilitating.

— Colby Jenkins, performing the duties of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict

Fenton emphasized the importance of these events that educate the team and push resources to those who need them most.

“We’re here to share information to the force,” said Fenton. “We need to flip the chain of command upside down. This information needs to get to the lowest level.”

While the event served as a conduit of information down the chain of command, it was also an opportunity for senior leaders to hear from leaders at the tactical level. Command teams from across the enterprise provided awareness of mitigation strategies that are being used in the field now, including using 3D printed charges to reduce the blast pressure, retrofitting shoot houses and breaching ranges with pressure-absorbing

materials, using suppressors and simulation rounds, using augmented reality and virtual reality for “less reps in the dirt,” and using blast monitors to assess BOP exposure.

Importantly, Fenton pushed back on the notion that reducing exposure to overpressure would lead to reduced readiness.

“We can absolutely do both. We can reduce exposure and remain lethal,” Fenton said.

As Fenton closed the forum, he reaffirmed SOCOM’s commitment to understanding and addressing the health implications of BOP exposure. While progress has been made, he acknowledged that the journey is far from over, calling for continued collaboration and innovation to safeguard the force.



U.S. Army Gen. Bryan Fenton, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, hosted the 1st SOF Truth Forum focusing on blast overpressure and its effects on health and readiness, at the headquarters, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, July 30, 2025. The ethos “humans are more important than hardware,” better known as the 1st SOF Truth, reminds special operations forces and the leaders of U.S. Special Operations Command that the right people, well-trained and well-supported, are the organization’s most valuable resource. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

A bridge across the Atlantic: Italian lieutenant colonel strengthens US-Italy defense cooperation at USSOCOM



Lieutenant Colonel Gabriele Zito is the Italian Liaison officer in U.S. Special Special Operation's J-3 International branch. The J3-International accelerates collaboration and interoperability between international Special Operations partners in order to more effectively deter in competition, respond in crisis, and prevail in conflict. Courtesy photo.

Courtesy article

USSOCOM J3-International

TAMPA, Florida. – From the cockpits of civilian aircraft to the heart of international military operations, Italian Liaison Lt. Col. Gabriele Zito's career has been defined by a relentless pursuit of service. While his dream of flying for the Italian Air Force was grounded due to height restrictions – it seems even fighter jets have their limits – Zito forged a new path in the elite Italian Special Operations Forces (SOF). His commitment to international collaboration led him to his current role as the Italian SOF

Liaison Officer at U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) in Tampa, Florida. Since 2022, Zito has been instrumental in bolstering the crucial defense partnership between Italy and the U.S., proving that sometimes the best vantage point is a little closer to the ground.

Zito's journey began over 25 years ago, with over 15 years spent within the demanding world of Italian SOF. His operational experience spans deployments across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, providing him with invaluable firsthand knowledge of high-risk environments.

Transitioning from tactical operations to strategic planning, he honed his expertise in the Operations Division of the

Italian Special Operations Command (Comando interforze per le Operazioni delle Forze Speciali, or COFS) based in Rome, where he played a key role in mission planning and coordination. This wealth of experience made him the ideal candidate for the prestigious role of liaison officer to USSOCOM, where he continues to champion Italy's strategic interests and foster stronger ties with allied forces.

Enhancing Interoperability: The Cornerstone of Success

At USSOCOM, Zito acts as the linchpin between Italian and U.S. Special Operations Forces. Reporting directly to senior leadership, his responsibilities encompass a wide spectrum, from coordinating joint exercises and facilitating strategic dialogues to ensuring seamless communication between the allied forces. Zito's approach prioritizes enhancing interoperability – the ability of different military units to operate together effectively. This is achieved through meticulously planned joint training exercises that synchronize tactics, techniques, and procedures, ultimately strengthening the collective capabilities of both nations.

Zito's impact is evident in his instrumental role in securing the participation of Italian Special Operations Forces in Exercise Emerald Warrior 25.1. This marked a significant milestone, allowing Italian SOF to train alongside U.S. and allied forces in complex, realistic scenarios designed to push the boundaries of joint operational capabilities. The exercise focused on challenging mission sets in austere environments, sharpening readiness, decision-making, and coalition coordination under pressure.

Beyond Emerald Warrior, Zito also spearheaded efforts to broaden international participation in Exercise Flintlock, AFRICOM's largest annual special operations exercise in Africa. His diplomatic efforts and advocacy successfully integrated additional nations into the exercise, fostering greater allied cooperation and building partner capacity in a strategically vital region. This directly contributed to enhanced collaboration among partner nations and a strengthened collective ability to address regional security threats.

A Legacy of Collaboration and a Vision for the Future

Zito's impact extends far beyond specific exercises. He is a champion for advancing interoperability, particularly in the complex domain of Special Operations Air Force-Land Integrations. His work has been crucial in synchronizing joint capabilities across air and ground components, ensuring mission effectiveness and tactical cohesion during multinational exercises and real-world operations. Furthermore, he has fostered a culture of mutual respect and understanding among international partners,

strengthening trust and operational synergy within the global special operations community.

As a seasoned officer with a global perspective, Zito recognizes the importance of unity and shared objectives in addressing evolving global security challenges. He actively engages with military representatives from over 28 partner nations, promoting a cohesive approach to international security cooperation.

Looking ahead, Zito envisions a future where U.S.-Italy military cooperation remains agile and adaptive. He advocates for the integration of advanced communication strategies and emerging technologies to navigate new challenges and enhance the effectiveness of joint operations.

Zito's tenure at USSOCOM stands as a testament to the enduring strength of the U.S.-Italy military alliance. His dedication, leadership, and unwavering commitment to collaboration have not only fortified existing partnerships but have laid the groundwork for future cooperation, ensuring that this vital alliance remains a cornerstone of global security for years to come.



Lieutenant Colonel Gabriele Zito is the Italian Liaison officer in U.S. Special Special Operation's J-3 International branch. The J3-International accelerates collaboration and interoperability between international Special Operations partners in order to more effectively deter in competition, respond in crisis, and prevail in conflict. Courtesy photo.

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

JSOU's Enlisted Academy hosts GATEWAY course for USSOCOM, USCENTCOM

By Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller
U.S. Special Operations Command

TAMPA, Florida. – The Joint Special Operations University's Enlisted Academy (JSOU-EA) hosted 29 service members with U.S. Special Operations Command and U.S. Central Command, June 23-26, during the university's first iteration of GATEWAY for the geographically co-located combatant commands.

The two-week long GATEWAY course is in resident enlisted joint professional military education held at the National Defense University, Fort McNair, Washington D.C., that reinforces joint perspectives for mid-grade senior noncommissioned officers while preparing them for enhanced joint leadership opportunities at the operational level.

Last year, the decision was made by former Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, U. S. Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Troy Black, to start hosting GATEWAY at the combatant commands, outside of the National Capitol Region. With support from four-star leadership across the COCOMs, U.S. Strategic Command at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, held the first pilot course in December 2024, hosting two members from each COCOM.

"I'm excited that our leadership, from the chairman down, knows the importance of enlisted PME, especially joint PME," said U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Dan Krause, senior enlisted leader of the joint force development directorate with the Joint Staff at the Pentagon, Washington D.C. "The only place you're going to get pure joint PME is through the joint PME programs."



U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Dan Krause, senior enlisted leader of the joint force development directorate with the Joint Staff at the Pentagon, Washington D.C., speaks to service members with U.S. Special Operations Command and U.S. Central Command during the first iteration of the GATEWAY course at Joint Special Operations University Enlisted Academy, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, June 23, 2025. The GATEWAY course is enlisted joint professional military education, typically held at the National Defense University, Fort McNair, Washington D.C., that reinforces joint perspectives for mid-grade senior noncommissioned officers while preparing them for enhanced joint leadership opportunities at the operational level. Last year, the decision was made by former Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, U. S. Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Troy Black, to start hosting GATEWAY at the combatant commands. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller)



Service members with U.S. Special Operations Command and U.S. Central Command use artificial intelligence to accomplish a practical exercise for an Enhancing Leadership Through Logic, Communication and AI class during Joint Special Operation's first iteration of the GATEWAY course at JSOU, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, June 24, 2025. The GATEWAY course is enlisted joint professional military education, typically held at the National Defense University, Fort McNair, Washington D.C., that reinforces joint perspectives for mid-grade senior noncommissioned officers while preparing them for enhanced joint leadership opportunities at the operational level. Last year, the decision was made by former Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, U. S. Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Troy Black, to start hosting GATEWAY at the combatant commands. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller)

Former and current senior enlisted advisors to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and service senior enlisted advisors advocated the need to provide EJPME to NCOs when selected for a joint assignment, or shortly after arriving, enabling members to meet the demands of emerging future operating environments.

"We live in an era of accelerating complexity – [Artificial Intelligence], cyber threats, peer competition, disinformation," said U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Garrie Banfield, the command senior enlisted leader of JSOU. "The battlefield is no longer confined to a grid square. Education is how we prepare joint senior enlisted leaders to think critically, collaborate globally and act decisively when doctrine runs out. It is the foundation of strategic agility in an uncertain world."

To cut travel costs and ensure NCOs received EJPME, the commandant of JSOU-EA suggested hosting a GATEWAY course for U.S. SOCOM and U.S. CENTCOM members, two geographically co-located COCOMs, rather than having all the COCOMs send their members on a temporary duty.

"There were a couple of creative ways to take what the SEAC's vision was," said Dr. Kari Thyne, chief learning officer for JSOU-EA. "To push it out to the commands, but also to infuse that by taking advantage of geographic location."

The commandant of JSOU-EA did not stop there.

"Our commandant wanted us to relook at the curriculum, since a lot of the faculty here had developed the original curriculum. In the past three years, it needed a little updating and revising," said Thyne. "We spent about a month and a half working on that, and we will continue to evolve it as we get inputs from the different combatant commands."

While each branch of military service provides PME to its members, the ever-changing battlefield requires more than just one branch's area of expertise.

"You should be able to go from the service environment to the joint environment with a minimum transition period so we can continue to maximize your experience and the leadership that we need you to provide in that environment," said Thyne. "The prevailing wisdom is that we, as services, like to think that we can do it all, but the nature of conflict, the changing character of war suggests that it's not going to be one service doing it all."


U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Kyle Ryan, executive assistant to the command senior enlisted leader of U.S. CENTCOM, is serving in his first joint position and when he heard about the course, he knew he wanted to attend.

"It was more than what I expected," said Ryan. "There was a lot of information, and you don't know what you don't know. Then being in the joint world, you find out how close you are to the mission, but also how you're a small piece to the main puzzle."

Even though Ryan talked to other service members who have been to the course, it was nothing like he thought it would be.

"It's eye opening," said Ryan. "You now understand the big-picture mission – not just about the Air Force, but all departments of the military; the Army, Marines, Navy, and how everybody comes together and fights for that sole mission purpose."

Service members in grades E-7 and E-8 serving in or transitioning to joint assignments, who are interested in the GATEWAY course, should coordinate with their supervisor and senior enlisted leader to enroll in upcoming sessions.

A full-page photograph of Taylor Propes, a member of Team Special Operations Command, shooting a free throw. He is a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a black and gold basketball jersey with "SOCOM" and the number "11" on it. He is holding a red and white basketball with both hands, looking up at it. He has tattoos on his left arm and is wearing black fingerless gloves. The background is a blurred indoor basketball court.

Taylor Propes, a member of Team Special Operations Command, shoots a free throw during wheelchair basketball at the 2025 Department of Defense Warrior Games in Colorado Springs, Colorado, July 20, 2025. The DoD Warrior Games was held July 18-26, and brought hundreds of wounded, ill and injured active duty and veteran military members to compete in adaptive sports as part of their recovery journey. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller)