



# SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

VOLUME 17, ISSUE 7 • JULY 2026

## The Evolution of the Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha

# ODA



**Eight Reasons**  
Military Veterans  
Should Write

Special Forces and  
**Operation Noble Obelisk**  
(1997)

**SOCAF**—Strategic imperative:  
Strengthening African  
Security Through Partnership



## IN THIS ISSUE:

From the President .....	1
From the Editor .....	2
SFA Chapter 78 Presents Valor Luncheon Donation to Sunburst Youth Challenge Academy .....	2
A Long Beach Stalwart, The American Gold Star Manor .....	3
Book Review <i>From OSS to Green Berets: The Birth of Special Forces</i> by Aaron Bank, Col. USA (Ret.) .....	4
Eight Reasons Military Veterans Should Write .....	5
The Evolution of the Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha.....	7
Special Forces and Operation Noble Obelisk (1997) .....	11
US SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – AFRICA Strategic imperative: strengthening African security through partnership....	12
TAPS: James Joseph Montano, Colonel, United States Army (Ret.) March 4, 1946 – May 30, 2026.....	13
SFA Chapter 78 May 2026 Chapter Meeting .....	14



**FRONT COVER:** The U.S. Army Special Operations Command History office website, [arsof-history.org](http://arsof-history.org), included images of 1960's and current ODA soldiers in its article "The Evolution of the Special Forces Operation Detachment-Alpha," featured in this issue on page 7. (Photo courtesy US Army)

## CHAPTER OFFICERS:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>President</b><br>James McLanahan                              | <b>Chaplain</b><br>Doreen Matsumoto                            |
| <b>Vice President</b><br>Don Deatherage                          | <b>Corporate Ambassadors At Large</b><br>Jim Cragg<br>Len Fein |
| <b>Secretary</b><br>Gary Macnamara                               | <b>Sentinel Editor</b><br>How Miller                           |
| <b>Treasurer</b><br>Richard Simonian                             | <b>Immediate Past President</b><br>Aaron Brandenburg           |
| <b>Sergeant At Arms/ Quartermaster</b><br>Mark Miller            | <b>Project Officer</b><br>Don Gonneville                       |
| <b>Coordinator of ROTC Program</b><br>Gary Macnamara (Temporary) |  |



Please visit [specialforces78.com](http://specialforces78.com)

Connect with SFA Chapter 78!

**Scan the QR code**  
or visit [specialforces78.com/links/](http://specialforces78.com/links/)



Funding for the SFA Chapter 78 Sentinel is provided by  
**VETERANS AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAM**  
A program of American Veterans Assistance Group  
888-923-VETS (8387)  
[VeteransAffordableHousing.org](http://VeteransAffordableHousing.org)



The *Sentinel* is published monthly by Special Forces Association Chapter 78, Southern California — **art direction and design by Debra Holm, Dinwiddie Holm Graphics**. The views, opinions and articles printed in this issue do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Army or the United States Special Operations Command, the Special Forces Association, or Special Forces Association Chapter 78. Please address any comments to the editor at [sfchapter78@gmail.com](mailto:sfchapter78@gmail.com).

# From the President | July 2026



James McLanahan  
President SFA Ch. 78

## Normandy and American Patriotism

I wish I could have taken my grandparents to Normandy. They would have loved it immediately.

At home, we are surrounded by noise about America: her flaws, her failures, and the mistakes we have made. Some of that criticism is fair. I carry my own feelings about policy decisions in Afghanistan that still trouble me. But Normandy reminded me that the scars

of a nation do not erase its greatness.

Tom Turney and I first talked about going while discussing places to visit. He found [Walk Among Heroes](#), Jeff Wells' nonprofit that brings World War II veterans and their families back to the battlefields and monuments of Europe. What we found there was more than history. It was reverence.

Everywhere we went, American flags flew. People stopped our World War II veterans to shake their hands, take photos, ask for autographs, or simply say thank you. The moment I will never forget was watching French schoolchildren line up to kiss and thank 102-year-old Jack Boeki, a veteran who escaped the Nazis, was aided by the French Resistance, joined the U.S. Army, and returned at Utah Beach.

The people of Normandy have not forgotten. They remember occupation. They remember liberation. They remember what young Americans did on beaches like Omaha and cliffs like Pointe du Hoc.

I wish every American could see that gratitude. We would come home quieter, prouder, and more grateful for the country we inherited and for the ones who fought in that great and terrible conflict to save the world. ❖

*De Oppresso Liber,*

James McLanahan

President, SFA Chapter 78



Check out our short video entitled "2026 Valor Luncheon with Dick Thompson" about our recent Valor Luncheon. If you missed the event, this will give you a taste what it was like. Join us next year! You can view it on our YouTube channel @SFAchapter78 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1ApK-4z6Os>).



## SFA Chapter 78 Monthly Meeting

### July 18, 2026

Breakfast – 0800 • Meeting – 0830

Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos  
The Pub at Fiddlers Green  
4745 Yorktown Ave Bldg 19,  
Los Alamitos, CA 90720-5176

Please send RSVP by Monday, July 13 to  
VP Don Deatherage @ [drdeathca@gmail.com](mailto:drdeathca@gmail.com)

## Next month—August 15, 2026

Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos  
The Pub at Fiddlers Green

## 2026 Meeting Schedule

August 15 • September 19  
October 17 • November 21  
December (to be announced)

# From the Editor | July 2026



How Miller  
Sentinel Editor

This issue begins with Chapter 78 President James McLanahan's "**A Long Beach Stalwart, The American Gold Star Manor,**" in which he reports on his visit to the American Gold Star Manor for their Memorial Day/National Poppy Day ceremony. James explores this unique Long Beach community, dedicated to serving Gold Star families, veterans, and seniors and preserving the memory of America's fallen service members. James discusses the Manor's history and its mission.

In "**Eight Reasons Military Veterans Should Write,**" **Robert Adolph**, who had significant careers with both SF and the State Dept, including during the Beirut embassy bombing, makes a convincing case for why we should write about our Vietnam and other experiences. Among other things, he says that it is the best form of self-improvement for the mind, while doing worthwhile work, getting your experiences out there to be shared by new generations.

**Aaron Bank** is referred to as the Father of SF. He used his experience as a Jedburgh team leader with the OSS in WWII to stand up the initial Special Forces group in June of 1952 – named the 10th SFG (A)- to fool the Soviets.

The book he wrote, **From OSS to Green Berets: The Birth of Special Forces**, was reviewed by **MAJ John Byrnes** in the *Special Warfare Journal*. He calls it entertaining and informative, covering his Jedburgh days, through working with Ho Chi Minh in Indochina, and more.

"**The Evolution of the Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha,**" A-teams, as we Vietnam vets called them, now known as ODA Alphas, are the basic unit of SF. They were 12-man teams, sometimes with additional members such as a Psyops Lieutenant.

They evolved through time from 15-man OSS OG teams, 12 man + A-teams, to, for example, ODA 595, popularized as the Horse Soldiers, who opened the ground war in Afghanistan and added two USAF Combat Controllers to great effect.

In October of 1997, SF was called upon to assist in the emergency evacuation of US civilians and those of many countries from Sierra Leone. **John Friberg** published in his *SOF.News* online magazine his rendition of what was called **Operation Noble Obelisk**.

From **USASOC's Tip of the Spear**, **Lt. Cdr. Joshua Belk** gives us a sitrep of SOF efforts in Africa presently and describes what is being done to accomplish the mission going forward.

We were informed of the recent passing of **Jim Montano**, an original member of the 1st Battalion (Ranger), 75th Infantry (part of what became the modern 75th Ranger Regiment). Although not a chapter member, he had attended our chapter meetings from time to time before moving to Delaware and was held in high regard by many members of Chapter 78. New member **Richard Negrete** has kindly provided photos, and we've received permission to print a poem written about Jim by a fellow Ranger.

Lastly, read about our chapter meeting with guest speaker **William B. (Bill) Scott**, who spoke about Brigadier General Robert F. Titus, the topic of his book, **EARTHQUAKE**.

So please follow Robert Adolph's advice and write about your SF experiences! And then send them to me at the Sentinel. We've been very fortunate to have received some outstanding stories this year, and we'd love to publish yours too. ❖

How Miller  
Sentinel Editor

## SFA Chapter 78 Presents Valor Luncheon Donation to Sunburst Youth Challenge Academy



On Thursday, May 28, 2025, Chapter Vice President James McLanahan (at far left), along with chapter member Mike Jameson (at far right), presented the Sunburst Youth Challenge Academy with a check for \$12,500, proceeds from the "Raise Your Paddles" auction at the Chapter's Valor Luncheon held in April. The cadets pictured about provided much appreciated assistance at the Valor Luncheon. (Photo courtesy James McLanahan)

# A Long Beach Stalwart, The American Gold Star Manor

By James McLanahan

I first learned about American Gold Star Manor when our chapter was invited to its Memorial Day/National Poppy Day ceremony. Arriving at the Long Beach campus, I was immediately struck by its immaculate, park-like grounds—a rare find in Los Angeles County.

American Gold Star Manor is one of those rare institutions that is both a place and a promise. The Manor provides safe, affordable, independent living for Gold Star parents, veterans, and eligible seniors. Its deeper purpose, however, is remembrance. It stands as a living commitment to honor the families of America's fallen service members and to the enduring obligation our nation has to those who have borne the cost of war. Everywhere I looked, banners flew in tribute to fallen service members, reinforcing that mission of remembrance.

It is difficult to explain to those who have not experienced it firsthand. I cannot imagine what it must feel like to lose a child, spouse, or loved one to war. As a veteran, I have the benefit of understanding their service in a way most family members never get. I watched young men train, mature, and become the soldiers our nation needed them to be.

The Manor's origins trace back to American Gold Star Mothers, Inc., the national organization founded by mothers whose sons and daughters died in military service. At the organization's 10th Annual National Convention, members proposed establishing a national memorial home for pensioned Gold Star Mothers.

In 1953, they purchased Truman Boyd Manor, a 93-acre Long Beach property—a site that had served as temporary housing for WWII defense workers and military personnel. The organization set to work transforming the wartime complex into a permanent home for Gold Star Mothers. From that initial vision, American Gold Star Manor was born, evolving into a vibrant community serving Gold Star families, veterans, and low-income seniors.

Today, American Gold Star Manor occupies a gated, park-like campus that offers housing, community, recreation, and support services. Its mission extends beyond its residents through assistance programs that provide short-term rent or mortgage support to Gold Star parents facing financial hardship.

This year, the Manor gathered residents, families, and supporters on the Friday before Memorial Day—also recognized as National Poppy Day—for its annual ceremony in the Memorial Gardens. Upon arrival, I met Chapter member Mark Griffin, and we were each given a red poppy pin—a symbol of remembrance for those who gave their lives in service to the nation. Seeing it brought to mind the lyrics of “The Green Fields of France” and the immense toll paid by our country in both World Wars.



U.S. Army Ranger veterans Steve Keesal, at left, and Ryan Antes, right, were guest speakers at the American Gold Star Manor Memorial Day/National Poppy Day Ceremony. (Photos above by James McLanahan)

Among this year's guest speakers were Steve Keesal and Ryan Antes, both American Gold Star Manor board members who have also spoken at Chapter meetings. Both are former U.S. Army Rangers with deep ties to Long Beach and the broader veteran community. Keesal served with the 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, deploying to Afghanistan and Iraq before continuing his service through civic and veterans' organizations. Antes, a Long Beach native, also served in the 75th Ranger Regiment with deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq before returning home to build a career as a trial attorney and later a trust attorney, while remaining an advocate for veterans.

Together, their presence reflected the spirit of the Manor itself. Their remarks honored sacrifice not only through remembrance of fallen comrades, but also through continued service to Gold Star families, veterans, and the community. In many ways, they demonstrated that remembrance is not simply about looking back—it is about carrying forward the responsibility to serve others.

Well done, gentlemen. *Rangers Lead the Way!* ❖

**AMERICAN**   
**GOLD STAR MANOR**  
Learn more at [goldstarmanor.org](https://goldstarmanor.org)

# Book Review

## *From OSS to Green Berets: The Birth of Special Forces* by Aaron Bank, Col. USA (Ret.)

By Maj. John Byrnes

Special Warfare Journal, February 12, 2026, <https://www.swcs.mil/Special-Warfare-Journal/Article/4405165/book-review-from-oss-to-green-berets-the-birth-of-special-forces-by-aaron-bank>; U.S. Army

**“Walk into every room like your ancestors sent you to be there.”**

This saying carries profound implications. However, to truly appreciate them, one must have a sense of the history leading up to his existence. For Special Forces soldiers, such history is so often emphasized that it often becomes an afterthought. Still, understanding the context behind the creation of the Green Berets reveals lessons as relevant today as ever. Retired Col. Aaron Bank's memoir, *From OSS to Green Berets: The Birth of Special Forces*, offers just such an understanding. As such, this book should be required reading for every Green Beret in the formation today.

Aaron Bank is known as the father of Special Forces. He was the first Director of Special Forces and was the first Commander of 10th Special Forces Group when it was activated in 1952. Before standing up Special Forces as the Army's premier unconventional warfare capability, Col. Bank served in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) as a Jedburgh during WWII. In writing the book, Col. Bank wanted to tell the story of the OSS's operational groups conducting unconventional warfare in WWII, and of the subsequent development of the Green Berets. His purpose in telling this story was to emphasize that the OSS and its legacy are intrinsically tied to that of the Green Berets as the “operational predecessor” of U.S. Army Special Forces.

There is no grandiose introduction in this book. Instead, Col. Bank lets his experiences speak for themselves. From the first sentence, he dives right into the fascinating story of how he applied for a position with the OSS to get out of a boring position as a training officer for a tactical railroad battalion in Camp Polk, Louisiana. He wanted to liven up his career and exercise his foreign language capabilities, which the unit required. Needless to say, he had little idea of what lay in store for him. The memoir covers his training in clandestine activity, weapons and explosives, tradecraft, sabotage, and small unit tactics, which became the backbone of the Jedburgh's skills. From there, he recounts his operational successes aiding resistance groups and guerilla networks in operations against the Nazis behind enemy lines in France.

After France's liberation, Bank recalls an attempt to commence an unconventional warfare campaign in Germany, including a vague directive from “Wild Bill” Donovan, the head of the OSS, to capture Hitler. However, the OSS canceled the mission just before it began. Equally fascinating are Bank's vignettes from postwar Indochina. He details the complexities of a changing world order, his relationship with Ho Chi Minh, and their discussions about Vietnam's future. He also describes run-ins with the French and British, highlighting uncertain alliances and shifting policies after the war.

Bank's detailed account of the Army's force development of an unconventional warfare capability provides valuable context on the process that led to the creation of Special Forces. These sections of the book are as close to the horse's mouth as you can get, offering valuable insight into what Bank and his contemporaries were thinking. Interestingly, Bank went to great lengths to differentiate Special Forces from the Rangers, which senior leaders at the time consistently conflated. He painstakingly explained at every opportunity that, while Rangers offered a limited, direct-raid capability into enemy lines, Special Forces operated in the deep, behind enemy lines for extended periods to develop, train, and fight alongside guerilla forces.

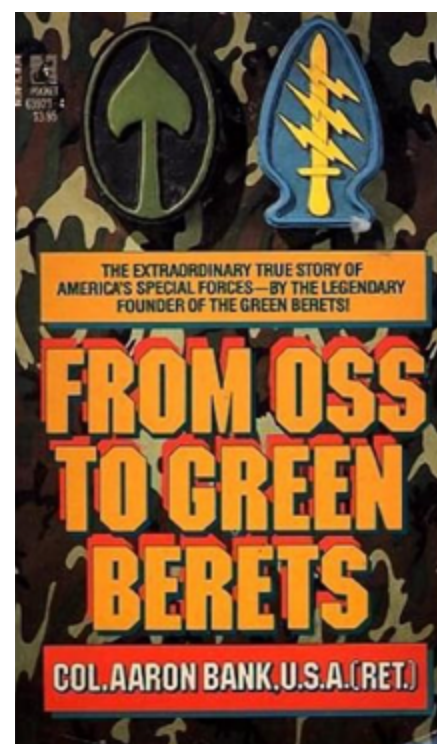
Additionally, Bank faced a myriad of challenges from senior leaders using doctrinal terms interchangeably, which obscured his vision for the branch. He lamented the fact that “the terms unconventional warfare, clandestine operations, unorthodox warfare, and special operations were being used interchangeably” (Bank 1986, 151). The incorrect use of doctrinal terms and definitions still plagues special operations today and will be a problem for Conventional Forces and Special Operations Forces Integration, Interoperability, and Interdependence (CF-SOF I3) in large-scale combat operations (LSCO) without sufficient SOF integration into plans and operations before crisis.

*From OSS to Green Berets* is both entertaining and informative. The book's first part, detailing Bank's operations during and after WWII, reads like a military adventure novel. The section on Special Forces' development is drier but packed with relevant insights for the regiment and the broader special operations community. One disappointing aspect is the lack of mention of the First Special Service Force, from

Continued on page 6

[From OSS to Green Berets: The Birth of Special Forces](#)

By Col. (ret.) Aaron Bank  
Published by Presidio Press 1986  
216 pages



# Eight Reasons Military Veterans Should Write



By Robert Bruce Adolph

<https://medium.com/@adolwulfe/eight-reasons-military-veterans-should-write-by-robert-bruce-adolph-2828f1f3cc56>

***Military veterans should write because the hard-earned experience, loss, sacrifice, and truth of your service are worth honoring and preserving.***

I retired twice, once from the US Army's Special Forces in 1997 and later from the United Nations Department of Safety & Security in 2014. I can only hazard a guess that I am not very good at leisure activities, because I found myself at work again as a security consultant in Lebanon, war-torn Ukraine, and Azerbaijan regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh War. I also published a well-reviewed memoir of my early and violent years with the UN. Additionally, I published several dozen essays and commentaries in the US and Europe in recent memory. Writing is my topic today, and one that you might find of interest. Although there is no doubt more, there are at least eight reasons why writing is beneficial. Let me count the ways....

First—Canadian public intellectual, Jordan Peterson, said it, “Writing is the most rigorous form of thought.” If you are concerned for the health of your gray matter, try writing for publication. Every word matters to editors. Exercising the muscle between your ears is a preventative to any number of ailments tied to the mind. Stay sharp and write. Although it may sound absurd, every piece must have an introduction, body, and conclusion. Structure matters. You might be surprised how many fledgling scribblers miss this basic mark. Good writing simplifies complex topics for the reader as well as yourself. The rule of thumb: tell them what you are going to tell them; tell them; finally, tell them what you told them.

Second—If you are curious about people and events, writing is good for you. One of the best ways to understand a topic is to write about it. Writing often compels research. Those who write are often better

informed than the public, at least within their areas of interest. Good writers don't merely have opinions—they have informed opinions. Curiosity, though, remains the heart and soul of good writing.

Third—If you hope to expand your circle of friends, there are few better ways of sparking conversation than talking about your recent writing efforts. Making new friends can be challenging. Psychologists confirm that this is especially true for men. You will discover, as I did, that those topics that interest you often interest others as well. This is true for fiction and non-fiction writers alike. In other words, writing can make you more interesting. Some of the most engaging people I have ever met were handy with a keyboard.

Fourth—Writing led to speaking. When my book was published, I had to promote it, which meant speaking before audiences. It wasn't as hard as you might think. The memoir covered four years and was based on my extraordinarily challenging and potentially life-threatening experiences in Africa and the Middle East. Speaking about what happened to me required little preparation. And if I am any judge, audiences found the subject matter engaging. My most recent gig was the keynote address before a conference on the future of technology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. The topic had nothing whatever to do with my memoir, but instead my newspaper and magazine essays on related issues. The more you write, at least in my experience, the better you speak.

Fifth—You don't need to have the talent of Stephen King or John Grisham to become a competent writer. I am living proof. The best of us writes as we speak in what's called the active voice. You might be like me and know very little about grammar. However, as a lifelong book lover, I had little trouble putting what I had unconsciously learned while reading into practice at the keyboard. In any case, most computers today have integrated grammar check programs. Write! Let the machine correct your tenses, punctuation, and spelling. Storytelling is

an art form, just like painting or music. However, it is the most egalitarian of artful pursuits. Average intelligence is sufficient. Anyone who possesses the desire can write and get better at it through practice.

Sixth—Some years back, my ailing father asked me to write and present the eulogy upon the sudden and unexpected death of his wife, my mother. He thought that I had a shot at finding the right words to best describe her life. I could receive no higher praise than to be asked to perform such a critically important and necessary family function. I only hope that I did her enough credit. Essentially, I felt honored by my father's request. I still do.

Seventh—It isn't about the money. Although there are a few who can make significant financial gains through writing, most don't. Count me in the latter category. In fact, I have spent more in terms of both time and bucks in the process than I ever made back. So, if it isn't about the financial reward, what is it about? For me, it is about self-improvement and the respect that comes with becoming a published author and established writer. It is also about the attempt to leave something of value behind, a legacy of sorts. I am 74 years of age as I write this piece. There are far fewer days ahead than behind. For some of us, legacy matters.

Eighth—Writers have changed the world. Writers have had a greater impact on civilization than any other profession. Writers scribed the histories we read. Writers created our sacred texts. Writers—also great thinkers—established the various schools of philosophy. Writers conceived the most revolutionary secular documents ever penned to parchment, the American Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. Writing is self-evidently important within a democracy.

On the other hand, I have lived and worked in several countries where writers are regularly harassed, imprisoned, disappeared, or killed outright. Writers clearly matter. Dictators live in fear of the written word.

You don't have to have lived a life of adventure and danger to write interesting prose. Some of the best writers known to us today spent considerable time within their own homes and communities, Jane Austin, for example. Unsurprisingly, some pretty good thinkers have also been pretty good writers. The two often go together.

For me, writing provides the invaluable intangibles of meaning, purpose and relevancy. Write about your experiences. Write political commentaries. Write about what interests you. For the truly ambitious, try writing a book.

If there is a better self-improvement method for the mind, I do not know of it. Clearly, regular writing can make a positive impact, not only in your own life, but potentially in the lives of others, too.

Not the least of reasons—for those who still suffer from the mental and physical anguish experienced in the aftermath of arduous and hazardous service, writing can offer a possible catharsis. Trust me. It often works.

This essay first appeared in SOFREP Magazine. It has also been accepted for reprint by the *Sentinel*. ❖



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Bruce Adolph—a qualified Military Strategist—is a retired senior Army Special Forces soldier. Once retired, he joined the UN and subsequently saw service in multiple crisis countries across three continents. Robert holds graduate degrees in both International Affairs & National Security Studies, and formerly taught university courses in US

History, American Government, and World Politics. His over three hundred articles and commentaries have appeared in more than fifty newspapers, magazines, professional journals, and academic publications. He also authored the very well reviewed book *Surviving the United Nations: A true story of violence, corruption, betrayal, and redemption*, now out in a second paperback edition and on Audible & Kindle. Robert is a member of the Steady State Group composed of former senior US National Security professionals. Discover more at [www.robertbruceadolph.com](http://www.robertbruceadolph.com).

## Book Review: *From OSS to Green Berets: The Birth of Special Forces* by Aaron Bank, Col. USA (Ret.) continued

which Special Forces claims official Army lineage. This may have been intentional as the First Special Service Force had little in common operationally with the OSS, whom Bank used as the model for the Special Forces Groups.

Ultimately, all Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operations interested in expanding knowledge of unconventional warfare and special operations history should read this book. For newly-minted Green Berets, I would consider this required reading. One must know an organization's past to effectively chart its future. For the modern Special Forces regiment, I believe this will be an enlightening addition to one's own professional library.

Note: Currently, this book is out of print. Copies are available online, but they are somewhat expensive. I recommend searching for copies of the book at local or professional libraries. It is also a worthy collector's item if you have funds available. ❖

**Editor's Note:** This book is available on the Internet Archive in the form of a digital flipbook. (<https://archive.org/details/fromosstogreenbe0000bank>)

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major John Byrnes is a pseudonym for an active-duty Regular Army Soldier and Civil Affairs Officer with a background in Infantry and Special Operations. He is a graduate of the United States Military Academy and the National Defense University, and he currently serves as an editor for the *Special Warfare Journal*. The views, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent those of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

# The Evolution of the Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha ODA



A 1960s recruiting poster highlights the 12-soldier ODA. However, it has had organizational models of up to 15 soldiers.

By Troy J. Sacquety, PHD

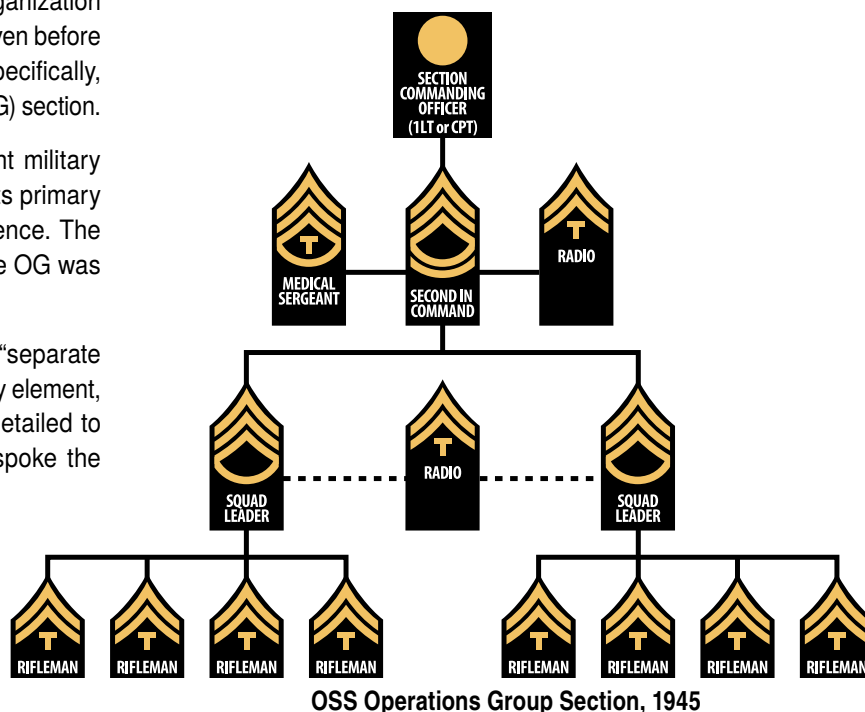
From Veritas, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2023 ([https://arsof-history.org/articles/v19n1\\_evolution\\_of\\_the\\_special\\_forces\\_oda\\_page\\_1.html](https://arsof-history.org/articles/v19n1_evolution_of_the_special_forces_oda_page_1.html))

Today the Special Forces (SF) Operational Detachment-Alpha (ODA) consists of twelve soldiers. However, that has not always been the case. Its number of personnel has ranged from twelve to fifteen, depending upon era and contemporary doctrine and force structure requirements. What follows is a brief look at the historic organization of the lowest SF unit of action, the ODA. This study starts even before the creation of SF in 1952 by going back to World War II, specifically, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Operational Group (OG) section.

Created on 13 June 1942, the OSS was a separate, joint military service that reported directly to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Its primary mission was to collect, analyze, and disseminate intelligence. The second was to conduct unconventional warfare (UW). The OG was one of the key OSS UW elements.

On 4 May 1943, the OSS activated the OG Branch as a “separate tactical unit” within the OSS.<sup>1</sup> Although it was not a U.S. Army element, it was manned almost exclusively with Army personnel detailed to the OSS who possessed the cultural background and spoke the languages of the areas to be infiltrated. The OGs trained and were employed as small groups. Their mission was to infiltrate enemy-occupied areas to harass the enemy and to be the “operational nuclei of guerrilla units” through organizing, training, equipping, and advising them.<sup>2</sup> OGs operated in France, Norway, Yugoslavia, Italy, Greece, Burma, and China.

The basic organizational unit in the OG Branch was an Operational Group. An OG fluctuated in size throughout the war but was designed to operate in two independent sections. The main structure for how the OG operated in the field, was the section which could be further divided into two semi-independent squads. The final OG table of organization and equipment (TO&E), dated 20 February 1945, had a fifteen-man section comprised of a commanding officer (usually



a Lieutenant), a senior non-commissioned officer (NCO), a medical sergeant, two radio operators, two squad sergeants, and eight riflemen.<sup>3</sup> This structure later became the basis for the ODA.

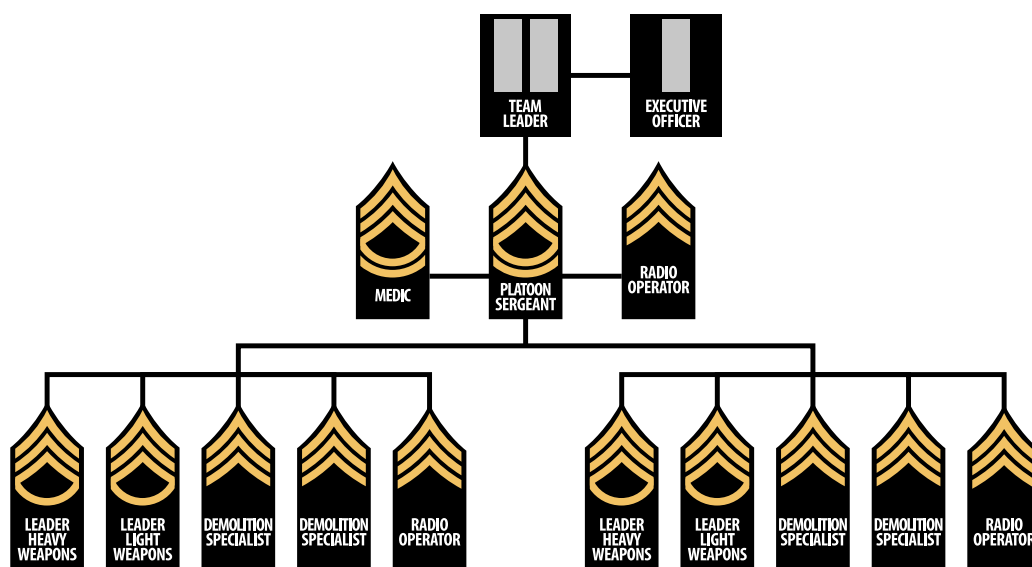
After World War II, the OSS disbanded on 1 October 1945, and the Army similarly deactivated its special operations units. Within five years, however, the U.S. was again at war. Korea, the first major flare-up of the Cold War, highlighted that the Army needed to recreate special operations units. Therefore, U.S. Army leaders looked to create an unconventional warfare element to work with guerrilla forces. Rather than invent a new structure, they looked at the OG section as a model.

One of the earliest field manuals (FM) on unconventional warfare, which provided the doctrinal foundation for Army SF, was FM 31-21: Organization and Conduct of Guerrilla Warfare, dated October 1951. Its author was Colonel (COL) Russell W. Volckmann, leader of Philippine guerrillas on Luzon during World War II. Although COL Volckmann had extensive UW experience, his Philippine formations did not have a codified structure. He therefore looked to the OSS

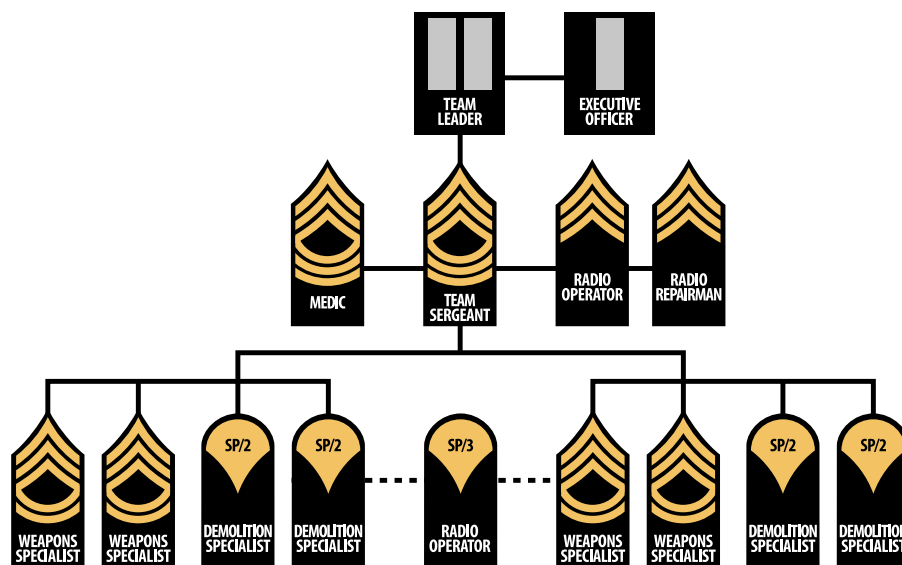
OG, a TO&E element that did. COL Volckmann even borrowed the OSS nomenclature in FM 31-21, when he called for an “Operational Group” of unspecified size, composed of “specially qualified military personnel in uniform, organized, trained, and equipped to operate as teams within enemy territory,” to be the main element to form and assist guerrilla forces.<sup>4</sup>

The proposed TO&E 33-510, dated 14 May 1952, set the organization for an FA Team (no acronym assigned but in current parlance, an ODA). Like the OSS OG section, it was fifteen personnel comprised as follows: a Detachment Commander (O-3), Executive Officer (XO) (Lieutenant), Platoon Sergeant (E-7), Medic (E-7), two Leader Heavy Weapons (E-6), two Leader Light Weapons (E-6), four Demolition Specialists (E-5), and three Radio Operators (E-5).<sup>5</sup> This same organization was reflected in FM 31-20: U.S. Army Special Forces Group (Airborne), dated August 1955.<sup>6</sup>

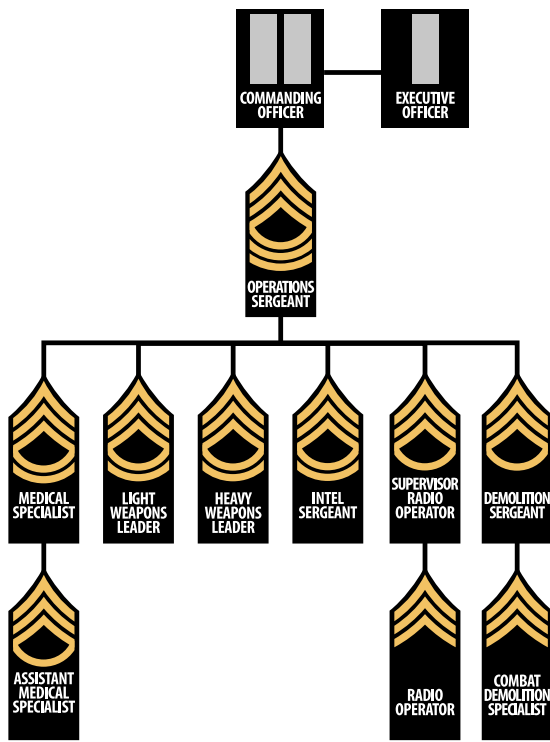
The first change to the ODA structure came in Army FM 31-21: Guerrilla Warfare and Special Forces Operations, dated 8 May 1958. This manual retained the fifteen-man construct but changed



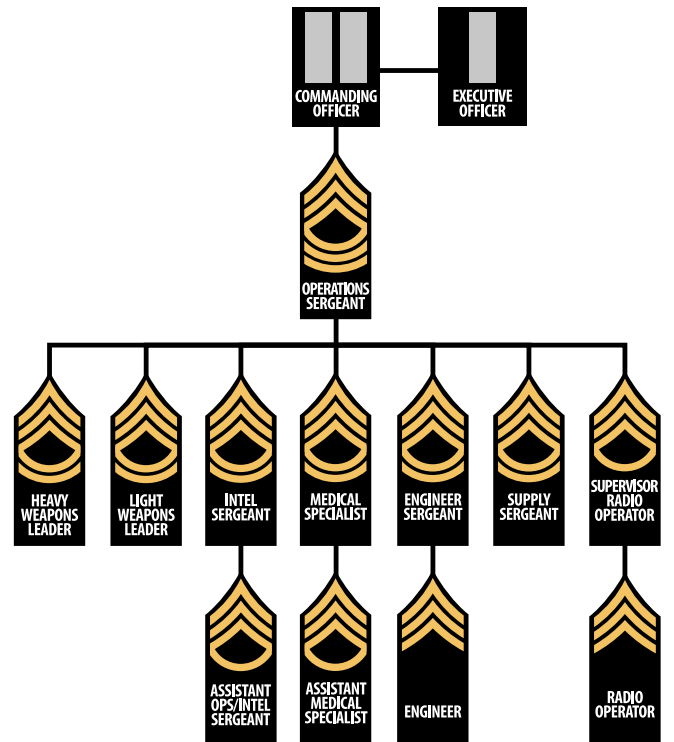
FA Team 1952



FA Team 1958



ODA, 1963



ODA, 1971

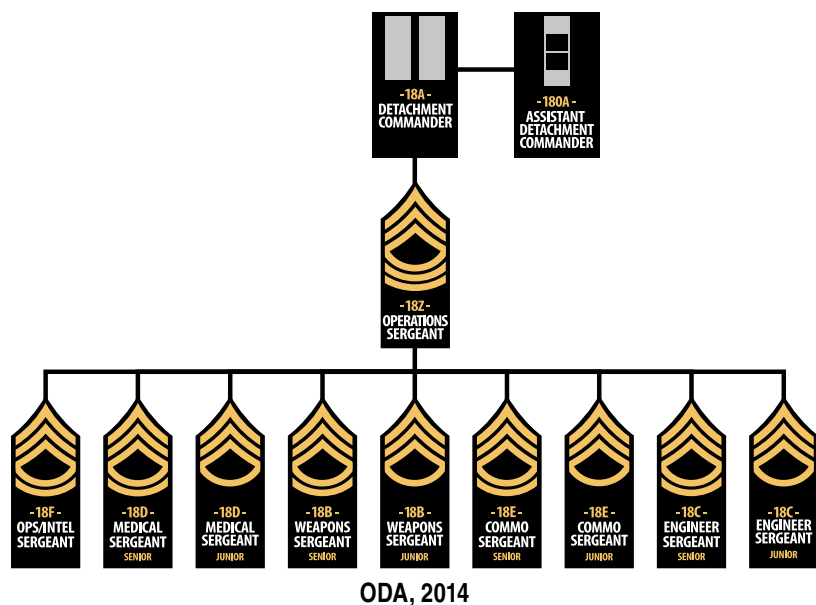
the rank structure and job descriptions of the FA team. It now had a commander (O-3), XO (Lieutenant), Team Sergeant (E-8), Medic (E-8), four Weapons Specialists (E-7), four Demolition Specialists (Specialist 2), one Radio Repairman (E-5), one Radio Operator (E-5), and one Radio Operator (Specialist 3).<sup>7</sup>

The first personnel reduction came with TO&E 31-107E, dated 25 September 1963. The FA team, renamed to ODA, was changed to twelve soldiers and restructured the ranks. It had a commander (O-3), an XO (Lieutenant), an Operations Sergeant (E-8), a Heavy Weapons Leader (E-7), an Intelligence Sergeant (E-7), a Light Weapons Leader (E-7), a Medical Specialist (E-7), and Radio Operator Supervisor (E-7), an Assistant Medical Specialist and Demolitions Sergeant (E-6), and a Chief Radio Operator and Combat Demolition Specialist (E-5).<sup>8</sup> TO&E 31-107G, dated 28 June 1968, kept the same general organization as the 1963 version but increased the rank of the Demolitions Sergeant, now called a Special Forces Engineer Sergeant, to an E-7, and renamed the E-5 Combat Demolition Specialist to a Special Forces Engineer.<sup>9</sup>

The twelve-man ODA lasted until TO&E 31-107H, dated 10 June 1970. This document increased the ODA structure to fourteen by adding a Supply Sergeant (E-7) and an Assistant Operations/Intelligence Sergeant (E-6).<sup>10</sup> A subsequent change to this TO&E on 1 March 1974 reduced the ODA to thirteen men by removing the E-7 Radio Operations Supervisor.<sup>11</sup> Another change on 1 September 1974 brought the ODA back down to twelve by removing the E-7 Supply Sergeant (E-7) and Assistant Operations/Intelligence Sergeant (E-6) but bringing back the Radio Operations Supervisor (E-7). It also changed the Intelligence Sergeant position to an Assistant Operations Sergeant.<sup>12</sup>

The final significant change occurred in 1984 when the first SF warrant officers (WO) began to replace lieutenants on ODAs. This change was motivated by a study conducted by COLs Charles A. Beckwith and J.H. "Scotty" Crerar, who were concerned about the lack of continuity and competency within the ODAs. In their estimation, the seconds-in-command, being lieutenants, were still learning their profession; had spent little time on the team; and did not have enough team time to gain adequate experience and knowledge to





become an ODA commander. In COL Crerar's words, "justly or not [lieutenants] were viewed as burdens on their detachments," necessitating replacing them with a more experienced warrant officer that could provide more seasoned leadership to the ODA.<sup>13</sup>

The ODA structure has not changed since 1984. Currently it is as follows: Detachment Commander (O-3), Assistant Detachment Commander (Chief Warrant Officer 2), Operations Sergeant (E-8), Operations/Intelligence Sergeant, Senior Weapons Sergeant, Senior Engineer Sergeant, Senior Medical Sergeant, Senior Communications Sergeant (E-7), and Weapons Sergeant, Engineer Sergeant, Medical Sergeant, and Communications Sergeant (E-6).<sup>14</sup>

As this brief article has detailed, the ODA structure has its roots in the final version of the OSS OG section, which developed based on personnel availability and operational requirements. Since 1952, the SF ODA has had numerous changes to its personnel and rank structure, albeit with a few constants: a captain as commander, a second-in-command (lieutenant and then warrant officer), a senior NCO, and medical, communications, weapons, and demolition (engineer) personnel. With the ODA having fluctuated between twelve and fifteen soldiers, it has historically been treated as a "living" structure and subject to change based on existing requirements. ❖

## ENDNOTES

1. William J. Donovan, "Office of Strategic Services Special Order 21," 13 May 1943, Folder 1460, Box 140, Entry 136, Record Group (RG) 226, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, MD. The order was effective 4 May 1943.
2. Kermit Roosevelt, *War Report of the OSS* (New York: Walker and Company, ca. 1976), 223.
3. Operational Group Command, "Table of Organization," 20 February 1945, Folder 1461, Box 140, Entry 136, RG 226, NARA.
4. Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), FM 31-21: *Organization and Conduct of Guerilla Warfare* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, October 1951), 39-40.
5. HQDA, Table of Organization and Equipment 33-510 (proposed), 14 May 1952, contained in David R. Lawler et al., eds., *A Critique of the US Army Special Forces Tests and Field Exercises: 15 June to 3 July 1953* (Chevy Chase, Maryland: Operations Research Office, Johns Hopkins University, 1953), 75-92.
6. HQDA, FM 31-20: *U.S. Army Special Forces Group (Airborne)* (Washington DC: U.S. Government, 10 August 1955), 130.
7. HQDA, FM 31-21: *Guerrilla Warfare and Special Forces Operations* (Washington DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 8 May 1958), 29.
8. HQDA, Table of Organization and Equipment 31-107E (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 25 September 1963), 8.
9. HQDA, Table of Organization and Equipment 31-107G (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 28 June 1968), 10.
10. HQDA, Table of Organization and Equipment 31-107H (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 10 June 1970), 9-10.
11. HQDA, Table of Organization and Equipment 31-107H: Change Number 3 (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 1 March 1974), 3.
12. HQDA, Table of Organization and Equipment 31-107H: Change Number 4 (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 1 September 1974), 6-7.
13. J.H. Crerar, "The Special Forces Warrant Officer, the Beginnings," Warrant Officer Historical Foundation, [https://warrantofficerhistory.org/Hist\\_SF\\_WO.htm](https://warrantofficerhistory.org/Hist_SF_WO.htm).
14. U.S. Army JFK Special Warfare Center, "Proposed SF Standard METL: Special Forces Company (31817K000), copy in USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC. Also see HQDA, FM 3-18: *Special Forces Operations* (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 28 May 2014), section 4-56 and figure 4-13.

# Special Forces and Operation Noble Obelisk (1997)

By John Friberg

Originally post on May 30, 2025 SOF News, <https://sof.news/history/operation-noble-obelisk/>; used with permission

Between May 30 and June 3 of 1997, a Special Forces detachment deployed on a training mission to Sierra Leone assisted in the departure of 450 Americans, 250 Britons, and 1,800 nationals of about forty other countries during a non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO). On May 27, 1997 rebel forces and military officers conducted a coup to overthrow the government of Sierra Leone. Foreigners in the country were at risk during this crisis and needed to be evacuated. A few months prior to the coup a U.S. Army Special Forces detachment had deployed in Sierra Leone for a joint training exercise. This detachment would take a leading role in helping to secure the U.S. embassy and residential compounds, provide intelligence to U.S. forces, identify helicopter landing zones, and assist in the overall conduct of the non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO).

The NEO was conducted by Joint Task Force Noble Obelisk established May 27, 1997 – consisting of the USS Kearsarge (LHD-3), the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), and the Special Forces detachment. The Kearsarge arrived on station off the coast of Freetown on May 28, 1997. The JTF conducted a series of three evacuations over six days that included transport of the evacuees by Marine helicopter to the Kearsarge and then disembarkation off the Kearsarge in Conakry, Guinea. US forces evacuated over 2,500 people – about 450 of the evacuees were American citizens and the rest third-country nationals. Operation Noble Obelisk was officially disestablished on June 6, 1997.

A Special Forces detachment from the 3rd Special Forces Group was deployed in April 1997 to develop a training plan in the development of a newly established Sierra Leone Army. The deployment was a Joint-Combined Exchange Training (JCET) rotation. The mission was to train a 300-man light infantry battalion – known as the RSLMF 1st Battalion over a three-month period. In late May SFODA 334 would find itself in the middle of a crisis and very involved in assisting in the evacuation of American and foreign citizens.

On the morning of 25 May the SF detachment learned of a coup taking place in the capital. The SF team quickly established communications with its company leadership (forward-deployed in Mali) and Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR) of the situation. After having established a defensive posture at its training camp in Benguema the team sent out elements to search for suitable airfields, landing zones, and sites of naval landing



Evacuees from Freetown, Sierra Leone, are directed from a CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopter across the flight deck of the USS Kearsarge during Operation Noble Obelisk. Over 2,500 people from 40 different countries were evacuated. (Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Wes Cheney, U.S. Navy, May 30, 1997)

craft. The next day the team moved to the embassy compound in Freetown. At that location they coordinated with Nigerian and other military units for security for U.S. citizens and the embassy and conducted a reconnaissance of helicopter landing zones. As advanced members of the MEU arrived the ODA escorted them to the evacuation sites and landing zones. Once the evacuation began the detachment organized convoys to the landing zones and coordinated for security during the NEO process.

During the NEO event the SF team played an important role in all aspects of the operation. The training of Special Forces detachments, cultural orientation, and relationships with embassies in their regional areas of operation make them ideally suited to assist in non-combatant evacuation operations. The actions of SFODA 334 reflect the adaptability, flexibility, and responsiveness of Special Forces units in the midst of an emerging crisis. ❖

## REFERENCES:

*The Role of United States Army Special Forces in Operation Nobel Obelisk*, by Francis M. Beaudette, MAJ, USA, CGSC, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2001, PDF, 112 pages.

<https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA395166.pdf>

*Operation Noble Obelisk: An Examination of Unity of Effort*, by William M. Kennedy, LCDR, CHC, USN, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 2001, PDF, 25 pages.

<https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA389782.pdf>

Operation Noble Obelisk, Wikipedia

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Noble\\_Obelisk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Noble_Obelisk)

*Army Special Operations Forces Noncombatant Evacuation Operations*, FM 3-05.131, November 2009.

*Noncombatant Evacuation Operations*, Joint Publication 3-68, November 2015. [https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3\\_68pa.pdf](https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_68pa.pdf)



Sierra Leone

# US SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – AFRICA

## Strategic imperative: strengthening African security through partnership



By Lt. Cdr. Joshua Belk

Special Operations Command—Africa

Previously published in *Tip of the Spear*, a U.S. Special Operations Command publication, MacDill AFB, Florida, August 2025, page 6, <https://www.socom.mil/TipOfTheSpear/USSOCOM%20Tip%20of%20the%20Spear%20August%202025.pdf>

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 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.



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)

“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)

## James Joseph Montano

Colonel, United States Army (Ret.)  
March 4, 1946 – May 30, 2026



Colonel James Joseph Montano, USA (Ret.), passed away on May 30, 2026, at his home in Millsboro, Delaware. He was a founding “plank holder” of the 1st Ranger Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment when the unit was activated in 1974—and the reverence his men held for him endures to this day, beautifully expressed in Michael Monfroe’s poem at right. To read a fuller tribute, visit [specialforces78.com](https://specialforces78.com).

## A True Warrior

### Col. James J. Montano USA Ret.

He recruited many a troop, myself among others.  
Even today, years past, we are all still brothers.  
As a Pit. Ldr. & Co. Cdr. in the Nam, he had men fall,  
not ever forgetting, shed a tear ... seeing their names on the Wall.

1st Bn 75th Rangers formed, one of the first to volunteer.  
Helped lay the groundwork for the Regiment, a history revered.  
For over 25 years, he has led men in peace and war,  
when they exceeded the norm, he pushed them even more.

Grunts have terms of endearment, Old Man, 06 and Hard Core.  
In the Nam, he was Mountain Man and all the above and more.  
Always striving to be his best,  
evident to all by the badges & medals, worn proudly on his chest.

“The Ranger Hall of Fame,” where legacies are preserved,  
his service warrants induction, an honor well deserved.  
To list all his accomplishments in verse, difficult to say.  
Our history says it best, “He Led the Way.”

Michael D. Monfroe USA Ret  
“E” Co. RECON 3/506th–“L” Co. 75th Rangers  
July 14, 2018

Originally published in the 75th Ranger Regiment Association’s  
*Patrolling*, Summer 2018, Volume 30 Issue III,  
reprinted with permission

**Guest Speaker,**  
**William B. (Bill) Scott**  
 Author of *EARTHQUAKE*:  
*Brigadier General Robert F. Titus*

**1** Guest speaker William B. (Bill) Scott presented a fascinating overview of his book *Earthquake: Brigadier General Robert F. Titus*. Our *August 2025 Sentinel* included excerpts from Bill's book, which tells the story of BG Titus, codename "Earthquake." Bill spent hundreds of hours with *Earthquake* documenting his amazing 32-year military career. Visit [williamsboscott.com](http://williamsboscott.com) to learn more about him.

**2** Chapter President James McLanahan reported on awards presented to Sunburst Academy and local ROTC cadets, displaying the medal that had been presented by chapter representatives.

**3** Tom Turney shared details about the upcoming Normandy D-Day tour with *Walk Among Heroes*.

**4** Len Fein, along with Mark Miller, expresses his appreciation for the April issue of the *Sentinel*.

**5** Robert Cassilas' guest, Ranger veteran Rene Macare is presented a chapter coin by James McLanahan. Rene served with the 173rd Airborne and was one of the first Army soldiers to attend sniper school in Vietnam.

**6** Nimo and his wife Nazia met with Richard Simonian.

**7** Robert Crebbs and Ramon Rodriguez

**8** *Sentinel* staff, Debra Holm, art director/designer/webmaster, and How Miller, editor.

**9** New chapter member, Richard Negrete, and Gary Macnamara. Members Ham Salley and Jim Duffy are visible in the background.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9

**Connect**  
 with SFA Chapter 78!

Scan this code



or visit  
[specialforces78.com/links/](http://specialforces78.com/links/)