**Delta Force**

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*For the computer game, see Delta Force (computer game).*

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| **1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta (Airborne)** | |
| 1st SFOD-D (A) Insignia | |
| **Active:** | 1978 |
| **Country:** | United States |
| **Branch:** | United States Army |
| **Type:** | Special Forces |
| **Role:** | Versatile Special Operations Force, mainly trained for Counter-Terrorism. |
| **Command structure:** | U.S. Army Special Operations Command |
| **Garrison/HQ:** | Fort Bragg, North Carolina |
| **Culture and history** | |
| **Nickname:** | "Delta Force" |
| **Notable battles or wars:** | Operation Urgent Fury Operation Just Cause Operation Desert Storm Operation Restore Hope Operation Enduring Freedom Operation Iraqi Freedom |

The **1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta** (**1st SFOD-D**), commonly known as **Delta** within the U.S. Army or as **Delta Force** by the general public and officially recognized by the Pentagon as the **Combat Applications Group**, is a Special Operations Force (SOF) and an element of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC).

The force's main task is counter-terrorism, although it is extremely versatile. Delta Force is believed to conduct missions similar to those regularly attributed to the British Special Air Service (SAS), after which it was modeled.

**Background**

The Pentagon tightly controls information about Delta Force and publicly refuses to comment on the secretive unit. The unit took part in Operation Eagle Claw, the failed attempt to rescue American hostages from the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1980. The mission failed due to an overly complex plan, inadequate Special Operations Aviation training for the aircrews, a collision between a rescue helicopter and a re-fueling tanker aircraft, and mechanical problems with the helicopters transporting the rescuers, caused by a severe sandstorm clogging the engine intakes and reducing visibility to nothing. After the debacle, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) was created to transport special forces personnel to and from Areas of Operation.

Since the 1990s, the Army has posted recruitment notices for the 1st SFOD-D, which many believe refers to Delta Force. The Army, however, has never released an official fact sheet for the force.

In 1999, writer Mark Bowden published the book *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* which chronicles the events that surrounded the October 3, 1993 Battle of Mogadishu. The book, in a short brief, relates Delta Force's involvement in the operations that occurred before the events leading to the battle. The book was later turned into a film by director Ridley Scott in 2001.

**Operations**

According to the book *Inside Delta Force* by CSM Eric L. Haney (ret.), the smallest unit is a team, consisting of four to five members. Each team specializes in HALO/HAHO, SCUBA, or other skill groups. The next tier is the troop level, consisting of four to five teams. Finally, squadron level (there are four squadrons) consists of two troops (Assault and Sniper). Squadrons are broken down into troops and teams as needed to fit mission requirements.

Each individual member of Delta is known as an *operator* such as in the Australian SAS. This was to avoid confusion with the CIA's term *operative*.

In *Not A Good Day To Die: The Untold Story Of Operation Anaconda*, *Army Times* staff writer Sean Naylor describes Delta as having nearly 1,000 soldiers. Naylor wrote that only 250 of those are operators trained to conduct direct-action and reconnaissance missions. Those soldiers are divided into three squadrons—A, B, and C—with each squadron subdivided into three troops. Two are assault troops while a third troop specializes in reconnaissance and surveillance and is known as the "recce" troop. The remaining soldiers in Delta are highly trained specialists in mechanics, communications, intelligence and other support activities, and a headquarters staff. Naylor also wrote that Delta maintains an aviation squadron based somewhere else on the East Coast.

**Recruitment and training**

Most recruits come from the United States Army Special Forces (Green Berets) and 75th Ranger Regiment, but recruits are also drawn from all branches of the Army.

**Delta Force in modern conflicts**

One of several operations in which Delta Force operators are thought to have played important roles was the invasion of Iraq in 2003. They allegedly entered Baghdad in advance, undercover with long hair and moustaches, along with SEALs from DEVGRU, guiding air strikes, building networks of informants while eavesdropping on and sabotaging Iraqi communication lines.

The force was also involved in the offensive against the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2002. Many observers strongly suspect that members of Delta Force made up one of two units involved in a raid on a residence belonging to Mullah Omar. According to the Pentagon, the level of resistance to that operation was minimal.

The Mullah was not present but some papers and computer disks were said to have been seized in the raid. Critics later alleged that the second unit was unnecessary, claiming that it was very large and uncoordinated. As a result, they say, the defenders were alerted early and the number of friendly casualties was in fact higher than reported. According to the book *Shadow Wars* by David Pugliese, Delta operators wanted a quiet insertion method which was denied as command opted for a combined Ranger assault. Taliban fighters apparently ambushed the team when they were extracting and several Delta operators were severely wounded.

Delta Force operators are granted an enormous amount of flexibility and autonomy, as with their Navy counterpart, DEVGRU. They reportedly do not maintain any general uniformed presence and civilian clothing is the norm on or off duty while at Ft. Bragg. This is done to conceal the identities of these "secret soldiers". Uniforms are rarely worn, if at all, with any markings, names, or branch names on them. Hair styles and facial hair are allowed to grow to civilian standards in order for the force to be able to blend in and not be immediately recognized as military personnel.

This special status that sets the force apart from the "regular army" is depicted quite accurately in the book *Black Hawk Down* by Mark Bowden, and the film of the same name. The Army Rangers in the media, elite by their own right, have the standard "high and tight" haircuts, yet the Delta operators are seen to be sporting much longer styles with side burns, un-shaven faces, and non-military issue helmets (actually hockey helmets, more to protect from bumps and scrapes while entering buildings than against gunfire, as noted in the book) and boots.

According to *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War*, Delta Force members are typically referred to by other personnel as "D-Boys", "Operators", "Rocks", or simply "Delta". The book also mentions that they hold little regard for rank within their force and refer to one another only by nicknames. Throughout the book Delta soldiers are recorded as expressing contempt for other, more regular US Army units, dismissing their training and combat performance. The Rangers on the other hand are throughout recorded as being in awe of the Delta soldiers, who were almost invariably older and with much greater skill and experience.

Delta's unconventional nature also allows its operators to carry highly customized weapons. Although their standard weapon of choice may be the M4 carbine, they also use the SOPMOD (Special Operations Peculiar Modification) kit on the M4, and it is not unusual to find them carrying foreign weapon systems that are often used by the enemy in the Area of Operation (AO). This is to either help them "blend in" with the locals or to use the ammunition from slain enemy fighters.

Additionally, in his book *Killing Pablo*, Mark Bowden suggests that a Delta Force sniper may have assassinated Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar. There is no hard evidence of this though and credit is generally attributed to Colombian security forces.

Delta Force has formed the core of the special strike unit which has been hunting individuals like Osama Bin Laden and others since the October 2001 beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom. It has been variously designated Task Force 11, then seemingly Task Force 121, then after that Task Force 145 and Task Force 6-26 (not necessarily in that order(!)).

**Operations**

* Operation Eagle Claw: Iran, 1980
* Operation Urgent Fury: Grenada, 1983
* Operation Acid Gambit: Panama, 1989
* Operation Just Cause: Panama, 1989
* Operation Desert Shield: Iraq, 1990
* Operation Desert Storm: Iraq, 1991
* Operation Restore Hope: Somalia, 1993
  + Operation Gothic Serpent: the operation that led to the Battle of Mogadishu
* Operation Enduring Freedom: Afghanistan, 2001
* Operation Anaconda: Afghanistan, 2002
* Operation Iraqi Freedom: Iraq, 2003

**Famous Delta Force operators**

* Colonel Charles Beckwith
  + Selected by President Jimmy Carter to organize and form a highly specialized counter-terrorism unit, known today as Delta Force.
* Major Richard Meadows
  + Key role in establishing Delta Force.
* General Peter J. Schoomaker
  + 35th Chief of Staff of the United States Army. Commander of *1st SFOD-D* from 1989–1992.
* Lieutenant General William G. Boykin
  + Commander of 1st SFOD-D from 1992–1995. Commanding Officer of the 1st SFOD-D unit at the Battle of Mogadishu.
* Master Sergeant Gary Gordon
  + Medal of Honor, KIA in the October 3, 1993, during the Battle of Mogadishu.
* Sergeant First Class Randall Shughart
  + Medal of Honor, KIA in the October 3, 1993, during the Battle of Mogadishu.
* Eric L. Haney, Command Sergeant Major, US Army (ret)
  + Self-proclaimed founding member of Delta Force who has sparked controversy in his post-Army career. Wrote the book *Inside Delta Force: The Story of America's Elite Counter-terrorist Unit*, upon which the television series *The Unit* is based (and self-referenced in show credits). Many of Haney's specific mission claims are disputed by current and former SFOD members, though there is no dispute as to his having served in Delta Force during the time periods he describes.
* Sergeant First Class Paul Howe
  + The real life version of Delta Force Sergeant First Class Jeff Sanderson, played by William Fichtner in the film *Black Hawk Down*. Name changes were made in an attempt to keep the Delta Force operators anonymous.

**Delta Force in popular culture**

* Delta Force is referenced to in many video games, and is often a playable force.
* In the American movie Predator, actor Arnold Schwarzenegger leads a Delta Force group into the Amazon jungle to search for fallen Green Berets.
* Delta Force was the subject of the film The Delta Force starring Chuck Norris.
* In the television series *24*, agent Jack Bauer is noted to have previously been a member of Delta Force.
* In the novel Deception Point by Dan Brown, Delta Force plays a major antagonist role.