

# The Special Operations Memorial

The US Special Operations Command Memorial Foundation, Inc., is a non-profit organization dedicated to creating an everlasting memorial to all special operations personnel of all Services. The concept was a vision of the late Richard Leandri who was also the driving force for the Ranger Memorial now in place at Fort Benning, Georgia.

In 1995, Dick Leandri contacted a select few civilians (including Peter Kreuziger and Dick Tappan) and special operations retirees (MG Joe Lutz and Geoff Barker) from the Tampa Bay community, and formulated his plan. The original concept placed the memorial in the traffic circle immediately to the front of the headquarters of the U.S. Special Operations Command. This vision was supported by (then) USCINCSOC, General Wayne A. Downing, and the Memorial Foundation was born. Within each Service there are many fine memorials depicting the courage, missions, and accomplishments of their members. The Special Operations Memorial located at MacDill AFB is the first joint/all-Service special operations memorial to be placed in the United States. A monument long overdue to memorialize those quiet professionals often unrecognized who have maintained the safety and integrity of our great nation. Dick Leandri passed away unexpectedly in 1998. He was recognized on 2 November 1998, at a ceremony at MacDill AFB, when General Peter J. Schoomaker, Commander in Chief, USSOCOM, posthumously awarded the Outstanding Civilian Service Medal to Dick Leandri.

Major General Joseph C. Lutz, USA (Ret), the first military retiree member of the Foundation passed away in 1999 as he was serving as the Foundation Chairman. Plaques commemorating Richard Leandri and Major General Joe Lutz are placed, one on either side, of the entrance wings of the memorial site.

During the tenure of General Henry H. Shelton, following General Downing as Commander in Chief, USSOCOM, the location was next planned to be immediately to the front of USSOCOM, augmenting the security to the front of the building. This requirement ceased as USSOCOM, under the command of General Peter J. Schoomaker, became the focus of much tighter and more stringent physical security measures, in part due to terrorist targeting of United States facilities overseas. In order to retain accessibility to the memorial site, General Schoomaker strongly supported discussions with Brigadier General Solingen, (then) Base Commander, MacDill AFB., to place the memorial in its present choice location close by the primary entrance to the USSOCOM complex.

The statue was unveiled and dedicated during ceremonies hosted by General Schoomaker on 6 April 1999. The statue is the focal point of the memorial, with surrounding walls designed to accommodate engravings to memorialize past, present, and future special operations personnel and organizations.

The first donations came from the Tampa Bay civilian community, a continuing source of revenue. In 1997 the Special Operations Association (SOA), who had earlier considered funding a similar memorial in Washington, DC, elected to join the Special Operations Memorial Foundation at MacDill AFB. Inspired by Committee Chairman Larry Trimble, SOA collected more donations than any other single organization. The Special Forces Association took up the challenge and became a co-sponsor in 1998, also boasting a sizeable combined donation to the cause. In late 1998 the Foundation welcomed the UDT/SEAL Association as a co-sponsor, to honor and perpetuate the memory and traditions of their special operators. The 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regiment Association joined us in 2001.

Phase I was the installation of the central figure and the placement of the adjacent walls, the next phase will be to expand the monument with engraving plazas to the left and right. The walls are intended to eventually hold concise histories of the generic special operations forces of all Services. The central, prominent wall holds engravings of those special operations personnel awarded the Medal of Honor (and the three Australian posthumous recipients of the Victoria Cross, earned while working with U.S. Special Forces in the Republic of Vietnam). On either side of the MOH and VC recipients are the special operations personnel killed in action or killed in training since the first modern-day joint special operations mission - the Iran Hostage Rescue attempt (Operation EAGLE CLAW) in 1980.

We challenge you to keep the flame of freedom burning brightly, by participating in our Engraving Program. Engravings vary in size, as described in the accompanying application. They honor the memory of fallen or past comrades, and also keep alive the names of today's special operators. They have been purchased as farewell gifts for personnel departing units for reassignment, for prior-Service members, and by individuals adding their own name in support of this worthy cause. One contributor purchased an engraving for each of his twenty-two comrades who lost their lives, or have since passed on, who served with his Special Forces unit in the Republic of Vietnam.

The Special Operations Memorial currently provides a unique tribute to special operations forces as the first and only truly joint memorial paying tribute to SOF personnel of all Services. This is made possible by the voluntary contributions being made by today's active force, from their predecessors, relatives of SOF personnel, the civilian community, and through their respective special operations fraternal organizations.

**We sincerely thank you for your support.**

