



USPACOM

Area of Responsibility

SCOPE

- 3 largest economies
- Over 1,000 languages
- 52% of Earth's surface
- 36 countries
- 16 time zones
- World's six largest armed forces
- Two oceans
- Over half the world's population

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

- 10 trillion dollars of annual bi-lateral trade
- Five of seven U.S. Mutual Defense Strategies
- 1 trillion dollars of U.S. commerce
- Region a key driver of global politics

RISKS

- Nuclear weapons
- Growing tensions between states
- Radicalization / VEOs
- Economic disparity
- Energy, food, water security issues
- Natural Disasters



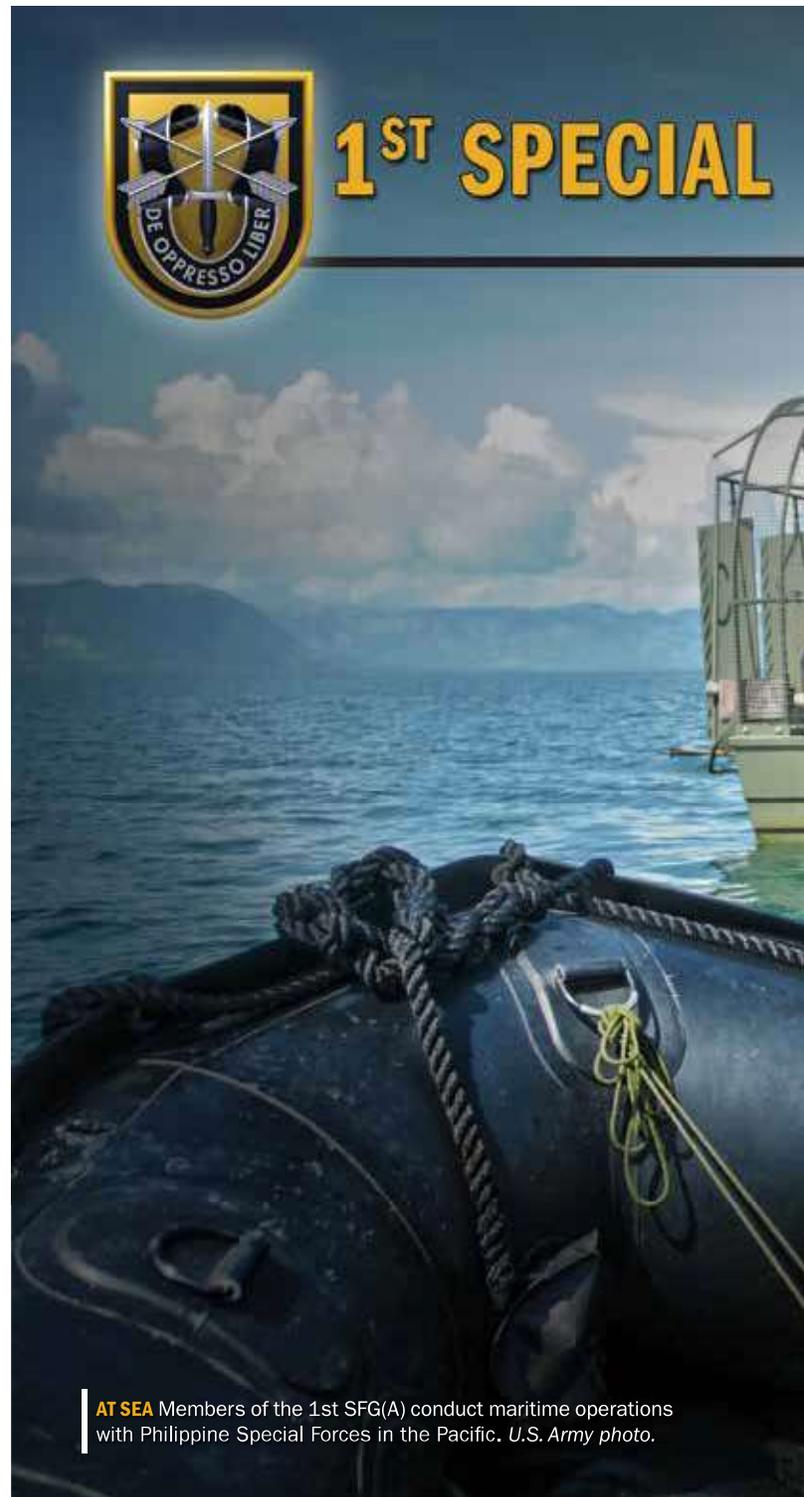


1ST SPECIAL

On any given day, multiple teams of the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, are deployed throughout their regional area of responsibility. Like their SF brothers in the other groups, members of the 1st SFG(A) are also deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan; however, it is the work quietly undertaken over the past decade that has made a significant difference in one of the most critical regions of the world: the Pacific.

In early 2012, the nation's attention was refocused on the Pacific through the issuance of the National Defense Strategy, which was designed to rebalance the nation's global posture and presence by placing a greater emphasis on operations in the Pacific. For the members of the 1st Special Forces Group (A), this was not news.

Regionally aligned to the Pacific, the 1st Special Forces Group's AO is home to three of the world's largest economies. More than 1,000 languages are spoken throughout the region. The area covers 52 percent of the Earth's surface, spanning 16 time zones and is comprised of a multitude of countries. Those countries, by the way, are home to more than half the world's population; they are also home to six of the world's largest armed forces. The region has great strategic importance to the United States. Annually, more than \$10 trillion in bilateral trade is conducted in the region. Five of the seven U.S. Mutual Defense Strategies are tied to the region, a region which is also a key driver of global politics. With all that the region has going for it, it has more than its share of issues. There is a huge economic disparity between the haves and the have-nots, which lends itself to radicalization of the populace by violent extremists organizations. The region is



AT SEA Members of the 1st SFG(A) conduct maritime operations with Philippine Special Forces in the Pacific. *U.S. Army photo.*

also rife with a plethora of natural disasters from typhoons and earthquakes to mudslides and tsunamis. Add to that the growing tensions between states, the race for nuclear arms, the ever present influence of China and the importance of this region for trade and transportation and one can see the efforts of the 1st SFG(A) become increasingly more important.

1st SFG(A) has two forward deployed elements: 1st Battalion stationed at Torii Station, Okinawa, which is under the operational control of the Commander U.S. Special Operations Command-Pacific; and SF Detachment 39, which is forward deployed to Songnam Korea, where its members work directly with the Republic of Korea Special Forces Brigades under the operational control of Special Operations Command-Korea. U.S. Special Forces have been working

FORCES GROUP (AIRBORNE) IN THE PACOM AOR

BY JANICE BURTON



directly with their Korean counterparts since 1957, building the ROK Special Forces Brigades from the ground up. The detachment, which operates on “the frontier of freedom,” has unequalled access and placement with their counterparts.

“This is a very complex AOR,” said Maj. Matt Gomlak, operations officer, 1st SFG(A) “In many of these countries there is no overt conflict. The question becomes how do we stay engaged in countries without that overt conflict. Nowhere we go is really the ‘wild west’ like Afghanistan or Iraq. These are really more established democracies.”

Throughout the Pacific, 1st SFG(A) participates in a wide array of engagements. This year alone, the group has deployed on 41 operational deployments to 19 countries. In 2015, that number will increase by 63 percent, with 65 planned operational deployments. The

deployments will include everything from one to two men serving in embassies to ODAs conducting joint combined exchange training to company-level deployments in support of large-scale regional Joint Chiefs of Staff exercises.

“This AOR is challenging and rewarding and it exemplifies what Special Forces were designed to do,” said Col. Max Carpenter, the deputy group commander. “It’s not dry. The food is awesome, the people are friendly. Our troops are not sequestered behind walls. They get out into the country. They interact with the people on a daily basis. Many of them go to Asia and never leave. We have a robust auxiliary of retired SF guys in the region.”

The dynamic of the region lends itself to the small footprint SF teams utilize while in country. The ability to plan and to work



far from the flag pole is something the teams have embraced and have mastered.

“Here at the 1st SFG(A) we have the ability to quickly deploy units and plug them into the host-nation infrastructure with minimal \ support. We do our own planning. We arrange everything from our own lodging to letting our own contracts,” said Gomlack “Our guys do a great job of figuring out how to leverage the host-nation infrastructure. Our ODAs have become very capable of operating with minimal assistance and more often than not, are quite capable of operating with complete autonomy while taking care of business for the Country Team. We probably do that better than anyone.”

Due to the AORs massive size, the group has divided the AOR into four very specific regions; South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia and Oceania. Additionally, the group helps fill the PACOM Augmentation Teams that serve in the various U.S. Embassies throughout the AORs.

The 1st SFG(A) is distributed throughout the AOR but it is Southeast Asia that captures a large portion of its attention and its force. This year, 36 of the group’s missions have been in Southeast Asia, with 22 JCETS being the bulk of those missions. Training is conducted extensively in each of the regions. Within Southeast Asia, 1st SFG(A) has trained with Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, Australia and Vietnam, with Thailand, the Philippines, Cambodia and Malaysia being more constant partners. In other countries, like Indonesia, the training that can be provided by the 1st SFG(A) is non-lethal and aimed more toward planning and building the force. In Vietnam, doors are just beginning to open for the group.

“The more we expose ourselves to Vietnam, the more opportunities we see for growth,” said Gomlack.

That was evident during a recent visit to JBLM by Vietnamese Army leaders. While the Vietnamese contention was at JBLM visiting the conventional forces, they were excited to hear of the Special Forces presence on the installation. They asked if there was a way they could visit with the SF troops. The 1st SFG(A) quickly pulled together a demonstration that highlighted a few of its capabilities and gladly welcomed the contingent. This particular contingent was led by the Vietnamese equivalent of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and was comprised of 14 flag officers. Although the encounter was brief, it helped open more doors in the country.

In South Asia, the 1st SFG(A) is definitely focused on India, which is in support of the PACOM Commanders priority of efforts. While the number of U.S. forces in India is small, as mandated by the political environment, the relationship between the two forces has grown considerably, and is developing more with each training iteration and unit exchange visit. Members of the Indian special operations forces routinely visit Joint Base Lewis-McChord for bilateral training; the latest visit was in August of 2013 and was designed to build interoperability between the forces

Building relationships within India is of key importance. The country not only has the largest growing economy in the world, its strategic location is undeniable. It is also a nuclear state that is adjacent to areas where violent-extremists organizations flourish. While language is key throughout the Pacific AOR, in India it does not have a huge affect on training. Many of the Indian officers and noncommissioned officers speak English and have received formal military training at schools like Sandhurst in England. The group frequently partners with the 1st Parachute Regiment, which is among the oldest and most battle-hardened in the country. It is the equivalent of a battalion in the U.S. Special Forces.



AROUND THE WORLD Members of the 1st SFG(A) work with militaries from across the PACOM AOR. *Left top:* Weapons training with Thai Soldiers; *Left bottom:* Mountaineer training in India; *Center:* Exercise Balance Magic in Mongolia; *Above:* The Vietnamese contention visits the 1st SFG(A) headquarters at JBLM. U.S. Army photos.

Early in FY13, the 1st SFG(A) had the opportunity to conduct an extended rotation to India for training. “Our training in India was definitely unique. We had worked with this unit on two previous exchanges. On our latest exchange, we were the first U.S. forces to train in the foothills of the Himalayas,” explained Maj. Judd Floris, a company commander in 3rd Bn., 1st SFG(A), who has deployed to numerous countries in the region including Malaysia and Indonesia.

“We did jungle, mountain and altitude training. They are not a historic partner, so we had a little longer period of getting to know each other. In many countries in which we operate, we have habitual partners, but this latest visit to India was a developmental experience for us,” he continued.

In many countries, long-term partners and infrastructure are already in place. In PACOM, that isn’t always the case.

“In India we haven’t yet established that rolodex of people and skills. We have conducted assessments of what they need from us, what training we can offer and what we can learn from them, in order to get the maximum output from every training engagement,” continued Floris.

Beyond unique, sharing training and skills the groups share their cultures. During its latest training mission to India, the Special Forces Soldiers were escorted to the Taj Mahal and other cultural points in the historic country.

“It’s important to see what they are proud of in their country,” said Floris, adding that it is important to understand and respect their military heritage. “Normally when we go on a JCET, the unit we are training with is very deferential to us and will willingly receive whatever training we are ready to offer. In this case, they were not only eager to learn, but also to teach us. It is a very reciprocal relationship.”

While there, the Indian forces showed the 1st SFG(A) Soldiers how they conduct mountaineer training, and execute navigation and survival in a jungle setting. Back at JBLM, the SF teams taught close-quarters combat, planning and marksmanship.

While the Soldier skills shared are a large part of the exchange, the Soldiers of 1st SFG(A) take away something even more important: cultural expertise and new found relationships.

“We have some highly capable speakers within the group, but there are so many variations of the language within the country it is hard to master,” he explained. “To help us be more prepared for these JCETs, we laid on immersion training to improve our language skills, our awareness of the culture and provide us the increased capacity to have successful engagements in theater. Our cultural expertise was a significant part of our success.”

That knowledge served the small teams well as they navigated the logistical systems in many of the countries.

“Just getting there is an experience. It’s literally planes, trains and automobiles. We literally travel across the world to get to India, but once we got there, the journey was just beginning,” he explained. “There aren’t military landing strips, which makes bringing our equipment in difficult. We have to contract for trucks to take us in country to the Himalayas. It’s a four to six hour drive on roads as big as the truck, with no side rails. Once you get to where you are going, there is no equipment to off load the equipment or carry it up to the base camp. So you rely on your partners and that shared suffering and hardship builds the relationship with your partners.”

Lt. Col. Mike Lackman, the group executive officer, noted that the geography and language are two of the major challenges to operating in that part of the world. “But it’s also what makes 1st SFG(A) really unique.”



FRIENDLY EXCHANGES Members of the 1st SFG(A) work with militaries from across the PACOM AOR. Above: sniper training with Bangladesh Special Operation Forces; Center: ambush training at the Special Forces School in the Philippines; Right top: scuba training exercise with the Japanese Army at JBLM; Right bottom: A Republic of Korea General visits the 1st SFG(A) headquarters. U.S. Army photos.



As a new team leader, his first mission in 1999 was to lead a JCET to Sri Lanka. “We were given \$225,000 and told to go forth and do great things,” he recalled. “I didn’t even know where Sri Lanka was. Fortunately, I had a senior E7 who had traveled around the world and was able to teach me what needed to be done when planning a mission from start to finish in Asia.

Part of the complication came from the fact that the country was in the midst of a bloody civil war with the Tamil Tigers, otherwise known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a guerrilla organization that sought to establish an independent Tamil state in northern and eastern Sri Lanka.

“You have to understand, this was pre-9/11. SF teams did not have a lot of combat time and we were going in to advise the 4th SF Regiment, which had been in constant battle for years,” said Lackman. “They started asking us about our combat experience. It took about six weeks for us to build rapport and overcome the credibility issue of not having seen combat. Our NCOs made that connection and shared their experience and skill in small-unit tactics with the regiment’s officers, who had just recently faced a horrible defeat. They took that training and went right back up north to engage the insurgents.”

In Northeast Asia, long-established partners like South Korea and Japan are beginning to take much of the attention of the 1st SFG(A). The developing relationship with SOCKOR is one of the most interesting in the AOR. SOCKOR has a relatively small AOR as compared to SOCPAC; however the requirement for the 1st SFG(A) to be able to deploy on short notice in support of a multitude of operational plans and crisis situations is a no fail requirement. The relationship with South Korea special operations forces has always been one of the stron-

gest in Asia, but the radical behavior of North Korea has increased the attention that the 1st SFG(A) is giving to the Korean Theater of Operation. 1st SFG(A) executes numerous JCS exercise, JCETs, subject-matter expert exchanges and OPLAN rehearsals with both SOCKOR and Republic of Korea SOF.

Master Sgt. Mark Koopman has become something of an expert operating on Detachment 39. “What’s really unique about the Korean experience is that you are constantly doing your job with your ROK partners. I would get phone calls from them every day, even when I was at home,” he said. “They want to do their job. They know the importance of doing it.”

Koopman added that working with Korean forces is really a dream job for an SF Soldier. “We are entrusted to work daily with the ROK Brigades as the sole American representatives. That’s where we, as SF guys, really flourish. We are given the latitude to do the mission and adapt as the need arises. The people there are always happy to have our assistance and advice. They want us working with them,” he continued.

In regards to Japan, 1st SFG(A) habitually conducts a bilateral training exercise, Silent Eagle, with the Japanese Ground Self Defense Force Special Operations Group. This training normally takes place at JBLM each fall. The exercise is designed to improve interoperability between the units. Japanese forces can only be trained as a defensive force, so the skills that can be taught differ than those that are taught with other partners.

One of the most significant events to occur in Northeast Asia in the last 14 years was the opportunity to train in Mongolia in August 2013. The historic event was important for not only the United States, but also for Mongolia. The event included attendance by the President of Mongolia. The exercise, known as Balance Magic 13-1,



was designed to increase the proficiency of the Mongolian force to conduct UW and FID operations. Of significant note, the Mongolian partner unit has supported operations in Afghanistan and Iraq through regular rotations, so the participants had been exposed to U.S. Special Forces previously. The training focused on small-unit Infantry tactics and combat casualty care. At the conclusion of the exercise, U.S. and Mongolian forces conducted an airborne op from a Mongolian helicopter, which resulted in the first awarding of U.S. Parachutist Wings to Mongolian soldiers.

“One thing that is unique about the 1st SFG(A) is that we look at things from a different perspective because of the diversity of our AOR. The problem sets we encounter are much more diverse,” added Gomlack.

As are the benefits. For Master Sgt. James Olive, a JCET in Thailand resulted in a rare experience. “While in Thailand, we were surveying a dropzone for an air exercise,” he recalled. “They use elephants for a lot of things in the country and on that particular day, the elephants were coming down the mountain and passed the proposed dropzone. We had the opportunity to ride an elephant that day. That was a pretty unique experience.”

Lackman also had unique experiences in Thailand patrolling its border with Burma. “Pre-9/11, we were doing counterdrug operations on the Burmese border. A lot of heroin moves through that area,” he said. “We taught the Thai Army how to use sensors to monitor the jungle trails. We also talked a lot about human rights. In every JCET, we conduct in the AOR, the first thing we talk about is human rights.”

For more than 11 years, the 1st SFG(A) has devoted considerable forces and assets to the nation’s success in Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines, where they work under the operational control of the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines. For many in 1st SFG(A), the Philippines is their Afghanistan. They have spent the past

decade building the Philippine Special Operations Forces and the Special Action Forces of the Philippine National Police from the ground up. It is these units that have made special connections and long-lasting ties to the men of 1st SFG(A). They have trained them for more than a decade, and have watched them grow in many different ways. Now, combat advising at higher levels, the group can see the progress that has been made. They can also see the losses. Students training in Philippine military courses do not graduate without a culmination exercise. Unlike those CULEXs held in the states, the Philippine CULEX involves a real-world mission to real-world combat. If a Soldier completes the exercise, he graduates. For many that isn’t the case, as they are killed in battle. It is the reality of operating in the Philippines.

In the Philippines, the 1st SFG(A) takes a collaborative approach to building interoperability between agencies and improving positive civil-military relationships in order to enhance operations while building the credibility of the government to the local populace. Today’s operations are designed to move the country into a steady state, where terrorist organizations are marginalized and stability is more than just a dream. They do this by sustaining the counterterrorism gains of the past decade, enhancing friendly networks, setting conditions for development and governance and supporting the transformation of the Philippine Security Forces. While the steady state is in sight, continued relationships, training exchanges and collaboration between 1st SFG(A) and its Philippine counterparts will continue in the coming years.

There will be an ongoing need for planned, focused training with the force even when the steady state is reached. Like the established and new partnerships within the region, the U.S. mission in the Pacific is a long-term commitment. **SW**

Janice Burton is the editor of Special Warfare.