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# ARMY SPECIAL FORCES IN THE ALASKAN ARCTIC

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Monterey, CA; Naval Postgraduate School

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**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**DEFENSE ANALYSIS  
CAPSTONE REPORT**

**ARMY SPECIAL FORCES  
IN THE ALASKAN ARCTIC**

by

Thomas E. Boehm, Nathan D. Carda,  
and Patrick Tomaszewski

March 2024

Thesis Advisor:  
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**ARMY SPECIAL FORCES IN THE ALASKAN ARCTIC**

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**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN APPLIED DESIGN FOR INNOVATION**

from the

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## ABSTRACT

Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) are poorly manned, trained, organized, and equipped to conduct sustained operations in the Arctic. ARSOF currently conducts “Arctic Tourism”: misaligned and episodic training combined with personnel policies that dilute Arctic expertise and limit institutional knowledge and unit capability. This is compounded by the strained relationship between the U.S. government and Alaska Native communities, denying the U.S. military Arctic expertise and presenting a gap for malign influence. To address this issue, we examined the question: How can the United States Army Special Operations Command influence policy, improve strategy, and optimize readiness in the Alaskan Arctic in support of the 2022 NDS and NSS, 2019 DOD Arctic Strategy, and the 2022 Army Arctic Strategy? Through Arctic training events, conferences, and case studies, we determined ARSOF currently does not have a dedicated formation to provide Arctic capability or capacity. Historical U.S. and current Canadian indigenous units provide models for an Alaskan homeland defense and domain awareness force, but current cultural and political conditions prohibit implementation. Our main recommendation is that an Alaska-based National Guard Special Forces unit provides the best means to establish ARSOF Arctic capability, mend relationships with Alaska Natives for a potential indigenous homeland defense organization, and build future capacity to project power in Arctic regions abroad.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A2AD	Anti Access Area Denial
AKARNG	Alaska Army National Guard
ALCOM	U.S. Alaska Command
AOB	Special Forces Advanced Operating Base
ARSOF	Army Special Operations Forces
ATG	Alaska Territorial Guard
BDE	Brigade
BN	Battalion
CA	Civil Affairs
CO	Company
COL	Colonel
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 19
CV2	Certification, Validation, Verification
DOD	Depart of Defense
ECW	Extreme Cold Weather
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GWOT	Global War on Terror
HALO	High Altitude, Low Opening Parachuting
HASC	House Armed Services Committee
I3	Integration, Interoperability, & Interdependence
IADS	Integrated Air Defense System
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance

JFE	Joint Forcible Entry
JPMRC	Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center
JRTC	Joint Readiness Training Center
LSCO	Large Scale Combat Operations
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel
MAJ	Major
METL	Mission Essential Task List
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NORAD	North American Aerospace Defense Command
NORSOCOM	Norwegian Special Operations Command
NORSOF	Norwegian Special Operations Forces
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
NSS	National Security Strategy
NTC	National Training Center
OCT	Observer, Coach, Trainer
OPFOR	Opposing Force
PRC	People’s Republic of China
RMT	Realistic Military Training
RTU	Rotational Training Unit
SASC	Senate Armed Services Committee
SERE	Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape
SF	U.S. Army Special Forces

SFG(A)	Special Forces Group (Airborne)
SFOD-A	Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha
SOCNORTH	Special Operations Command North
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOF-CF-I3	Special Operations Forces – Conventional Forces Integration, Interoperability, & Interdependence
SOTD	Special Operations Training Detachment
TSC	Department of Defense Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies
UFMC	USASOC Force Modernization Center
USAF	United States Air Force
USARAK	U.S. Army Alaska Command
USASOC	United States Army Special Operations Command
USEUCOM	U.S. European Command
USG	United States Government
USINDOPACOM	U.S. Indo-Pacific Command
USNORTHCOM	U.S. Northern Command
USO	United Service Organizations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WWII	World War II



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This thesis examines how the United States Army Special Operations Command can influence policy, improve strategy, and optimize readiness in the Alaskan Arctic in support of the 2022 National Defense Strategy and National Security Strategy, 2019 DOD Arctic Strategy, and the 2022 Army Arctic Strategy. We find that ARSOF currently does not have a dedicated formation to provide Arctic capability or capacity. Our main recommendation is that an Alaska-based National Guard Special Forces unit provides the best means to establish ARSOF Arctic capability, mend relationships with Alaska Natives for a potential indigenous homeland defense organization, and build future capacity to project power in Arctic regions abroad.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) and Army Special Forces (SF) specifically are poorly manned, trained, organized, and equipped to conduct sustained operations in the Arctic. Arctic capability requires significant investment in demanding training for highly perishable skills, personnel stabilization, and unique equipment. Shortcomings could leave a gap in homeland defense and domain awareness in Alaska and in power projection abroad. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Russia are strengthening ties and investing in Arctic capabilities and infrastructure. Alaska provides the United States a power projection platform into the Indo-Pacific theater but is vulnerable due to critical homeland defense infrastructure located there that is at risk from all domains. This vulnerability is compounded by the strained relationship between the U.S. government (USG) and Alaska Native communities due to past grievances, which both denies the U.S. military the benefit of indigenous Arctic expertise and presents an opportunity for malign influence by the PRC or Russia to exploit. In the current environment of competing requirements and budgetary constraints, the DOD needs a low cost, economy of force option to address these challenges to shore up homeland defense, repair relationships with the indigenous population, and to build true Arctic capability and capacity for power projection abroad.

## RESEARCH APPROACH

This capstone project is in its second iteration and builds on the research and findings of the first group of Army Special Forces officers from 2021–2022 who initially sought to explore the state of ARSOF Arctic capabilities and gaps at the tactical level. During their research, they discovered that tactical Arctic gaps were driven by a lack of operational doctrine and strategic guidance concerning Arctic readiness and expected capabilities. As the second iteration of this Arctic capstone, we prioritized these findings to focus our research on Alaska as a means to address the two most important findings of the previous report: domain awareness in support of homeland defense, and ARSOF Arctic capability in general, both at home in Alaska and for power projection abroad in the European High North. Focusing on homeland defense gaps in Alaska by working with and through Alaska Native communities as Arctic experts and stakeholders could simultaneously build Arctic capability and future capacity to effectively operate alongside European High North partners in crisis or conflict. Army Special Forces are the ideal choice for this due to their design and history of working with indigenous partner units. These concepts helped focus our research on current ARSOF Arctic training, operations, and organizations, as well as historical and contemporary North American indigenous Arctic units to inform the feasibility of a modern Alaskan Arctic homeland defense and domain awareness organization.

- In order to complete the study, we conducted the following research:
  - March 2023: Observed Special Forces Arctic training event at the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center in Alaska.
  - March-June 2023: Developed and executed Arctic wargame with Norwegian Special Operations NPS students.
  - May 2023: attended Arctic and Homeland Defense Symposium at Peterson Space Force Base, Colorado.
  - July 2023 through January 2024: Conducted case studies of historical and contemporary Arctic and/or indigenous military units.

- February 2024: published an article on arctic tourism in the Tufts University Fletcher Forum of World Affairs.

## **FINDINGS**

- ARSOF currently lacks the manning, training, organization, and equipment to operate in the Alaskan Arctic or to partner with European High North allies. U.S. strategy and doctrine are aspirational given the lack of resourcing applied towards the region and units that are expected to operate in the environment.
- Arctic readiness will not be a priority until a crisis event, but the capability cannot be created reactively or on short notice.
- ARSOF currently conducts “Arctic Tourism:” misaligned and episodic training combined with personnel policies that dilute Arctic expertise and hinder the retention of institutional knowledge and unit capability. “Arctic Tourism” detracts simultaneously from both Arctic readiness and ARSOF unit preparation for operational deployments to non-Arctic regions. Current personnel policies create routine turnover in units expected to be subject matter experts, inhibiting the development of institutional knowledge.
- The DOD Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies is a necessary foundational organization to serve as an Arctic Center of Gravity, but it is still in a nascent stage and is more focused on establishment, growth, and education than operational coordination or impacts.
- European High North partners have a more advanced and established Arctic capability than ARSOF. ARSOF supporting European High North allies could be expected to partner with home guard units, due to their inability to operate alongside European SOF for Arctic operations.

- In the Arctic defense, academic, and commercial sectors, there is a heavy focus on the maritime, air, space, and cyber domains, with a relative neglect of the land domain. There is a great deal of knowledge and expertise in disparate entities, but it is siloed and uncoordinated.
- The Alaska National Guard and Alaska State Defense Force still lack adequate composition and disposition to support defense of the homeland.
- Indigenous persistent presence and Arctic knowledge are critical to domain awareness, homeland defense, and ARSOF Arctic capability.
- Previous iterations of U.S. indigenous Arctic formations were effective and created in times of crisis. The Alaska Scouts and Canadian Rangers provide good models to emulate, but reestablishing a modern iteration of those units have significant cultural, political, and military barriers to implementation that would preclude reactive or rapid organization. and may not be required or appropriate.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The DOD, USASOC, and National Guard Bureau should establish an Alaska-based Army National Guard Special Forces unit to provide an Arctic center of gravity to address multiple challenges: stabilization of personnel to maintain Arctic institutional knowledge, repairing the relationship with Alaska Native communities to leverage their Arctic expertise, support Alaskan homeland defense, and establish an SF Arctic capability to build capacity around for eventual Arctic power projection abroad in other COCOMs. This could additionally take the pressure off active-duty SF groups who are now attempting to simultaneously address Arctic readiness and prepare for non-Arctic operational deployments, to the detriment of both efforts. This endeavor needs to start now, as the desired capability cannot be created during a crisis.

- For Alaskan Arctic training events, USASOC should designate Arctic-focused units, and send those units to realistic military training scenarios located at outstation training sites on the periphery of the Alaskan coast and deep interior. This will provide the opportunity to train under demanding conditions to test mobility, survivability, communications and other Arctic TTPs. When training with conventional Arctic units, ARSOF needs to be physically distant from the conventional training site, or “box,” in a scenario that allows their tactical actions to support conventional maneuver and operations through creative effects.
- The DOD Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies needs continued funding and support to further develop itself into the U.S. Arctic Center of Gravity, connecting industry, academia, and defense.
- ARSOF, Army, DOD, and civilian leaders need to fully appreciate and recognize the current limited capabilities of ARSOF Arctic employment. In a European Arctic high-intensity conflict, ARSOF is not currently capable enough to operate with High North partners or able to accomplish the same Arctic tasks or missions.
- The U.S. Air Force Academy Homeland Defense Institute needs a deliberate inclusion of the land domain when discussing Arctic issues.



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# I. INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW, AND APPROACH

## A. RESEARCH QUESTION

How can the United States Army Special Operations Command influence policy, improve strategy, and optimize readiness in the Alaskan Arctic in support of the 2022 National Defense Strategy and National Security Strategy, 2019 DOD Arctic Strategy, and the 2022 Army Arctic Strategy?

## B. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Climate Change Drives Competition

There is a re-occurring theme across all the referenced documents pertaining to the Arctic, climate change is driving economic and military competition and it is not slowing down. This has triggered numerous discussions and symposiums, ranging from the lower levels of the Department of Defense to the highest levels of U.S. policymakers, all with a focus on how the U.S. can implement policies to deter threats to U.S. homeland.

This study is particularly focused on gray-zone competition between the United States, Russia, and China, spurred on by the impacts of climate change in the Arctic. Rising sea temperatures and retreating polar ice is driving increased competition in the region.<sup>1</sup> With greater access to the region comes increased competition for the vast amount of untapped oil, gas, and mineral reserves.<sup>2</sup> The Congressional Research Service wrote an excellent primer on virtually all facets of climate change in the Arctic.<sup>3</sup> It is instrumental in gaining and understanding of the challenges that all Arctic countries face.

Ms. Sharma’s work on the Chinese polar silk road is a clear-eyed look at how—in the span of a decade—China has advanced from having no published Arctic strategy to

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<sup>1</sup> Henrik Breitenbauch, Kristian Soby Kristensen, and Jonas Groesmeyer, “Military and Environmental Challenges in the Arctic,” *Carnegie Europe*, New Perspectives on Shared Security: NATO’s Next 70 Years, November 28, 2019, 45–50, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/NATO\\_int\\_final1.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/NATO_int_final1.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress*, CRS Report No. R41153 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2022), 2, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R41153.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Congressional Research Service, 1–82.

creating the first atomic powered icebreaker, with a nuclear-powered ice breaker in development.<sup>4</sup> She succinctly describes China’s Arctic aspirations and how they have continued to wield soft power to march toward their goals. The Chinese interest in sea lines of communication, energy, climate change, and scientific research will take years to develop, but it will likely be worth their effort.

In contrast to China, Russia is willing to yield both soft and hard power to realize their economic prosperity and military superiority in the region. Rumer et al. give a thorough assessment of Russia’s strengths and weaknesses, cautioning the U.S. and NATO from escalating competition into conflict.<sup>5</sup> Their work demonstrates a gap in U.S. policy/strategy within the region. There is little chance the U.S. is going to invest in equal/opposite military capability in the Alaskan Arctic when faced with keeping pace with China. USASOC and Army SOF maintain capabilities that would allow the United States and NATO to find success in gray-zone competition with Russia.

## **2. U.S. Response and Changing Strategy**

The 2022 National Security Strategy recognizes how climate change is turning the Arctic into both an economic opportunity zone as well as a competition space where both Russia and China are increasing their military, economic and scientific presences, and investments. The document outlines a plan of action to increase maritime domain awareness, communications, disaster response capabilities and icebreaking capacity. The strategy also aims to preserve freedom of navigation, invest in infrastructure while honoring native tribal sovereignty and reducing risk by avoiding escalation with only a U.S. government presence “as required.”<sup>6</sup> This is a contradiction that creates a gap; to reach these worthwhile goals, the U.S. government is going to need more than an “as

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<sup>4</sup> Anu Sharma, “China’s Polar Silk Road: Implications for the Arctic Region,” *Air University Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, October 25, 2021, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2820750/chinas-polar-silk-road-implications-for-the-arctic-region/>.

<sup>5</sup> Eugene Rumer, Richard Sokolsky, and Paul Stronski, *Russia in the Arctic – A Critical Examination* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/03/29/russia-in-arctic-critical-examination-pub-84181>.

<sup>6</sup> White House, National Security Strategy (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 44–45, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

required” presence. But it is also an opportunity: through persistent engagement and infrastructure development, the U.S. government can assist native Tribes while increasing domain awareness.

The 2022 National Defense Strategy seeks a stable Arctic through rules and norms, and to leverage deterrence in the region by improving early warning and ISR capabilities, partnering with Canada to enhance NORAD, and increase shared maritime domain awareness. Notably, it calls for a calibrated Arctic posture to preserve the focus on the DOD’s stated priority, the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>7</sup>

The 2023 HASC Report on the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) recognizes that melting sea ice is transforming the Arctic from a historic buffer zone into an area of opportunity and competition where economic and national security interests intersect. It calls for the U.S. to adjust and improve its Arctic posture, infrastructure, and situational awareness. The document outlines priorities for the DOD and SOCNORTH to report on, including how to define unit readiness with consistent terminology and focus as well as a validation pathway for Arctic ground units to man, train and equip in accordance with individual and unit level Arctic-specific tasks. The Act also specifically called for the meaningful incorporation of Special Operations Forces into the Arctic Security initiative.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, these specific points did not make it into the final signed NDAA that was reconciled with the Senate, but it is encouraging to see these ideas and specific verbiage in at least a draft NDAA.

This literature review will explore the 2022 National Strategy for the Arctic Region and its vision over the next 10 year to ensure the Arctic is a region that is peaceful, stable, prosperous, and cooperative.<sup>9</sup> The strategy breaks down the U.S. approach into four pillars to guide the United States’ affirmation agenda in the Arctic region for the next decade:

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<sup>7</sup> Department of Defense, 2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Including the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review and the 2022 Missile Defense Review (Department of Defense, 2022), 16.

<sup>8</sup> National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. H.R. 7900 (2022), 260–261, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/7900>.

<sup>9</sup> White House, *National Strategy for the Arctic Region* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2022), 1, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/National-Strategy-for-the-Arctic-Region.pdf>.

- Security
- Climate Change and Environmental Protection
- Sustainable Economic Development
- International Cooperation and Governance<sup>10</sup>

For this study we will focus on this strategy's first pillar, Security: Develop capabilities for Expanded Arctic Activity. This pillar explains that the highest priority of the United States "is to protect the American people and our sovereign territory and rights," with a focus on "national defense and homeland security" for "commercial and scientific activities."<sup>11</sup> This pillar of the strategy is broken down into three strategic objectives, that recognize the United States needs to:

- Improve our understanding of the Arctic operating environment
- Exercise presence to support priority goals
- Maximize unity of effort with allies and partners<sup>12</sup>

Throughout these three objectives the strategy references the use of the Coast Guard icebreaker fleet, working to improve sensing and observation capabilities, and the increasing the "operational familiarity with the Arctic region" to include cold weather operations and continuing "to partner with the state of Alaska and Alaska Native and rural communities on activities such as combined exercises" and cold weather training.<sup>13</sup>

Everything that is expanded on in the security pillar hits key areas that are necessary to conduct operations in the Arctic. What it does not cover is which entity will be conducting these tasks to ensure that the Arctic remains peaceful, stable, prosperous, and cooperative over the next 10 years. This gap opens the ability to conduct increased research to see what DOD element would be best suited to collaborate with allies, partners and

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<sup>10</sup> White House, *National Strategy for the Arctic* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 2.

<sup>11</sup> White House, *National Strategy for the Arctic Region* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2022), 7–8, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/National-Strategy-for-the-Arctic-Region.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> White House, *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*, 2022, 9.

<sup>13</sup> White House, 9.

indigenous Alaskan populations while understanding the nature of these relationships and leveraging them to meet the goals of U.S. Arctic strategy.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. The Gap

The Department of Defense *Arctic Strategy June 2019 Report* to congress contains most of the same key objectives as the 2022 National Strategy for the Arctic. The DOD Arctic strategy does identify that Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) routinely participate in Arctic or near-Arctic region exercises to ensure interoperability with allied partners. As stated in the DOD Arctic Strategy, “The agile and expeditionary nature of SOF, combined with established allied and partner relations and interoperability, provides DOD a ready capability to compete below the level of armed conflict in the Arctic region and across the spectrum of SOF core activities.”<sup>15</sup> The DOD Arctic strategy highlights the importance of integrating ARSOF into Arctic operations, but there is a gap in our understanding of how this integration should be carried out and how ARSOF can effectively contribute to Arctic Security. This compounds with the task of interoperability with other military actors; there is a gap in our understanding of how SOF can effectively collaborate with other military actors, including indigenous populations to achieve shared goals in the Arctic.

In the *INDOPACOM Journal* article “The Unconventional Approach to Arctic Security: Increasing Domain Awareness through the U.S. Army Special Operations Forces’ Indigenous Approach,” authored by U.S. Army Special Forces Majors Barret Martin, Michael Tovo, and Devin Kirkwood, the authors address some of the same gaps discussed previously, but focus on the U.S. Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) as the force to address strategic opportunities within “Indigenous communities and through combined operations with international partners. Engagement and integration with Indigenous communities in Alaska” and Northern Europe provides not only defensive

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<sup>14</sup> White House, 8–10.

<sup>15</sup> Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, *Report to Congress Department of Defense Arctic Strategy* (Washington, DC, 2019), 17, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jun/06/2002141657/-1/-1/1/2019-DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY.PDF>.

benefits, but also the potential to put “pressure on the Russian Federation.”<sup>16</sup> While ARSOF may be well suited for this strategy, the authors acknowledge the research gap of finding a willing and supportive Indigenous population to work with to achieve strategic goals. With over 110,000 Native Alaskans spread across 225 communities speaking over 20 languages and belonging to five ethnic groups, it will require time and research to identify a suitable group for integration with ARSOF. Additional restrictions based on authorities and permissions remain a constant for ARSOF operations in the United States. These gaps identified in the article provide areas for further research to answer the question of how the U.S. Army Special Operations Command can influence Arctic policy, improve Arctic strategy, and optimize readiness in the Alaskan Arctic in support of the 2022 National Defense Strategy and National Security Strategy, the 2019 DOD Arctic Strategy, and 2022 Army Arctic Strategy.

Expanding on the same theme as the 2022 NDAA in an information paper, MAJs William Martin, Michael Tovo and Devin Kirkwood articulate the need to redefine how we describe unit capability in the Arctic in response to the Army’s 2021 Arctic Strategy. They argue that to build a shared understanding and avoid confusion, the Army and DOD should do away with Arctic “Ready” and “Capable” in favor for the already established and understood doctrinal terms of “Trained” and “Proficient” to describe Arctic competency. The authors also advocate for rescoping Arctic requirements for any one element to just one of the five environments that Arctic units are currently expected to be prepared to operate in: Arctic, Sub-Arctic, extreme cold weather (ECW), high altitude, and mountainous. Finally, they propose developing and defining specific and standardized Arctic Mission Essential Task Lists (METLs) for different units and mission sets in the Arctic environment.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Barrett Martin, Michael Tovo, and Devin Kirkwood, “The Unconventional Approach to Arctic Security: Increasing Domain Awareness through the U.S. Army Special Operations Forces’ Indigenous Approach > Air University (AU) > Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs Article Display,” The Unconventional Approach to Arctic Security: Increasing Domain Awareness through the U.S. Army Special Operations Forces’ Indigenous Approach, October 3, 2022, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3171599/the-unconventional-approach-to-arctic-security-increasing-domain-awareness-thro/>.

<sup>17</sup> Barrett Martin, Michael Tovo, and Devin Kirkwood, “Nuance in Defining Arctic Capability” (Information Paper, Monterey, CA, Naval Postgraduate School, 2022), 1–3.

In a journal article for the U.S. Army War College by the same authors titled “Quiet, Cold and Vital: ARSOF in the Arctic,” the authors argue that strategic competition can be won through irregular warfare, especially in a periphery theater like the Arctic. They propose that the skills learned by SOF through an indigenous approach in the Middle East and elsewhere during the Global War on Terror can be applied with a renewed focus on Unconventional Warfare to produce results in the Arctic.<sup>18</sup>

The Special Operations Command North (SOCNORTH) Commander BG Shawn Satterfield and LTC Sky Jensen, a SOCNORTH planner, published an article in the *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* titled “Special Operations Command North: Leading Special Operations Forces in the North American Arctic” that outlined similar value propositions for SOF that Tovo, Kirkwood and Martin did. Satterfield and Jensen described three Arctic vectors for SOF: advance capabilities, demonstrate readiness, and prepare the environment. They advocated for consistent immersion and operational experience to thrive in the Arctic, as exemplified by a training event that some National Guard Green Berets partnered with indigenous Canadian Rangers in the Canadian Arctic, offering a potential template to emulate in Alaska. The authors also push for enhanced relationships between SOF and any entities that know how to live, work and thrive in the Arctic.<sup>19</sup>

For historical and contemporary examples of Arctic-focused and indigenous units operating in the North American Arctic, there is not a cohesive, all-encompassing history in either official DOD records or commercial publications. There is, however, a disparate collection of officially published and self-published books by private authors as well as semi-official unit histories and archival memorandums establishing the existence, consolidation and/or disbandment of various Arctic and indigenous units. *Forgotten Warriors of the Aleutian Campaign* by Jim Rearden and *Soldiers of the Mist: Minutemen*

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<sup>18</sup> Devin Kirkwood Tovo Barrett Martin, Michael, “QUIET, COLD, AND VITAL: ARSOF IN THE ARCTIC,” *War Room – U.S. Army War College* (blog), December 8, 2022, <https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/arsof-arctic/>.

<sup>19</sup> BG Shawn R. Satterfield and Lt COL Sky B. Jensen, “Special Operations Command North: Leading Special Operations Forces into the North American Arctic,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, October 2022, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3172966/special-operations-command-north-leading-special-operations-forces-into-the-nor/>.



of the *Alaska Frontier* by C.A. Salisbury are instrumental in gaining an understanding of the founding, structure, and employment of the 1st Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon during the Aleutian Campaign of WWII.<sup>20</sup> They provide the strongest accounting of the unit but lack the academic rigor that would make them definitive. Marvin “Muktuk” Marston’s book, *Men of the Tundra: Alaska Eskimos at War* provides ample, first-person detail of the formation of the Alaska Territorial Guard (ATG) but is heavily influenced by his prejudices.<sup>21</sup> A 1952 *Military Review* article by LTC Thomas Blakeney and an internally published history of the Alaska National Guard by Sergeant Marc McNab provide more unbiased accounts of the ATG’s exploits and its transformation into the Alaska National Guard, although both still rely heavily on Marston’s subjective account.<sup>22</sup> Finally, P. Whitney Lackenbauer is the subject-matter expert on the Canadian Rangers and his published works can be relied upon for accurate, rigorous analysis of the history and employment of the Canadian Rangers, specifically *The Canadian Rangers: A Living History*.<sup>23</sup>

### C. APPROACH/METHOD

This Defense Analysis Applied Design for Innovation capstone project is currently in its second iteration and remained narrow in scope, focusing on the deliverables agreed upon by the sponsors. It sought to address how the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) can influence Arctic policy, improve Arctic strategy, and optimize readiness in the Alaskan Arctic in support of the 2022 National Defense Strategy and National Security Strategy, 2019 Department of Defense (DOD) Arctic Strategy, and the

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<sup>20</sup> Jim Rearden, *Forgotten Warriors of the Aleutian Campaign* (Missoula, Mont: Pictorial Histories Pub. Co, 2005); C. A. Salisbury, *Soldiers of the Mist: Minutemen of the Alaska Frontier* (Missoula, Mont: Pictorial Histories Pub. Co, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> Marvin “Muktuk” Marston, *Men of the Tundra: Eskimos at War* (New York, NY: October House Publishers, 1972).

<sup>22</sup> James Richardson and Marc McNab, *Alaska Guard: Alaska Army National Guard and Other Stories* (Fort Richardson, AK: 134th Public Information Detachment, Alaska Army National Guard, 2008), <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/8368676/alaska-guard-by-lt-james-richardson-historical-officer-the-alaska-;> Thomas O. Blakeney, “The Security of Alaska and the Tundra Army,” *Military Review* 32, no. 6 (September 1952).

<sup>23</sup> P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers: A Living History*, Studies in Canadian Military History Series (Vancouver (B. C.): UBC Press, 2013).

2022 Army Arctic Strategy. These strategic documents provide the basis from which initial analysis was conducted to determine significant gaps in U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) Arctic capabilities. This iteration of the project utilized the aforementioned documents, as well as the published works of Major Barrett Martin, Major Devin Kirkwood, and Major Michael Tovo, the student researchers who initiated this capstone project. “The Unconventional Approach to Arctic Security: Increasing Domain Awareness through the U.S. Army Special Operations Forces’ Indigenous Approach,” “Quiet, Cold, and Vital: ARSOF in the Arctic,” and a white paper on the subject of “Nuance in Defining Arctic Capability” provided the background and roadmap for the continuation of the capstone.<sup>24</sup>

This capstone project is sponsored by the USASOC Force Modernization Center (UFMC). Additionally, the group received funding from the Special Operations Training Detachment (SOTD) to facilitate observation of Arctic SF training in Alaska. Broadly speaking, UFMC has expressed interest in defense of the homeland regarding the Alaskan Arctic and how ARSOF can impose cost on Russia through trans-regional irregular warfare campaigning.

#### **D. GAPS AND DELIVERABLES**

A thorough analysis was conducted to identify critical gaps in the realm of Arctic defense. This was achieved through an examination of existing documentation pertaining to the Arctic generally and the Alaskan Arctic specifically; attendance of Arctic-focused symposiums; participation in Arctic wargames; the observation of SF Arctic training events; and case studies of historical and contemporary Arctic-focused and indigenous military units. The analysis of DOD Arctic strategies and documents served to highlight any critical gaps in relation to DOD Arctic strategies and Alaskan homeland defense.

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<sup>24</sup> Devin Kirkwood Tovo Barrett Martin, Michael, “QUIET, COLD, AND VITAL: ARSOF IN THE ARCTIC,” *War Room – U.S. Army War College* (blog), December 8, 2022, <https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/arsof-arctic/>; Barrett Martin, Michael Tovo, and Devin Kirkwood, “The Unconventional Approach to Arctic Security: Increasing Domain Awareness through the U.S. Army Special Operations Forces’ Indigenous Approach,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, Air University Press* 5, no. 5 (October 3, 2022): 124–36, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3171599/the-unconventional-approach-to-arctic-security-increasing-domain-awareness-thro/>; Martin, Tovo, and Kirkwood, “Nuance in Defining Arctic Capability.”

Furthermore, this analysis identified gaps in the implementation of SF in the Alaskan Arctic.

A published journal article entitled “The Unconventional Approach to Arctic Security: Increasing Domain Awareness through the U.S. Army Special Operations Forces’ Indigenous Approach” served as a crucial starting point for analyzing how SF can leverage the Alaskan indigenous and resident populations. The analysis focused on assessing whether SF is well-suited for this strategy, and if so, how and with whom they could work with. It is important to note that while SF may possess the necessary capabilities, the success of this approach will ultimately hinge on effective collaboration with key officials, policy makers, and Alaskan indigenous/resident populations.

There were five primary deliverables requested by the sponsor UPMC, all of which were completed:

- Identify potential mission requirements for U.S. Army SOF in the Arctic based on guidance from the relevant Theater Special Operations Commands (SOCNORTH and SOCEUR).
- Identify and foster relationships with organizations with Arctic equities to aid in Arctic SOF Operating Concept development.
- Attend or participate in specific meetings and wargames that have relevancy to SOF in the Arctic.
- Observe U.S. SOF/Conventional Arctic training to identify current shortfalls and best practices and understand operational parameters.
- Identify current shortfalls across the Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership, Personnel, Facilities and Policy (DOTMLPF-P) spectrum and make recommendations to increase survivability and lethality in the Arctic.

## **E. MILESTONES AND PRODUCTS**

To meet the deliverable requirements, this capstone group conducted the following:

- 14–21MAR23: Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center (JPMRC) Rotation 23–02: Observed C Company / 3rd Battalion / 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) conduct Arctic force-on-force training event with 2nd Brigade / 11th Airborne Division near Forts Richardson and Greely, AK. This event exemplified how both SF and the conventional Army are currently approaching the Arctic fight. The capstone group was commissioned by the SOTD to write a white paper assessing/critiquing the rotation scenario. The white paper and its findings were discussed with USASOC, SOTD, and JPMRC following its completion to improve future rotations.
- 17MAR23: Conducted engagement with the DOD Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies (TSC) in Anchorage, AK: developed the relationship previously established by the first capstone group and further our understanding of the potential role the TSC will play in Alaskan defense.
- 27MAR–9JUN23: NPS OA4604 Wargaming Applications Course: the research group developed and conducted a wargame with Norwegian Special Operations Forces (NORSOF) NPS Students to investigate how NORSOF can contribute effectively during an initial phase of a high-intensity conflict in the European High North. The group applied the findings and lessons learned from the results of this wargame to further identify and understand the assumptions and capability gaps that exist between ARSOF and NORSOF and how each plan for and conduct Arctic operations.
- 11MAY23: Attended the Arctic and Homeland Defense Symposium at Peterson Space Force Base, Colorado: The U.S. Air Force Academy

Homeland Defense Institute and Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies hosted a gathering of Arctic and Homeland Defense stakeholders at the U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) and North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) headquarters. The research group made invaluable connections and established relationships with various academics, military leaders, and historians to further their research.

- JUL23–JAN24: Conducted case studies of historical and contemporary Arctic and/or indigenous military units: Through relationships established at the Arctic Symposium, the research group studied published books, first person accounts, official DOD memorandums and timelines compiled by official historians. The group assembled a coherent timeline and loose lineage of American Arctic and indigenous military units as well as a current iteration of a Canadian unit that could potentially offer a precedent for a new American Arctic unit.
- FEB24: Published a journal article on “Arctic Tourism” in the Tufts University Fletcher Forum of World Affairs to share research findings, generate discussion, and elicit feedback from the defense and academic communities.

Most of the chapters of this capstone report are separate, stand-alone documents that were written specifically for several different targeted audiences. There will be repetition of baseline concepts, facts, and assumptions that were provided for the context of the specific readers for each writing. We decided to leave each writing intact with the repeated context so as not to cause any confusion and display the completeness of each chapter on its own.

## II. HYBRID THREATS

Alaska has faced what could be categorized as “hybrid threats,” including territorial disputes, resource competition, and international tensions, even before the concept emerged in contemporary security discourse. Dr. Russell Glen describes hybrid threats as an “adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a tailored mix of conventional, irregular, terrorism, and criminal means or activities in the operational battlespace...may be comprised of a combination of state and non-state actors.”<sup>25</sup> Alaska has witnessed diverse and complex challenges that combined elements of diplomacy, military strategy, and resource-driven conflicts.

Two notable examples in Alaska’s history were the Battle of Old Sitka in 1802 and the Battle of Sitka in 1804,<sup>26</sup> which marked a significant historical turning point in the region. Situated in present-day Sitka, Alaska, these conflicts involved clashes between the indigenous Tlingit people and Russian settlers, the latter of which sought to expand their fur trading interests. The Battles of Sitka underscored the complexities of managing relations between Indigenous populations and foreign powers and marked the beginning of the strategic significance of Alaska’s natural resources.

Another resource-driven dispute, but with allies rather than adversaries, was The Bering Sea Dispute from 1881–1893 involving the United States, Great Britain, and Canada, which focused on the international status of the Bering Sea in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1881 the United States exercised economic exclusion over the Bering Sea waters, and in 1886 ordered the seizure of foreign sealing vessels, resulting in the seizure of British-crewed Canadian vessels.<sup>27</sup> The U.S. and Britain agreed in 1891 to jointly police the area to protect the shrinking seal herds, but an 1893 international tribunal in Paris ruled that the

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<sup>25</sup> Dr Russell W Glenn, “Thoughts on ‘Hybrid’ Conflict,” *Small Wars Journal*, March 2009, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/thoughts-on-hybrid-conflict>.

<sup>26</sup> National Park Service, “The Battle of 1804,” April 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/sitk/learn/historyculture/battle1804.htm>.

<sup>27</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia, “Bering Sea Dispute,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 24, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Bering-Sea-Dispute>.

Bering Sea was part of the high seas and that no single nation had jurisdiction over it.<sup>28</sup> This dispute involved an intricate web of international relations, resource competition, and attempts to control resources off the Alaskan coast. Such historical events underline the complex security dynamics that have long been a part of Alaska’s history, with economic interests, international relationships, and environmental concerns intertwined, akin to contemporary hybrid threats.

The largest and most significant flashpoint in Alaska was the Aleutian Campaign of World War II fought between the U.S. and the Empire of Japan from 1942 through 1943. This was a conventional conflict involving large military formations on both sides, fought by Japan to seize and the U.S. to retain the “most important strategic place in the world,” in the words of General Billy Mitchell.<sup>29</sup> The geo-strategic position of Alaska in general and the Aleutians specifically made both belligerents fear the other side possessing it; Attu was only 2,000 miles from Tokyo, and the U.S. assessed that Alaska could afford Japan the ability to bomb the American west coast.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, Alaska contained significant reserves of platinum, a strategic resource for both nations’ war efforts.<sup>31</sup> The initial actions taken by Japan in pursuit of Alaskan territory, however, were hybrid in nature, exhibited when Japanese surveyors landed on Saint Lawrence Island in early 1942, months before their bombing of Dutch Harbor and invasions of the Aleutian islands of Attu and Kiska in June 1942.<sup>32</sup>

The current paradigm of Great Power Competition with revisionist powers is renewing fears that resource competition like the Sitka and Bering Sea disputes will escalate into large-scale conflict around the Arctic as was seen in World War II. The current NDS designates the People’s Republic of China as a pacing challenge and the Russian Federation an acute threat, both of which are highly capable of threatening homeland

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<sup>28</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia.

<sup>29</sup> Francis Pike, *Hirohito’s War: The Pacific War, 1941–1945* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 643.

<sup>30</sup> Pike, 643.

<sup>31</sup> Marston, *Men of the Tundra: Eskimos at War*, 50–54.

<sup>32</sup> Marston, 32–33.

security, especially in the Arctic.<sup>33</sup> This focus is warranted given the that Russians have sent surface combatants into U.S. territorial waters, garnering a tepid response from the United States Coast Guard.<sup>34</sup> The Chinese have used buoys and balloons to spy on the United States.<sup>35</sup> Within the past year, the Russians and Chinese have begun cooperating on combined surface combatant trips around the Aleutian Islands.<sup>36</sup> Critical energy and homeland defense infrastructure in this area of Alaska can be subject to sabotage, underscoring the necessity for ongoing assessment.<sup>37</sup> These provocations highlight the need for increased domain awareness in the American Arctic, but the conditions that currently exist in Alaska are more vulnerable to contemporary hybrid threats from both China and Russia than the more overt military spectacles seen in the news.

One vulnerability comes from the fact that Native Alaskans on the Seward Peninsula and Saint Lawrence Island have generational relationships with the Eastern Military District of Russia. In support of these communities, the United States and Russia created a Bering Strait Visa-Free Travel Program that allows Indigenous people to cross the Bering Strait to visit fellow tribe members and native inhabitants who share a linguistic or cultural heritage in the other territory.<sup>38</sup> This situation could be exploited by infiltrators, as exemplified by two Russian nationals who fled military conscription for the war in

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<sup>33</sup> Lloyd Austin, 2022 National Defense Strategy, pp. 13

<sup>34</sup> Dan Sullivan, “Alaska State Senator,” Statements on Chinese and Russian Vessels in U.S. Waters off Coast of Aleutians, <https://www.murkowski.senate.gov/press/release/murkowski-sullivan-statements-on-chinese-and-russian-vessels-in-us-waters-off-coast-of-aleutians>

<sup>35</sup> Sakshi Tiwari, “Canada Discovers ‘Chinese Buoys’ In The Arctic That Could Be Tracking U.S. Nuclear Submarines In The Region,” *The EurAsian Times*, February 22, 2023, <https://www.eurasiantimes.com/canada-discovers-chinese-buoys-in-the-arctic-that-could-be-tracking/>; Caitlin Yilek, “What We Know so Far about the Chinese Spy Balloon and the Other Objects the U.S. Shot Down,” June 29, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/live-updates/chinas-spy-balloon-unidentified-objects-shot-down-what-we-know-so-far/>.

<sup>36</sup> Gordon & Youssef. Russia and China Sent Large Naval Patrol Near Alaska. Wall Street Journal, August 2023.

<sup>37</sup> Wolf, Chad F. “Strategic Approach for Arctic Homeland Security,” n.d., pp. 19

<sup>38</sup> The U.S. Department of State, Bering Strait Visa-Free Travel Program, <https://www.state.gov/bering-strait-visa-free-travel-program/>, July 1991



Ukraine by sailing a small fishing boat across the Bering Strait to Saint Lawrence Island and claimed asylum in the indigenous village there.<sup>39</sup>

The reality of climate change and the subsequent increasing access to natural resources in the Arctic threaten to turn what has historically been a region characterized by cooperation into one of competition, both economic and strategic. The PRC has declared itself a “Near-Arctic State” to justify its ambitions to add a “Polar Silk Road” to its One Belt, One Road initiative.<sup>40</sup> China’s economic interest in the Arctic is driven by its desire for a shorter, cheaper, and safer maritime route to Europe on the Northern Sea Route through the Bering Strait and along the Russian Arctic coast to Europe.<sup>41</sup> Russia’s 2023 Foreign Policy Concept also prioritized the development of the Northern Sea Route as a “competitive national transport artery” for international use “between Europe and Asia.”<sup>42</sup> This major economic and strategic alignment further solidifies ties between the two members of the “no limits partnership.”<sup>43</sup> This is concerning given Russia’s history of hybrid threats and warfare, from the “little green men” in Ukraine in 2014<sup>44</sup> and its interference with the 2016 U.S. presidential election.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, The PRC noted in its Arctic Policy that fish stocks have a tendency to move northward as seas warm, and that

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<sup>39</sup> Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, *Murkowski, Sullivan Respond to Russian Nationals Requesting Asylum on St. Lawrence Island* | *U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska* (Anchorage, AK: Office of Senator Lisa Murkowski, 2022), [https://www.murkowski.senate.gov/press/release/murkowski-sullivan-respond-to-russian-nationals\\_requesting-asylum-on-st-lawrence-island-](https://www.murkowski.senate.gov/press/release/murkowski-sullivan-respond-to-russian-nationals_requesting-asylum-on-st-lawrence-island-).

<sup>40</sup> State Council of the PRC, “China’s Arctic Policy White Paper,” January 6, 2018, [https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2018/01/26/content\\_281476026660336.htm](https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm).

<sup>41</sup> Matilde Biagioni, “China’s Push-in Strategy in the Arctic and Its Impact on Regional Governance,” Text, IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali, September 5, 2023, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/chinas-push-strategy-arctic-and-its-impact-regional-governance>.

<sup>42</sup> Nikita Lipunov Devyatkin Pavel, “The Arctic in the 2023 Russian Foreign Policy Concept,” The Arctic Institute – Center for Circumpolar Security Studies, May 30, 2023, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/arctic-2023-russian-foreign-policy-concept/>.

<sup>43</sup> Guy Faulconbridge et al., “Putin to Visit China to Deepen ‘no Limits’ Partnership with Xi,” *Reuters*, October 15, 2023, sec. World, <https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-visit-china-deepen-no-limits-partnership-with-xi-2023-10-15/>.

<sup>44</sup> Vitaly Shevchenko, “‘Little Green Men’ or ‘Russian Invaders’?,” *BBC News*, March 11, 2014, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26532154>.

<sup>45</sup> “Russian Interference in 2016 U.S. Elections,” Person, Federal Bureau of Investigation, July 13, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/cyber/russian-interference-in-2016-u-s-elections>.

China holds “a firm stance in favor of conservation [and] rational use” of fisheries.<sup>46</sup> This posturing is in stark contrast to the practices of the Chinese fishing industry, which has global reach and is depleting other countries’ fish stocks in what could be argued is a form of hybrid economic warfare.<sup>47</sup>

In summary, Alaska’s history and its position in relation to contemporary competitors is a testament to its enduring strategic significance. The battles of Sitka, the Bering Sea Dispute of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Aleutian Campaign of WWII and more recent developments with Russia and Chinese activities in the Aleutian Islands all exemplify the multifaceted nature of security challenges faced by the region. These challenges offer a historical precedent for understanding the diverse components of modern hybrid threats. Today, as Alaska grapples with the presence of foreign vessels, spy balloons, fishing fleets and economic surveyors, the need for increased domain awareness and adaptive security measures is more critical than ever. These historic and contemporary challenges underscore that Alaska’s strategic importance is vulnerable to various hybrid threats.

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<sup>46</sup> State Council of the PRC, “China’s Arctic Policy White Paper.”

<sup>47</sup> Steven Lee Myers et al., “How China Targets the Global Fish Supply,” *The New York Times*, September 26, 2022, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/09/26/world/asia/china-fishing-south-america.html>.

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### III. ARCTIC TOURISM

Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) currently conduct what the authors of this study call a form of “Arctic Tourism”: misaligned and episodic training combined with personnel policies that dilute Arctic expertise and hinder the retention of institutional knowledge and unit capability. This problem has far-reaching implications for both homeland defense and power projection abroad. ARSOF Arctic Tourism currently manifests across several training events, ranging from large scale combat exercises to SOF specific exercises designed to highlight unique capabilities in austere environments.

The first type of training event takes place at the Army’s newest Combat Training Center (CTC), the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center (JPMRC). This is an annual event that takes place in the interior of Alaska and is based on the structure of the more well-established CTC’s, the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Johnson, Louisiana, and the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California. The priority training audience for these events is a conventional Army Brigade Combat Team consisting of approximately 5,000 soldiers. ARSOF units, typically a Special Forces Company Headquarters, known as an Advanced Operating Base (AOB) with two of its subordinate detachments (SFOD-A’s), augment and train alongside the conventional brigade. The events place these rotational training units (RTU’s) in a fictional large-scale, force-on-force combat operation with a live opposition force (OPFOR) that plays the role of an enemy military occupying an allied nation. At the JRTC and NTC, the OPFOR is manned by a resident unit that has “home field advantage” and knows the terrain. At JPMRC, the OPFOR is typically filled by whichever of the two 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division brigades that is not participating in the rotation as the RTU. At the CTC’s, ARSOF is typically tasked with targeting critical components of the OPFOR’s integrated air defense systems (IADS) to facilitate an invasion by the conventional training unit; either an airborne or air assault joint forcible entry for light brigades or an armored land assault by heavy brigades.<sup>48</sup> ARSOF

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<sup>48</sup> U.S. Army Forces Command, “Army Combat Training Centers,” STAND-TO! The Official Focus of the U.S. Army, January 22, 2019, <https://www.army.mil/standto/archive/2019/01/22/>.

then executes on-order and short-notice missions in support of the constructive higher headquarters that both the AOB and brigade are subordinate to in the chain of command.

The CTC's were formerly the main pre-deployment certification and validation venues for Army units during the Global War on Terror (GWOT), with the scenarios then mimicking the paradigm of the time: forward-operating base-centric counter-insurgency missions. With the end of GWOT and the shift to Great Power Competition (GPC) and expeditionary Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO),<sup>49</sup> the CTC's offer a valuable opportunity for ARSOF to experiment and test how it will foster integration, interoperability, and interdependence (I3) with the conventional force in LSCO to support GPC. The problem is that the dearth of Arctic doctrine and threat conceptualization has relegated JPMRC to adopt the same basic scenario and threat template as the other CTCs.<sup>50</sup> This one-scenario-fits-all-environments approach is understandable given the lack of Arctic-specific strategy and guidance, but applying the same underlying assumptions from temperate regions to the Arctic does not make for realistic training. While there is a reasonable possibility that Russia could conduct a large-scale conventional invasion of the European High North,<sup>51</sup> the likelihood of that occurring in Alaska is significantly lower. The U.S. Army writ large, and ARSOF especially, needs to prepare for a hybrid threat in Alaska more than it does for high-latitude-LSCO. SOF capabilities and training objectives should not be tied to a faulty or incomplete conventional scenario. The applicability of an IADS-mission preceding a large scale conventional joint forcible entry in Alaska is doubtful and should be shelved until the threat warrants it.

There is also an issue regarding ARSOF performance at JPMRC in addition to the constructed, scenario-based problems. The SOF RTU has typically been filled by either

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<sup>49</sup> David M Spangenberg, "SOF-CF Interoperability in Large-Scale Combat Operations," *Center for Army Lessons Learned* 21–652 (July 2021), <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2023/01/31/ec4f4a8a/21-652.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Eve Baker, "Historic Nighttime Parachute Drop Conducted over Fort Wainwright," [www.army.mil](https://www.army.mil), March 27, 2023, [https://www.army.mil/article/265195/historic\\_nighttime\\_parachute\\_drop\\_conducted\\_over\\_fort\\_wainwright](https://www.army.mil/article/265195/historic_nighttime_parachute_drop_conducted_over_fort_wainwright).

<sup>51</sup> Minna Alander, "High North, High Tension: The End of Arctic Illusions – Foreign Policy Research Institute," May 11, 2023, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/05/high-north-high-tension-the-end-of-arctic-illusions/>.

10<sup>th</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Groups (SFG(A)). 10<sup>th</sup> SFG(A)'s alignment to EUCOM encompasses the European High North and Russian Siberia, putting almost half the Arctic in their AOR. 1<sup>st</sup> SFG(A) is aligned to INDOPACOM, which does not encompass any Arctic territory, but does include extreme cold weather (ECW) and high-altitude environments. These units would initially seem like an appropriate fit for JPMRC SOF RTU's, but their performance thus far has not supported that assumption. The multiple rotations at JPMRC have demonstrated that even the most-trained Arctic units from ARSOF struggle to survive and operate in the Alaskan Arctic and sub-Arctic. This research group's recent observation of JPMRC Rotation 23-02 in March 2023 highlighted ARSOF's inability to conduct long range infiltration on snow machines, as well as drop zone preparation for military free fall insertion (an unreasonable expectation for real world operations). Despite weeks of deliberate preparation with 10<sup>th</sup> SFG(A)'s Winter Warfare Detachment in Montana and with Swedish SOF in Europe, the 10<sup>th</sup> SFG(A) detachment conducting ground infiltration on snow machines encountered vastly different terrain, snow and conditions in Alaska compared to what they experienced in Montana and Europe. Their planned 60-kilometer snow machine infiltration was cut short to less than five kilometers after traveling less than a single kilometer in eight hours. This did little to instill conventional force confidence in ARSOF and just as little to validate all the training and resources that the unit put into their preparation.

Although anecdotal, the experience of this SOF RTU was similar to that of the previous year's JPMRC rotation 22-02, according to the unit responsible for facilitating ARSOF training at the CTC's, the Special Operations Training Detachment (SOTD). In March 2022, a 1<sup>st</sup> SFG(A) AOB and its ODA's also deliberately prepared for the rotation by attending the U.S. Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center in Bridgeport, California.<sup>52</sup> But despite the training, their performance was correspondingly limited by their ability to survive, maneuver, and operate in Alaska. SOTD itself is limited in its Arctic capability, as they have no permanent party stationed at JPMRC, forcing them to draw on personnel from NTC and JRTC, who rarely have any Arctic experience or background

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<sup>52</sup> "Mountain Warfare Instructors: Shaping Next Generations Warfighters," accessed October 16, 2023, <https://www.29palms.marines.mil/mcmwtc/>.

themselves. For the 23–02 rotation, the SOTD personnel who would be running the rotation as well as providing backside safety support were less ECW-qualified than the RTU they were tasked with supporting.

The second type of training events are SF-specific engagements with European allies that are hamstrung by the need to conduct remedial training for American “Arctic Tourists.” These theater security cooperation events primarily include Joint Combined Exchanges of Training (JCETs), which entail SF teams training with European Partners who are highly competent in their Arctic homelands.<sup>53</sup> When . ARSOF trains alongside its Arctic allies and partners, they often arrive without adequate familiarity with the equipment and environment or the necessary skills for success. Consequently, our allies and partners are burdened with the responsibility of providing basic training to ARSOF personnel to ensure their mere survivability in Arctic operations. Even after receiving training in fundamental skills, ARSOF units often still struggle to keep pace with their allies. Complicating matters further is the frequent personnel turnover within ARSOF units, resulting in the loss of this acquired base knowledge when new units rotate into the European High North, or even more frustratingly, the same units with virtually all new personnel. As a result, our partners and allies are repeatedly forced to start from scratch, impeding their ability to advance their own Arctic training efforts and interoperability with U.S. ARSOF. This recurring cycle creates friction with our Arctic allies and hampers ARSOF efforts to increase capability and capacity in the Arctic.

The third type of operations and training events are Special Operations specific, aimed at deterring our pacing challenge and acute threats. These events are intended to demonstrate the exquisite capability of SOF to infiltrate, maneuver, and survive in the Alaskan Arctic. While these operations are useful for influencing our competitors in the information environment, they collaterally project a false or inflated capability inwardly to U.S. audiences. These highly publicized events do not convey how little capability exists within SOF beyond flashy HALO (High Altitude Low Opening), maritime, and snow

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<sup>53</sup> “NATO Multimedia – U.S. Special Forces Prepare for Exercise Cold Response,” March 15, 2022, <https://www.natomultimedia.tv/app/asset/664026>.

machine infiltrations, and that each event is essentially just a photo opportunity. In a case of “the tail wagging the dog,” senior U.S. civilian and military leaders may be misled about what SOF are realistically capable of when they see social media posts intended to mislead our strategic competitors, setting the stage for disaster during crisis or conflict.<sup>54</sup>

In all these cases, the participating units tend to build minimum capability solely for the training event, and then must immediately shift to more pressing training for upcoming deployments in their geographic area of responsibility. Just as often, the collective institutional knowledge of the trained unit is lost when most of the members rotate out to different positions, teams, or units, forcing the team to start at square one again when it receives new members. The challenge of attaining minimum capability should not be underestimated, as it takes months of progressive training, exposure, and acclimation to just survive in the Arctic, sub-Arctic, and extreme cold weather environments. Elevating a unit to even basic cold weather competency, let alone to thriving in the environment, requires a significant investment of time and resources that leaves little time for any other tasks to be trained. This is too much to expect of active-duty Special Forces Groups, in this case specifically 1<sup>st</sup> SFG(A) and 10<sup>th</sup> SFG(A). 1<sup>st</sup> SFG(A) is contending with the People’s Republic of China and the largest area of responsibility, INDOPACOM. 10<sup>th</sup> SFG(A) is responsible for all of Europe in addition to the High North, not to mention the ongoing war in Ukraine. These challenges posed by our competitors demand much of the operational force’s attention and expecting them to attain and maintain Arctic capability simultaneously or at the expense of other priorities ensures degraded readiness everywhere. Diverting focus towards intermittent or singular Arctic events takes away precious training time and resources from preparation for operational deployments to majority non-Arctic destinations. The Arctic is a four-season environment and requires constant immersion to maintain proficiency and capability. Cycling various SFOD-A’s through isolated training events does virtually nothing to build capability or capacity when Army personnel policies will lead to turnover within two years. Arctic Tourism sets a dangerous precedent in an

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<sup>54</sup> 10th Special Forces Group (@tenthsfg), “10th Special Forces Group on Instagram: “The Originals Took on Freezing Temperatures While Conducting RAPIDS Operations from a CH-47 Chinook Helicopter during Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center Rotation 23–2 in Alaska.” *Instagram*, April 13, 2023, [https://www.instagram.com/p/Cq\\_Z8EIOIZ8/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Cq_Z8EIOIZ8/).



unforgiving environment by asking forces to simultaneously split their attention between the Arctic and other priorities. This dilemma degrades readiness for both Arctic and non-Arctic missions, rather than building capability for either.

It could be countered that Arctic Tourism is not necessarily a problem for ARSOF, that there is not a critical enough threat to warrant devoting more time, resources, and personnel to the environment. Most of the geographic combatant commands encompass minimal extreme cold weather regions, and only two include the Arctic (NORTHCOM and EUCOM). It is undeniably appropriate for the conventional force to train in Alaska for general Arctic readiness, and it is arguably an excellent opportunity for ARSOF to join them while they do so. It allows ARSOF to take part in a large, complex, and expensive training events that the conventional force (CF) is conducting anyways, providing another opportunity for SOF-CF-I3. It would be hard to argue against continuing JCETs as well since the priority for these events is the training of the ARSOF unit itself by the partner unit. Even the “photo opportunities” have value in support of their intended purpose to message to our adversaries to think twice before challenging the U.S. in the Arctic.

The issue with current ARSOF Arctic training is not with the intended objectives, but the unintended outcomes as a result of Arctic Tourism as currently practiced. The lessons learned and minimal competency that is gained through JPMRC rotations is often diluted or lost and costs ARSOF credibility with the conventional force. This risks ARSOF being deliberately excluded or sidelined from a potential Arctic contingency if the operation is commanded by a conventional commander who judged ARSOF performance poorly at a past JPRMC rotation. It would be difficult to measure if the experience gained outweighs the risk of exclusion, but it hardly seems worth the risk. The joint training events with Arctic-capable partners are incredibly valuable, but the value here too is squandered by Arctic-Tourist personnel policies to the point that ARSOF risks future opportunities to train with partners if our they assess the events are not worth their time, effort, or resources. The highly publicized Arctic events need to be internally caveated to U.S. decision makers to ensure they accurately understand our capabilities as they currently exist, not necessarily as we present them to adversaries.

## **IV. INFORMATION (WHITE) PAPER**

### **A. SUBJECT**

Refining Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center SOF Rotations in Alaska

### **B. PURPOSE**

This paper aims to inform the Special Operations Training Detachment (SOTD) on potential options for improving future Arctic, sub-Arctic and/or extreme cold weather (ECW) rotations at the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center (JPMRC) in Alaska.

### **C. BACKGROUND**

#### **1. Student Research Team**

SOTD & USASOC funded the travel of a student research team from the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) Defense Analysis department to assist in their thesis research—ARSOF roles in Arctic homeland defense and domain awareness—and gain insight into improving JPMRC rotations in Alaska. Two of the authors have Arctic, sub-Arctic, mountainous, and ECW operational experience in the European High North, Colorado, and Montana; the third author has experience as a SOF OC/T with SOTD during ten National Training Center rotations. To understand rotational training unit (RTU) training objectives, the student research team: reviewed all scenario products and orders; observed the Staff Mission Brief given to the SOF RTU; observed SOF RTU planning; and attended all ODA and AOB mission back briefs. The research team did not observe the RTU's in the field but spent significant time engaging with the Civil Affairs Company Commander and the AOB Commander after the rotation was complete. The research team also engaged with a litany of other Alaskan Arctic stakeholders and experts while in Alaska, including the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies, the Anchorage FBI field office, ARAK, ALCOM, and AKARNG Aviation. These engagements, along with connections made at the Arctic and Homeland Defense Symposium at Peterson Space Force Base in May 2023, have further informed this white paper.

## **2. Arctic Capable vs. Ready**

It is worth noting the two classifications of Arctic readiness as defined by the Army's Arctic Strategy: *Regaining Arctic Dominance (2021)*: Arctic-capable and Arctic-ready. "Arctic-capable" refers to units of action that are fully equipped with Arctic-specific equipment, are fully trained and capable of sustained combat operations in an Arctic environment. "Arctic-ready" refers to units of action equipped for operating in the Arctic environment for short-duration missions; however, due to limited or episodic training, they cannot conduct sustained operations. It would be fair to characterize the SOF RTU's for this rotation, C/3/10<sup>th</sup> SFG(A) and E Co, 92<sup>nd</sup> Civil Affairs BN (E/92) as Arctic-Ready.

## **D. DISCUSSION**

### **1. RTU Selection**

10<sup>th</sup> SFG(A) and 1<sup>st</sup> SFG(A) AOBs and Detachments are the seemingly logical choices for the SOF RTU at JPMRC given the presence of Arctic, sub-Arctic, mountainous, and ECW environments within their areas of responsibility. This AOB, however, had a rapidly approaching deployment with minimal requirements to train, certify, and validate for any of these environments. The unit was forced to significantly alter their planned deployment certification, validation, and verification (CV2) pathway and refocus to meet basic capability benchmarks for Alaska. The AOB attended 10<sup>th</sup> SFG(A) Winter Warfare Detachment's Winter Warfare Course in Montana, and some ODAs also attended the Swedish sub-Arctic Warfare Course as part of preparation for the rotation. This significant investment of time and resources resulted in two Detachments that were proficient in winter warfare but were unable to effectively operate in the Alaskan sub-Arctic due to its unique conditions. Future SOF RTUs may not have the opportunity to participate in the above courses or deliberately prepare otherwise, which would present considerable RTU risk-to-force and SOTD risk-to-mission. The small pool of available and marginally capable active-duty SOF RTUs will likely lead to continued disruption to AOB and ODA CV2 pathways in pursuit of SOF/Conventional Force Interdependence, Interoperability, and Integration (SOF/CF I3).

## **2. Alaska vs. European High North**

10<sup>th</sup> SFG(A) has long-standing relationships with European High North partners and routinely sends ODAs to attend their winter warfare courses. “Arctic” and “sub-Arctic,” however, merely describe position or proximity in relation to the Arctic Circle. “Arctic” does not mean the same terrain, snow, ice, or flora/fauna on one continent as another. The European High North is distinct from the Alaskan Arctic in many ways and training in one should not be taken as complete preparation for another. For example, the skis, snow machines and cold weather equipment that served C/3/10 well in Sweden were ill-suited for the conditions in Alaska, resulting in capability gap for long distance infiltration. It is also important not to conflate “Extreme Cold Weather” with “Arctic” or “sub-Arctic;” preparing for cold weather does not necessarily translate to effectiveness in Alaska. Alaska specifically and the Arctic generally encompass four-season environments, where mobility is more difficult in the warmer months.

## **3. OC/Ts**

In addition to the demands on the RTU to prepare for surviving in the Alaskan sub-Arctic, SOTD was forced to invest an immense amount of time, effort, and resources to get their personnel trained to survive and keep up with RTUs that were more proficient in winter warfare. In the end, both RTU soldiers and field OC/Ts expressed concerns that the SOTD OC/Ts were a liability to the RTU and that they detracted from training rather than facilitating and supporting it. This is not entirely unforeseeable—it is unreasonable to expect SOTD to provide highly capable winter warfare OC/Ts for a training event that occurs once a year—especially given the dearth of Arctic expertise across the regiment and the high personnel turnover rate.

## **4. Strategic/Operational Arctic Guidance**

The main Arctic Policy Documents (2019 DOD Arctic Strategy, 2021 Army Arctic Strategy: *Regaining Arctic Dominance*, 2022 National Strategy for Arctic, 2022 NDS) specify a desired end-state (“Arctic Dominance”), but insufficiently describe ways or means. While the shift to LSCO in temperate regions is a transition back to traditional roles of combined arms maneuver warfare for the conventional force, the Army does not have a

coherent operational Arctic framework for either conventional forces or ARSOF. The Army does not have Arctic doctrine and the assumption that the same principles applied in temperate areas can be overlaid onto the Arctic is faulty. The very idea of deploying large conventional formations (e.g., an airborne brigade conducting a JFE) into the snow to operate as they would in other environments oversimplifies the challenges of sustaining and surviving in the Arctic environments, let alone maneuvering, closing with, and destroying an enemy force. ARSOF does not have any specified METL for the Arctic, which in turn manifests poorly at the tactical level when ODAs struggle to move, sustain, operate, or survive beyond infiltration (which are highly recorded and publicized, misleadingly, as “Arctic Capability”).

## **5. Scenario**

The scenario for the rotation was foundationally similar to NTC and JRTC scenarios, where SOF disintegrates IADS prior to the conventional invasion/JFE and then executes on-order and short-notice missions in support of the constructive SOTF and Division. This one-scenario-fits-all-environments approach is understandable given the lack of Arctic-specific strategy and guidance. This rotation exemplified for both conventional and SOF RTU’s that applying the same underlying assumptions from temperate regions to the Arctic does not make for realistic training. The Army needs to challenge the assumption that SOF and conventional units would execute the same tasks in the Arctic as they would in other environments. There is a reasonable possibility that a near-peer adversary could conduct a large-scale conventional invasion of the European High North. But the likelihood of that occurring in Alaska is significantly lower and does not represent the most dangerous course of action regarding homeland defense. The Army, and ARSOF especially, needs to prepare for a hybrid threat in Alaska more than it does for high-latitude-LSCO.

## **6. SOF/CF I3**

While it is worthy to pursue SOF/CF I3 at the CTC’s, there is little to no measurement of perceived success, unit integration, or inter-unit appreciation. The typical dilemma is presented when the SOF RTU achieves meaningful effects through its own

actions, but the repercussions or tangible results of those effects are not adjudicated, so as not to preclude the conventional RTU from facing a live OPFOR. Thus, the very thing USASOC wants to show the conventional force at CTCs—what SOF is capable of and how they can support conventional operations in LSCO—is rarely achieved. This I3 is even more challenging at JPMRC, where both conventional and SOF elements have incomplete doctrine and struggle immensely with the environment. While the conventional Army determines its Arctic doctrine and tasks, ARSOF should not prioritize I3 with the conventional force over more the pertinent objectives of baseline SOF Arctic effectiveness.

## **7. Realistic Military Training (RMT)**

The Civil Affairs Company developed their own RMT lanes that were loosely connected to the scenario “in the box.” The three CA teams engaged local and tribal civil authorities in periphery villages, executing training tasks and objectives that were pertinent and appropriate to their METL and well-applied to the Arctic environment while not overextending themselves against the elements. They also found creative ways to influence the LSCO fight “in the box” and support the AOB and Brigade; when a notional landing of an OPFOR marine brigade was set to occur near one of the team’s locations, they asked the locals how they could stop that force from reaching the Yukon Training Area. Their solution was simple, unconventional, and influential: they could have told the individual in charge of plowing the roads to not show up to work, effectively closing or degrading the vital GLOC. Had these effects by a four-man team been adjudicated and reflected to the Brigade in the box, this is the kind of SOF/CF I3 that could leave a lasting impression on conventional commanders.

## **E. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. RTU**

The Arctic presents a uniquely demanding operating environment that necessitates units with Arctic-focused METLs, unique MTOEs and stabilization of personnel to keep institutional knowledge within the unit. Units cannot practice “Arctic Tourism;” they need to focus on it persistently. The best option would be National Guard SF, specifically 5th Battalion, 19th SFG(A). They are prioritizing the Arctic environment and homeland

defense while attempting to transfer a single ODA to base out of Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. The experience they gain and the relationships they establish through JPMRC rotations would serve them well as the SOF Arctic Homeland defense unit and keep the valuable Arctic institutional knowledge within the unit. AOBs and ODAs from 5/19th SFG(A) should be prioritized as the JPMRC-Alaska RTU-of- choice. If not them, then only units who volunteer, have a background in ECW, Mountain and/or high-altitude training, and who establish a robust pre-rotation training pathway should be considered as RTUs. 1–10th SFG(A)'s tentative Arctic company would initially seem like a logical alternative, but that unit needs to train in the European Arctic to support that GCC's priorities; traveling to and training in Alaska in vastly different environments would be expensive and counterproductive. Other 10th SFG(A) and 1st SFG(A) units are not ideal for JPMRC rotations. Both groups have major immediate and emerging threats in their AORs that outweigh the commonalities with the Alaskan Arctic (European High North for 10th, High Altitude/ECW/Mountain for 1st). Other active SF Groups have little to no cold weather priorities and require specialized training for the challenges in their AORs. 7th SFG(A), the active-duty Group tasked with homeland defense, has no real cold weather or Arctic capability to speak of. It is not worth the time, energy, resources, or risk for SOTD to put on a rotation for a unit that is not Arctic-focused, does not volunteer, or does not prepare seriously.

## **2. OC/T Selection**

SOTD cannot afford to train new OC/Ts every year on Arctic survivability. The 10<sup>th</sup> SFG(A) Winter Warfare Detachment is too small and task- saturated to either serve as guest OC/Ts or to train SOTD personnel. SOTD relies on guest OC/Ts at the established CTCs; it would be much more efficient and effective to train winter warfare qualified personnel to be OC/Ts than it is to train OC/Ts to be effective Arctic experts. 5/19<sup>th</sup> SFG(A) personnel not in the RTU are ideal candidates. Our European Arctic partners are eager and willing to participate in Alaskan training and it would be invaluable for their Arctic experts to serve as OC/Ts for both coaching, training, and risk mitigation. Personnel with Arctic/ECW experience or expertise from the Alaska National Guard, Northern Warfare Training Center, USAF SERE School, 11<sup>th</sup> ABN DIV, or anyone who is acclimated and familiar

with the environment could feasibly stand in for SOTD OC/Ts if the RFFs and prior coordination could be supported.

### **3. Scenario**

SOF capabilities and training objectives should not be tied to a faulty or incomplete conventional scenario. The applicability of an IADS-mission preceding a large scale conventional JFE in Alaska is doubtful and should be shelved until the threat warrants it. The RMT lanes that the CA teams executed during this rotation are a suitable model for all SOF RTUs going forward at JPMRC in Alaska. It would be more realistic for ODAs to work by, with and through indigenous populations that are the subject matter experts of their local environment. SOF RTUs could learn more about survivability, mobility, and TTPs from the locals than they could by training in Montana or Europe. This method also addresses the OC/T issue by basing in peripheral villages, thus exponentially increasing the survivability of the RTU, and shrinks requirements for persistent OC/T coverage. The guest CA OC/Ts from a sister company stayed in the AKARNG barracks while pulling OC/T coverage of the CA teams in Bethel, Barrow, and Kotzebue, maintaining reliable communications throughout. The CA model can also develop relationships and build domain awareness for 5/19th SFG(A) ODAs as the RTU, which would directly support their aspirational role as the dedicated Arctic unit for homeland defense. Unconventional operations on the periphery by small SOF RTUs can have significant payoffs for the conventional force, driving home the SOF/CF I3 that usually briefs well at the CTCs but is rarely felt by either RTU. The AOB and CA Company-HQ elements could still be “in the box,” located with or nearby the Brigade HQ. This would allow SOF/CF I3 to happen between the BDE and AOB while both are working directly under the constructive division and SOTF, rather than trying to force I3, unrealistically, at the ODA and conventional battalion level.



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## V. WARGAME

### A. CAPSTONE GROUP OBJECTIVES

During our research, an opportunity arose to partner with fellow NPS students from the Norwegian Special Operations Forces (NORSOF), to develop and execute a wargame aimed at answering their research question: “*How can NORSOF contribute to defeating against an adversary in the initial phase of a high-intensity conflict in the European High North in the near future (2-5 years).*”<sup>55</sup> While the focus of their research was not on Arctic conditions specifically, we recognized that their project had parallels to our own and could offer insights into their vision of SOF contributions to Arctic homeland defense, and how we could apply those lessons learned to ARSOF and the Alaskan Arctic.

### B. WARGAME SUMMARY

The following paragraphs are the findings of Maj Eldar Hagen and LT Benjamin Sverdrup of NORSOF:

The wargame was conducted as a part of a master’s degree thesis by Norwegian students attending the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, CA. The basis for the thesis and the wargame is the evolving geopolitical environment NORSOF must adapt to since the Global War on Terror (GWOT) pivot to Great Power Competition (GPC). The most dangerous scenario for Norway would be a strategic assault by a numerically and resourcefully superior adversary. Special operations can be a valuable asset in defending Norway. Understanding SOF’s potential roles and utilization in a high-intensity conflict will assist NORSOF in avoiding unrealistic expectations, minimizing misuse of NORSOF, and optimizing decision-making.

The wargame takes place in the European High North, comprised of the northern parts of Scandinavia and Russia, although the scenario and some of the injects encompass southern parts of Norway, political centers such as capitals, and the dynamic of the Baltics to explore strategic or political impacts on the players.

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<sup>55</sup> Eldar Hagen et al., “The Role of SOF in Large-Scale Combat Operations: The High-North Dilemma” (Master’s thesis, Monterey, CA, Naval Postgraduate School, 2023), 3.

Generally, the road to war describes Russia conducting a significant force build-up at the Baltic borders and plans to move against NATO. Before doing so, Russia must secure and position its second-strike capability. Therefore, Russia must control the Bear Gap from mainland Norway to Svalbard to bolster its A2AD reach and layered defense. Russia applies lessons learned from the Ukraine war. It conducts a surprise attack with in-place forces based in Murmansk Oblast to avoid forecasting its intentions in the initial phase of the conflict. Furthermore, NATO forces will be tied to the expected invasion in the Baltics; thus, attacking Northern Norway will induce a strategic dilemma for NATO.

## 1. Key Questions

- How can NORSOF influence an adversary's decision-making?
- How can operational-level decisions influence an adversary's behavior?
- What conditions influence an adversary's behavior?
- What conditions will impact the effectiveness of NORSOF?
- What operational-level decisions will impact the effectiveness of NORSOF?
- How will the initial absence of NATO forces influence NORSOF decision-making?
- What impact will the inclusion of Sweden and Finland into NATO shape the conflict?
- How will the inclusion of Finland and Sweden in NATO affect NORSOF decision-making?
- Under what conditions does NORSOCOM support Norwegian conventional forces?
- What key decision points are NORSOF faced with in the event of a strategic attack on Norway?
- Under what conditions does NORSOF operational-level decision-making space deteriorate?<sup>56</sup>

For wargame players, the NORSOF students selected individuals from both Norway and Sweden with extensive experience and knowledge of both their nations' defense forces and capabilities, as well as those of Russia.

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<sup>56</sup> Hagen et al., 3–5.

### C. CAPSTONE GROUP TAKEAWAYS

Although the European high north and the Alaskan Arctic are not identical, the Arctic environment still poses common challenges in both regions that must factor into operational assessments and assumptions.

The findings related to Norwegian strategic calculus were not particularly informative to our capstone or U.S. strategic options.

Of note, none of the key issues addressed Arctic capabilities specifically; the Arctic environment was simply a reality of conflict zone. The NORSOE research team's articulation that "understanding SOF's potential roles and utilization in a high-intensity conflict will assist NORSOE in avoiding unrealistic expectations, minimizing misuse of NORSOE, and optimizing decision-making" is of particular interest to us.<sup>57</sup> A critical goal of our research is to help high level decision makers avoid making unrealistic expectations of SOF's Arctic capabilities and potential misuse.

The players acting as strategic and national level decisionmakers inherently understood and appreciated the capabilities of their forces, to include baseline and advanced Arctic competencies and employment of both conventional and SOF units. There was no ambiguity of who was capable of or appropriate for various tasks, encompassing Arctic survivability and mobility.

This contrasted significantly with our impression at all levels of the current understanding of U.S. SOF Arctic capabilities.

The Arctic-related tasks that NORSOE was expected to be capable of during gameplay were validated and supported by the NORSOE representatives; these same tasks are not realistically feasible for USSOF to accomplish either in Europe or Alaska.

The wargame provided context as to how an Arctic nation should be able to operate in that environment to defend its territory; as an Arctic Nation, we do not assess that the U.S. is currently capable of this.

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<sup>57</sup> Hagen et al., 3.

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## VI. CASE STUDIES

### A. INTRODUCTION TO CASE STUDY

The purpose of this case study is to examine the employment of unconventional and irregular military units along various stages of the continuum of conflict. These units are the 1st Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon—also known as Castner’s Cutthroats — the Alaska Territorial Guard (ATG), the Scout Battalions of the Alaska National Guard, and finally the Canadian Rangers. This study intends to provide insight into both the suitability and feasibility of reconstituting the Alaska Scouts in Alaska as a domain awareness and homeland defense organization, primarily focused on Russian and Chinese hybrid and irregular threats. Primary and secondary source literature was used to examine the requirements that led to the formation of the unit, its organization, purpose, employment, disbandment, and implications for the security environment today.

To begin, the various unconventional Alaskan military units during World War II and the Cold War need to be deliberately identified. The term “Alaska Scout” groups together three distinct military units that operated in Alaska at various times from 1941 through the end of the Cold War. The 1st Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon, Alaska Territorial Guard, and Alaska National Guard Scouts were unique in their organization, mission, and their impact upon both national security and homeland defense. A challenging aspect of this case study is that no definitive history exists for each of these units. In fact, of the two definitive military histories of the Aleutian campaign that the U.S. Army endorses, only one mentions the 1st Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon, and does so only to mention a minor role they played in the retaking of Attu.<sup>58</sup> There are many primary and secondary sources that have varying degrees of reliability. This case study used multiple sources, with varying degrees of reliability, to create a sound analysis of each unit during their operational timeline. This research group also communicated with official unit

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<sup>58</sup> George L. MacGarrigle, *Aleutian Islands 3 JUNE 1942–24 AUGUST 1943* (Washington, D.C.: United States Army, 2019), [https://history.army.mil/html/books/072/72-6/CMH\\_Pub\\_72-6.pdf](https://history.army.mil/html/books/072/72-6/CMH_Pub_72-6.pdf); Stetson Conn, Rose C Engelman, and Byron Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2000), 277.

historians from USASOC, the National Guard Bureau and Northern Command/NORAD, who provided original source documents as well as their knowledge and analysis to fill in various gaps in official histories.

## **B. 1ST ALASKAN COMBAT INTELLIGENCE PLATOON**

### **1. Gap/Need/Requirement**

Immediately before World War II, the “knowledge of Alaska was nil” and “the ability of American forces to defend Alaska was pathetic.”<sup>59</sup> Despite General Billy Mitchell’s prophetic words in 1935 that “whoever holds Alaska will hold the world...it is the most important strategic place in the world,” his views were not widely shared by the rest of the military establishment.<sup>60</sup> In 1937, the Army Chief of Staff, General Malin Craig, rejected Alaska Delegate Anthony Diamond’s request for an Army air base in Alaska, due to “the reason that the mainland of Alaska is so remote from the strategic areas of the Pacific that it is difficult to conceive of circumstances in which air operations therefrom would contribute materially to the national defense.”<sup>61</sup> The impression was that Alaska was “away off by itself,” with “almost no Alaskans to” take part in “guerrilla fighting in case of enemy attack.”<sup>62</sup> Alaskans themselves lacked confidence that the U.S. military “would be able to defend Alaska successfully in the event of invasion, and there had even been talk in military circles of abandoning Alaska – on the ground that it would be difficult to defend.”<sup>63</sup> Only when Germany invaded Poland in 1939 did “Congress appropriate funds to construct the naval, ground, and air facilities required to defend Alaska and its adjacent waters in an age of intercontinental warfare.”<sup>64</sup> This included a single battalion of the newly formed 297<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, who were federalized two years later, just

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<sup>59</sup> Richardson and McNab, *Alaska Guard: Alaska Army National Guard and Other Stories*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> Pike, *Hirohito’s War: The Pacific War, 1941–1945*, 643.

<sup>61</sup> Marston, *Men of the Tundra: Eskimos at War*, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Richardson and McNab, *Alaska Guard: Alaska Army National Guard and Other Stories*, 15.

<sup>63</sup> Marston, *Men of the Tundra: Eskimos at War*, 4.

<sup>64</sup> Charles Hendricks, “The Eskimos and the Defense of Alaska,” *Pacific Historical Review* 54, no. 3 (1985): 273, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3639633>.

weeks before Pearl Harbor in 1941, leaving “Alaska’s population centers bereft of militia forces capable of providing local defense.”<sup>65</sup>

These conditions left the territory of Alaska in a precarious and vulnerable position when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and thrust the United States into World War II. Attu Island, the furthest island in the Aleutian Island chain and westernmost point of the United States, sat less than 1500 miles from the home islands of Japan. “Neither the new army airfields near Anchorage and Fairbanks nor the naval installations under construction at Sitka, Kodiak, and Dutch Harbor were capable of defending themselves.”<sup>66</sup> There was fear that there was “nothing to stop the Japanese;” that “if they wanted to, [they] could have come up the Aleutians, taken Anchorage, and come down past down Vancouver to Seattle.”<sup>67</sup> The commander of the Alaska Defense Command, General Simon Buckner, stated that “the Japanese would have the opportunity to set up airbases in the Aleutians, making coastal cities like Anchorage, Seattle, and San Francisco vulnerable within range to attack by their bombers. The fear of that scenario was real at the time because the Japanese were nearly invincible and ruthless in Asia and the Pacific.”<sup>68</sup> These fears were initially substantiated with the Japanese bombing of Dutch Harbor and invasions of the Aleutian Islands of Attu and Kiska in June 1942.<sup>69</sup>

## 2. Formation/Key Figures

In November of 1941, the commander of the Alaska Defense Command, General Simon Buckner, authorized Colonel Lawrence V. Castner and Major William J. Verbeck

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<sup>65</sup> Richardson and McNab, *Alaska Guard: Alaska Army National Guard and Other Stories*, 16; Hendricks, “The Eskimos and the Defense of Alaska,” 274.

<sup>66</sup> Hendricks, “The Eskimos and the Defense of Alaska,” 273.

<sup>67</sup> Laura Kraegel and Zoe Sobel, “Lt. Colonel Bob Brocklehurst and Tara Bourdukofsky Reflect on the Battle of Attu,” Alaska Public Media, May 14, 2018, <https://alaskapublic.org/2018/05/14/lt-colonel-bob-brocklehurst-and-tara-bourdukofsky-reflect-on-the-battle-of-attu/>.

<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Parshall and Anthony Tully, *Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005), 57.

<sup>69</sup> Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 261–63.



to establish the 1st Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon.<sup>70</sup> COL Castner's father, General Joseph C. Castner, was integral in the establishment of the Philippine Scouts of North Luzon in 1899, providing COL Castner a verified organizational framework from which to proceed.<sup>71</sup> COL Castner commanded the organization with MAJ Verbeck acting as his assistant.<sup>72</sup> The nickname, Castner's Cutthroats, is clearly derived from the commander of the unit, however it is not in reference to unit's conduct during the Aleutian campaign. COL Castner made the nickname up during a chance encounter with curious 7th Infantry Division soldiers.<sup>73</sup>

There was no shortage of nicknames for the Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon, as their exploits during the Aleutian campaign earned them considerable fame. *Time* magazine referred to them as the "Tundra Troopers," while other publications such as *Yank*, *Collier's*, and *Alaska Sportsman* referred to them as "Alaska Scouts" or "Castner's Cutthroats."<sup>74</sup> One can see how the myriad of nicknames for a unit that never exceeded 69 total members has led to confusion.<sup>75</sup> A casual observer could incorrectly surmise that Alaska Defense Command employed three different irregular or unconventional units in support of the Aleutian Campaign. Further confusion about the Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon is likely due to their deliberate choice to wear non-standard clothing, choosing to employ tried and tested equipment that the men used prior to the war. They knew this equipment worked because most of the men assessed and selected to serve in the platoon worked outdoors year-round in the harsh environment that comprises the sub-Arctic Alaskan interior and coast.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Brian Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War: World War II in Alaska and the Aleutians*, Classic Reprint Series, no. 4 (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1995), 169–70.

<sup>71</sup> Garfield, 170.

<sup>72</sup> Rearden, *Forgotten Warriors of the Aleutian Campaign*, 87–88.

<sup>73</sup> Rearden, 90.

<sup>74</sup> "Army & Navy – OPERATIONS: Tundra Troopers," *Time*, August 9, 1943, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,766932,00.html>; "TIME Magazine -- U.S. Edition -- August 9, 1943 Vol. XLII No. 6," accessed October 18, 2023, <https://content.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601430809,00.html>; Rearden, *Forgotten Warriors of the Aleutian Campaign*, 90–91.

<sup>75</sup> Rearden, *Forgotten Warriors of the Aleutian Campaign*, 88.

<sup>76</sup> Rearden, 88.

### **3. Structure/Purpose/Mission**

The men who served in the Alaska Combat Intelligence Platoon were trappers, prospectors, miners, and commercial fishermen.<sup>77</sup> COL Castner hand-picked each man, looking for unique skill sets that would allow them to survive and thrive during their missions in the Aleutians. Their ability to live and work in the wild, teach their unique skill set to other members, and willingness to operate in small teams made them perfect candidates for a scout unit that would be tasked with conducting reconnaissance in some of the most remote locations in the world.<sup>78</sup> The scouts of the Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon coalesced into small detachments that were intended to conduct reconnaissance on the numerous Aleutian islands, either hunting Japanese forces, scouting potential runways for troop staging and logistics, or assisting in personnel recovery operations.<sup>79</sup> The chosen literature provided little information with regard to any enforced standard operating procedures from the unit, other than strict entry qualifications. Additionally, no traditional chain of command or table of organization and equipment were available to discern a command structure outside of COL Castner and MAJ Verbeck. One can reasonably assume that the men stratified themselves into positions of authority based on their skillsets and how useful they were to the ongoing operation.

### **4. Actual Employment**

As previously mentioned, there is no definitive record of the exploits and operations of the Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon. Jim Reardon's book, *Forgotten Warriors*, catalogues the unit's greater contributions to the Aleutian Campaign through his interviews with former members of the Platoon. Prior to Japan's attack on Dutch Harbor and invasion of Attu and Kiska on 3 June 1942, the Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon was largely used for reconnaissance of remote islands along the Alaska Peninsula to find emergency landing strips for Army Air Corps pilots.<sup>80</sup> During the bombing of Dutch Harbor, members

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<sup>77</sup> Rearden, 87.

<sup>78</sup> Rearden, 104–5.

<sup>79</sup> Rearden, 87–88.

<sup>80</sup> Rearden, 88.

of the platoon were present and sent reports of the attack. According to COL Castner the reports were "...the best received on that raid by Alaska Defense Command."<sup>81</sup> The attack on Dutch Harbor and invasion of Attu and Kiska initiated a 15-month campaign in which U.S. Alaska Defense Command employed the platoon for a variety of operational tasks.

In the immediate aftermath of the bombing of Dutch Harbor, Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon members were tasked to begin scouting landing strips and beaches for amphibious landing sites for the impending island-hopping campaign to retake Attu and Kiska.<sup>82</sup> At the outset of the war for the Aleutians, it became clear that the Army Air Corps would require accurate weather forecasting across the vast archipelago. Minimally manned weather detachments would be effectively abandoned on remote islands to collect and report forecasts. These weather detachments were led by members of the Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon who ensured their safety and survival. Primarily, the scouts assisted in hunting, fishing, and fieldcraft to repair any damage to infrastructure and basic necessities.<sup>83</sup>

As the U.S. Army neared final preparations for the assault onto Attu, Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon members were conducting special reconnaissance on the surrounding islands, gathering intelligence on Japanese troops, aircraft, and naval vessels. Specifically, on 11 January 1943, 34 Alaska Scouts landed on the island of Amchitka, paving the way for establishing six aircraft runways, numerous observation posts and radar sites.<sup>84</sup> None of the literature reviewed suggests that the Alaska Scouts were essential to the operations, but a convincing case could be made that many more American lives would have been lost in the efforts to recon and secure a series of islands along the Aleutian archipelago.

After six months of preparation, on 11 May 1943, the Alaska Scouts and 7th Infantry Division conducted an amphibious assault to retake Attu. The Alaska Scouts

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<sup>81</sup> Rearden, 89.

<sup>82</sup> Rearden, 89–91.

<sup>83</sup> Rearden, 89–92.

<sup>84</sup> Rearden, 93–95.

performed critical roles during this battle, acting as guides, snipers, map readers, messengers, and environmental advisors to the 7th Infantry soldiers who had recently arrived from Fort Ord, California. Jim Reardon's interviews provide graphic details of the scouts leading the 7th Infantry soldiers through treacherous terrain and, even though COL Castner ordered them to avoid direct combat, fighting their way through the mountains of Attu to save the lives of the infantrymen.<sup>85</sup> Three short months after the battle of Attu, the Alaska Scouts once again led the assault onto Kiska. However, on 15 August 1943, the U.S. realized that the Japanese had abandoned the island, effectively ending the operation.<sup>86</sup> Had the Japanese remained, one can expect that the Alaska Scouts would have conducted similar operations as they did on Attu. The men of the 1st Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon spent the remainder of the war conducting field testing, mapped remote locations in Alaska, and acted a personnel recovery mechanism.<sup>87</sup> The literature reviewed does not give an explicit date to when the 1st Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon was officially disbanded, but it would be reasonable to assume that at the end of hostilities in WWII the unit was shut down and the men returned to their previous lives, as many did during that time.

The Alaska Scouts exemplified purpose-built unconventional units that meet the specific needs of a given region, theater, or combat zone. COL Castner provided the men extreme latitude with their equipment and tactics, prioritizing mission success over uniformity. The men were recruited based on tangible skill sets and ability to work in small teams. While the terms did not exist in the 1940s, the 1st Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon conducted special reconnaissance, foreign internal defense, and direct action. These missions are very similar to what would be asked of a modern-day purpose-built force designed to operate in the remote reaches of Alaska. This study will further analyze the feasibility of recreating a unit such as the 1st Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon given the threats leveled at Alaska currently and the socio-political factors present in the state. Before that, however, a detailed analysis of the history, formation, and employment

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<sup>85</sup> Reardon, 96–99.

<sup>86</sup> MacGarrigle, *Aleutian Islands 3 JUNE 1942–24 AUGUST 1943*, 30–31.

<sup>87</sup> Reardon, *Forgotten Warriors of the Aleutian Campaign*, 98–99.

of another irregular unit must be examined. The Alaska Territorial Guard was established during the same time period, but was employed in a drastically different manner, with great implications for homeland defense during the Cold War period.

## C. ALASKA TERRITORIAL GUARD

### 1. Formation/Key Figures

To address the immediate security gaps in the absence of dedicated forces and fully operational military facilities, two key figures independently envisioned a territorial home guard for Alaska and later aligned their efforts. The first was Alaskan Territorial Governor Earnest Gruening, who had lobbied the War Department for the delayed Army airfields in Alaska, the National Guard that was later federalized, and finally a home guard. He expressed that he “did not want a single male non-combatant in Alaska. I wanted everyone who was not called to service in the Army or Navy or engaged in essential war work to be enlisted in a home guard. Alaska was the country’s front line of defense and I felt we should mobilize every available human being for that defense.”<sup>88</sup> Governor Gruening received authorization for his unpaid, all-volunteer Alaska Territorial Guard (ATG) concept in March of 1942 from Western Defense Command and started touring around the state in May to personally recruit its members.<sup>89</sup>

Simultaneously, Major Marvin “Muktuk” Marston, a reserve-commissioned Army Air Corps Officer serving in Alaska, conceived of an indigenous guerrilla force to oppose Japanese attacks along the Bering Sea coast, without any awareness of Governor Gruening’s efforts to form the ATG.<sup>90</sup> While escorting a celebrity on a USO morale tour for troops around Alaska in March 1942, Marston made a stop at the desolate and isolated Saint Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea, less than fifty miles from Russian Siberia. While engaging with the indigenous villagers there, he learned of a Japanese surveying party that had landed there and engaged with the villagers. He also recognized that the Alaska Natives

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<sup>88</sup> Marston, *Men of the Tundra: Eskimos at War*, 4, 46.

<sup>89</sup> Hendricks, “The Eskimos and the Defense of Alaska,” 276.

<sup>90</sup> Hendricks, 277.

had “lived for generations under the most rugged conditions man has known,” and had an epiphany that “the successful defense of the Arctic could be made only by the [Alaska Natives].” What Marston conceived as the “Tundra Army” took shape in his mind, and upon returning to his post in Nome, he started advocating for the formation of an Alaska Native home guard. He was then assigned as a military aide to Governor Gruening, and the two men consolidated their visions into a single effort to organize the ATG.<sup>91</sup> In July 1942, Marston and Gruening spent two weeks touring around the native towns and villages along the Bering Sea and in the Alaskan bush, recruiting volunteers to enlist in the ATG and distributing World War I-era Enfield rifles, ammunition and ATG patches, the only official uniform of the unit.<sup>92</sup> When they visited native villages, Marston and Gruening would ask for the Natives’ help to protect Alaska and the United States by defending their villages, informing them of the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor, Dutch Harbor and the Aleutians, warning them that the Japanese wanted to drive them out of their villages and take their fish, whale, and seal hunting grounds. They requested that the Natives keep a look-out for unfamiliar boats and planes, to report what they saw to the Army, and to fight and harass any Japanese invaders should they land.<sup>93</sup>

## **2. Structure/Intended Purpose/Mission**

The ATG divided the state into two sectors, an eastern and western half on either side of the 156<sup>th</sup> Meridian, with Marston responsible for the Western half most exposed to the Japanese threat along the coast.<sup>94</sup> The ATG’s initial and primary mission was the selling point for joining, to give the Alaska Natives the means to defend their homes and villages from any invading Japanese units. In the course of their normal activities of hunting and fishing in remote areas, their larger purpose was to be the eyes and ears for Alaska Defense Command by observing and reporting any enemy activity or incursions, and to provide initial resistance followed by guerrilla-style harassment until regular

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<sup>91</sup> Marston, *Men of the Tundra: Eskimos at War*, 27–32, 47.

<sup>92</sup> Marston, 49–61.

<sup>93</sup> Marston, 58.

<sup>94</sup> Marston, 50.

military forces could arrive. The challenge of timely reporting was overcome by establishing a procedure to travel to the nearest Army Signal Corps station or amateur radio-owner located in isolated villages. They had the additional capability through their authority under the governor to aid in disasters of any type and to guard critical areas or infrastructure where local police were not available, such as a critical platinum mine on the isolated Goodnews Bay.<sup>95</sup>

The disparate units were formed and organized by Marston, putting out the word to all able-bodied men when he arrived in a village and appointed a literate member of the community as commander, usually a white teacher or minister but sometimes an Alaska Native. He would either deliver what weapons and ammunition he had or give them instructions on where to pick them up. Oaths were administered and standing orders given with minimal training, as their “very existence [was] based on their ability as hunters...employing stealth, natural camouflage, and the ability to move quickly and shoot accurately.”<sup>96</sup> Marston made additional trips to recruit more villages into the program, and by September 1943, almost every village in western Alaska had an ATG unit, equipped with Enfield rifles, ammunition and ATG patches.<sup>97</sup> Although a lack of accurate records prevent exact counts, total active ATG membership during the war is estimated at just under three thousand personnel.<sup>98</sup>

### **3. Actual Employment**

By late 1942, American military strength had built up enough in the Aleutians and mainland Alaska that the danger of a significant Japanese attack had declined.<sup>99</sup> There was still a tangible threat of isolated Japanese sabotage on the critical lend-lease route for ferrying American-supplied aircraft to the Soviet Union through Alaska. This applied

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<sup>95</sup> Blakeney, “The Security of Alaska and the Tundra Army,” 53–57.

<sup>96</sup> Richardson and McNab, *Alaska Guard: Alaska Army National Guard and Other Stories*, 22–23; Blakeney, “The Security of Alaska and the Tundra Army,” 10.

<sup>97</sup> Richardson and McNab, *Alaska Guard: Alaska Army National Guard and Other Stories*, 30.

<sup>98</sup> Marston, *Men of the Tundra: Eskimos at War*, 221.

<sup>99</sup> Hendricks, “The Eskimos and the Defense of Alaska,” 278.

especially to Nome on the Seward Peninsula, whose airfield was the last stop for the planes before flying on to Siberia. Marston traveled around the entirety of the Seward Peninsula in late 1942 for a month by dog sled to establish units around the peninsula during one of the harshest winters in decades.<sup>100</sup> The successful application of the original concept for the ATG, to detect and resist a Japanese incursion, could not be accurately determined, since that attack never came.<sup>101</sup> But the ATG provided value and utility in various other ways. They were credited with breaking hundreds of miles of trails in the Alaskan wilderness, repairing shelter cabins, putting out fires, building airfields, recovering a downed U.S. pilot, and shooting down and recovering Japanese incendiary balloon-bombs.<sup>102</sup>

#### **4. Disbandment/Evolution**

At the close of World War II with the surrender of Japan in August 1945, the future of the ATG was tenuous and uncertain.<sup>103</sup> There was valid reason to maintain the organization and its proven capabilities with the immediate transition to the Cold War. The Bering Sea was now the front line between the U.S. and USSR and no longer a cooperative logistics route as it had been for the Lend-Lease act during WWII. Marston argued that if the ATG disbanded, the Army would have to send “white men to guard the Arctic who do not like it and are unable to cope with it, just as we found at the beginning of WWII.”<sup>104</sup> Since the end of the war, Governor Gruening actively advocated for the retainment of the ATG in some form, and in November 1946 submitted a plan to the National Guard Chief and Secretary of War calling for the formation of two National Guard scout battalions. These units would be subdivided into platoons and squads dispersed across native villages along the coast and manned by former ATG members. Their mission would be almost identical to that of the ATG’s, to maintain “constant surveillance of the coastal areas” and

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<sup>100</sup> Marston, *Men of the Tundra: Eskimos at War*, 65–89.

<sup>101</sup> Blakeney, “The Security of Alaska and the Tundra Army,” 8.

<sup>102</sup> Marston, *Men of the Tundra: Eskimos at War*, 204.

<sup>103</sup> Hendricks, “The Eskimos and the Defense of Alaska,” 281.

<sup>104</sup> Marston, *Men of the Tundra: Eskimos at War*, 206.



report any information. They would also be tasked with testing cold-weather military clothing and equipment, and notably be excused from drill or training during hunting and fishing seasons.<sup>105</sup> Gruening was forced to officially disband the ATG in March 1947, and although delayed by bureaucratic resistance and legislative processes, the Alaska National Guard was approved and established by the Alaska Territorial Legislature in March 1949.<sup>106</sup>

Once established, the Scout Battalions of the Alaska Army National Guard proved their value over the first three decades of the Cold War. Alaska was a unique operational environment where active duty and National Guard units and personnel exemplified an ideal level of integration, interoperability, and interdependence. The Scouts provided excellent surveillance and screening to the active force by virtue of their living in dispersed villages, essentially in their “foxholes” twenty-four hours a day. A good example of this capability was when the ATG spotted a submarine off the Alaskan coast during World War II, which the U.S. Navy only admitted was theirs right before Army Air Corps bombers were called in to destroy it.<sup>107</sup> During joint training events, Active soldiers from U.S. Army Alaska learned techniques for Arctic survival, cross-country mobility and ancient methods for living off the land and sea from the guard scouts, and in turn taught the Alaska Native scouts military patrolling, helicopter operations, radio communications, weapons, demolitions and vehicle operation. For larger Arctic exercises, the scouts served as a competent, thinking opposing force and harassing guerilla elements to test and challenge active unit competency. These events also brought in much needed funds and revenues into the remote native communities, further enhancing the mutually beneficial relationship between the military, the scouts, and the communities they hailed from.<sup>108</sup> This precedent is a model to follow in the contemporary security environment, one in which Russia is again a global competitor and potential adversary. What was true in 1952 according to a

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<sup>105</sup> Hendricks, “The Eskimos and the Defense of Alaska,” 284–85.

<sup>106</sup> Hendricks, 284–90; Richardson and McNab, *Alaska Guard: Alaska Army National Guard and Other Stories*, 34–38.

<sup>107</sup> Marston, *Men of the Tundra: Eskimos at War*, 209; Hendricks, “The Eskimos and the Defense of Alaska,” 290.

<sup>108</sup> Marston, *Men of the Tundra: Eskimos at War*, 209–10, 216.

U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel who wrote for the Military Review is true today: “If we train and equip them in military observing, reporting, and guerrilla tactics; if we establish channels for passing information; if we tell the Eskimos what to look for, whom to report, and what we want them to do under certain circumstances; then their contribution will be great. We can greatly add to the protection of our country without seriously depleting our military commitments elsewhere.”<sup>109</sup>

## 5. Legacy Problems

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union reduced the immediate necessity for the Alaska Army National Guard scout battalions and forced a re-examination of their role and mission in rural Alaska. There was already tension between National Guard regulations and the special exceptions given to Alaska Natives regarding waivers for “vocational aptitude testing, random drug testing, certain fitness levels, and required attendance at training and drills.”<sup>110</sup> These exceptions were previously tolerated given their unique skills, location, hunting and fishing seasons, and remote way of life. The National Guard wanted to convert the scout units into conventional battalions, which necessitated integration into the rest of the U.S. force and possible deployment away from Alaska, which had not been a factor previously due to their unique specificity and utility to their ancestral home.<sup>111</sup> Many Alaska Natives viewed the enforcement of National Guard requirements as “as an attack on their capabilities, an insult to their heritage and pride, and even an attack on the Native Alaskans themselves,” and “while Native Alaskans still serve in the Alaska National Guard, the end of the Alaska Scout battalions effectively sundered the National Guard’s connections with Native Alaskan villages.”<sup>112</sup>

The ATG and Cold War-era Alaska National Guard scout battalions offer an excellent precedent and model to follow for true Arctic capability for the contemporary

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<sup>109</sup> Blakeney, “The Security of Alaska and the Tundra Army,” 12.

<sup>110</sup> “207th Infantry Group (Scout),” accessed December 3, 2023, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/army/207in.htm>.

<sup>111</sup> “207th Infantry Group (Scout).”

<sup>112</sup> Lance Blyth, *Information Paper on the Alaska Scouts* (Colorado Springs, CO: NORAD & USNORTHCOM, 2011), 1–2; “207th Infantry Group (Scout).”

U.S. military. Whether a revamp of a nearly identical program would be an answer for today's Arctic security challenges or a new concept that borrows the best parts of these historical units requires further analysis. However, the feasibility of any such program would first require making amends with the Alaska Native communities. As recently as 2009, the federal government moved to cut off retirement pay for veterans of the ATG, which only added insult to the previous injury of the scout waivers being rescinded.<sup>113</sup> The federal and Alaska state governments, as well as the military and National Guard would need to make amends with Alaska Native communities in order to ever again leverage their Arctic expertise and capabilities in service of U.S. homeland defense and power projection in Arctic environments abroad.

## **D. CANADIAN RANGERS**

### **1. Introduction**

The Canadian Rangers, an exceptional and indispensable subcomponent of the Canadian Armed Forces Reserve, provide a pivotal function in safeguarding the security and sovereignty of Canada's expansive and isolated northern communities.<sup>114</sup> This case study delves into the Canadian Rangers, analyzing their historical origins from the establishment of The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers to their present organizational structure and operations in both Canada's Arctic and the most remote areas in northern Canada. The indigenous peoples of Canada have played a significant role in the effectiveness of this military occupation, making their evolution as a military occupation a compelling subject of analysis for our capstone. Through a thorough examination of the Canadian Rangers' strategies, achievements, and adaptation to the Arctic and remote environments, we aim to provide insight that could inform discussions on enhancing the United States Military's presence, domain awareness, and effectiveness in the challenging terrain and environment of the Alaskan Arctic and sub-Arctic.

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<sup>113</sup> The Associated Press, "Army Stops Retiree Pay for Alaskans in World War II Force," *The New York Times*, January 24, 2009, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/us/25alaska.html>.

<sup>114</sup> "Canadian Rangers," navigation page, August 22, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/proactive-disclosure/secd-april-24-2023/canadian-rangers.html>.

## 2. Gap/Need/Requirement

Canada spans an expanse that is 1.6% larger than the United States, and when including Canada's waters, it is the second largest country in the world, after Russia. This region boasts over 5,000 miles of rugged coastline, as well as extensive road and rail networks that traverse its interior.<sup>115</sup> Maintaining a traditional military presence over the entirety of the country is excessively expensive, due to its extremely low population, extreme climate and physical terrain.<sup>116</sup>

Prior to World War II, Canada would have faced challenges in maintaining its neutrality in the event of a conflict in the Pacific. Due to its close connections with the United States and Britain, Canada would have inevitably become involved.<sup>117</sup> In his 1937 publication "*The Pacific and War*," William Strange asserted that the Canadian Coast is "extremely rugged. It possesses an intricate system of islands and channels, and the tide-rips are treacherous...to the point of seemed impregnability."<sup>118</sup> This perception of Canada, shared by many during that time, was described by Senator Raoul Dandurand as a "fireproof house far from any inflammable material."<sup>119</sup> Canada's most effective approach was to avoid engagement in wars, a strategy that proved successful over the years.

At the time that Japan started aggressive activities against the U.S. in December 1941, concerned citizens worried that the Canadian Forces available would not meet their security needs.<sup>120</sup> In early 1942, Japan launched its attacks on Britain's Asian colonies, which disrupted the usual sense of security felt by the citizens of British Columbia on Canada's Pacific coast.<sup>121</sup> With the fall of Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya, and Burma

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<sup>115</sup> "The Canadian Rangers @ 75," 5, accessed December 4, 2023, <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/19-DCASS-CdnRgrs-75keydocs.pdf>.

<sup>116</sup> "The Canadian Rangers @ 75," iii.

<sup>117</sup> Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers*, 27.

<sup>118</sup> William Strange, *Canada, The Pacific and War* (Toronto, Thomas Nelson and Sons, Limited, 1937), 212.

<sup>119</sup> P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Guerillas in Our Midst: The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942-45," *BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly*, no. 155 (2007): 34, <https://doi.org/10.14288/bcs.v0i155.628>.

<sup>120</sup> Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers*, 29.

<sup>121</sup> Lackenbauer, 27-56.

(present day Malaysia and Myanmar), Some members of the Canadian Parliament, such as Howard Green warned of potential bombings and the possible land assault of British Columbia.<sup>122</sup> Fearing that their province could be invaded next, coupled with the fear of having to surrender the coast, concerned citizens flooded the office of the commander of the Pacific Coast defense. Major-General R.O. Alexander wrote to the chief of the general staff stating “Letters are being written continually to the press and I am being bombarded by individuals...demanding that something should be done.”<sup>123</sup> Several individuals, including a veteran of the First World War, expressed their discontent with Ottawa in February 1942: “Too long have we waited for apathetic Ottawa, that is a thousand miles from possible danger, to understand the position of British Columbia. Apparently, the lessons of France, Greece, Hong Kong, and Singapore mean nothing. We are misrepresented by a government that only exists by coddling pacifistic Quebec...”<sup>124</sup>

The number of active-duty forces in British Columbia was insufficient to ensure complete protection for the province. The infantry troops in British Columbia constituted merely two brigades, and the Royal Canadian Air Force stationed at Patricia Bay had only three anti-aircraft guns.<sup>125</sup> Due to the absence of both armed personnel and adequate protection, residents of British Columbia eagerly volunteered to enlist, and called for the establishment of home guard defense formations.<sup>126</sup> Despite the fact that senior military officials reassurance to the federal government regarding the adequacy of the province’s defense against potential attacks, the heightened public anxiety demanded more visible military readiness.<sup>127</sup> Under mounting pressure from the numerous service clubs, unions,

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<sup>122</sup> Lackenbauer, 29.

<sup>123</sup> Patricia E. Roy, *Mutual Hostages: Canadians and Japanese during the Second World War* (Place of publication not identified: Univ Of Toronto Press, 1992).

<sup>124</sup> Kerry Ragnar Steeves, “The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942–1945” (University of British Columbia, 1990), 18, <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0107130>; Alexander Page, “Letter to the Editor, Victoria Daily Colonist,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, February 22, 1942, [https://archive.org/details/dailycolonist0242uvic\\_17/mode/1up?view=theater](https://archive.org/details/dailycolonist0242uvic_17/mode/1up?view=theater).

<sup>125</sup> C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments, The War Policies of Canada 1939–1945* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1970), 47; C.P. Stacey, *Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, n.d.), 168.

<sup>126</sup> Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers*, 29.

<sup>127</sup> Lackenbauer, 55.

and organizations in British Columbia, the federal government was compelled to establish a civilian defense force in response to the resolutions voted on by various other groups.<sup>128</sup> As written by P. Whitney Lackenbauer “British Colombians flocked to enlist in army units and demanded home defenses formations. Residents in outlying areas, anxious to ‘protect themselves and their loved ones,’ polished their sporting rifles, pooled their arms, and imagined mounting a grassroots defense.”<sup>129</sup> The insufficiency of the defenses was a significant catalyst for the establishment of the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, with public sentiment also exerting an equal, if not a greater, influence.<sup>130</sup>

Officials in the Defense Department acknowledged the potential for local volunteers to serve as auxiliaries, to provided support to the Canadian Army.<sup>131</sup> To constitute force, they enlisted experienced men, including loggers, trappers, prospectors, and ranchers who possessed a profound understanding of the local topography and terrain.<sup>132</sup> Initially proposed by the Pacific Command, the idea was to establish coastal defense guards in areas where setting up reserve army units proved impractical. The proposed final structure remained uncertain and technically violated military law, meaning that the communities could not defend their homes without being liable to punishment as unlawful combatants. The Department of National Defense announced on 23 February 1942 that the subunits of the Canadian Army (Reserve) would form a home guard and guard “every B.C. coast town and strategic point in the Interior.”<sup>133</sup> This decision laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, serving as the precursor to the modern-day Canadian Rangers.

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<sup>128</sup> Steeves, “The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942–1945,” 16.

<sup>129</sup> Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers*, 29.

<sup>130</sup> Steeves, “The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942–1945,” 21.

<sup>131</sup> Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers*, 31.

<sup>132</sup> “Pacific Coast Militia Rangers,” *CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum* (blog), July 19, 2019, <https://navalandmilitarymuseum.org/article/pacific-coast-militia-rangers/>.

<sup>133</sup> Steeves, “The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942–1945,” 23.

### 3. Formation Pacific Coast Militia Rangers/Key Figures

Thomas Alexander Hatch was given the duty of transforming the concept of the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers into a defensive organization.<sup>134</sup> “Tommy” Taylor, a land surveyor by trade, enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Vancouver and was promoted to Captain during his service in WWI.<sup>135</sup> Between the wars, he continued his land surveying work, timber cruising, and railway construction.<sup>136</sup> His appreciation for the diverse geography and people of the province influenced his wartime approach to the organization of the home defense.<sup>137</sup> Major Taylor was appointed as the commanding officer of the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers and subsequently promoted to lieutenant-colonel.<sup>138</sup> He needed experienced men accustomed to rugged timber country with the strength of character and ability to work independently and creatively to fill his ranks.<sup>139</sup>

The response from volunteers was overwhelming, leading to the creation of multiple Ranger detachments. These detachments were dispersed around the entirety of the province, from the northern parts of the Yukon to as far east as the Rocky Mountains, but the highest priority was the region of Vancouver Island and the coast.<sup>140</sup> In August 1942, the Rangers were incorporated into the Active Militia of Canada, despite their original tasking of being created as a reserve militia force.<sup>141</sup> A total of approximately 10,000 new recruits joined the Rangers within a span of four months, and by August 1943, the corps achieved its highest strength, consisting of 14,894 Rangers assigned to 128 companies.<sup>142</sup> However, this strong support did not come without its challenges.

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<sup>134</sup> Lackenbauer, “Guerillas in Our Midst,” 40.

<sup>135</sup> Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers*, 33.

<sup>136</sup> Lackenbauer, “Guerillas in Our Midst,” 40.

<sup>137</sup> Lackenbauer, 40.

<sup>138</sup> Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers*, 36.

<sup>139</sup> Lackenbauer, 33.

<sup>140</sup> Steeves, “The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942–1945,” 23.

<sup>141</sup> Steeves, 23.

<sup>142</sup> Stacey, *Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific*, 174.

The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers were in conflict with the other well-established home defense organizations about personnel recruitment from the very beginning of their existence.<sup>143</sup> The Air Raid Precautions, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps Reserve, and Canadian Army Reserves, all expressed their resentment of having to compete with a new organization for recruits and resources.<sup>144</sup> Disputes arose with each organization regarding whether or not members of one organization could be members of another, additionally, which organization would be given priority to receive new recruits if conflict arose.<sup>145</sup> Colonel Taylor, recognizing the challenges at hand, took it upon himself to address and resolve the issues, diligently working to streamline and rectify the situation. Due to the poor relationship between the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers and reserve army, Colonel Taylor addressed the differences in training and purpose of each unit in Circular Letter Number 51.<sup>146</sup> Kerry Ragnar Steeves outlines Colonel Taylor's letter in his work "The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942–1945":

According to the circular letter, Rangers were trained in guerilla tactics and were designed to fight only in their local area, whereas the reserve army was trained along orthodox military lines. This training would enable the reserve army, "when called out, to take the place of Active Army Units." In addition, while the reserve army's role was to defend their local area, they could be required to fight anywhere in Canada.<sup>147</sup>

While the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers under Colonel Taylor's leadership proved to be an invaluable addition to the safety and security of British Columbia, they were also a cost effective means that helped calm the citizens.<sup>148</sup> According to Steeves "Ultimately, the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers were created for psychological and political as much as military reasons."<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Steeves, "The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942–1945," 25.

<sup>144</sup> Steeves, 25–29.

<sup>145</sup> Steeves, 25.

<sup>146</sup> Steeves, 29.

<sup>147</sup> Steeves, 30.

<sup>148</sup> Steeves, 32.

<sup>149</sup> Steeves, 32.



Despite the fact that the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers were never activated for federal service, the group was an essential component that bolstered the defense and intelligence network in British Columbia.<sup>150</sup> This organization made it possible for men of various ages to contribute to the war effort, which freed others for service overseas.<sup>151</sup> The Rangers provided a feeling of safety and protection to the citizens in their communities and served to connect civilians and the military, something that had not existed before.<sup>152</sup> When WWII ended, the Canadian armed forces demobilized rapidly, and on September 30, 1945 the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers were disbanded.<sup>153</sup> It was Colonel Taylor's concepts and determination to turn this idea into a reality, and his organization not only served its purpose, it laid the ground work in the event the homeland needed defending again in the future. This work led to the future creation of the Canadian Rangers.

The emergence of the Cold War prompted Canadian defense planners to look into a redux of the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers concept.<sup>154</sup> During the early stages of the Cold War, safeguarding their communities from hostile forces and maintaining national security were the top priorities.<sup>155</sup> Following the conclusion of the war, Major-General F.F. Worthington, who commanded the Western Command, made efforts to strengthen public support for the military efforts in the Western region.<sup>156</sup> Like Taylor, General Worthington focused on using community-based reservists to establish a military presence in remote areas.<sup>157</sup> It was a great idea to make use of the expertise that was available locally, and the Department of National Defense had mandated a fostering of public interest in the post-war army.<sup>158</sup> Unlike the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, this organization would be

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<sup>150</sup> Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers*, 55.

<sup>151</sup> Lackenbauer, 55.

<sup>152</sup> Lackenbauer, 56.

<sup>153</sup> Lackenbauer, 57.

<sup>154</sup> Lackenbauer, 56.

<sup>155</sup> "The Canadian Rangers @ 75," iv.

<sup>156</sup> Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers*, 62.

<sup>157</sup> Lackenbauer, 64.

<sup>158</sup> Lackenbauer, 64.

national, spanning across all of Canada, and focus on the small, isolated communities along the “fringe”.<sup>159</sup> Importantly, it would not be in competition with the reserve troops that are already existing.<sup>160</sup>

On August 12, 1947, Brigadier, for Chief of the General Staff W.J.Megill signed the Canadian Army Policy Statement NO. 26, establishing the Canadian Rangers as a military organization.<sup>161</sup> The only places where they were to be located and perform their functions were in the remote coastal regions with a low population density.<sup>162</sup> It was determined that the total strength would not exceed 5,000 members that would be distributed across all five Canadian commands.<sup>163</sup> The formation of this unit did not come without its growing pains; it was met with resistance throughout the country, and it wasn’t until the early 1950s that the Canadian Rangers as a national force took shape.<sup>164</sup> From 1951 to the end of 1952, the Rangers saw a two hundred percent growth in personnel size, when nearly fifteen hundred people joined the Rangers across Canada.<sup>165</sup> In essence, the establishment and development of the Canadian Rangers, which originated from the legacy of the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, exemplified the lasting significance of community-based reservists in safeguarding remote regions and contributing to national defense strategies.

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<sup>159</sup> Lackenbauer, 64.

<sup>160</sup> Lackenbauer, 64.

<sup>161</sup> “The Canadian Rangers @ 75,” 18.

<sup>162</sup> “The Canadian Rangers @ 75,” 19.

<sup>163</sup> “Report NO. 92, Historical Section Army Headquarters. ‘The Canadian Rangers,’” December 1, 1960, 4, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/themes/defence/caf/militaryhistory/dhh/reports/ahq-reports/ahq092.pdf>.

<sup>164</sup> Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers*, 151.

<sup>165</sup> Lackenbauer, 151.

#### 4. Structure/Purpose/Capabilities

The modern Canadian Rangers fall under the Canadian Army Reserve Force, comprising 5,131 members distributed across 196 patrols nationwide.<sup>166</sup> According to the Government of Canada's Canadian Rangers website:

Canadian Rangers are non-commissioned members of the Canadian Army (CA) Reserve. They are members who are always ready for service but not required to undergo annual training. They serve only when placed on active service or when called out in an emergency, like any other reservists, the Rangers are considered on duty when they are undergoing training or when they are called upon during an emergency situation or domestic operation.<sup>167</sup>

There are strict guidelines for becoming a member of the Canadian Rangers, As stated on the Canadian Rangers government website, Prospective Canadian Rangers Must:

- Be intimately familiar with the local population, terrain, weather and other conditions within their area.
- Be able to recognize, observe and report on any unusual ships, aircraft or incidents within their area.
- In the opinion of the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Ranger Patrol Group, possess useful skills for Canadian Ranger Duties in their area.<sup>168</sup>

Because of how vast and remote the areas that the Canadian Rangers monitor and oversee are, they are broken down into five separate patrol groups, each assigned to a certain community across the isolated areas north of the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>169</sup> Information provided from the Canadian Rangers government website explains how the Canadian Ranger Patrol Groups are broken down:

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<sup>166</sup> "Canadian Rangers," navigation page, August 22, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/proactive-disclosure/secd-april-24-2023/canadian-rangers.html>.

<sup>167</sup> Canadian Army National Defence, "Organization: Patrol Groups," organizational descriptions, March 8, 2013, <https://www.canada.ca/en/army/corporate/canadian-rangers/patrol-groups.html>.

<sup>168</sup> Canadian Army National Defence, "Canadian Rangers," organizational descriptions, March 8, 2013, <https://www.canada.ca/en/army/corporate/canadian-rangers.html>.

<sup>169</sup> National Defence.

- 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Ranger Patrol Group (Nunavut, Yukon Territory, and Northwest Territories)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Ranger Patrol Group (Quebec)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Ranger Patrol Group (Ontario)
- 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Ranger Patrol Group (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba)
- 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Ranger Patrol Group (Newfoundland and Labrador)<sup>170</sup>

To ensure the patrol groups are trained and ready, a Regular Force or Reserve member is assigned to each group to conduct visits and inspections.<sup>171</sup> Each Patrol Group is commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel, who oversees the administration and operations of the group.<sup>172</sup> Within the Patrol Groups there are Canadian Ranger Instructors with the tasks of supervising and training Rangers.<sup>173</sup> These instructors are normally the rank of Sergeants or hold the rank of Warrant Officers selected from the Regular forces or the Primary Reserves because of their expertise.<sup>174</sup> The instructors manage the training for all the Canadian Rangers in their respective Patrol Group.<sup>175</sup>

Each Canadian Ranger Patrol Group consists of multiple patrols that are assigned to a specific Area of Responsibility.<sup>176</sup> The typical Canadian patrol includes Patrol Leaders and trained Rangers supervised by a Ranger Instructor.<sup>177</sup> The Patrol Leaders are usually community members with Ranger experience, while other leadership positions include the Sergeant in command, three Master Corporals, three Corporals and eight Privates for each sector.<sup>178</sup> All Patrol Leaders are approved by the Patrol Group Commander, on the basis

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<sup>170</sup> National Defence.

<sup>171</sup> “The Canadian Rangers @ 75,” 582.

<sup>172</sup> “The Canadian Rangers @ 75,” 582.

<sup>173</sup> “The Canadian Rangers @ 75,” 582.

<sup>174</sup> “The Canadian Rangers @ 75,” 582.

<sup>175</sup> “The Canadian Rangers @ 75,” 581–83.

<sup>176</sup> Canadian Army National Defence, “1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group,” organizational descriptions, March 8, 2013, <https://www.canada.ca/en/army/corporate/canadian-rangers/1-canadian-ranger-patrol-group.html>.

<sup>177</sup> “The Canadian Rangers @ 75,” 582–83.

<sup>178</sup> “The Canadian Rangers @ 75,” 581.

of recommendations made by local members of the community that patrol serves.<sup>179</sup> With this training and leadership, members of the Canadian Rangers are able to partner with the Canadian Armed Forces to share tactics, techniques, procedures, and lessons learned on how to survive and thrive in their community.<sup>180</sup>

Since their establishment in 1947, as outlined in “The Canadian Rangers @ 75:”

The Canadian Rangers (CR) are considered the eyes, ears, and guides for the Canadian Army (CA) in the remote, coastal, and northern areas in which they serve. They allow the CAF to maintain contact with Canadians in those communities, and they provide a critical and enduring presence on the ground. The CR are vital to routine surveillance, acting as guides, local cultural advisors, and interpreters when required. As part of the One Army Team, the CR form the core of local liaison capacity in many locations, all while remaining immediately available to support local government or other agencies in times of need.<sup>181</sup>

Because of the magnitude of success that the Canadian Rangers have provided to the Canadian Armed Forces, It is expected that the Canadian Rangers will continue to play a pivotal role with providing early warning in Canada’s remote regions, while maintaining Canadian sovereignty.<sup>182</sup>

## 5. Actual Employment

The perceived potential threats to the Arctic region from Russia and China include Russia’s rapid military buildup and commercial partnership with China in the region.<sup>183</sup> As the Arctic becomes more accessible due to climate change, both countries are vying for pre-eminence in the area.<sup>184</sup> Russia’s military buildup and collaboration with China, along with the exploitation of natural resources and the opening of new shipping lanes, can be

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<sup>179</sup> “The Canadian Rangers @ 75,” 583.

<sup>180</sup> “The Canadian Rangers @ 75,” 581–83.

<sup>181</sup> “The Canadian Rangers @ 75,” 586.

<sup>182</sup> “The Canadian Rangers @ 75,” 586.

<sup>183</sup> Norimitsu Onishi and Nasuna Stuart-Ulin, “Caribou Meat and Moon Signs: Inuit Lessons for Soldiers in the Arctic,” *The New York Times*, June 4, 2023, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/04/world/canada/canada-military-arctic-climate.html>.

<sup>184</sup> Onishi and Stuart-Ulin.

seen as potential threats to Canada sovereignty and security in the Arctic. The Canadian Rangers stand ready in remote areas that can be exploited by these threats, and are prepared to report anything out of the ordinary in the lands and waters around their respective communities.<sup>185</sup> The Canadian Army works regularly with the Canadian Rangers by engaging in joint exercises and patrols in the Arctic region. Military exercises such as Operation Nanook-Nunavut, where the Canadian soldiers are increasing their capacity of Arctic knowledge by working with the Canadian Rangers, and other federal and territorial governments.<sup>186</sup> These ongoing encounters between the Canadian Army and the communities that are located in the northern regions of Canada serve only to improve the level of interoperability that exists between the military and the local population.

In addition to working with the Canadian Armed Forces during exercises, the Canadian Rangers are also responsible for assessing damages to the Northern Warning System sites after heavy storms, and search and rescue efforts in their communities.<sup>187</sup> The Canadian Rangers played a significant role at a New Year's Eve celebration in Kangiqsualujjuaq, a small community with approximately 650 citizens.<sup>188</sup> During this celebration, snow from a steep hill beside the village broke loose and smashed through the walls of the building where the residents were located.<sup>189</sup> After this disaster, Rangers from eleven of the fourteen Patrol Groups in Nunavik assisted in the recovery of individuals and the cleanup from the disaster.<sup>190</sup> By providing this response, the Rangers demonstrated that they continue to play a vital leadership role in the rural areas of Canada.<sup>191</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Rangers were instrumental in the response across northern

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<sup>185</sup> "The Canadian Rangers at 75: The Eyes and Ears of the North," *Eye on the Arctic* (blog), May 2, 2022, <https://www.rcinet.ca/eye-on-the-arctic/2022/05/02/the-canadian-rangers-at-75-the-eyes-and-ears-of-the-north/>.

<sup>186</sup> National Defence, "Op NANOOK-NUNALIVUT Reinforces Skill Sets in Canada's North," news releases, February 14, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2022/02/op-nanook-nunavut-reinforces-skill-sets-in-canadas-north.html>.

<sup>187</sup> "The Canadian Rangers at 75."

<sup>188</sup> Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers*, 4.

<sup>189</sup> Lackenbauer, 4.

<sup>190</sup> Lackenbauer, 5.

<sup>191</sup> Lackenbauer, 6.

Canada. They were responsible for establishing tents and other health care infrastructure, as well as providing food and medicine in the Northwest Territories.<sup>192</sup> Written by the leading expert on the Canadian Rangers, P. Whitney Lackenbauer “The Rangers successfully integrated national security and sovereignty agendas with community-based activities and local stewardships.”<sup>193</sup> This makes them the ideal organization and the nexus for relationships in Northern Canada. This strategy demonstrates its effectiveness and presents an opportunity for the United States to learn from it to restore the fractured relationship between the U.S. Military and Indigenous population residing in the vast and isolated regions of Alaska. This would facilitate increased domain awareness and Arctic capabilities.

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<sup>192</sup> “The Canadian Rangers at 75.”

<sup>193</sup> Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers*, 7.

## **VII. FLETCHER FORUM JOURNAL ARTICLE: ARCTIC TOURISM: AN ARMY SPECIAL FORCES PROBLEM WITH A NATIONAL GUARD SOLUTION**

### **A. ABSTRACT**

Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) are poorly manned, trained, organized, and equipped to conduct sustained operations in the Arctic. ARSOF currently conducts “Arctic Tourism:” misaligned and episodic training combined with personnel policies that dilute Arctic expertise and hinder the retention of institutional knowledge and unit capability. This is compounded by the strained relationship between the U.S. government and Alaska Native communities, denying the U.S. military Arctic expertise and presenting a gap for malign influence. This piece explores how creating an Arctic-focused National Guard Special Forces unit can help address homeland defense gaps, Arctic capacity shortfalls, historically fraught relationships with Alaska Native communities, and natural resource vulnerabilities.

The 2022 U.S. National Defense Strategy largely ignores the Arctic and specifically fails to acknowledge how Alaska’s exposed frontier will be defended in great-power competition with China and Russia. Alaska has faced hybrid and irregular threats long before these concepts emerged in contemporary security discourse. The need for an Arctic-dedicated force is highlighted by the challenges of Russian and Chinese military cooperation, defense of critical infrastructure, and protection of Indigenous peoples (also known as Alaska Natives) made vulnerable by their remoteness, long history of exploitation, and infrastructure degradation due to climate change.

Alaska-based land forces currently consist of local Army National Guard and Reserve troops; various rotational units of active-duty Army Special Forces, also known as Green Berets; and the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. The 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division is the sole Arctic-focused active-duty Army unit in the United States but is simultaneously assigned to Indo-Pacific Command, whose area of responsibility does not encompass any Arctic territory. These forces are ill-prepared to address the security threats in the region, especially the Special Forces units, which conduct misaligned and episodic training with



poor personnel policies. These policies dilute expertise and institutional unit knowledge by frequently rotating personnel out of the teams who execute Arctic training. We define this current approach as “Arctic tourism.” Creating a center of gravity for Arctic expertise in Alaska in the form of National Guard Special Forces could alleviate this problem.

An Alaska-based U.S. Army National Guard Special Forces unit could be a true force multiplier to address domain awareness and homeland defense gaps, Arctic capability and capacity shortfalls, neglected Alaskan Native communities, and vulnerable natural resources. U.S. Army Special Forces work with and through Indigenous communities, often in austere environments, to combat irregular and hybrid threats across the competition continuum. Through relationships with Alaska Native populations, who have survived and thrived in this harsh environment for generations. An Indigenous-focused approach in Alaska would allow National Guard Special Forces to address training shortfalls, enhance homeland defense, increase domain awareness in the Alaskan Arctic, and build Arctic capability for power projection abroad. The security challenges of budgetary and personnel limitations during a period of strategic ambiguity can be addressed partly by Special Operations Forces partnered with local Arctic communities. National Guard Special Forces present an economy of force option that can better address hybrid and irregular threats due to their smaller size and stabilized personnel trained to work with Indigenous forces with minimal financial and resource requirements.

## **B. HYBRID THREATS AND CURRENT SHORTFALLS**

Alaska is vulnerable to hybrid threats due to its exposed strategic location on the seam of three combatant commands. The 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division is stationed in Alaska (the Northern Command) but is also assigned to Indo-Pacific Command, though the nearest threat emanates from Russia across the Bering Strait (proximal to the European Command). This command relationship provides little assurance of a coordinated response in a crisis. For example, China has used buoys and balloons near Alaska to collect intelligence on the United States, and even went so far as to send Chinese nationals posing as tourists through

the Fort Wainwright gate near Fairbanks.<sup>194</sup> China has also coordinated with Russia to send combined naval patrols around the Aleutian Islands.<sup>195</sup> Additionally, two Russian nationals infiltrated Saint Lawrence Island to escape conscription.<sup>196</sup> Native Alaskans on the Seward Peninsula, in the Northwest Arctic Borough, and on Saint Lawrence Island have generational relationships with Indigenous communities living in the Eastern Military District of Russia, to the point that the United States and Russia created a Bering Strait Visa-Free Travel Program that allows Indigenous peoples to freely cross the Bering Strait.<sup>197</sup> Critical energy and homeland defense infrastructure in this area of Alaska is thus vulnerable to sabotage, due to both the challenge of mustering a coordinated response as well as the freedom of travel under the visa-free program. This underscores the necessity of ongoing threat and infrastructure assessments as well as the need for increased domain awareness and Arctic capability.<sup>198</sup>

The Department of Defense wants to achieve “Arctic dominance” by improving readiness, training, and exercises with allies and partners.<sup>199</sup> While these efforts—including training exercises like ARCTIC EDGE and efforts to strengthen Arctic-capable forces within the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division—represent a significant step in the right direction,

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<sup>194</sup> Tim Ellis, “Fort Wainwright Apprehended ‘Chinese Spies,’ Sullivan Says,” *Alaska Public Media* (blog), June 8, 2023, <https://alaskapublic.org/2023/06/08/fort-wainwright-apprehended-chinese-spies-sullivan-says/>; Yilek, “What We Know so Far about the Chinese Spy Balloon and the Other Objects the U.S. Shot Down”; Tiwari, “Canada Discovers ‘Chinese Buoys’ In The Arctic That Could Be Tracking U.S. Nuclear Submarines In The Region.”

<sup>195</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Nancy A. Youssef, “WSJ News Exclusive | Russia and China Sent Large Naval Patrol Near Alaska,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 6, 2023, sec. Politics, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-and-china-sent-large-naval-patrol-near-alaska-127de28b>.

<sup>196</sup> Murkowski and Sullivan, *Murkowski, Sullivan Respond to Russian Nationals Requesting Asylum on St. Lawrence Island* | *U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska*.

<sup>197</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Bering Strait Visa-Free Travel Program* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State), accessed October 25, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/bering-strait-visa-free-travel-program/>.

<sup>198</sup> Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Approach for Arctic Homeland Security* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Homeland Security, 2021), 19, [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/21\\_0113\\_plcy\\_dhs-arctic-strategy\\_0.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/21_0113_plcy_dhs-arctic-strategy_0.pdf).

<sup>199</sup> Department of the Army, *Regaining Arctic Dominance* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2021), 6–7, [https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/about/2021\\_army\\_arctic\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/about/2021_army_arctic_strategy.pdf); White House, *Implementation Plan for the 2022 National Security Strategy for the Arctic Region* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2023), 3, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/10/23/fact-sheet-implementation-plan-for-the-united-states-national-strategy-for-the-arctic-region/>.

they do not fully address the unique challenges of Arctic operations.<sup>200</sup> The Army does not have a coherent operational Arctic framework and struggles to execute training for large-scale combat operations (LSCOs) in Alaska.<sup>201</sup> Challenges stem from and are compounded by the extreme environment and terrain that stress people, equipment, mobility, and logistics, in addition to the limited available means of communication caused by sparse satellite coverage at such high latitudes. The same conditions that apply in temperate regions cannot be expected in the Arctic, including ease of temperate mobility and logistics, communications, medical treatment and evacuation, or equipment operation and repairs in non-hostile environments. Combined with the fact that Special Forces do not have any specified mission-essential tasks for the Arctic, oversimplifying these challenges creates conditions where units struggle to sustain, move, or operate beyond infiltration.

Further compounding these challenges are critical military shortfalls due to a strained relationship with Alaska Native communities, who possess the specific knowledge and skills that U.S. forces need to learn to operate effectively in this environment. The U.S. government has historically antagonized Indigenous peoples and its behavior in Alaska was no exception. During World War II, there was significant Indigenous membership in the Alaska Territorial Guard (ATG), a home defense unit that later became the Alaska Army National Guard scout battalions during the Cold War.<sup>202</sup> The end of the Cold War forced a re-examination of their role and mission in rural Alaska. There already existed tension caused by the comparison between National Guard regulations and the special exceptions given to Alaska Natives regarding waivers for aptitude testing, fitness levels, and required attendance at training and drills.<sup>203</sup> These exceptions for Alaska Natives were previously tolerated given their unique skills, remote location, hunting and fishing seasons, and remote way of life. The National Guard wanted to convert the scout units into conventional battalions, which necessitated integration into the rest of the U.S. force

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<sup>200</sup> White House, *Implementation Plan for the 2022 National Security Strategy for the Arctic Region*, 13.

<sup>201</sup> Staff Sgt. Michael Reinsch, "Preparing Today for Tomorrow's Fight," *Army News Service*, October 11, 2022, [https://www.army.mil/article/261004/preparing\\_today\\_for\\_tomorrows\\_fight](https://www.army.mil/article/261004/preparing_today_for_tomorrows_fight).

<sup>202</sup> Marston, *Men of the Tundra: Eskimos at War*, 209–12.

<sup>203</sup> "207th Infantry Group (Scout)."

structure and possible deployment away from Alaska.<sup>204</sup> These factors had not been a possibility previously due to Alaska Natives' specific place-based knowledge and utility to their ancestral territories. Many Alaska Natives viewed the enforcement of National Guard requirements as “as an attack on their capabilities, an insult to their heritage and pride, and even an attack on Alaska [Natives] themselves,” and “while Alaska [Natives] still serve in the Alaska National Guard, the end of the Alaska Scout battalions effectively sundered the National Guard’s connections with Alaska [Native] villages.”<sup>205</sup> As recently as 2009, the federal government moved to cut off retirement pay for veterans of the ATG, which only added insult to injury of the scout waivers being rescinded.<sup>206</sup> The federal and Alaska state governments, as well as the military and National Guard, would need to make amends with Alaska Native communities to again leverage their Arctic expertise. This must be done—while being careful not to treat Indigenous knowledge as mere means to an end—by taking significant action to invest in Alaska Native communities and preserve their cultural heritage for the benefit of both Indigenous peoples and U.S. defense.

### C. ARCTIC TOURISM

Arctic tourism, previously defined as misaligned and episodic training with poor personnel policies that dilute institutional expertise, occurs through several types of training events, each with unique implications. At the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center (JPMRC) in Alaska, a conventional Army brigade supported by Special Forces trains against a live opposition force in an LSCO scenario. In the European High North, Special Forces take part in theater security cooperation events that occur routinely with partners and allies aimed at building interoperability. In Alaska, Green Berets conduct special operations intended to deter strategic competitors through the demonstration of advanced infiltration and mobility capabilities.

When the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division and Special Forces conduct JPRMC rotations in Alaska, they train using virtually identical scenarios as they do in the Mojave Desert and

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<sup>204</sup> “207th Infantry Group (Scout).”

<sup>205</sup> Blyth, *Information Paper on the Alaska Scouts*, 1–2.

<sup>206</sup> The Associated Press, “Army Stops Retiree Pay for Alaskans in World War II Force.”

the swampy woodlands of Louisiana, where the other combat training centers are located. This one-scenario-fits-all-environments approach is understandable given the lack of Arctic-specific guidance, but does not make for realistic training. The likelihood of a conventional invasion occurring in Alaska is low and does not account for some of the most dangerous hybrid threats to the homeland, such as clandestine infiltration, infrastructure sabotage, economic subversion, or other malign influences. The United States Army writ large, and Special Forces especially, need to prepare for hybrid threats in Alaska more than they do for high latitude LSCO.

Previous rotations have demonstrated that even “Arctic-ready” Special Forces units struggle in Alaska.<sup>207</sup> Recent observations highlighted the Special Forces’ inability to conduct even short-range ground infiltration and unrealistic drop zone preparation for military free-fall operations, which does little to instill the conventional force’s confidence in Green Berets. Credibility matters because, in a future crisis or conflict, those same conventional commanders may avoid employing Special Forces due to their previous interactions with Green Berets in training environments.

During theater security cooperation events, Special Forces teams train with highly competent European Arctic partners. When U.S. teams arrive, they often show up without the necessary foundational skills to keep up with their Arctic partners.<sup>208</sup> Consequently, our allies are often burdened with providing basic Arctic training to ensure the teams’ minimum survivability. Even after receiving training in these fundamental skills, U.S. teams often still struggle to keep pace. The frequent personnel turnover within active-duty Special Forces units complicates matters further, limiting or diluting acquired base knowledge. As a result, our partners are forced to repeatedly start from scratch, impeding their ability to advance their interoperability with U.S. formations. This recurring cycle creates friction with our Arctic allies and hampers Special Forces’ progression in the wide array of Arctic competencies.

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<sup>207</sup> Martin, Tovo, and Kirkwood, “Nuance in Defining Arctic Capability,” 1.

<sup>208</sup> Thomas Boehm, Patrick Tomaszewski, and Nathan Carda, “Refining Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center SOF Rotations in Alaska” (Information Paper, Monterey, CA, Naval Postgraduate School, 2023), 1–5.

Special Operations in Alaska aimed at deterring Russia and China present the starkest example of Arctic tourism by intending to demonstrate the exclusive capabilities of Special Forces to operate in the Arctic. While these exercises are useful for influencing the information environment, highly publicized photo opportunities mask how little capability actually exists within Special Forces beyond flashy free-fall parachute and dive infiltrations. Special Forces may even be unintentionally misleading U.S. leaders about the strength of its capabilities through social media posts intended to deceive our strategic competitors. This continued under-preparedness sets the stage for potential disaster during a crisis or conflict.<sup>209</sup>

These three types of events (JPRMC rotations, theater security cooperation events, and deterrence special operations in Alaska) typify Arctic tourism, in which the participating units tend to build minimum capability solely for the event and then immediately shift to more pressing training for upcoming, non-Arctic operational deployments. Just as often, the collective institutional knowledge of the trained unit is lost when most of the members rotate out, forcing the unit to start at square one again with new members. The challenge of attaining minimum capability should not be underestimated, as it takes months of dedicated progressive training, exposure, and acclimation just to survive in the Arctic. Elevating a unit from basic cold weather competency to four-season Arctic capability requires a significant investment of time and resources that leaves little room for other priorities. The United States cannot feasibly have the same units simultaneously devoting limited time and finite resources to the Arctic as well as other regions. Addressing the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, deterring the PRC, and dealing with other challenges posed by our competitors understandably demands much of the operational force's attention, but the United States cannot afford to do this at the expense of, or completely neglect, Arctic readiness.

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<sup>209</sup> 10th Special Forces Group (@tenthsfg), "10th Special Forces Group on Instagram."

## D. A NATIONAL GUARD SOLUTION

Arctic tourism sets a dangerous precedent in an unforgiving environment, but there is a way to address the problem. The Arctic requires units with Arctic-focused mission-essential task lists, unique organization and equipment, and longer personnel assignments. The best option would be a National Guard Special Forces Company, but as a starting point, a single team could suffice. The U.S. Air Force currently employs a viable model in Alaska, where they maintain active-duty, Air National Guard, and reserve units that regularly interface with each other.<sup>210</sup> The Air Force uses local guard and reserve pilots, who have operated in the Arctic for years, to train and mentor rotational active-duty pilots and impart Alaska-specific expertise that takes years to develop. At present, the U.S. Army cannot adopt this model because current Alaska Army National Guard units have been consolidated in and around Anchorage and Juneau. This places the U.S. Army far from the Indigenous communities with whom they would need to build relationships to counter the hybrid threats along the western and northern Alaskan coasts. The current model sharply limits domain awareness. A Special Forces Company headquartered in Anchorage with its subordinate teams dispersed among periphery towns along the coast could remedy this. This would go far in building a reliable domain awareness network while developing the Arctic expertise of the unit itself.

This proposed framework would require shifting away from the current training model that peaks at flashy infiltration to an Indigenous-focused approach to learn Arctic expertise from those who have honed it for generations. A National Guard Special Forces unit, with longevity and the ability to develop lasting relationships with Alaska Natives, provides a clear way ahead to start repairing the relationship with local communities, addressing domain awareness gaps, and safeguarding vulnerable populations from malign influence.

An Alaska-based Special Forces unit could then be the training unit of choice to participate in Arctic exercises. This would further solidify the unit as the nexus for Special

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<sup>210</sup> Department of the Air Force, *Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 2020), 13, <https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/2020SAF/July/ArcticStrategy.pdf>.

Forces in Alaska and power projection in Arctic regions abroad. For JPMRC rotations, where integration, interoperability, and interdependence between Special Forces and the conventional Army is paramount, a truly Arctic-capable Special Forces unit could accurately convey its value to senior commanders.<sup>211</sup> In addition, training exercises would provide another opportunity to learn from and support Indigenous communities in coastal villages and bring additional funds and projects to the villages that most sorely need them. Taken together, these steps could begin to repair the fractured relationship between the federal government and Alaska’s Indigenous peoples.

By way of teaching, the unit of Arctic experts could serve as a cadre to teach Arctic survivability as well as tactics, techniques, and procedures to active-duty Special Forces units. Once the unit’s capability is firmly established, it could launch a special operations Arctic course to diffuse expertise across Special Forces and build Arctic capacity.

#### **E. CRITIQUES OF THIS APPROACH**

One could argue that this is a facile proposal with significant barriers to implementation, which do not justify the high associated costs. The first issue with establishing a National Guard Special Forces unit in Alaska is determining how exactly to do it. States can effectively “trade” National Guard units, but this is a contentious process that is filled with bureaucratic red tape and interstate resistance. States also have the option of reactivating old units, but this could strain current budgets and impact current force structure equities. The previously mentioned fractured relationship with Alaska Natives is another obstacle. Additionally, outside of isolated crisis events such as the China spy balloon incident, it is difficult to convey the strategic significance of investing in homeland defense in Alaska or maintaining a demanding capability like Arctic readiness to decision makers, particularly when compared to more immediate security requirements in Europe and the Pacific.

While these arguments are valid, they do not negate the fact that there is a critical gap in Arctic Homeland Defense and Arctic capabilities for power projection abroad.

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<sup>211</sup> Spangenberg, “SOF-CF Interoperability in Large-Scale Combat Operations.”



Furthermore, a National Guard Special Forces unit would be a smaller, more cost-effective option than the current conventional or active-duty units stationed in Alaska. Special Forces are purpose-built for working with partner forces and could begin to repair relationships with Alaska Natives to leverage their unique Arctic expertise and knowledge.

## **F. CONCLUSION**

This proposal aspires to first build true Arctic capability and, later, capacity. Multiple hurdles need to be cleared, including authorities, infighting among states, recruitment, funding, and relations with Alaskan Native populations. Establishing a long-term Special Forces Arctic capability supports domain awareness and homeland defense in Northern Command and projects power abroad. This can be done at a fraction of the cost by placing the right people with the right training to leverage the assets that already exist through an Indigenous approach.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

ARSOF generally and Special Forces specifically currently lack adequate manning, training, organization, and equipment to effectively operate in the Arctic. This dilemma is understandable given the preponderance of competing global requirements, the lack of an imminent threat in Alaska or Europe, and the cost in time and resources that Arctic preparedness demands. The fourth SOF truth describes: “Competent Special Operations Forces cannot be created after emergencies occur...Employment of fully capable special operations capability on short notice requires highly trained and constantly available SOF units in peacetime.”<sup>212</sup> This concept also applies to Arctic capability. To meet the demand, USASOC needs to make a deliberate effort in establishing an Arctic capability beyond the current model of Arctic Tourism.

An Arctic-focused National Guard Special Forces unit in Alaska is a feasible, cost-effective, and realistic option to start building towards that capability, and lays the foundation for a redux of the Alaska Territorial Guard program if a similar organization is deemed necessary. Further research is required to determine the feasibility and requirement for an Indigenous homeland defense and domain awareness organization like the modern Canadian Rangers. But an Arctic Special Forces element with the ability to partner with Alaska Natives sets the conditions for multiple options going forward. From our observations of current training and attendance at Arctic-focused conferences, the current situation is not conducive to Arctic readiness either in crises or campaigning.



Our proposals aspire to first build true Special Forces Arctic capability and, later, capacity. Multiple hurdles need to be cleared, including authorities, infighting among states, recruitment, funding, and relations with Alaskan Native populations. Establishing a long-term Special Forces Arctic capability supports domain awareness and homeland defense in Northern Command and projects power abroad. This can be done at a fraction of the cost by placing the right people with the right training to leverage the assets that already exist through an Indigenous approach.

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<sup>212</sup> USSOCOM, “SOF Truths,” accessed February 13, 2024, <https://www.socom.mil/about/sof-truths>.

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## APPENDIX: THE ARCTIC AND HOMELAND DEFENSE SYMPOSIUM 2023

# The Arctic and Homeland Defense Symposium 2023

**Key Takeaways:**

- USASOC facilitated the ongoing research of three Army Special Forces Officers which allowed them to engage across the JIM environment to advance and secure vital support for capstone research. Specifically, a planned case study on the Alaskan Scouts and irregular warfare campaigning.
- It remains clear that Arctic security stakeholders are unsure how land component/ARSOF forces will be employed in the Alaskan Arctic. Speakers and organizations focused on Air, Maritime, Space, and Cyber domains in the Arctic, barely mentioning the Land domain, all while using photos of ground-based forces in Arctic terrain.

Symposium Attendee	Relevancy to Capstone Project	Deliverables
<b>Mr. Peter Belk</b> NORTHCOM DJ3, SES (US)	Deep knowledge of SOF and strong relationship with NPS. Understands capabilities ARSOF can employ in the region. Strategic viewpoint: NSC, SOCOM, NORTHCOM	Will provide support to research and publishing
<b>Dr. Whitney Lackenbauer</b> , Network Lead, North America Arctic Defense and Security Network (Canada)	Subject matter expert on the Canadian Rangers as a contemporary low-cost, indigenous means for Domain Awareness in the North American Arctic. Has written and published extensively regarding Canadian Rangers and North American security.	Integration into Alaskan Scouts case study as guest lecturer/seminar lead
<b>Dr. Lance Blyth</b> , NORTHCOM/NORAD Command Historian	NORTHCOM/NORAD Command Historian with connections to command historians across both active and national guard components	Has connected USASOC, AK NG, US Army, and NG Bureau historians with capstone group
<b>Mr. Michael Unbehaun</b> , HQDA DCS G-3/5/7, Studies and Research Coordinator	Focused on legacy Alaska Scouts & Contemporary Canadian Rangers as means for Domain Awareness in Arctic	Connection with Army and DOD-centric view of Alaskan Arctic
Valuable Engagements	Relevancy to Capstone Project	Deliverables
<b>CDR, C/3/10SFG(A)</b>	Provided and received feedback on recommendations in upcoming white paper for SOTD on Arctic JPMRC rotations	SOTD white paper on Arctic JPMRC rotations
<b>10SFG(A) Winter Warfare Det.</b>	Valuable insight into the challenges of training and resourcing Arctic-Ready/Capable Units of Action	Continued engagement regarding training in the Alaskan Arctic
<b>Lead SOCNORTH Planner for POLAR DAGGER</b>	Gained refined insight into how SOCNORTH/NORTHCOM envision ARSOF training and operations in the Arctic and how to leverage messaging to impose costs on adversaries	Continued engagement regarding training and operations in the Alaskan Arctic
<b>Incoming SOFLE to the ALCOM G-3/5</b>	Key stakeholder synchronizing ALCOM/11 <sup>th</sup> ABN DIV and SOCNORTH priorities, advocate for ARSOF in the Arctic	Continued engagement regarding training and operations in the Alaskan Arctic

The Arctic and Homeland Defense Symposium provided a valuable platform to learn and explore the strategies for strengthening homeland defense efforts. As the Arctic region gains strategic significance, this symposium offered an opportunity to consider the potential utilization of Special Operations to address evolving security challenges, enhance domain awareness, and collaborate with the local population.

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\*All discussion panel participants in notes

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