
THE SEMINOLE STANDARD



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THE COMMANDER'S COUNCIL OAK

Forged in Preparation: Building a Task Force for the Horn of Africa

In less than two months, what began as a 713-Soldier infantry battalion has transformed into a fully integrated 1,135-Soldier task force preparing for deployment to the Horn of Africa. Building a cohesive formation of this size and complexity in such a short time is no small feat. Yet through disciplined preparation, relentless teamwork and exceptional leadership at every level, this task force has rapidly forged itself into a capable and ready force. The progress made in this short period stands as a testament to the professionalism and commitment of every Soldier, leader and supporting staff member involved.

Following pre-mobilization training in Florida, the unit moved to Fort Bliss, Texas, to validate. Many within the formation have become far more well-acquainted with the Dona Ana Range Complex than they might prefer. During our time in Texas, Task Force Seminole companies conducted a combined arms live-fire exercise integrating maneuver, fires, and supporting assets to simulate the complexity of modern combat operations. These exercises demanded coordination, discipline and adaptability; qualities the companies demonstrated consistently throughout the training cycle.

A major focus of the Fort Bliss training was base defense operations. Soldiers trained extensively on the newest technologies in integrated counter-unmanned aircraft systems, preparing them to defend critical infrastructure and personnel against evolving aerial threats. These systems represent some of the most advanced defensive capabilities available, and Soldiers quickly mastered their integration into base defense operations.

In addition, each company participated in a realistic culminating training exercise that placed leaders and Soldiers in challenging operational scenarios. These events tested decision-making, standard operating procedures and endurance while reinforcing the teamwork necessary to operate effectively in a deployed environment. Through these exercises, companies proved their readiness to execute the mission while maintaining the safety and welfare of their Soldiers.

Behind the scenes, some of the most complex and impressive work has been accomplished by the task force staff and support elements, particularly the S-1 and S-4 teams. Constructing a Deployment Manning Document for a task force of this size is a monumental undertaking under any circumstance. In this case, the challenge was even greater, as personnel were sourced from units across two states and from every major subordinate command in Florida in less than six months.

Equally critical to the success of this deployment has been the tremendous effort of the S-4 and Forward Support Company teams. Their work represents nothing short of a logistics miracle. With the unequalled support of the Florida G-4 enterprise, these teams executed the complex property and maintenance actions necessary to prepare thousands of pieces of equipment from across the state for deployment while ensuring full accountability across the task force. - Continued on Page 3 -

In addition to property accountability, the maintenance effort required to prepare the unit's equipment for operational use has been immense. Their countless hours of maintenance, inspections and repairs have ensured that when this task force arrives in theater, it will have the equipment necessary to operate effectively from day one.

Of course, the true strength of this task force lies within its companies and their leadership teams. Day after day, company leaders and Soldiers have demonstrated professionalism, adaptability and an unwavering commitment to mission success. They have executed demanding training events, embraced new technologies and built the trust and cohesion necessary for success in a deployed environment.

Just as important as the mission ahead is the responsibility we carry to the families who support these Soldiers. Families should feel confident that the leaders within this task force, from top to bottom, are committed not only to accomplishing our mission with excellence but also to taking care of every Soldier entrusted to us.

This task force has demonstrated what can be achieved when committed professionals unite with a shared purpose. In a remarkably short period of time, this formation has become a capable, cohesive and ready force, prepared to represent our organization with pride and professionalism in the Horn of Africa.

Command Sergeant Major Pletcher and I are incredibly proud and grateful to be members of this team. The dedication we have witnessed, from the staff sections to the company formations, reflects the very best of our organization.

LTC Ryan M. Swinford
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NEVER SURRENDER!



TASK FORCE SEMINOLE
HORN OF AFRICA 2026



(U.S. Army photo illustration by CPT Dakota Burr)

THE WARPATH

Command Sergeant Major's guidance on leadership, standards and readiness across the task force

As we close this final phase of mobilization requirements and prepare for onward movement for deployment, I want to highlight a key element of what makes us successful and what has enabled us to build Task Force Seminole. The tremendous leadership and accountability at the company level enhanced our capabilities throughout the pre- and post-mobilization training and validation process. The success of this task force is built from the ground up, and in our formation that foundation is our leadership teams and noncommissioned officers.

Over the past several months, we successfully completed all required deployment validation events, and that achievement is a direct reflection of disciplined leadership, engaged command teams and noncommissioned officers who enforced standards every day. Company commanders, first sergeants, platoon leaders and platoon sergeants ensured their Soldiers were trained, equipped and ready to execute the mission. When leaders at the company level take ownership of readiness, maintain accurate accountability and hold their formations to the standard, the entire task force becomes more lethal, cohesive and capable.

Overall, our task force performed exceptionally well during the validation process. Leaders at every echelon demonstrated a strong commitment to training, maintaining equipment readiness and ensuring Soldiers understood their roles and responsibilities. The level of professionalism and attention to detail across the formation was evident in the results we achieved. That said, readiness is never a finished product. As we move forward, we must continue refining our systems for accountability, communication and disciplined execution of standards. Small lapses in reporting, maintenance tracking or leader engagement can quickly grow into larger issues if left unchecked. Our goal is continuous improvement, tightening our processes, developing our junior leaders and ensuring every Soldier understands how their individual readiness contributes to the success of the task force and the mission ahead.

My charge to the noncommissioned officer corps and every Soldier in this task force is simple: own your responsibility and lead from where you stand. Noncommissioned officers must continue to set the example through disciplined leadership, enforcing standards and developing the next generation of leaders. Know your



LTC Ryan Swinford and CSM Jonathan Pletcher, the battalion commander and command sergeant major of 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, pose for a photo after the final night of a combined arms live-fire exercise Feb. 24, 2026, at Fort Bliss, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)

Soldiers, know their readiness and capabilities, and ensure they understand the importance of the mission we are preparing to execute. Soldiers must remain focused on maintaining their individual readiness, physically, mentally and professionally. Every piece of equipment, every training event and every standard we enforce today directly impacts our ability to accomplish the mission tomorrow. If we continue to uphold our standards, hold each other accountable and lead with professionalism and pride, this task force will remain ready to deploy, fight and win.

CSM Jonathan D. Pletcher
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NEVER SURRENDER!

VALIDATING THE MISSION

Task Force Seminole Soldiers complete critical training events at Fort Bliss in preparation for deployment to the Horn of Africa

Training Snapshot

- 5-Day Culminating Training Exercise
- Counter-UAS operations
- Military-Assisted Departure rehearsal
- Mass Casualty response training
- Combined Arms Live Fire

Culmination Training Exercise

One of the key events during the training cycle was the Culminating Training Exercise, which took place across multiple locations in the New Mexico desert near the Dona Ana Range Complex. Over the course of five days, Soldiers operated from several forward operating bases while executing missions that mirrored real-world deployment scenarios.

Throughout the exercise, units conducted patrols, security operations and defensive missions while an opposing force attempted to disrupt movements and initiate contact. Soldiers manned defensive tower positions, monitored perimeter security and responded to simulated attacks during both day and night operations. The opposing force regularly probed defenses, forcing units to maintain constant vigilance and rapidly respond to emerging threats.

"Soldiers maintained constant vigilance as opposing forces attempted to probe defenses and exploit vulnerabilities."

Counter-UAS operations

Training also included counter-unmanned aircraft system operations, where Soldiers practiced detecting, identifying and responding to hostile drones. As unmanned aircraft increasingly appear on modern battlefields, these exercises helped Soldiers understand how to identify aerial threats and employ countermeasures to protect personnel and critical infrastructure.

Mass Casualty Response Training

Task Force Seminole medical personnel conducted mass casualty training to prepare for large-scale medical emergencies. These scenarios simulate combat or crisis conditions. Soldiers practiced tactical combat casualty care procedures, casualty collection point operations, triage and coordination with medical evacuation assets. The training emphasized the ability to transition rapidly from combat operations to lifesaving medical response while maintaining mission effectiveness.

Combined Arms Live Fire Exercise (CALFEX)

During the four-day CALFEX, the objective was to conduct a coordinated task force attack, defense and counterattack to seize and retain key terrain. The exercise required all companies within the task force to coordinate direct and indirect fires during both day and night operations, demonstrating the unit's ability to synchronize maneuver and fires across the battlefield.

Military Assisted Departure

Soldiers assigned to the East Africa Response Force conducted a simulated military-assisted departure (MAD). A MAD, such as an embassy evacuation, is a U.S. Department of State-led operation that uses Department of War resources to evacuate American citizens from dangerous, unstable or disaster-stricken areas to a nearby safe location. Exercises like this demonstrate the task force's ability to conduct crisis response, protect U.S. personnel and diplomatic facilities, support disaster relief, conduct personnel recovery and provide humanitarian assistance.

SOLDIER SPOTLIGHT

Meet Specialist Jamal Rivers



Hometown: Davenport, Florida

MOS: 11B Infantryman

Favorite MRE: Meatballs & Marinara

Favorite Movie: Repo! The Genetic Opera

Hobby: Writing

SPC Jamal Rivers, an infantryman assigned to Delta Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, serves as a gun truck driver in the battalion's heavy weapons company. Outside of the Army, Rivers works as a chef, where he enjoys developing new recipes and experimenting with different cuisines. His passion for cooking allows him to be creative in the kitchen while sharing meals with friends and family.

Rivers joined the Army National Guard four years ago with a clear purpose in mind. "I joined the military to give my daughter the life that I never had," he said. Since enlisting, Rivers said the experience has helped him grow both personally and professionally and has pushed him to become a better version of himself.

One of his most memorable Army experiences came during training at the National Training Center, where his vehicle was designated as part of the unit's quick reaction force. During the exercise, Rivers supported rescue operations while maneuvering through simulated hostile conditions as the unit's designated recovery vehicle.

Rivers will once again support quick reaction force operations during the battalion's upcoming deployment to the Horn of Africa. The

mission requires Soldiers to remain prepared to respond to a wide range of operations, including crisis response, protection of U.S. personnel and diplomatic facilities, disaster relief, personnel recovery and humanitarian assistance, while strengthening partnerships with allied nations under U.S. Africa Command.

Outside of training, Rivers enjoys a variety of hobbies. He has a passion for cooking, particularly French cuisine, and spends time writing short stories. He also serves as a dungeon master for tabletop role-playing games and enjoys sparring, wrestling and kickboxing.

"My friends call me 'Taskmaster,' like the Marvel character," he said. "I have always been able to watch something and pick it up quickly, whether it is fighting styles or other skills."

As the battalion prepares for deployment, Rivers said he is especially excited about opportunities to train alongside partner forces overseas and learn from other militaries.

During challenging training days, Rivers stays motivated by advice that has followed him since childhood.

"My grandfather always told me, 'Don't be sorry. Just be better,'" Rivers said. "Hearing that again in the game *God of War* really stuck with me. You just get up, dust yourself off and keep going," he said.

SOLDIER SPOTLIGHT

Meet Sergeant First Class Veronica Vega



Hometown: Tampa, Florida

MOS: 88M Motor Transport Operator

Favorite MRE: None

Favorite Book: The Perfect Marriage

Hobby: Reading

SFC Veronica Vega is a motor transport operator and serves as the distribution platoon sergeant for Task Force Seminole. Vega supervises the Soldiers responsible for moving personnel, equipment and supplies across the unit's area of operations, ensuring training events and missions are supported.

As a distribution platoon sergeant, Vega plays a key role in supporting the battalion's training and deployment preparation. Logistics, she explained, are critical to mission success because every combat operation depends on reliable transportation, supply distribution and sustainment support.

Vega lives in Tampa, Florida, and has served for 15 years in the Army National Guard. Outside of the military, she has worked for the United States Postal Service for the past seven years.

Vega joined the Army as a single mother seeking financial stability and benefits for her family. What began as a practical decision quickly became a career built on leadership, service and mentorship.

One of her most memorable experiences came during a 2016 Regionally Aligned Forces mission, where she supported training efforts with the Guatemalan Army. The experience allowed her to work alongside partner forces while contributing to international military cooperation.

Throughout her career, Vega credits Master Sgt. Mark Zapata as one of the most influential mentors she has had. She said his leadership helped keep her focused on professional growth and opened doors that allowed her to continue developing as a noncommissioned officer. Vega is particularly proud of completing Master Driver School, which strengthened her expertise in transportation operations and enabled her to be an asset.

Preparing for the unit's upcoming mission has brought unique challenges, particularly the transition from traditional National Guard status to Title 10 active-duty service. Vega said one of her priorities has been reinforcing standards and ensuring Soldiers understand the seriousness of the mission they are preparing to execute.

Looking ahead, Vega said she is most excited about continuing to grow professionally and gaining a deeper understanding of operational Army logistics during the deployment.

Outside of the Army, Vega enjoys reading, especially Christian fiction and murder mystery novels. She also enjoys drawing and sketching, a creative outlet many Soldiers in the unit may not know she has.

On difficult training days, she draws strength from her faith. "God is my push. He is my rock and my strength. Esther 4:14, 'for such a time as this,' reminds me that your current circumstances and placement are intentional and designed for you to make a difference," she said.

FROM THE AID STATION

Insights and health guidance to keep Task Force Seminole mission ready

Task Force Seminole Workout of the Month

1-mile run

20 hand-release pushups

30 air squats

15 burpees

20 walking lunges

30-second plank

Repeat for 3 rounds

Heat Acclimatization in the Horn of Africa

Deploying to the Horn of Africa means preparing for extreme heat and frequent coastal humidity, both of which can accelerate dehydration and heat stress. Although rainfall is limited, conditions near Djibouti City can still feel oppressive because high temperatures combine with atmospheric moisture. Soldiers should hydrate early, replace electrolytes during heavy sweating, pace activity, and take heat mitigation seriously during the hottest parts of the day. Most people need about 7 to 14 days to substantially acclimatize to a hot environment, with noticeable improvement often beginning sooner. If arriving from a different elevation, initial altitude adjustment usually takes 3 to 5 days, while fuller adaptation may continue for weeks to months.

"The goal is simple, adapt progressively so you stay safe, effective, and mission ready."

Ruck Around Africa

Task Force Seminole is taking on a new challenge, walking the entire coastline of Africa together. Beginning April 1, Soldiers across Task Force Seminole will track their ruck march mileage as part of a collective fitness challenge designed to build endurance, promote readiness and strengthen esprit de corps during the deployment.

The coastline of Africa spans approximately 18,950 miles. While that distance may seem daunting, it becomes achievable when broken down across the entire formation. If each Soldier contributes a small amount of distance consistently, the task force can reach the goal together. Over eight months, if each Soldier rucks 2.09 miles per month, the task force will achieve the goal. Every mile counts. Whether it comes from a unit or individual ruck march.

Beyond the numbers, the challenge is meant to encourage Soldiers to stay active, support one another and maintain the physical and mental endurance required during deployment. Small efforts across the formation can add up to something much larger.

Mileage tracking will begin April 1, and updates will be shared in future issues of The Seminole Standard. Lace up your boots, grab your ruck and help Task Force Seminole walk the coast of Africa, one mile at a time.



Current Distance: 0
Miles Remaining: 18,950

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

RUN YOUR RACE

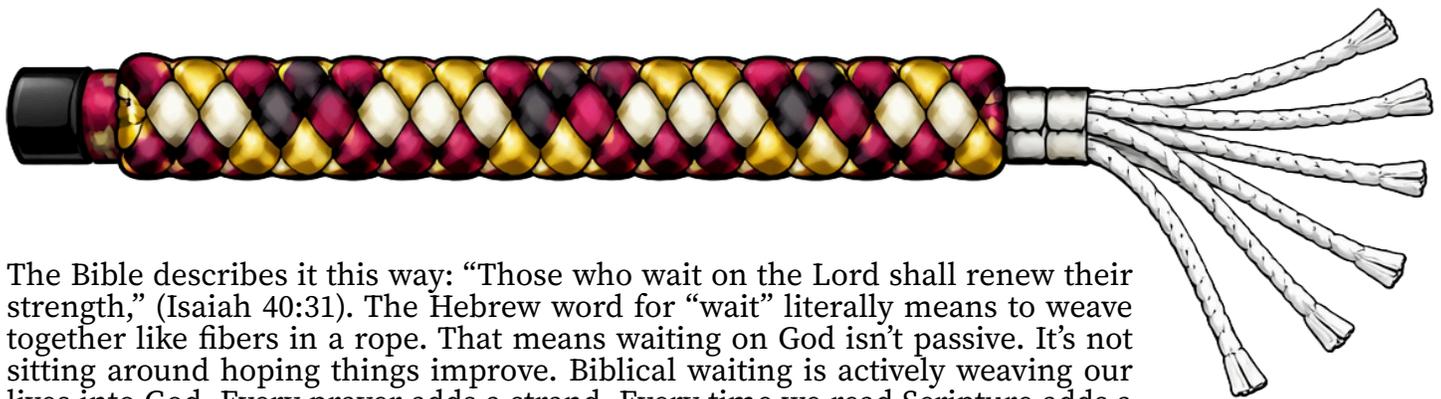
Chaplain Jason Fletcher

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

Every Soldier understands endurance. It's the ruck march when the straps start digging into your shoulders. It's the last mile of a run when your legs feel like concrete. Endurance isn't about comfort. It's about continuing forward when everything in you wants to stop.

Over the past few weeks, I've been talking about endurance, not just physical endurance, but spiritual endurance. The reality is deployments, the pace of military life, and the challenge of soldiers and families finding a new rhythm at home can wear on everyone over time. Running our race with endurance means having the strength to stay under pressure without quitting. Biblical endurance, however, is not passive waiting, but confident perseverance that holds the line until God moves.

Real endurance comes from the source. To understand this kind of endurance, think about something every Soldier has used, 550 paracord. At first glance, paracord looks like a single cord. But if you cut it open, you'll find seven inner strands, each made of smaller fibers. The outer sheath contains more than 30 fibers. Altogether, one piece of paracord contains more than 50 individual strands working together. One thread cannot do much on its own. But when the strands of paracord are woven together, the cord can more than 500 pounds!



The Bible describes it this way: “Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength,” (Isaiah 40:31). The Hebrew word for “wait” literally means to weave together like fibers in a rope. That means waiting on God isn't passive. It's not sitting around hoping things improve. Biblical waiting is actively weaving our lives into God. Every prayer adds a strand. Every time we read Scripture adds a strand. Every act of obedience, worship, service, and time spent with other believers strengthens the rope. Over time, those strands form a strength greater than anything we could carry on our own.

I like to say it this way: “They that have all aspects of their lives intertwined and bound together with the Lord, like threads of a rope, shall exchange their meager strength for the strength of the rope. They shall rise to meet challenges as if they had powerful wings like an eagle. They shall run through life and not be weary. They shall walk through problems and not faint.” (Paraphrase of Isaiah 40:31)

As you run the race set before you, run with endurance and remember the paracord. Don't try to carry life on a single thread. Weave your life into Him. When your life is bound together with God, you gain a strength far greater than your own. That's the kind of endurance that will help you run your race well.

This product includes elements generated using artificial intelligence. These AI-generated elements were reviewed and edited by relevant Department of Defense personnel to verify appropriateness and compliance with DoW policies and guidance. (U.S. Army graphic by CPT Dakota Burr)

PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD





CPL Michael Davis, a team leader assigned to Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army National Guard, engages opposing forces during a base defense operation Feb. 13, 2026, at Fort Bliss, Texas. Soldiers operated from several forward operating bases while executing missions designed to mirror real-world scenarios. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)



SGT Brandon Beckman, a sniper assigned to Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army National Guard, provides overwatch during a simulated military-assisted departure as part of the culminating training exercise Feb. 17, 2026, at Fort Bliss, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)



Soldiers assigned to Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army National Guard, assault the objective during the day live-fire iteration of the combined arms live-fire exercise Feb. 21, 2026, at Fort Bliss, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)



Mortarman assigned to Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army National Guard, fire 60 mm mortars during the daytime iteration of the combined arms live-fire exercise Feb. 23, 2026, at Fort Bliss, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)



2LT Christian Mejica, a platoon leader assigned to Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army National Guard, conducts precombat checks and inspections Feb. 23, 2026, at Fort Bliss, Texas. The inspections ensured Soldiers and equipment were prepared for the night combined arms live-fire exercise. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)



Soldiers assigned to Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army National Guard, engage targets from a support-by-fire position during the night live-fire iteration of the combined arms live-fire exercise Feb. 23, 2026, at Fort Bliss, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)



A soldier assigned to Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army National Guard, engages targets from a support-by-fire position during the day live-fire iteration of the combined arms live-fire exercise Feb. 21, 2026, at Fort Bliss, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)



SGT Riley Burrell, a combat medic assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army National Guard, conducts an intravenous insertion under low-light conditions Feb. 16, 2026, at Fort Bliss, Texas. The training was part of a mass casualty exercise designed to ensure medics can provide lifesaving treatment to Soldiers under a wide range of operational conditions. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)

S.H.A.M. — the Specialist Hotline for Advice & Morale

Have a dilemma? A barracks mystery? A leadership puzzle?

Submit your anonymous questions to S.H.A.M. — the Specialist Hotline for Advice & Morale.

Our panel of highly experienced (and moderately qualified) Specialists will provide their best guidance to improve readiness, morale, and overall survivability.

Submissions may be edited for clarity, brevity, and operational security.



Task Force Seminole Swag

The first shipment of Task Force Seminole merchandise arrived just before the unit's departure to the Horn of Africa. A dedicated website for Soldiers and family members to order additional items will be launching soon. More information will be published once the site goes live.



Seminole Suggestion Box

If you have any suggestions, requests for future content, or would like to contribute to The Seminole Standard, please reach out to CPT Burr at dakota.j.burr.mil@army.mil

MASTHEAD

The Seminole Standard

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