

In Africa *It's All*



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A typical street scene in Senegal, Africa. Vendors of all types line the busy corridors in hopes of selling their wares to passersby.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY JENNIFER G. ANGELO

Relative



BY JANICE BURTON

*“Mes amis! Mes Amis! Come here!
I am Picasso — the artist.
Come, let me show you my art!”*

This is the constant chant of a young street vendor, whose shop is set up across from a popular hotel and restaurant in Thies, Senegal. Stepping into the hut that houses Picasso’s treasures, one is confronted with an array of intricate carvings and butterfly drawings. Picasso’s constant chatter continues, asking the buyer to name a price.

The offer of \$12,000 CFA (Senegalese currency) is met with disbelief.

“My father made these carvings. He has a fine shop in the city. There they sell for \$80,000 - \$120,000 — no way,” he says.

“But this isn’t a fine shop. It is a tin building on a dirt road,” countered the buyer, “Look, there is a pig standing in doorway.” That is relative to Picasso, as is much of what one encounters in Africa.



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For military and other government agencies operating throughout the Continent, it is imperative to keep that perspective. Yes, the weapons of African partners are more than 25 years old, but the soldiers who carry them maintain them to the best of their ability. Yes, a vast majority of the African soldiers do not know how to drive, but they are proud that they have vehicles. It's all relative.

In a land where everything can be an enemy from unending dust to the burning sun or the swarm of mosquitoes or the mind-numbing poverty of many and the never-ending supply of terrorist threats, the development of a well-trained military is an imperative. To that end, the U.S. African Command hosts the annual Flintlock Exercise, which brings partner militaries from more than 30 countries together to cement partnerships, focus operations and build interoperability between the U.S., European and African partners.

At its core, Flintlock is a high speed counter-terrorism event. While the event changes locations annually, it remains focused on terror threats like those posed by Daesh and its African affiliate, Boka Haram.

According to Col. William D. Rose, the 2016 Flintlock exercise director, the Flintlock Exercise is one of many run throughout the year, all of which are designed to engage and build relationships with African partners while building their capability and capacity.

"It is difficult for us and our partners to be

everywhere all at once," continued Rose, noting that U.S. Special Operations Forces working in conjunction with their partners enjoy relative freedom of movement and can often blend with the populace. We have learned through good partnerships with our African and European partners that we can establish a network that helps counter violent extremists organizations and terrorist threats."

The changing face of the threats, and the ability of terrorists organizations like Boko Haram to garner support, training and resources from more developed organizations, has partner nations facing more proficient enemies. That has not; however, lessened their resolve to eliminate the existing threats and stop the growth of new threats.

"While some report that there is more radicalization among existing terrorist cells, it has not impacted the militaries of our African partners," said Rose. "In fact, quite the opposite has happened. First and foremost, they are dedicated to deterring the terrorist threat, containing it and eliminating it. There are no religious or ethnic issues within our partner militaries. It is not part of the equation."

Instead, the dedication of the soldiers is gaining them respect with their western partners. "Our partners are very receptive to their African partners and how they are reacting. They see them as sophisticated, relevant, competent forces who are looking to refine their tactics, techniques and procedures by learning

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Senegalese Special Operations soldiers conduct a rehearsal for a high value target extraction exercise in St. Louis, Senegal. The HVT exercise is the culmination of a week-long training on water and land operations as part of Flintlock 2016.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. DAVID M. SHEFCHUK

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The harsh African terrain itself can pose a threat to military forces operating in the continent.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO COURTESY OF 3RD SFG(A) PAO





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01 Senegalese Commando soldiers conduct a briefing with partner nation forces during Flintlock 2016.

U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. DAVID M. SHEFCHUCK

02 A dancer performs a traditional dance at a crop storage facility dedication in Kedougou, Senegal.

U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. KULANI J. LAKANARIA

03 A Senegalese Navy Special Operator stands guard on a captured boat as it docks during a maritime drug interdiction exercise in St. Louis, Senegal.

U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY JENNIFER G. ANGELO

04 Senegalese SOF pull security during a high value target (HVT) extraction exercise.

U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. DAVID M. SHEFCHUCK

05 Senegalese soldiers participate in the opening ceremonies of Flintlock 2016.

U.S. ARMY PHOTO

from each other as well as their Western partners.”

Key to that growth is the numerous exercises conducted throughout the year (more than 20 large exercises) that focus on various areas of development for the force. The growth in capability and capacity of partner forces is further bolstered by ongoing Joint combined exchange training and joint planning and assistance teams. While smaller than the exercises, the JCETs and JPATs focus on individual partners for longer periods of time, while a large-scale exercise like Flintlock serves as a combined training rotation, which puts all of the forces together for a large multinational training event.

The JCETs and JPATs fall under the authority of the Special Operations Commands-Forward, an evolution of the Joint Special Operations Task Forces, that are under the command and control of the 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne). Currently, there are three SOC-Forward elements. SOC-Forward North and West took the place of JSOTF-Trans-Sahara; SOC-Forward Central Africa; and SOC-Forward Eastern Africa.

Prior to 2002, 3rd SFG(A), known as The Bushmen, were regionally aligned to Africa. With the onset of continuous Afghanistan deployments in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) took on the regional orientation for Africa. In September 2014, the orientation was changed and 3rd SFG(A) returned to its roots.

“There is a bit of a learning curve for 3rd Group to come back into Africa,” said Rose. “They are very eager to get back to their roots, although for many of the Soldiers within the group, this Flintlock Exercise is their first trip to the Continent.”

Rose noted that the transition was easier due to the professionalism of the 10th SFG(A). He explained that the transition was phased in at natural splits, such as a team’s deployment, which allowed the Soldiers of the 10th Group to introduce their 3rd

Group brothers to their African partners.

“This is definitely a first for a lot of these 3rd SFG Soldiers, but a lot of their senior leaders and NCOs, in particular, have time in and around Africa. It is their heritage and tradition, so a lot of these younger Soldiers are eager to be back here,” said Rose.

Among the many challenges faced by U.S. troops operating in Africa is logistics. “There is always a challenge in sustaining the force and at times, it is the biggest challenge for us to overcome,” said Rose, who noted that despite more than a year and a half of planning, there have still been logistical challenges with Flintlock 2016. “Africa is ruled by the tyranny of distance. It’s a problem for all of our partners. It takes time to project anywhere.”

With that being said, Rose noted that Senegal, the host for this year’s event did a great job of providing the logistics support needed to make Flintlock a success.

“We helped identify requirements, but this year’s event is really a partner-led effort. The Senegalese Army has done a really excellent job of identifying resources and supplies for everyone here and the Senegalese military has proven that they are fully capable of providing for the exercise.”

It is proven partnerships, like those with Senegal and many other African partners, that are valuable to the Special Operations Command-Africa.

“We value partnering with leadership. Good partners who can set up a base of support are always a partnership in which we will invest,” concluded Rose. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Janice Burton is the editor of *Special Warfare*.



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