



SPECIAL
OPERATIONS
COMMAND

U.S. Special Operations Command

Today's U.S. Special Operators are the product of centuries of development of military strategy, tactics, and technology. The Athenians were famous for their mastery of the sea, but their greatest general, Alcibiades, was known for his awareness and exploitation of the customs and unique capabilities of rival powers. The Romans relied on their heavy infantry, understood the value of examining enemy culture and language, and used slaves to translate and provide critical intelligence in analysis of adversaries.

Special Forces gained recognition after World War I, but they became more widely recognized during World War II and after, when the daring exploits of American and British silent warriors gained renown through the press and popular movies.

During the Cold War, American strategists and planners considered both U.S. Special Forces and the Soviet *Spetsnaz* as vital factors in conflict. When terrorists began to kidnap, hijack, and kill Americans and their allies in the 1970s and 1980s, Special Operators took note and expanded their expertise to deal better with the transnational terrorist threat. Desert One, the attempted rescue of American hostages held by Iranian radicals, spurred considerable scrutiny of Special Forces capabilities and provided impetus for the services to move forward aggressively. Special Operations evolved more rapidly through the 1980s, and by 1990, operators had employed the latest technology, training, and tactics around the globe. With every operation, American Special Operations became more sophisticated, and the joint U.S. Special Operations Command grew in capability.

The 24-hour news cycle emphasized the crucial role of Special Operations in Operation *Desert Storm*. American and British Special Operators returned with essential experience that helped the profession advance rapidly through the 1990s; these lessons were incorporated into tactics and technology in preparation for more flexible applications of the military instrument in the dynamic post-Cold War strategic environment.

Because of the importance—and danger—of missions delegated to Special Operators, leaders recognized early that considerable joint and dedicated training and tailored, highly specialized equipment were required. In 1998, General Peter Schoomaker, then commander of U.S. Special Operations Command and now Chief of Staff of the Army, said:

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We must also have the intellectual agility to conceptualize creative, useful solutions to ambiguous problems and provide a coherent set of choices to the supported [combatant commander] or joint force commander—more often like Sun Tzu, less like Clausewitz. This means training and educating people how to think, not just what to think.¹

After the attacks on September 11, 2001, America needed a uniquely capable force with the experience and ability to operate in areas previously considered improbable battlegrounds. Few can forget the iconic image of an American combat controller on a horse, armed with a global positioning device and radio, directing bomber strikes against the Taliban. Some consider Operation *Enduring Freedom*, the successful battle for the liberation of Afghanistan, a new American way of war: an air and space war

supported by joint teams of Special Operators and indigenous forces on the ground. Operation *Iraqi Freedom*, the second major test in the War on Terror, has seen further integration of Special Operations into a joint and coalition environment. While northern Iraq saw the largest airdrop since Grenada and southern Iraq saw a lightning war of maneuver, western Iraq was again the domain of Special Operators and joint air. Special Forces and traditional military capabilities were uniquely and expertly tailored to meet the threat.

This U.S. Special Operations Command *JFQ* special feature section begins with an essay by General Bryan D. “Doug” Brown, Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, who presents the command’s history and describes its diverse global portfolio. Next, Lieutenant General Dell Dailey and Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey Webb

frame the role of the command in the War on Terror. Major General Paulette Risher then describes the organization and education of Special Operations warfighters. The special feature concludes with a discussion by Dale Uhler on the approach and requirements for acquisition of new technology critical to keeping the command on the cutting edge.

JFQ

M.E. Krause

NOTE

¹ General Peter J. Schoomaker, “Special Operations Forces: The Way Ahead,” *Defense Issues* 13, no. 10, available at <www.defenselink.mil/cgi-bin/dlprint.cgi?http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/1998/s19980201-schoomaker.html>.