



## Range Support: Total orchestration at land, sea and air

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5/7/2010 - HURLBURT FIELD, Fla. -- *Editor's note: The 1st Special Operations Support Squadron Range Support flight is dedicated to providing Air Force Special Operations Command, joint and coalition units with realistic training scenarios in preparation for real world challenges. The flight is comprised of four departments: maritime training, opposition forces, assault zones and Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape. This is part one of a four-part series highlighting each of those divisions.*

The sugar-white sands of the beaches and bluest of waters in the gulf make the Emerald Coast of northwest Florida a popular destination for tourists to visit and an inviting environment for fishermen to chance their luck. It's also home to the Air Force Special Operations Command at Hurlburt Field where Air Force aircraft are regularly seen flying through the skies above the coast.



U.S. Navy Special Warfare boat operators from Special Boat Team 20 secure a platform as an MC-130H assigned to the 15th Special Operations Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Fla., makes a pass over the Gulf of Mexico April 26, 2010. SBT-20, home-ported at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek, Va., and the 15th SOS participated in joint training conducted by the maritime training division of the 1st Special Operations Support Squadron Range Support Flight from Hurlburt Field. (DoD photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Matthew Loken)

Although many people are accustomed to the sights and sounds of planes frequenting the area, some may have seen something even more unusual than an elusive giant marlin pass under the Bay Bridge in Destin, Fla., April 26.

With private boats and hotel resorts flanking them as they left port, a small team of two U.S. Navy Mark Vs and other special operations watercraft ventured more than 10 miles southwest into the Gulf of Mexico.

They weren't seafarers going fishing or guides embarking on a three-hour tour. They were a contingent of Special Boat Team 20, home-ported at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek, Va., tasked with a unique objective: to rendezvous at a predetermined location where a U.S. Air Force MC-130H Combat Talon II would drop U.S. Naval Special Warfare inflatable boats and launch more than 20 parachute-jumpers at a height of more than 5,000 feet. The special warfare boat operators then had to secure all of the boats' expensive rigging and its platform, and confront potential hypothermia and nausea from the onslaught of choppy, seven-foot-high waves.

For the Sailors, it was the culmination of months of tireless training designed to make the difference between success and failure in a real-world situation when their country most needs them. For Samuel Osborne, 1st Special Operations Support Squadron Range Support assistant flight commander, it was just another Monday at work.

Since 2007, Mr. Osborne has led the maritime division of Range Support, covering aspects of water survival, infiltration/exfiltration, scuba support and other diverse training at sea. He and his team provide the logistics and the opportunity for military personnel to achieve their Mission Essential Task Lists, also called METLs, for each job.

"Our goal is to always keep the customer happy," Mr. Osborne said. "Whether they're Ranger or SEAL teams or any group within United States Special Operations Command, we support them and always put them first."

The success of each exercise depends on his management and coordination of assets both in the sky and the water. It's the organization of the necessary resources and logistics all along the backdrop of the Gulf of Mexico that have kept maritime customers coming back to Hurlburt Field since Range Support formally began in 2003.

"There are a lot of moving parts to each mission," Mr. Osborne said. "A lot goes behind a Talon simply taking off from the flightline."

After he arranged the use of equipment and areas in the gulf with the U.S. Coast Guard at their station in Destin, Mr. Osborne contacted Debbie Carswell, 1st Special Operations Group assistant flight chief, to utilize the needed airspace. Ms. Carswell said the reservation of the zones from Eglin Air Force Base and commercial patrons for training purposes was crucial to the mission.

"We acquire a very small window of opportunity to make this happen," Ms. Carswell said. "Time management is a top priority, so we are very busy during that timeframe."

The final piece to the maritime training puzzle is the use of assets from the 1st Special Operations Wing. For this exercise, aircraft from the 15th Special Operations Squadron carried the boats and jumpers out to sea.

Master Sgt. John Wade, 15th SOS first sergeant, served as a loadmaster on the flight that tossed out the 36-foot-long, 10-ton boats. He said the timing and location were not the only constraints that could hinder the outcome of an exercise.

"Fuel is always a factor because we don't want to loiter any longer than we need to," Sergeant Wade said. "We leave just early enough to operate within the tight window of time so we will be ready when called upon."

With all the elements arranged in place, the boat drop scenario requested by the customers became a reality. After the boats made contact with the water, resulting in a giant splash, Sailors quickly moved to prepare the watercraft for transport and secure their parachutes and platforms.

The team then piloted their newly-obtained vessels back to shore with any lessons from their performance in the scenario still fresh in their minds.

"The sea-state was ideal for training circumstances," said U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Jason Scott, SBT 20 special warfare boat operator. "This was quality training done in real-world environmental conditions."

The experience is not only appreciated by the clients, but by the facilitators in their respective fields as well. Sergeant Wade said it was nice to have the opportunity for loadmasters like him to see the fruits of their labor pay off toward special operations training.

"The awesome part for us is that we don't do this very often and it's a break from our regular jobs to do something different," he said.

Having reserved airspace for similar operations during the last six years, Ms. Carswell rode with Mr. Osborne's boat to personally witness the exercise in the Gulf of Mexico for the first time.

"I've never seen anything like all that coordination," she said. "It's exciting to see it materialize, and I admire the Sailors for what they do. I loved it."

With this scenario complete, Mr. Osborne and his team stand ready to tailor and facilitate the next maritime assignment for future clients and their needs.

"It's very rewarding to know we help achieve mission METLs and make the customers happy all while training the next generation of special operations personnel," he said.