
THE

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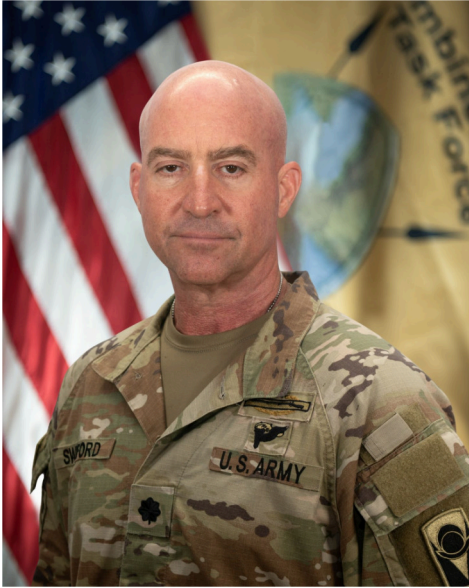
↖ **STANDARD** ↗



Volume 2 | April, 2026

THE COMMANDER'S COUNCIL OAK

From Transition to Execution: Advancing the Task Force Mission



I am honored to share our latest achievements and upcoming milestones with you in this edition of the *Seminole Standard*. Our Soldiers, hailing from six states and two Army components, are firmly establishing our presence across the Horn of Africa. This past month has been particularly noteworthy, marked by our successful transition from Fort Bliss, Texas, to our operational environment here in Africa.

The transition process was anything but simple. Yet, through careful planning and effective execution, our Soldiers demonstrated unparalleled resilience and commitment. Their ability to maintain cohesion across multiple countries and bases, while integrating into a new theater of operations, is a testament to the strength and character within our ranks. It is truly inspiring to see how, despite the initial hurdles, we have rapidly moved forward to fulfill our mission with distinction, maintaining focus and driving progress every day.

I am thrilled to report that our companies are not just meeting expectations; they are exceeding expectations. Each unit has shown incredible adaptability and skill in executing their tasks. This effort demonstrates our Soldiers' dedication and reflects highly on the training and preparation undertaken prior to deployment. Your hard work is laying a foundation for success not just for our Task Force, but for the broader objectives of the United States military in this vital region.

Another significant milestone recently achieved was the successful validation of our Base Defense Operations Center. This was no small feat, and the smooth operation reflects the diligence and professionalism of our crews in this vital aspect of our mission. Validation at this level is a major achievement in the Horn of Africa and speaks volumes about our operational readiness as we prepare to face any challenges that may arise.

Adding to our string of successes, the Horn of Africa staff has noted with astonishment that we have now achieved a perfect record in our battle drills, not once, but twice. Both Blackjack and Disco Company executed their drills flawlessly, marking the first time the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa staff has seen perfect scores since they began maintaining documentation seven years ago. This achievement showcases our Soldiers' ability to train hard, work as a cohesive unit, and excel under pressure.

Moreover, Apache and Combat Companies have hit the ground running, improving their patrolling tactics, techniques, and procedures. Their proactive approach not only enhances mission readiness but also contributes to our overall effectiveness in working alongside partner forces and local communities. This commitment to continuous improvement is essential as we move towards enhancing our operations throughout the region. -- continued on next page --

Comanche has already conducted an Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercise (EDRE) as the East Africa Response Force at a level not achieved since 2017. Their ability to plan on the move and accomplish the mission was exciting to watch. The feedback from this exercise will allow that capability to be even more proficient in the future.

As we begin to shift out of the assessment phase of our mission, the focus for the entire Task Force now turns toward optimizing our operational capabilities in support of ourselves, the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa staff, and follow-on units. It is vital that we keep the momentum we have built over these initial months. Each step we take towards refining our tactics and improving the mission will help create long-lasting benefits both for us and our partner forces in this region.

Exciting training opportunities are also on the horizon, as we will soon engage with militaries from other nations. These exercises will not only hone our skills but also foster collaborative relationships that are necessary for successful multinational operations.

In closing, I want to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude to our dedicated Soldiers. Your hard work, sacrifices, and commitment do not go unnoticed. Additionally, I extend heartfelt thanks to the families, friends, employers, and supporters of our Soldiers. Your unwavering support is crucial to our mission and helps sustain our morale and spirit.

As we continue our journey in Africa, let us uphold our standards of excellence and remain committed to our mission while supporting one another. Together, we are creating a legacy of success across the Horn of Africa.

With pride,
LTC Ryan M. Swinford
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NEVER SURRENDER!



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

THE WARPATH

This Month's Focus: Mission Analysis and Ownership



Over the past month, we have come a long way from training and validation at Fort Bliss, and we are now fully integrated into our mission in the Horn of Africa. During this time, we received the mission from our predecessors, Task Force Bataan, and completed a relief in place and transfer of authority. This period of transition is a critical time for every leader and Soldier to focus on mission analysis and situational awareness. Our success begins with understanding the operational environment, the tasks we are charged to accomplish, and how we can best leverage the strengths of our formation. Leadership at each echelon must identify capability gaps, personnel shortfalls or

surpluses, and areas where duties and responsibilities can be adjusted to improve how we conduct the mission. Every action taken now lays the foundation for the efficiency, effectiveness, and survivability of our Soldiers during mission execution.

Take the opportunity to incorporate lessons learned from previous units while tailoring our processes to fit the unique strengths of Task Force Seminole and leaving things better than when we got here. Leaders must encourage candid assessments from their Soldiers, validate assumptions with facts, and implement changes that enhance our ability to fight as a cohesive unit. Every Soldier must take ownership for their assigned responsibilities and consider how improvements in their foxhole strengthen the formation as a whole. Small adjustments at the individual and team level compound into greater effectiveness across the Task Force.

This is where disciplined leadership and individual ownership must take hold. NCOs set the tone. Drive standards, develop your Soldiers, and ensure every team understands not just what to do, but why it matters. Leaders at every echelon must remain engaged, adaptive, and honest in their assessments. Soldiers, focus on your foxhole. Know it, improve it, and take pride in it. When every position is strengthened, the entire formation becomes more capable, more cohesive, and more lethal. Stay focused, remain disciplined, and carry forward the mindset that defines this task force.

CSM Jonathan D. Pletcher

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NEVER SURRENDER!

AROUND THE AREA OF OPERATIONS



APACHE COMPANY



SGT David Strider, assigned to Alpha Company, Task Force Seminole, prepares his team for a patrol April 16, 2026, in the Horn of Africa. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Jake Anico)

As the Soldiers of Apache Company, 2-124 Infantry Regiment, arrived steadily at their outstation, life began to settle for the first time in what seemed like a very turbulent period since leaving Florida. It is a welcome feeling after many weeks of rigorous training at Fort Bliss, Texas. For many Soldiers of Apache Company, this is their first OCONUS mobilization. Some have never even left Florida, except for training, making this a new experience for many. Eagerly, these Soldiers arrive ready to tackle anything that comes their way.

While the mission remains the priority, Soldiers have opportunities for morale activities when the schedule allows. These include a United Service Organizations (USO) building, pickleball/basketball court, and two gyms. This ensures that Soldiers can take a mental breather and enjoy activities while deployed. On Easter this year, the USO organized an Easter egg hunt, providing a sense of normalcy in an otherwise abnormal environment.

In addition to the activities already available, CPT Aaron Benningfield, commander of Apache Company, has begun organizing events for his Soldiers, including fencing, Army combatives,

Brazilian jiu-jitsu, golf, and yoga. These opportunities allow Soldiers to learn new skills or develop hobbies they may not have otherwise pursued.

Soldiers seeking religious support have access to a non-denominational chapel that regularly offers services for various faith backgrounds. The chapel fosters an inclusive environment, ensuring all Soldiers feel welcome. As an added benefit, it also provides snacks and hygiene essentials and remains open for use at any time.

Now that Apache Company has fully arrived, the road ahead holds many challenges. But backed by world-class support system both here and abroad, the Soldiers of Apache Company are ready to execute their mission with the intensity and precision that members of the Florida National Guard are known for.

Soldier Shoutout

- 1LT Dylan Mandel (13A) is an attachment to Apache Company who was promoted from 2LT to 1LT on 16 April 2026.
- SSG Leslie Lewis (11B) is an In-Theater Extension (ITE) from the Louisiana National Guard who will be joining Apache Company throughout this mobilization.
- SPC Michael Smith (11B) will be getting promoted from SPC to SGT on 2 May 2026.
- SPC Uyi Akhimien (92Y) welcomed his first child, a healthy baby boy on 13 April 2026.

BLACKHAWK COMPANY

Blackhawk Company's Area of Operations (AO) is a hidden gem within the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa area of responsibility. Charged with ensuring the safety and security of personnel within and surrounding the AO, Blackhawk Company immediately began the process of assuming control upon arrival.

Blackhawk Company initiated its training progression with anti-armor weapons systems. Beginning with the Carl Gustaf 84mm recoilless rifle, Soldiers received hands-on instruction covering the system's history and operational application. Training was conducted by outgoing Soldiers with experience on the system, enabling effective knowledge transfer and valuable feedback. Following competency assessments, Soldiers transitioned to the AT4, building on training received during the pre-mobilization phase. This instruction served as an effective refresher and reinforced proficiency across the formation.

Finally, Soldiers completed in-depth instruction on the Javelin weapon system and its Command Launch Unit. Blackhawk's operational effectiveness relies on the technical expertise of its Soldiers, and their ability to employ anti-armor systems remains critical to mission success within the AO.

To maintain its operational footprint, Blackhawk Soldiers conducted deliberate and continuous presence patrols in Mine-Resistant All-Terrain Vehicles (M-ATVs) throughout the AO, reinforcing security, deterring potential threats, and strengthening situational awareness across key areas.

These patrols not only demonstrated a persistent and visible security presence, but also enabled



SPC Otrayou Downer, assigned to Task Force Seminole, patrols in a Mine-Resistant All-Terrain Vehicles (M-ATV) April 16, 2026, in the Horn of Africa. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Jake Anico)

leaders to assess terrain and build familiarity with the environment.

To date, Blackhawk Company has successfully assumed full responsibility for operations within AO and is fully integrated into its role as a security forces element. Leadership remains confident in the unit's ability to support ongoing counterterrorism efforts and takes pride in serving as the "Tip of the Spear" for Task Force Seminole.

BLACKJACK COMPANY

Over the past month, the Blackjack Company showcased their commitment to interoperability by hosting members of the Japanese military and the 776th Expeditionary Air Base Squadron for a joint range day.



From top left, SGT Julian Graziano and SPC Damarrion Hutchinson; and bottom left, SPC Victor Gavin, SPC Christopher Head, SSG Joshua Law, SGT Anthony Pekkanen and 1LT Maslin Brown, all assigned to Blackjack Company, 1st Battalion, 167th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, participate in a range day on April 3, 2026 in the Horn of Africa. The training enhanced marksmanship proficiency and reinforced interoperability.

During the range operations, Japanese military personnel received hands-on familiarization with U.S. weapons systems, including the M4 carbine and the M17 handgun. In return, U.S. forces had the opportunity to observe Japanese weaponry. The exchange extended beyond marksmanship, as service members from both nations tried on each other's vests and plate carriers to compare tactical equipment. The long day of shooting and discussion allowed the two military forces to understand the tactical similarities and differences that shape our operations.



SPC Mattingly Jenkins and SPC Jaxon McEuen, assigned to Blackjack Company, 1st Battalion, 167th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, pose for a photo after a 26.2-mile marathon on March 27, 2026, in the Horn of Africa. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Piper McIntosh)

Beyond tactical training, the Soldiers of Blackjack Company participated in a marathon hosted by the 776th Expeditionary Air Base Squadron, demonstrating a continued commitment to physical readiness across the formation. Additionally, throughout the month of April, the Soldiers of Blackjack Company collectively completed 32 miles of rucking, ensuring the unit remains physically conditioned and prepared to meet future mission requirements.

Through combined training with international partners and a relentless dedication to physical fitness, Blackjack 1-167 continues to maintain a highly capable force in the region.

Soldier Shoutout

- 1LT Maslin Brown, range operations officer in charge, and SGT Julian Graziano, range operations noncommissioned officer in charge, for successfully facilitating and executing a joint range day.
- SPC Jenkins for completing a 26.2-mile marathon with a finishing time of 5 hours and 8 minutes.

COMMANCHE COMPANY

Comanche Company successfully arrived in the Horn of Africa and assumed the mission of the East African Response Force (EARF), reinforcing Task Force Seminole's crisis response capability across the African continent. Within 24 hours of arrival, the company demonstrated immediate readiness by executing an Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercise (EDRE), rapidly deploying the entire formation to Kenya. This swift action validated Comanche Company's ability to project combat power and respond to emerging contingencies on short notice.

During a 10-day rotation, Comanche Company provided critical support to Combat and Apache Companies by conducting Security Force operations and executing Random Anti-Terrorism Measures (RAMs) throughout the Task Force area of operations. The EARF further expanded its operational reach by conducting an additional EDRE, deploying a platoon to a separate area of operations where they maintained 24-hour ground security in support of Blackhawk Company. These efforts ensured continuous force protection while enhancing interoperability.



Soldiers assigned to 3rd Platoon, Comanche Company, Task Force Seminole, prepare to board an MV-22 Osprey aircraft for an operation in the Horn of Africa. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Michelle Ferrari)

Following redeployment, Comanche Company shifted focus to refining steady-state operations in order to maximize mission effectiveness. Key initiatives included detailed analysis and optimization of ammunition pallet configurations, equipment load plans, and rucksack packing procedures. These refinements are designed to increase efficiency, improve deployment timelines, and sustain operational readiness across future missions.

Comanche Company also made a meaningful impact beyond tactical operations through community engagement efforts. SGT Sebastian Bennoon, 3rd Platoon, demonstrated exceptional initiative by supporting the local population. His contributions included providing basic medical assistance to civilians, delivering English instruction to both children and adults, and assisting individuals displaced from neighboring regions.

In addition, SGT Bennoon played a key role in a grassroots donation initiative by creating keychains from recycled materials, which were sold to support a local shelter. Through these efforts, he fostered strong relationships with community members, gained valuable cultural insight, and positively represented the unit abroad. His actions reflect a commitment to service that extends beyond the mission and contributed to strengthening the overall impact of Comanche Company during deployment.

COMBAT COMPANY



A Soldier assigned to Combat Company, Task Force Seminole, hands out a water bottle to children April 3, 2026 in the Horn of Africa. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Manuel Valle)

Soldiers assigned to a combat company took time during a recent mission to engage with members of a nearby village, distributing bottled water and small treats to local children. The interaction provided an opportunity to foster goodwill while reinforcing the Army's commitment to supporting local communities in areas where Soldiers operate.

During the engagement, Soldiers paused from their operational duties to connect with the village's youngest residents. Children gathered near a tactical vehicle as Soldiers handed out water and sweets, creating a moment of shared connection and positivity. The smiles and excitement from the children reflected the meaningful impact of even small gestures.

While maintaining mission readiness remains the top priority, moments like these highlight the importance of building trust and rapport with local populations. Positive interactions can contribute to a more stable and cooperative environment, which benefits both Soldiers and the communities they serve. By demonstrating respect and compassion, Soldiers help strengthen relationships that are essential for long-term success in any operational setting.

Leaders emphasize that engagements with local communities are conducted in a manner that prioritizes safety, professionalism, and cultural awareness. Soldiers are trained to remain vigilant while also recognizing opportunities to represent the Army in a positive and respectful way. These interactions are carefully balanced with operational requirements to ensure that mission effectiveness is never compromised.

Additionally, these engagements provide valuable real-world experience for Soldiers operating in a complex and dynamic environment. Interacting with local populations enhances cultural understanding and reinforces the importance of communication, adaptability, and disciplined decision-making. These moments, while seemingly small, contribute to building trust and strengthening relationships that support long-term stability in the region. By maintaining a balance between mission focus and human connection, Soldiers continue to demonstrate that professionalism and compassion are not mutually exclusive, but essential components of successful operations.

The distribution of water also underscores a broader awareness of basic needs within the area. Access to clean water is vital, and providing it when possible reflects the Army's dedication to humanitarian values alongside its primary mission objectives. Though brief, these encounters can leave a lasting impression on both Soldiers and civilians.

For the Soldiers involved, the experience serves as a reminder of the broader impact of their service. Beyond training and tactical operations, their presence can influence lives in meaningful ways. For the children, it is a moment of kindness that brings joy and reinforces a sense of connection.

Such engagements exemplify the Army's core values in action; selfless service, respect, and integrity. Even in demanding environments, Combat Company Soldiers remain committed to making a positive impact.

NASTY DAWG COMPANY

While deployed to the Horn of Africa, Delta Company, 2-124th Infantry Regiment, established a high operational tempo focused on readiness, joint integration, and the execution of real-world security operations. Upon arrival, the company quickly assumed its role as the Task Force's Quick Reaction Force (QRF), with platoons strategically arrayed across the area of operations to provide responsive and flexible security coverage.

Delta Company has emphasized building and sustaining warfighting proficiency across all formations. Soldiers have conducted extensive training on assigned weapon systems and equipment, with key focus areas including counter-IED procedures, driver's training, counter-UAS operations, detainee handling, electronic warfare systems, and sensitive site exploitation. This training, conducted alongside joint and partner forces, has strengthened interoperability, enhanced tactical coordination, and fostered cohesive relationships critical to future operations.

Delta Company has remained engaged in maintaining security throughout its assigned locations. Platoons have executed numerous patrols, Random Anti-Terrorism Measures, and QRF rehearsals designed to validate and refine emergency action plans. These efforts translated directly into real-world success, including the rapid reinforcement of security postures, response to a perimeter breach, and the detention of unauthorized personnel. The effectiveness demonstrated during these incidents earned recognition from partner forces and reinforced confidence in the unit's capabilities.

The Company's success is driven by the initiative and expertise of its Soldiers. Specialist Galicia exemplifies this commitment, having voluntarily extended his deployment to continue supporting the mission. Originally

trained as a cavalry scout, SPC Galicia has played a key role in improving communications, enhancing vehicle maintenance practices, and increasing route familiarization across the formation. As a nationally certified paramedic, his knowledge and willingness to mentor others have had a direct and positive impact on both mission execution and Soldier welfare.

Through continued integration with joint and allied partners, disciplined execution of security operations, and the leveraging of individual Soldier expertise, Delta Company remains postured, ready, and fully committed to supporting Task Force objectives.



A soldier assigned to Delta Company, Task Force Seminole, engages targets with an M2 .50-caliber machine gun during a combined arms live-fire exercise Feb. 21, 2026, at Fort Bliss, Texas. The exercise validated the unit's ability to conduct coordinated combat operations while synchronizing direct and indirect fires across the battlefield. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)

DISCO COMPANY



From left, SPC Brodie Ferguson, SPC Justin Blasingame, SPC Devin Shumate and SGT Elioenai Campos, assigned to Disco Company, 1st Battalion, 167th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, conduct a martial arts exchange in the Horn of Africa, April 14, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by 2LT Rafael Montes)

Disco Company continues to establish its footing in the Horn of Africa, transitioning into a steady operational rhythm. As Soldiers settle into life at their respective locations, the focus has shifted toward refining systems, building cohesion, and maintaining a disciplined battle rhythm. The early stages of deployment have required adaptability and professionalism, with Soldiers quickly assuming responsibilities and integrating into the broader Task Force Seminole mission. Through this transition, Disco Company has demonstrated its ability to remain flexible while sustaining high standards across all lines of effort.

On April 9, Disco Company conducted an awards ceremony recognizing two Soldiers for their outstanding performance and contributions to the mission. SPC Mark Kerkes was awarded the Army Achievement Medal

for his dedication and exceptional efforts during his previous deployment. SPC Kerkes arrived at Camp Lemonnier over nine months ago with Task Force Bataan, where he served at the Entry Control Point (ECP). In that role, he was responsible for facilitating installation access while maintaining strict security standards. Over the course of his tour, he developed into a subject matter expert on ECP operations. During the transition between Task Force Bataan and Task Force Seminole, SPC Kerkes played a key role in ensuring continuity of operations. He provided critical knowledge transfer across all aspects of security forces operations, advising at multiple levels up to and including company leadership. His efforts directly contributed to a seamless transition and the continued effectiveness of security operations.

SSG Benjamin Edwards was also recognized for his performance, receiving a Navy Top Performer coin. The Navy Top Performer program highlights the top one percent of enlisted personnel across the installation each month. SSG Edwards currently serves as both a squad leader and a Sergeant of the Guard, a dual role that requires a high level of responsibility and leadership. Despite limited time to transition into the Sergeant of the Guard position, he quickly established himself as a capable and reliable leader. At the same time, he continues to excel in his duties as a squad leader, consistently maintaining accountability, discipline, and operational effectiveness within his formation. His performance reflects a strong commitment to mission success and sets the standard for others within the company.

Disco Company also continued to build relationships with partner forces through joint training opportunities. Four Soldiers, SGT Elioenai Campos, SPC Devin Shumate, SPC Brodie Ferguson, and SPC Justin Blasingame, participated in a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu training session at a Japanese installation. The engagement provided an opportunity to exchange techniques and strengthen interoperability with allied personnel. The two-hour session fostered a professional training environment focused on skill development and mutual learning. SGT Campos, a second-degree black belt, led portions of the training, enhancing the technical depth and overall quality of the session.

The interaction highlighted the professionalism and enthusiasm of the Japanese personnel, whose hospitality reinforced the strength of the partnership. Engagements like this continue to build trust, improve coordination, and promote shared understanding between forces. Disco Company remains committed to pursuing opportunities that enhance interoperability and strengthen relationships with partner nations across the area of operations.

HATCHET COMPANY



SPC Nia George practices CPR on an infant mannequin April 12, 2026, in the Horn of Africa. (U.S. Army photo by John DiCampli)

While deployed to the Horn of Africa in support of Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa, Hatchet Company, 53rd Brigade Support Battalion, has quickly established itself as a critical enabler across the area of operations. Following a rapid and effective relief in place and transition of authority, the company assumed responsibility for sustainment operations.

Since Hatchet Company's arrival, the distribution platoon has played a key role in moving personnel and equipment across multiple locations in East Africa, helping set conditions for ongoing security force missions. The section has also supported the development of mass casualty evacuation planning in preparation for potential crisis response operations. Simultaneously, the maintenance section has ensured that all assigned vehicles and weapon systems remain fully mission capable.

As operations continue, Soldiers are adapting to their new environment and expanding their capabilities through additional training opportunities across the installation. Courses such as mail handler certification, basic life support, CPR, and customs procedures are enhancing individual proficiency and enabling our Soldiers to support a wider range of mission requirements.

Morale across the formation remains high as Soldiers continue to settle into the rhythm of deployment life and familiarize themselves with the camp. Hatchet Company remains focused on sustaining operations while building cohesion and maintaining the high level of support required across Task Force Seminole.

Hatchet also recently recognized a significant professional milestone with the promotion of SSG Barnash to Sergeant First Class. The ceremony was recorded and shared with his family, allowing them to be part of the moment.



SGT Bernard Joseph practices CPR on an infant mannequin April 12, 2026, in the Horn of Africa. (U.S. Army photo by John DiCampli)

TOMAHAWK COMPANY

April was a month of firsts for Tomahawk in its new home; first workouts, first office meetings, and first encounters with roommates. April also marked the first month that all of Task Force Seminole was on ground together in the Horn of Africa. Since arriving, Tomahawk Soldiers have already made their mark early in the deployment.

A mere two weeks into his new role, SPC Malek Naija, an analyst on the intelligence team, delivered his first professional intelligence brief since completing advanced training at Fort Huachuca. The brief was for CJTF-HOA senior leaders, including the Chief of Staff to the Commanding General. While he's had plenty experience briefing in training settings, briefing in a real-world operational environment is different. Though he claimed to be nervous, it didn't show, and he was given kudos for his professionalism and attention to detail.



CPT Amber Presto, a medical evacuation liaison officer assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force Seminole, recites the Oath of Commissioned Officers after being promoted by Brig. Gen. Andrew Ballenger, deputy commanding general of Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa, April 6, 2026, in the Horn of Africa. (U.S. Army photo by SFC Kenneth Tucceri)

Chaplain, Pastor Jason Fletcher, had a first of his own as well. The Sunday following Easter, Chaplain Fletcher preached his first sermon at Camp Lemonnier's Freedom Chapel. It was a packed house. Not having enough chairs to seat the congregation, people stood in the back of the chapel, eager to listen to his message. Chaplain Fletcher, along with SGT Yalimar Mercedes and the Unit Ministry Team, are excited to continue sharing the Word and motivating more servicemembers throughout the area of operations.

Outside of normal duty hours, the Seminole Sluggers, Task Force Seminole's premier softball team secured their first victory of the season against the Bashin' Baddies. Strong performances from CPT Eric Stephenson and MAJ Ryan Starkey, who both hit home runs, helped propel the team to the win. CPT Amber Presto also delivered at the plate, going 3-for-4 in the victory. Stay tuned for more updates as the Seminole Sluggers continue their season.

Lastly, on April 6, CPT Amber Presto and SGT Ryan Kelleher were promoted to their current ranks. The two soldiers were promoted by BG Andrew Ballenger, the Deputy Commanding General of CJTF-HOA, outside of the TFSE office building, with Florida's state flag flying above. The ceremony was a recognition of the soldier's achievement but also a reminder of where we've come from, and to be proud of that journey.

HHC is off to a strong start and continues to build momentum. Tomahawk Company looks forward to sharing more of our future accomplishments with friends and family back home.

SOLDIER SPOTLIGHT

Meet Specialist Manuel Tineo



Hometown: Palm Harbor, Florida

MOS: 94F Computer Systems Repairer

Favorite MRE: Chicken Chunks

Favorite Movie: The Poughkeepsie Tapes

Hobby: Video games

SPC Manuel Tineo, assigned to Hatchet Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, serves as a communications and maintenance specialist supporting Task Force Seminole. A 94F computer detection systems repairer, Tineo is responsible for maintaining and troubleshooting critical electronic systems that enable unit operations.

Tineo has served nine years in the Army National Guard and is from Palm Harbor, Florida. Outside of the military, he works as a commercial technician, where he repairs commercial equipment and applies many of the same technical skills he uses in uniform.

Tineo said his path to military service began unexpectedly during his senior year of high school. “I saw an ad and put my information in, but I did not think much of it at the time,” he said. “A recruiter reached out later, and I am glad I answered the call.”

Throughout his Army career, Tineo said one of his most memorable experiences was participating in gunnery training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, where he had the opportunity to support large-scale training operations.

In his current role, Tineo serves as the battalion’s primary 94F, making him the sole subject matter expert for his specialty within the formation. He also supports the forward support company as a communications specialist and has cross-trained with the battalion S6 section and unit armorers, allowing him to assist with a wide range of maintenance and operational tasks. Tineo said his ability to adapt and fill multiple roles contributes directly to the unit’s success.

Looking ahead, he said he is focused on improving himself both physically and professionally, with goals of maximizing his Army Fitness Test performance and strengthening his overall Soldier competencies.

Outside of the Army, Tineo enjoys spending time with his wife, watching movies and documentaries and playing competitive video games. During difficult training days, Tineo said his motivation comes from his wife. “My wife is my rock,” he said. “Listening to music that reminds me of her helps keep me going.”

For Tineo, maintaining connections with fellow Soldiers remains important, especially while deployed. He said he wanted to give a shoutout to his friends across Task Force Seminole. “I hope my friends at the outstations are doing well and having a good time,” he said. “I am looking forward to seeing everyone again at the end of the deployment.”

SOLDIER SPOTLIGHT

Meet Staff Sergeant Hunter Hayes



Hometown: Florida

MOS: 56M Religious Affairs Specialist

Favorite MRE: Chicken Stir-fry

Favorite Book: A Land Remembered

Hobby: Outdoor Recreation

SSG Hunter Hayes, assigned to Delta Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, serves as the platoon sergeant for 3rd Platoon, where he leads Soldiers supporting quick reaction force operations for Task Force Seminole. A 56M religious affairs specialist, Hayes is currently serving in an infantry role within the company's weapons platoon, demonstrating versatility and leadership.

Hayes has served 13 years in the Army National Guard and was born and raised in Florida. Outside of the military, he works as a police officer, balancing his civilian career in law enforcement with his responsibilities as a noncommissioned officer.

Hayes said his decision to join the Army was inspired by family legacy. "My grandfather and his two brothers served in World War II, and I wanted to serve my country as well," he said.

One of his most memorable Army experiences came during a deployment to Ukraine, where he had the opportunity to train alongside allied soldiers and partner forces from multiple countries. The experience strengthened his perspective on multinational operations and reinforced the importance of interoperability,

something he is equally as excited about for this deployment.

Looking ahead, Hayes said he is most excited about continuing to train alongside allied soldiers and partner forces during the unit's deployment, further strengthening relationships and shared capabilities. Outside of the Army, Hayes enjoys spending time outdoors, including kayak fishing, hunting, hiking, free diving, mountain biking and traveling.

During difficult training days, Hayes said his motivation comes from his faith and his belief that perseverance is rooted in something greater than himself. For Soldiers considering new opportunities, Hayes encourages them to take initiative and pursue their goals without hesitation.

"If there is something you want to do in the military, go for it," he said. "Do not wait until you are older or until you believe you are good enough. If you do not take the chance, you will never know. Go for it now and give it your all. If you do not make it the first time, learn where you are deficient, correct the issues and go for it again."

Among the accomplishments he is most proud of are experiences that challenged him and contributed to his growth as a Soldier and leader, including supporting and training alongside an Operational Detachment Alpha, participating in the Urban Breachers Course and earning his parachutist badge.

FROM THE AID STATION

Insights and health guidance to keep Task Force Seminole mission ready

Stress Management for Mission Readiness

In our line of work, stress is not just common, it's an operational certainty. Chronic or unmanaged stress is a significant threat to our health, decision-making, and overall mission readiness. Learning to effectively manage this pressure is a critical warfighting skill that enhances both individual resilience and team effectiveness.

Proactive stress management begins with recognizing your personal stress indicators, such as irritability, poor sleep, or difficulty concentrating. Once aware, you can deploy simple yet powerful techniques. One of the most effective tools is tactical breathing, like "box breathing": inhale for a four-count, hold for four, exhale for four, and hold for four. This exercise can be done anywhere, at any time, to lower your heart rate and reset your nervous system.

Another key strategy is maintaining strong social connections. Regularly debriefing with trusted peers, leaders, or family members provides an essential outlet and critical perspective. Finally, never underestimate the role of physical readiness; regular exercise is one of the most effective methods for improving mental clarity.

"Stress management is part of core warfighting discipline"

Treating stress management as a core discipline, much like physical training or marksmanship, is essential. If you feel that stress is becoming unmanageable, it is a sign of strength to seek support from medical personnel, a chaplain, or behavioral health resources. Your resilience is vital to the success of our team.

Nutrition is a Force Multiplier

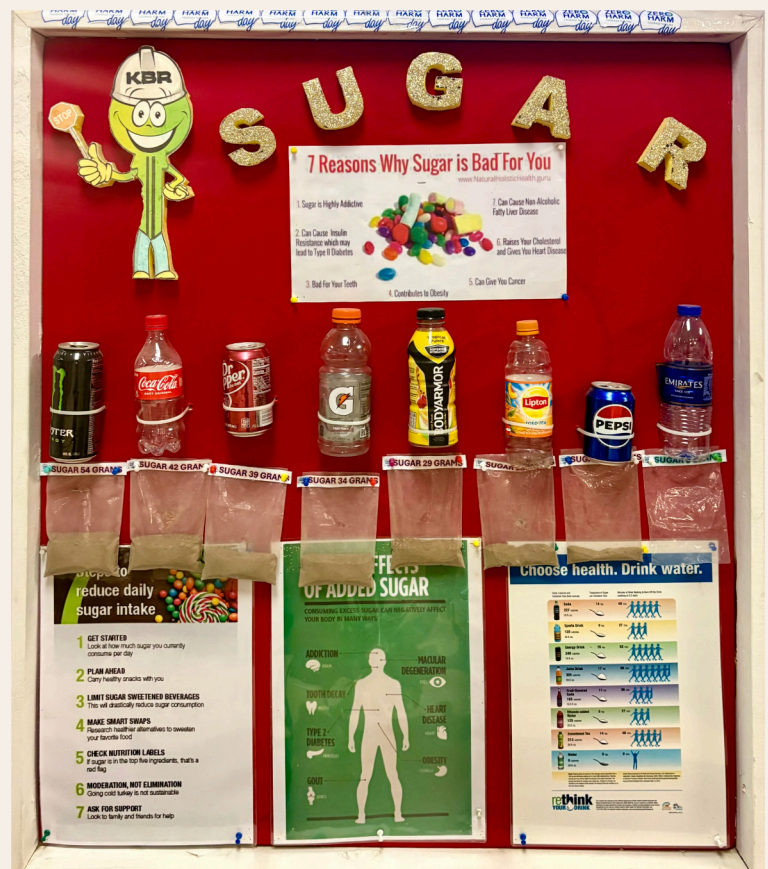
Fueling your body correctly is just as important as any physical training event. What you eat directly impacts your energy levels, recovery, mental clarity and overall mission readiness.

Start with the basics: protein, carbohydrates and hydration. Protein supports muscle repair and recovery, especially important with high operational tempo and physical training. Carbohydrates are your primary energy source, particularly for running, rucking and high-intensity efforts. Without enough carbs, performance and endurance will suffer.

In a deployed environment, consistency is the goal. At the DFAC, prioritize lean proteins, vegetables and complex carbohydrates when possible. Avoid consuming excess sugar-heavy foods and drinks, which can lead to energy crashes.

Eating a balanced meal 1-2 hours before physical activity can improve performance, while consuming protein after training supports recovery. Skipping meals or under-fueling will degrade both physical output and cognitive performance over time.

Fuel your body with purpose to maintain readiness and perform when it matters most.



SEMINOLE STRENGTH

Building strength, endurance and readiness — Never Surrender!

Task Force Seminole Workout of the Month

800-meter ruck
10 pull-ups
40 mountain climbers
20 v-ups
Repeat for 4 rounds

Building a Culture of Fitness

Physical readiness is a leadership responsibility at every level. Squad and team leaders are encouraged to integrate functional fitness into routine training, reinforcing standards that translate directly to mission success.

Incorporating events such as ruck marches, circuit training and team-based competitions builds both physical capability and unit cohesion. Leaders set the tone; consistent, disciplined training drives results across the formation.

"A ready force starts with engaged leadership"

Ruck Around Africa

Since kicking off the challenge on April 1, Task Force Seminole has logged 215.68 total miles, bringing the formation to 1.14% of the 18,950-mile journey around Africa's coastline.

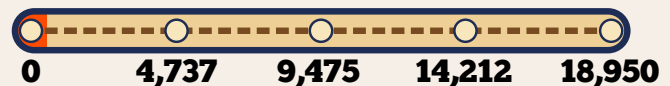
Based on current progress, the task force is behind schedule of the projected timeline needed to complete the challenge within eight months. Consistent participation across the formation remains the key to success, and even small distances will continue to make a measurable impact.

Top contributing companies this period include Commanche Company with 96 miles, followed by Disco Company with 78.68 miles.

As the challenge continues, leaders are encouraged to incorporate rucking into unit physical training plans, while Soldiers can contribute through individual efforts during personal time. Whether it's a short ruck around the AO or a longer weekend movement, every mile moves Task Force Seminole closer to the finish line.

As a reminder, at our current pace, each Soldier would only need to complete 2.5 rucking miles a month to accomplish our goal. Individual rucking miles reported through your chain of command count as well.

The coastline doesn't get any shorter, but together, we are closing the distance.



Current Distance: 215.68
Miles Remaining: 18,734.32

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

ENDURING VISION

Chaplain Jason Fletcher

Every pilot is trained to trust your instruments, not your feelings. Because in the dark, your feelings will lie.

A pilot can feel like they are flying straight and level while actually descending into the ground. It is called spatial disorientation, and it has taken down experienced, capable aviators who simply trusted what felt right instead of what was true. Pilots are trained to override their feelings and lock in on the instruments. Truth over feelings. Every time.



The same principle applies to life.

Hebrews 12 tells us to run with endurance, but it also tells us how to do it. It says we are to “look unto Jesus.” This means we are to turn away from everything else and fix our focus on one thing, Him.

Because just like a pilot in the dark, there are moments in life when things get dark. Stress gets high. Emotions get heavy. Times to connect seem hard. Kids are not listening. Demands at work continue to mount. Pressure builds. And in those moments, if you are not focused on Truth, you start to let feelings lead.

Jesus said it plainly in Matthew 6. What you look at determines whether the body is full of light or full of darkness. This is why your focus matters so much. God's Word is your instrument panel. It tells you what is true when everything around you feels uncertain. But feelings, pressure, distance, and fear will constantly try to pull your eyes away from the truth.

This is clearly seen when Peter, although brief, walked on the water (Matt. 14). When Jesus called him out of the boat, Peter, eyes locked in on Jesus, stepped onto the water and walked. Yet, the moment Peter shifted his focus to the wind and the waves, fear took over and he began to sink. Same storm. Same water. Same Jesus. Different focus.

This is where enduring vision becomes personal. Every day, you are choosing what gets your attention. If you do not choose your focus, life will choose it for you. Stress, comparison, pressure, and distraction will pull at you constantly. That is why you have to be intentional. Scripture before screens. Prayer before pressure. Worship before worry.

When visibility is low, trust the instruments. When life is heavy, trust what God has said. Your feelings are real, but they are not reliable navigators.

You also have to lay aside what is pulling your focus away. Not everything that slows you down is sin, but it can still drain your endurance. Distractions, unhealthy habits, and constant noise will keep you from locking in on what matters most, Him.

Here is the bottom line. You do not sink because of the storm. You sink when your eyes leave Jesus.

If your faith feels weak, your joy feels low, or your endurance is fading, do not start by trying harder. Start by refocusing. Fix your eyes on Him again. Because what you look at will shape you. And when you keep your eyes on Jesus, you will not just run your race. You will run it with endurance.

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





SGT Robert Irigoyen and SPC Lane Wheaton, both assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army National Guard, move a simulated casualty to the evacuation area during a mass casualty validation exercise at Fort Bliss, Texas, Feb. 16, 2026. The training simulated large-scale medical emergencies under combat conditions. (U.S. Army photo by CPT. Dakota Burr)



Soldiers assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army National Guard, load a simulated casualty onto an HH-60 helicopter during hot-load training March 18, 2026, at Fort Bliss, Texas. The training enhanced casualty evacuation capabilities and familiarized Soldiers with procedures and equipment used in operational environments. (U.S. Army photo by CPT. Dakota Burr)



BG Andrew Ballenger, deputy commanding general of Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, promotes Ryan Kelleher to the rank of sergeant in the Horn of Africa, April 6, 2026. Kelleher serves in the Task Force Seminole S6 section, responsible for managing communications systems and networks that enable mission command across the formation. (U.S. Army photo by SFC Class Kenneth Tucceri)



Members of the Kenyan Navy prepare to salute the official party during a key leader engagement in Manda Bay, Kenya, April 9, 2026. The engagement focused on strengthening collective security by identifying opportunities to share responsibilities across partnered forces. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)



SSG Dylan Prather, assigned to Comanche Company, Task Force Horn of Africa. The training prepared Soldiers to safely respond to photo by Senior Airman Michelle Ferrari)

Seminole, teaches Soldiers how to use a lasso April 7, 2026, in the wild animals encountered in the area of operations. (U.S. Airforce



LTC Ryan Swinford, commander of Task Force Seminole, meets with Brigadier Lazarus Patroba Wafula, commander of Kenya Navy Base Manda, and other Kenya Navy leaders April 9, 2026, in Manda Bay, Kenya. The visit focused on strengthening collective security by identifying opportunities to share responsibilities across partnered forces. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)

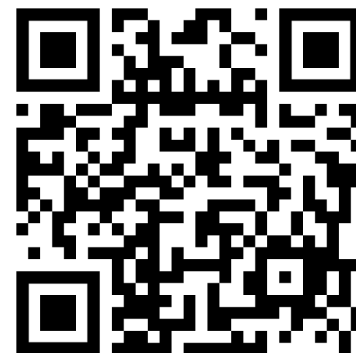


SgtMaj Mike Brown, the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa senior enlisted leader, meets with CSM Jonathan Pletcher, Task Force Seminole command sergeant major, April 9, 2026, in Manda Bay, Kenya. The visit focused on strengthening collective security by identifying opportunities to share responsibilities across partner forces. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)

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.



Thanks for submitting your questions and trusting us with your problems. That's on you. The following responses are provided by a panel of highly experienced Specialists. Guidance may vary. Outcomes are your responsibility.

Q: How do I pick my nose while my hands are covered in CLP?

A: That's a self-solving problem. You've already got maximum lubrication. Stop hesitating and execute.

Q: If I catch a black mamba can we keep it for morale?

A: Yeah, go ahead and catch it. Let us know how that works out for you. We'll put your story in next month's issue under "lessons learned."

Q: Have Escobar say tongue twisters into the radio to make 3rd Platoon think we've been infiltrated.

A: You're about two bad decisions away from creating a completely unnecessary situation. I respect it.

Q: I suck at socializing with the rest of the guys in the platoon. How do I fix that?

A: Honestly? None of us are good at socializing. We just keep showing up. Just be a good dude or dudette and take care of the person next to you. If you're struggling, find someone in the platoon who you think is outgoing and just ask to tag along. Don't overthink it. Say something dumb, get roasted, laugh it off, and keep it moving. Hold your head high and just be yourself. Platoon bonding is 20% personality and 80% shared suffering.

Q: There have been multiple reports of condiment-related incidents. How do we handle it?

A: We recommend posting a guard and maybe making DFAC condiments a controlled item. Unfettered access, plus free will, tends to produce... effective results.

MASTHEAD

The Seminole Standard

Published by:

2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment
53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team
Florida Army National Guard

Command Team:

LTC Ryan M. Swinford — Battalion Commander
CSM Jonathan D. Pletcher — Battalion Command Sergeant Major

Editorial Staff:

CPT Dakota Burr — Public Affairs Officer / Editor
2LT Evan Hydock, SGT Nakaana and SrA Duell — Editor

Contributing Writers:

LTC Ryan M. Swinford	SSG Edward Peters	CPT Amber Presto
CSM Jonathan D. Pletcher	SSG Marshall Verkler	SPC Jacob McCaslin
CPT Dakota Burr	SGT Roy Nicholas	SPC Piper McIntosh
Chaplain (CPT) Jason Fletcher	SSG Hunter Hayes	SPC Ryan Alires
CPT McGuire Bennett	2LT Benjamin Bartlett	1LT Michael Kiser
SGT Jake Anico	1LT John DiCampli	2LT Evan Hydock

Photography:

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Contact:

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

Disclaimer:

This publication is a newsletter published by the Task Force Seminole command team. Contents are informational and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of War or the U.S. Army.

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