Proudly Serving the United States Servicemembers of Joint Task Force Bravo

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Army surgeons lend a 'hand' to Honduras

By Master Sgt. Pat McKenna
Public Affairs

Photo by Master Sgt. Pat McKenna

Hand surgeons separate web fingers during a procedure at Hospital Escuela in Tegucigalpa. The surgeons are part of a team of Army doctors from Ft. Hood, Texas, who worked on more than 60 patients.

In the right hands, a razor-sharp machete can blaze a path through a briar-choked, vine-snarled jungle wide enough to taxi a C-5 Galaxy through. Wielded the right way, a machete can manicure a lawn finer than a golf course's putting green, peel apart a pineapple in seconds, and slice and dice a coconut into a macaroon.

But in the wrong hands, a machete can be a deadly weapon, cleaving through flesh and bone like a Ginsu knife through Brie.

During the last two weeks, a team of U.S. Army surgeons found out first-hand just how destructive and damaging a machete can be.

"A machete injury is nothing like a knife wound," said LTC (Dr.) Mark Bagg, a hand surgeon from the Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio. "We've looked at a lot of them in the past couple of days, maybe a dozen, and a machete will cut right to the bone, severing every tendon and nerve in its path. In every case we've seen, the machete has also caused some sort of fracture.

"Fortunately, it makes a pretty clean slice, which makes it easier to reconnect nerves and reattach tendons," the surgeon said.

Bagg was the leader of a 10-member surgical team that treated patients with hand injuries and deformities at Hospital Escuela, a teaching hospital in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. The team was composed of two hand surgeons, a hand surgeon resident, an anesthesiologist, a nurse anesthetist, an occupational therapist, an operating room nurse, an enlisted OR technician, and two enlisted orthopedic techs. The majority of his team was from Darnell Army Community Hospital at Fort Hood, Texas. In addition to the 10-member team, three members from Joint Task Force-Bravo lent their assistance by working the logistics of the mission and by providing a translator.

This is the second such hand surgery medical readiness training exercise, or MEDRETE for short, conducted in Honduras. Unlike other MEDRETEs, which focus on aiding the indigent Honduran patients while training U.S. military health professionals for war, the hand surgery visits also provide medical education to Honduran physicians and residents. During this visit, Bagg and his team held four lectures on hand surgery for five Honduran doctors. The team's occupational therapist also taught lessons at a local rehabilitative clinic.

"We didn't go out to the boonies to do this exercise; we came to Hospital Escuela for a good reason," said Bagg, who did a six-month stint at Soto Cano in 1991. "One of the biggest impacts of this mission is showing (Honduran) doctors and residents how to manage acute hand injuries.

"Hand surgery is a fairly neglected field in Honduras and hasn't captured the interest of physicians here. One reason is that they don't have the equipment to do this type of surgery properly," Bagg said. "You need smaller instruments, smaller sutures, magnifying glasses and microscopes. It's very complicated and intricate work. If you don't have the right instruments, hand surgery isn't a lot of fun."

Honduran Dr. Juan Carlos Funes, a one-time medical liaison officer at JTF-Bravo, is one of the only hand surgeons in the country. You could say he has his hands full in more ways than one. He is overwhelmed by the number of cases that present themselves to Hospital Escuela, only one of two public medical centers in the country that treat the poor. Funes sees the toughest cases and patients from all regions of the country.

"The local doctors can't keep up, and hand problems aren't a high priority," Funes said. "Unfortunately, most Hondurans are laborers, working with their hands. If you lose that ability, everything is gone. How are you going to work and feed five children?"

Most patients who suffer hand injuries in Honduras are treated for the superficial wound only. "Often they just wash the wound and close the skin without fixing the structures underneath," Bagg said. "Obviously, the hand isn't going to work very well."

Funes had more than 75 patients lined up to see the U.S. hand surgeons before they even arrived.

Most of the patients suffered from either injuries long neglected or from birth defects. However, they saw many patients who were rushed in from the emergency room. On this day, they treated a boy who had a firecracker explode in his hands, a woman whose hand was crushed when her car rolled over, a teen who was shot through the hand with an AK-47 and a woman who lost her left hand, and the thumb and part of a index finger on her right when her husband lopped them off with a machete. Because she was now missing a hand and one of two of her thumbs, she would never be able to pick up a glass or use a fork. The surgeons used what was left of her index finger to fashion a thumb.

Another of Bagg's emergency pa-

See **Doctors**, *Page 2*

Commanders' Corner

Mentorship: one of many military leadership roles

By MAJ Joelle Rankins
Intelligence Office

Mentor *n.* ***1.*** *A trusted counselor or guide: tutor or coach. "Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary"*

Did you have a mentor while you were growing up? Someone that you trusted, that helped guide you as you went through your everyday life? Perhaps it was your mother, father, teacher or a coach. No matter what your age, no matter what your profession, mentors can and should be an integral part of your everyday life. Mentoring is no less important to us as members of the military.

Today's leaders have the critical responsibility to develop future leaders prepared to meet tomorrow's challenges. An essential component of this development is mentoring.

Mentoring is usually an informal, familiar exchange from seniors to juniors conducted with a professional and caring rapport. Mentoring will often focus on our unique military culture and will frequently address professional development concerns; it is real-life leader development for every subordinate.

Mentoring is about one-on-one, face-to-face counseling, focused on preparing junior leaders for increased responsibility.

A successful mentor can significantly influence character and values while guiding a young soldier or officer through the fundamentals of military life.

Mentoring begins with the leader setting the right example. Leaders mentor soldiers every day in a positive or negative way depending on how they function and live military values. It allows junior leaders to see a mature example of values, attributes and skills in action. It motivates young soldiers to develop their own leadership abilities accordingly. Mentoring is not without a degree of risk as senior leaders share their own personal and professional experiences with junior leaders to exemplify a coaching point that builds confidence and competency.

Mentoring requires leaders to look for and take advantage of teaching and coaching moments; opportunities to use routine tasks to build skills and confidence in subordinates. It should not be limited to formal sessions. Every event should be considered an opportunity to mentor, from quarterly training briefs to after-action reviews to casual recreational activities.The most important legacy of today's senior leaders is to mentor junior leaders to fight and win future conflicts. Mentoring develops strong leaders to lead tomorrow's great soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines.Each of us can be a mentor, whether NCO, officer, or civilian. We all have experience to give if we have the heart, the spirit, and the caring attitude to share these experiences and the lessons we derive from them.

"Mentoring is simply giving of your knowledge to other people. To be an effective mentor, you need the experience and wisdom of your years, and one vital quality —you have to care," from the "Collected Works of the Thirteenth Chief of Staff, United States Army GEN John A. Wickham, Jr."

Doctors

(*Continued from Page 1*)

tients wasn't so lucky. This man had badly burned his hands and forearms while attempting to save his brother, who was hung up on high-voltage power lines. Doctors had to amputate both hands of the man, who was just starting a new welding business to support his family.

"It will definitely change his life for the worst," Bagg said. "For some of these folks who lose the use of their hands and arms, they might eventually end up on the streets as beggars."

The U.S. military doctors treated about 60 patients, performing around 140 procedures, during this most recent visit. With this volume and variety of cases, the medical team is getting a crash course in combat trauma.

"This is as close to wartime surgery as you can get," Bagg said. "You're seeing real patients and real trauma. We're learning new ways to do things in an austere environment that we can apply in field conditions."

"Helping people in need is why many of us came into medicine in the first place," Bagg said. "And we know that even though we haven't even put a dent in the overall health problems facing this country, we have, for a few people, turned their lives around."

What do you know for certain?

One evening, I was speaking with one of the soldiers, and this person was having some problems.

He was worried about his wife, he was worried about his future, he was worried about if we went to war and what would happen to him in his occupational specialty. He was worried about a lot of things and he concluded each statement by saying, "I don't know." After several minutes of him concluding each worry with these words, I made a statement, "If you don't know, why do you worry about it so much?"

Worry is one of the things that gets to us, especially if we let it. We don't know what will happen to us in the future.

Yes, we could lose someone close to us. We could also get hit by a meteor, but will these things happen? Yes, it is possible, but these probably will not take place, so why worry about it.

Mark Twain said something to the effect that, "I have known a lot of things to worry about that never happened." So why waste your time losing sleep in worry, fear, and dread on something that may or may not happen?

Yes, we don't know what the future holds, but there is one thing we can know for sure, and that is who holds the future. By this I am speaking about God.

Let us spend our time and attention on something we can know for sure. It is as King David wrote, "Even though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death..." This is a scary thought, one that we may not look forward to. Yet, he could record, "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me..."(Psalm 23). The Lord is with us also. You can be certain of this.

Fire Prevention Week roars across base

Attention in the station: "We have a report of a fire in Bldg. 371. There are two personnel unaccounted for."

This is the moment that all firefighters around the world train for — the point in time when people's lives are at risk and property is being destroyed.

When this happens at Joint Task Force-Bravo, there are about 18 people ready to respond 24 hours a day and put their training to use. This group works a 48-hour shift. At the fire station, they have a kitchen, TV room, training room, fitness center and sleeping facilities. In essence, the firefighters spend half of their tour at the fire station. There are two operational shifts that work the alternating 48-hour schedules.

Besides the shift workers, there are others that support the fire protection mission. The communication center is the main 911-reception location. There are two Honduran nationals and two military firefighters working 24-hours a day that receive calls and dispatch resources. When the new fire alarm system goes into operation, the computerized alarm receiver will be located in the communications center.

Preventing fires is the main goal of the fire prevention section. This two-man shop inspects all the JTF-Bravo facilities annually looking for fire and life safety discrepancies. These are then turned over to the facility manager for correction. The fire inspectors also provide newcomer's briefings, hands-on fire extinguisher training, and review plans for construction projects.

Training is the key to any successful operation, and the fire department is no exception. The assistant chief for training is responsible for all training conducted within the department. This includes reoccurring proficiency training, upgrade training and certification training. Training makes up the majority of the operational shift's duty day and can include everything from assigned and transient aircraft to confined space rescue.

The firefighters can be called upon to perform a wide range of operations. The day of just fighting structure or aircraft fires is long gone. Today's firefighters are also trained to deal with hazardous chemical releases from various containers. This requires them to wear specialized suits that protect them from the liquid and vapor hazard.

Another hazardous tasking is confined-space rescue. This entails entering an area that has limited access and the possibility of a toxic atmosphere. These areas include below grade pits, above ground fuel tanks, and fixed wing fuel cells.

Another aspect that is prevalent in Honduras is brush firefighting. When the rain stops and the vegetation dries up, brush fire season is under way. Again, this requires specialized clothing and equipment. The local fire departments are very limited on resources so they count on JTF-Bravo for support. There is a written agreement between the Comayagua Fire Department and the JTF-Bravo fire department that allows base resources to be used off base.

The Soto Cano firefighters have also deployed to other countries in support of military operations. In December of 1999, a crash truck and a crew of four were sent to Columbia.

Pace takes over command for USSOUTHCOM

By Tech. Sgt. Lee Roberts
USSOUTHCOM Public Affairs

MIAMI — Marine Gen. Peter Pace took command of the U.S. Southern Command here Sept. 8 pledging to cooperate with partner nations in Latin America and the Caribbean to ensure that democracy, prosperity and freedom continue to grow strong roots in the hemisphere.

In front of hundreds of military and civilian guests, Secretary of Defense William Cohen passed the reins of command to Pace from Marine Gen. Charles Wilhelm, who culminates his command and 37-year military career.

Pace, 54, assumes responsibility of U.S. military operations in the command's area of responsibility, which includes 32 nations spanning 12.1 million square miles, from Latin America, the Caribbean Sea and island nations, the Gulf of Mexico and portions of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

With command personnel, local community leaders, civilian and military dignitaries from Latin America and the Caribbean present, Pace publicly thanked the secretary of defense for his trust and confidence in selecting him for command. "I understand the enormity of the mission you have given me. I will not betray your trust, sir," Pace promised Cohen.

Pace also addressed the command, calling it a great honor and privilege to become commander in chief. The general announced he would not ask anyone in the command to run faster or jump higher. "I am simply going to ask you to continue to do what you have always done, to meet every challenge head on."

Cohen, who was joined by wife Janet, welcomed Pace and his wife Lynne to Miami. He recalled how he knew the general from his previous service on the Joint Staff and in Norfolk, Va., and then declared the "straight-talking soldier-of-the-sea" ready for his new post. "He is a man of extraordinary ability, with the skill, experience, and judgment to carry on the critical work of this command," said Cohen.

Cohen specifically recognized Wilhelm for his leadership, loyalty, commitment, and for overseeing the nation's security interests with "tactical skill and strategic genius." The secretary said the general "forged deeper bonds with the democracies of this hemisphere; and, brought help in the wake of natural disasters such as Hurricane Mitch."

Also, in his three years as commander in chief, Wilhelm led the implementation of the Panama Canal treaties and brought the command to Miami. He also brokered an end to the long-standing border conflict between Peru and Ecuador, and the achievements made by the Military Observer Mission under the auspices of the Rio Treaty. In addition, he directed the massive military assistance to countries in the Caribbean in the aftermath of Hurricane Georges, and redeployed troops from Haiti. Previously, Pace commanded 92,000 Marines and sailors as the commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Atlantic; commanding general, Fleet Marine Forces, Atlantic; commander, Marine Corps Bases, Atlantic; commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Europe; commanding general, Fleet Marine Forces Europe, and commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces South in Miami.

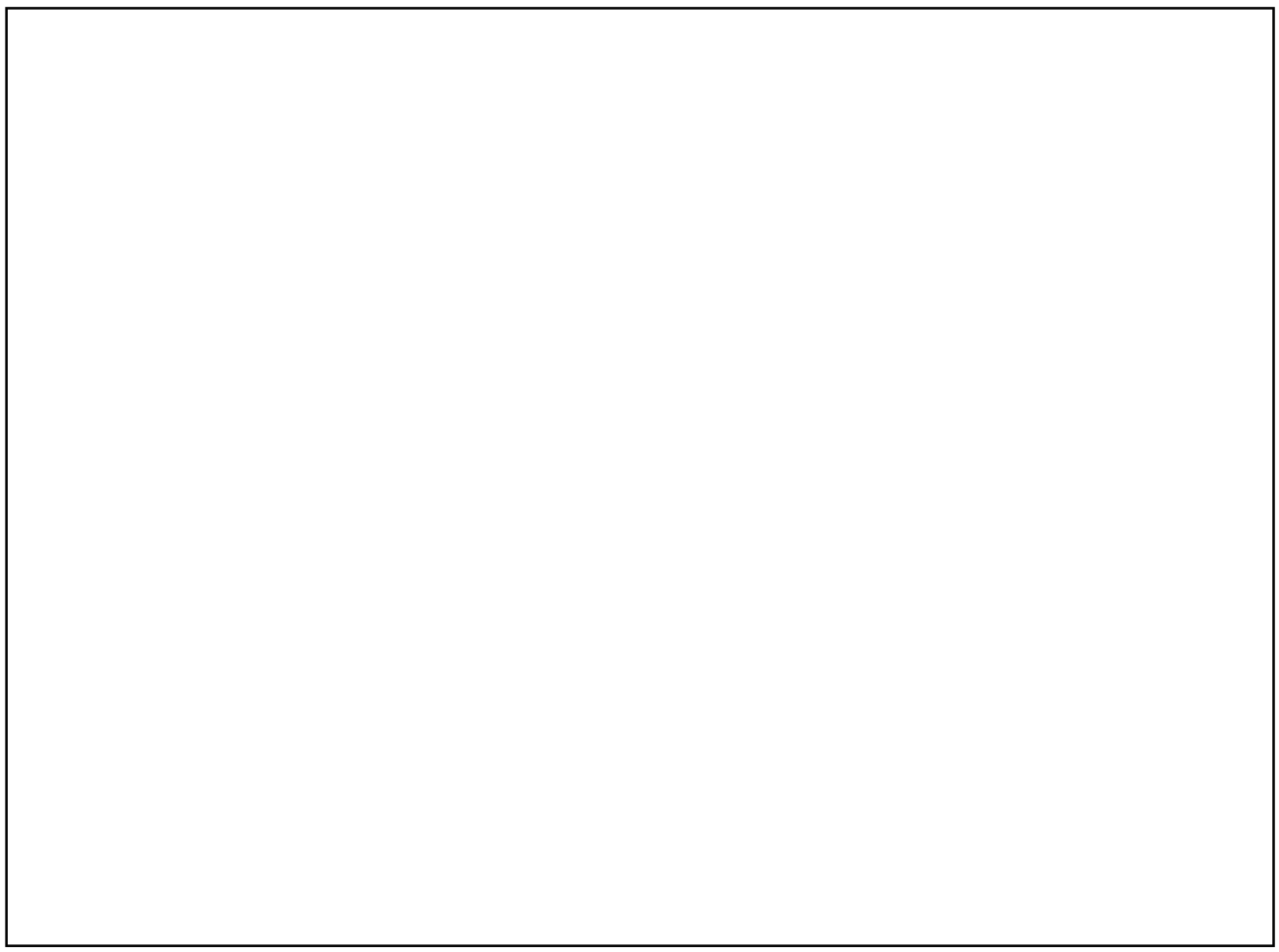


Photo by Martin Chahin

COL Michael Wood, JTF-Bravo commander, makes the first donation for the beginning of the CFC fund - raiser on base. CFC-Overseas will take place at Soto Cano from Oct. 2 through Nov. 17.

Troops qualify for 10-miler

By 1st Lt. Kim Garbett
Public Affairs

It's America's largest 10-mile race. Snaking around the streets of Washington, D.C., the 16th Annual Army 10-Miler is set for Oct. 15 at 8 a.m.

With the colors of autumn beginning to settle around the capital city of the United States, over 16,000 participants will make a run for it. Led by Command Sergeant Major Herman Fisher, a team of eight Army and Air Force men and women from Soto Cano have been training diligently for this big day for the past month and a half.

According to 1LT Chris Danbeck, one of Soto Cano's representatives for the 10-Miler team, over 100 teams are participating from all over the world in different categories, to include the individual level, Army team and mixed team competitions. "It's really a quite competitive race," Danbeck said. "Command Sergeant Major Fisher is the impetus behind the team, organizing and rallying the troops to get us out there. I think (with all the training that we've been doing) our team has a very good chance of doing very well in this race. We have a good core of people training. We hope to finish in the top 10 for mixed teams."

Representing different ranks, career fields, genders and military services, team members who qualified for Soto Cano's Army Ten-Miler mixed team include: 1LT Chris Danbeck, 1LT John Kunstbeck, 1LT Tricia Evans, Senior Master Sgt. Irving Rodriguez, SGT Sheldon Thomas, Staff Sgt. Melissa Melger, SSG Kevin Santos and PFC Elias Odar-Gamez.

A runner at heart, Danbeck said he decided to do the Army 10-Miler because he's never done it before, and it's one of the more popular road races in the United States.

"At my home unit, I would never really have had an opportunity to participate in something like this because of regular field exercises."

Photo by 1st Lt. Kim Garbett

Troops check their start time during one of many morning training sessions for the Army 10-Miler.

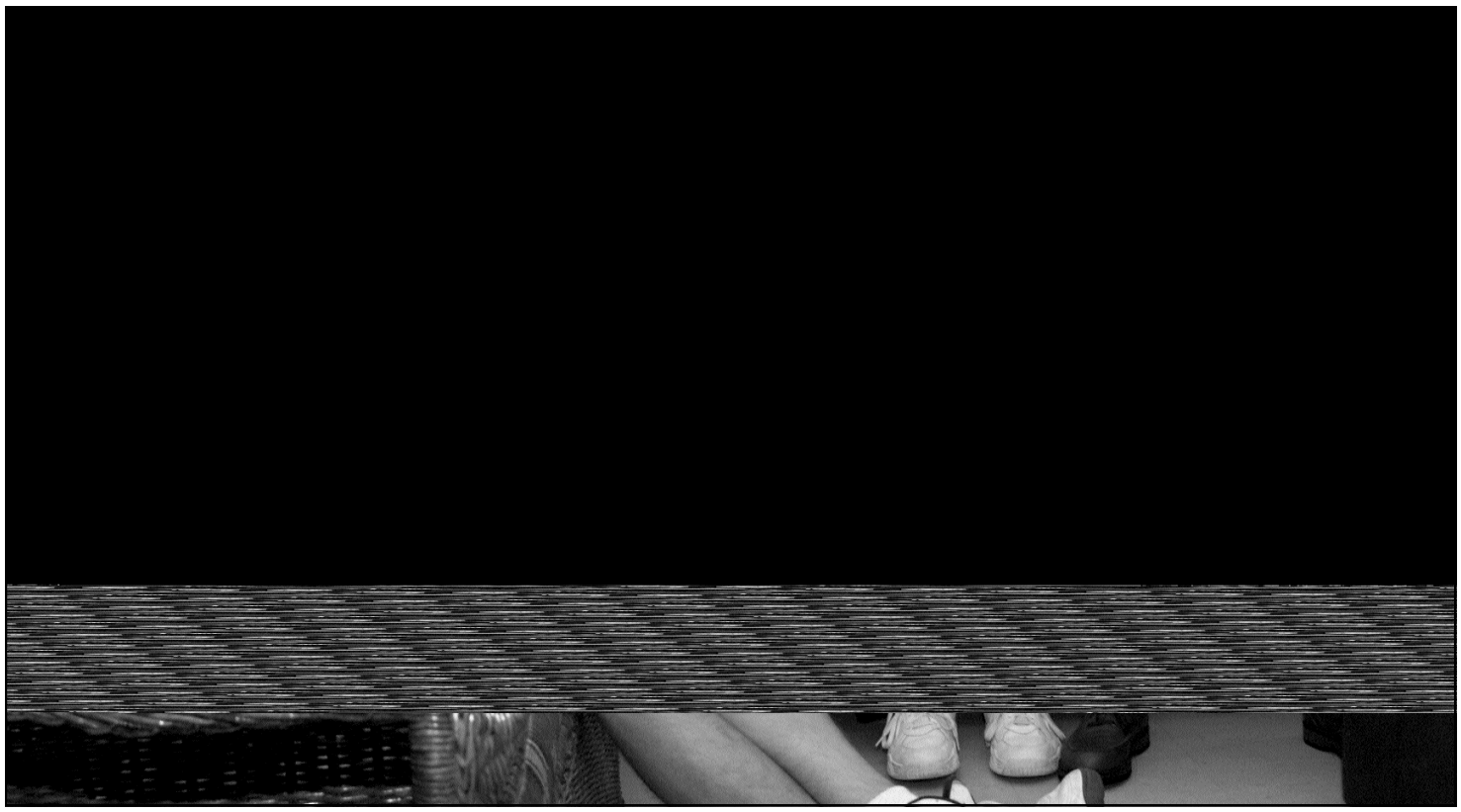


Photo by Master Sgt. Pat McKenna

Coffeehouse Opens!

Lt Col Stephen Mis, AFFOR director of operations, Maj Richard Dopierala, AFFOR assistant director of operations, and Lt Col John Brainerd, AFFOR commander, relax in the newly renovated Recovery Room coffeehouse, which had its grand opening Saturday. The Recovery Room is offering an October special.

Change to pass policy

By COL Michael Wood
Commander, JTF-Bravo

The following amendments to JTF-Bravo Directive 1 are effective as of Oct. 2.

Personnel signing out of Soto Cano must be in possession of a JTF-B Pass Card. The new paragraph 6-4(b) now reads: SIGN OUT/SIGN IN PROCEDURES: All personnel departing the gate of Soto Cano on a daily or weekend pass must show a JTF-B Pass Card to the JSF gate guard.

Upon return, personnel must present their pass card and DOD Identification Card for re-entry.

Personnel on TDY or Leave status will show the appropriate documents (TDY orders or leave form).

JSF will ensure that all vehicles, except those designated by JTF-B that report all departures and entry to the JOC directly, have a proper dispatch, and that all personnel in the vehicles are in possession of a Pass Card.

For MWR trips, the senior ranking person will ensure that all personnel in the bus or van have a valid Pass Card and will inform the JSF.

Procedures for issuing and tracking of the JTF-B Pass Card will be determined by the individual MSC Commanders and Joint Staff Directors.

The bottom line intent of this policy is to ensure 100% accountability of all personnel at all times, especially when off base.

New BX/PX authorized access policy

The following are authorized access and purchasing privileges at the BX Facility:

U.S. active duty military with ID Card; U.S. Reserve/National Guard serving on active duty with ID Card and orders confirming their active duty status;

U.S. Civilians, Department of Defense, Department of State, and other Government employees possessing a DD Form 1173 ID;

American citizens employed with the U.S. Embassy that possess an Embassy blue stripe or purple badge;

Individuals possessing a SOUTHCOM Form 59 (Privilege Card) signed by the JTFB Commander; or designated representative.

One-time pass holders or any visitor whose name appears on an approved memorandum signed by JTFB Commander or designated representative;

Honduran Officers approved by the JTFB Commander;

Local dependents of active military personnel with proper dependent ID card are allowed access when accompanied by the sponsor. Visiting dependents of U.S. Military soldiers and retirees serving in an active JTF-B position are authorized a one-time 14-day pass. Must show ID and Temporary Pass signed by JTF-Bravo Commander or his representative. Please contact the J-1 with any questions.

Marines take over protection role at Joint Security Force

By Sgt. Shannnon Partch
Joint Security Forces

History was made on Sept. 20 when 30 hard charging, motivated devil dogs touched down on Soto Cano Air Base.

This historic occasion marks the first time the Marine Corps has served as the rotational augmentation for the Joint Security Forces.

Over the next four months, they will work hand-in-hand with the U.S. Army, U.S. Air Force and the Honduran La Guardia on a day-to-day basis maintaining base security and law enforcement operations for JTF-Bravo.

Where did the Marine Corps find such a fine group of young men and women? To assemble this platoon, the Marine Corps searched far and wide, from sea to shining sea. Our newest members of JSF were brought together as volunteers from many different units from five different states, including California, Kentucky, Minnesota, Ohio and Pennsylvania. They were all relocated to Ohio for pre-deployment preparations and to form as part of the Dayton Ohio Military Police Platoon (REIN) prior to joining us here in Honduras.

Staff Sgt. Thomas Ballentine, the leader of this outstanding platoon and soon to be JSF 1SG, said the reason he volunteered for this mission was, "to have an opportunity to serve with other branches of the armed forces in a joint operation as well as with the host nation." Ballentine hails from Columbus, Ohio and spent months coordinating this deployment working directly with the Dayton Military Police Platoon and JSF.

Part of this coordination took place when Ballentine traveled to Soto Cano in July as part of a site survey team.

Sgt. Randall Anderson from Alexandria, Kentucky, said, "I wanted to experience a real-world mission as an MP that wasn't just a training exercise. I also wanted the chance to travel and see another part of the world."

Lance Cpl. Nathaniel Mink, one of the youngest devil dogs, said, "I volunteered for this mission in Honduras, because I wanted to get some experience on active duty as an MP and it sounded like a good opportunity to travel outside the United States and work with other branches of the military."

Even though spirits are high and everyone is looking forward to having some fun in the sun, these Marines know that there are definite challenges down the road. One of the biggest concerns is the language barrier.

Like the current Army JSF platoon, they are rather short on Spanish speakers. They hope to combat this by taking Spanish classes and getting to know the local population.

The current monsoon season and the ever-present threat of hurricanes also concerns this platoon, but they are motivated and ready to lend a helping hand if and when the need for assistance arises anywhere within Central America.

Our new comrades are slated to leave no later than Jan. 21, 2001 and we hope this tour of duty proves to be an excellent learning experience for all of those involved ... Marines, Army and Air Force.

FEATURES

Photos by SPC Brad Mincey

PFC Christopher MacCubbin sets up his buoyancy control device for his third of four dives to get his Basic Open Water Certification.

Crystal clear, turquoise waters, moray eels, a coral reef that stretches from Belize to Nicaragua, fresh seafood and waking up to the sound of waves crashing on the shore ... these are just a few of the sights and sounds found on a scuba diving trip to one of the islands off the coast of Honduras.

The Morale, Welfare and Recreation office, located in Bldg. H401, offers three- and four-day trips to Utila and Roatan for fishing, diving or just spending a relaxing weekend at the beach.

Classes for scuba diving begin at the base swimming pool after students read the PADI book provided by MWR. One of several certified instructors from the Bay Island College of Diving introduces students to diving equipment and how to put it together.

They are also taught the basics of diving, from hand signals to buddy-assisted breathing.

The would-be divers literally jump right into training. On the first day, they attach tanks to their buoyancy control devices, don masks and fins, and get wet.

Once the basics of breathing with the regulators are learned, the students are taken to the deep end of the pool and go through a variety of skills that must be learned and perfected before going on their first real dive.

Students learn to clear their mask of water, take off and put on their BCD and weight belt while under water, and help their buddy if they run out of air. Upon completion of the course at the pool, and passing five quizzes and the final exam, students can take one of the MWR trips, where after four dives, they receive their Basic Open Water Certification.

Several troops took advantage of the opportunity to dive in the clear waters off the island of Utila Sept. 22 to 25.

The range of experience stretched from novices, who has not made a first dive to expert, who has many years of diving experience under their belt.

Two of the first-timers crammed two weekends of training into one and spent much of the time on the island studying or in the water training. 2LT Wallace myers was one of them.

"I had to," said Myers. "The weekend the course was offered, Task Force Sebaco was redeploying, and since I will leave before the next course, I wanted to take all the classes at once."

On the first day, Myers and PFC Christopher MacCubbin went through the step-by-step training the other divers had completed at the base pool. Bright and early that morning, the two soldiers went into the shallow ocean waters to learn about and get used to breathing with the regulators.

Within a few hours, they were stepping off the back of the boat and diving into a whole new world.

"The most enjoyable part of the trip for me was seeing the completely different world under water," said Myers. "There are ***a lot*** of creatures down in the water that are colorful, interesting and cool."

The first dive was meant as an orientation to the coral reefs and allowed the divers to get used to swimming with flippers and controlling their buoyancy with the BCD.

As Cecilia Mendez, one of the instructors from BICD led the way for the divers, they followed and slowly descended to a depth of 40 feet.

As the divers went deeper and adjusted their ears to the pressure, more and more marine life seems to suddenly appear right in front of their goggles.

Multi-colored fish that would normally be seen in saltwater aquariums swim in and around the coral.

Purple sea fans wave back and forth with the currents.

Moray eels hide under rock and coral outcroppings and schools of tiny silver fish dart in and around the divers in unison in a smooth, fluid motion as if of one mind.

After the initial dive, the newly inducted divers were taken to another spot where they went through the safety procedures every diver must know, whether it be taking care of yourself or looking out for your buddy.

After two days and four dives, the once novices were upgraded to certified open water divers.

One opportunity afforded the new divers was a chance to go on a night dive. This is something usually saved for the advanced course, so most of the divers took advantage of this since, for some, it might be a once-in-a-lifetime chance.

"That was not an experience I will soon forget," said Myers. " Things in the water are so different at night that it's like a whole other world."

Divers go down with a waterproof flash light and see many of the fish and other sea life not typically seen during the day.

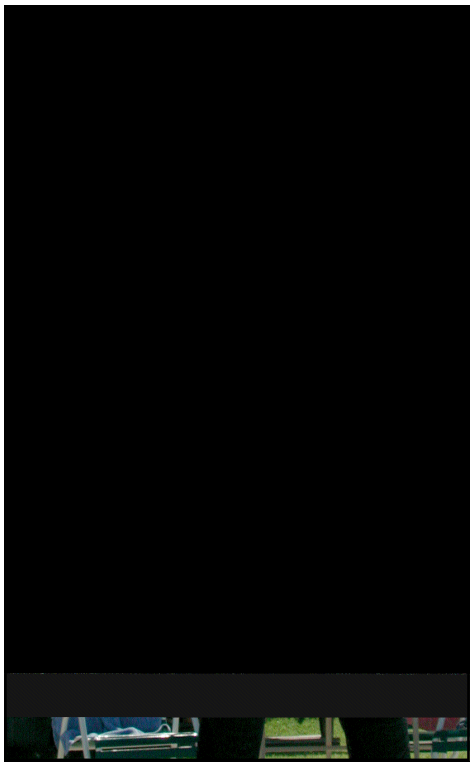
Tiny worms and fish are often attracted to the light. The eyes of shrimp light up and seem to glow in the dark when spotlighted with the flash light.

The ocean takes on a different "light" when all the flash lights are turned off.

Phosphorescent plankton glow with every movement of an arm or fin. By simply moving an arm through the water, divers leave a "stardust" trail behind them.

All of the divers enjoyed their trip, even though for some, it may have been the only opportunity to dive among coral reefs.

"This is a great opportunity for soldiers," said Myers. "It takes their minds off the job, gives a breather from base life, lets them see new cultures and experience new things."



Cecilia Mendez, one of the instructors from the Bay Island College of Diving, dons a wet suit before getting into the pool.

"The soldiers and airman stationed at Soto Cano work hard," said Edward Brennan, the MWR director. "When there is an opportunity for some free time, they need to be able to go to a place where they can relax and enjoy themselves at a reasonable cost while still being in a safe, clean environment."

PA Exchange Seminar unites countries

By 1st Lt. Kim Garbett
Public Affairs

Photo by 1st Lt. Kim Garbett

Members from the Dominican Republic, Honduras and El Salvador discuss Public Affairs crisis management strategies in the base theater.

They came from all over Central America and the Caribbean to Soto Cano for the first-ever multilateral public affairs exchange seminar Sept. 10 through 14.

Representing eight countries, including Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Honduras and the United States, more than 35 top military and civilian leaders came to Soto Cano to share experiences and knowledge between the many countries and to standardize different approaches to public affairs. The countries selected were all Spanish speaking; the seminar was conducted entirely in Spanish.

According to Raul Duany, chief of media relations at U.S. Southern Command Public Affairs, the overall emphasis of the seminar was understanding public affairs as a whole. This included the transparency of information; the role of public affairs as a spokesperson and adviser to the commander, PA doctrine in general, the ethical aspects of PA, and having effective control of strategy and tactics in the release of information. Duany, who has a bachelor of arts degree in advertising, has been in PA for more than 12 years. He has worked for the military in public affairs for many of those 12 years, some as a military member, some as a civilian. Duany was the primary speaker during the seminar.

"In three days, we covered a wide spectrum of the PA mission, serving as an ethical practitioner, a credible and prepared adviser for the mission ... ranging from maintaining the force and keeping families properly informed to dealing with the media and establishing positive relations with the community," Duany said.

SOUTHCOM PA spearheaded the concept for this pilot program, in conjunction with the Commander in Chief's vision. Joint Task Force-Bravo was selected as a test site by SOUTHCOM for a potential future Public Affairs Exchange Center, where multilateral exchanges like this could continue to occur on a regular basis. Other possibilities for a center include Puerto Rico, and a couple of other sites to be determined will be explored in the Southern Cone and Andean Region of South America.

One of the most important things key players hoped to cultivate was building relations between the countries. "In the event of potential contingencies or future operations, we'd be better able to have a parallel understanding with our counterparts with what our roles (as PA) are and have a common ground for effective execution, especially when our nations are so closely bound together," Duany said.

The United States has close ties with many countries in Latin America, he continued, with the fifth largest population of Spanish speakers present within its borders. Within a decade, Duany suggested, the United States is expected to have the third largest Spanish-speaking population.

The bottom-line, said Duany, is that this exchange seminar was a great opportunity to find a common ground and understand that the media is not an enemy, but a key medium of fostering support from our community of nations.

In such an increasingly interconnected global society — a transnational society with transnational threats, such as illegal narcotics-- this communication foundation is vital for smooth working relations between countries.

For many of the participants, the seminar turned out to be an incredible learning experience.

"Since I'm new to the job, having so many others (from a variety of countries) share their experiences in and knowledge about public affairs was extremely beneficial to me," said COL Nelson Florentino, director of the Dominican Republic's Armed Forces public affairs. "At the seminar, I have learned to address the media more effectively and learned different ways to handle difficult high-visibility situations. As soon as I return to my country, I will put into execution all I have learned here in these three days... Relations between our military and our public can be better; it's my responsibility to make sure this happens."

"This exchange seminar was a very valuable element, especially with multiple countries present," said Mayor Eduardo Figueroa Ambulo from El Salvador. "It gave us the opportunity to share thoughts, experiences and friendships. We can also learn to standardize our communications among the countries through these lessons learned. For me, crisis management and planning of public affairs strategy and tactics were the most critical things I will take away with me from this seminar. If other opportunities arise for another seminar of this nature, I would definitely go."

SOUTHCOM PA is planning the next test center and exchange seminar to be held in Puerto Rico in early to mid-December.

MWR Trips

Certification in Utila
Oct. 20 to 23, 27 to 30

Copan Ruins
Oct. 27 to 29

La Ceiba Beach
Oct. 20 to 22

Roatan Islands
Oct. 13,16, 21 to 23, 27 to 30

San Pedro Sula
Oct. 20 to 22

Valley of Angels
Oct. 7, 8, 14, 22, 28

Guanaja Islands
Oct. 14 to 16

Cigar Factory Trip
Oct.14

Historical Comayagua
Oct. 21

Villa Elena Golf Course
Oct. 7, 14, 21, 28

Lake Yojoa
Oct. 8, 9, 14, 15, 21, 22, 28, 29