

# COMBAT DIVING IN SPECIAL WARFARE

BY CAPTAIN SACHARY GRIFFITHS

*The views presented are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Defense Department or the U.S. government.*

On July 9, 2014, a video of Hamas divers infiltrating to attack Kibbutz Zikim in Israel spiked to more than half a million views on YouTube.<sup>01</sup> Diversionary mortar fire suppressed Israeli defenses as wet-suited divers flowed through the low-ground in rebreathers with ready weapons. Now, consider Hamas' March 29, 2004 raid. Two 18-year-olds — in wetsuits and flippers — died outgunned on the beach.<sup>02</sup> Though the 2014 attack was unsuccessful, Hamas' adaptation is clear.

Israel is taking this innovation seriously. *The Algemeiner* reported in late 2014 that Israel deployed the PointShield system to spot divers 500 meters offshore.<sup>03</sup> However, Hamas' divers have not been deterred. Last May, *The Jerusalem Post* reported that the Israel Security Agency and Nitzana border guards intercepted 40 wetsuits being smuggled into Gaza.<sup>04</sup> This innovation is not confined to paramilitary organizations; drug smugglers and other nefarious groups are operating underwater.

Meanwhile, Special Forces Underwater Operations struggles to stay above the Special Warfare Center and School's cut-line. Recent changes to SFUWO — the proposed underwater advanced infiltration course and the return of equipment testing authority — will improve our maritime infiltration capability. SFUWO's future divers will still be great Green Berets with the same haircuts, the same short-shorts and same equipment as those divers memorialized on my barracks room walls. Twin-80s will crush them and they'll wheeze through the LAR-V. But while they rehearse subsurface swims to resistance linkups, insurgent groups are reinventing combat diving on the cheap. Infiltration isn't enough.

SFUWO was established 52 years ago to train Green Berets in subsurface infiltration. Diving has proliferated and its time to expand beyond infiltration: Let's train combat diving advisors.

The equipment is out there. On May 8, 2008, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam claimed responsibility for destroying a Sri Lankan supply ship. At 2:20 a.m., a Sea Tiger suicide diver punched a large hole in the 60-meter ship's hull, sinking it at anchor in the Trincomalee Naval Station.<sup>05</sup> *Jane's Navy International* reported in 2009 that the Sea Tigers were hand fabricating four submarines and diving with modern rebreathers.<sup>06</sup> These capabilities began at home, where the Sea Tigers built a capable irregular navy by leveraging off-the-shelf equipment and local expertise.

Basic human capacity exists in tourist diving guides. The Professional Association of Diving Instructors reports there are certified instructors in 190 countries.<sup>07</sup> Even Somaliland boasts the Maan-Soor Hotel, a five-star diving resort.<sup>08</sup> With these trainers, and the penetration of dive shops into coastal areas, future naval insurgents, like the Sea Tigers, have the raw material they need.



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## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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01

**A SFUWO student emerges from the water in an LAR-V rebreather.** U.S. ARMY PHOTO

02

**SFUWO students prepare to jump into the pool during training with "Twin-80" tanks on their backs.** U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY THOMAS K. FITZGERALD

03

**SFUWO students train underwater with the LAR-V rebreather.** U.S. ARMY PHOTO



02

Maritime insurgents have the raw material — but make basic mistakes. Hamas and the Sea Tigers both innovated from weakness, fabricating equipment and refining tactics. However, deadly missteps like Hamas' choice to spring a daytime assault show that irregular groups would benefit from expert advice. Guerrillas need to run messages, reconnoiter, cache equipment and even destroy 60-meter ships. They do not need high-end dive capabilities, but irregular combat divers with Green Beret training could turn the tide on a repressive regime.

Training indigenous forces is our competitive advantage. The Special Forces are unconventional warriors, borne from advising resistance groups in World War II. Lieutenant General (Retired) Charles Cleveland codified our return to first principles with *Army Special Operations Forces 2022* and *ARSOF Next*. Our underwater operations should support efforts to win in the Human Domain.

Some might expect the SEALs to do this, but it's not their job. At-sea rescues of Richard Philips from the Maersk Alabama and stealthy swims to shore against Al-Sha-

bab militants show the SEALs at their best: masters of high-end diving and seaside direct action. While their mission includes developing partner capability, the Special Forces are the nation's choice for irregular trainers. Give us high-end diving; let us train irregular forces.

There are three steps to getting this started:

First, we should study how diving impacts irregular conflicts. Rather than the narrow mission of subsurface infiltration, SFUWO should produce the Regiment's experts in maritime insurgency and foreign internal defense.

Then, we should validate this concept by training diving candidates to be our Sea Tigers in an unconventional warfare Joint Readiness Training Center rotation. A successful rotation would validate this concept like the Louisiana Maneuvers validated modern combined arms before World War II.

Simultaneously, we can test and field foreign equipment. The world doesn't dive the LAR-V and twin-80s. With the recently restored testing authorization at SFUWO, we should prepare our Green Berets by experimenting with Russian IDA-71 and AVM-12-K, the French Amphora and other common rigs. Prepare our Green Berets by packing the prep stations with foreign equipment.

Diving has changed. Let's adapt. **SW**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**NOTES** **01.** "Hamas Terrorists Infiltrate Israel and Are Neutralized." YouTube. July 8, 2014. Accessed January 4, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ff1Vb1ZqSE&feature=youtu.be>. **02.** "Israeli Soldiers Kill Two Palestinian Frogmen." Taipei Times. March 27, 2004. Accessed January 4, 2016. <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/world/archives/2004/03/27/2003107961>. **03.** "Israel Deploying Underwater Barrier, Sonar Array Against Hezbollah Divers (VIDEO)." The Algemeiner. December 28, 2014. Accessed January 4, 2016. <http://www.algemeiner.com/2014/12/28/israel-deploying-underwater-barrier-sonar-array-against-hezbollah-divers-video/>. **04.** Lappin, Yaakov. "Israel Intercepts 40 Diving Suits En Route to Gaza." The Jerusalem Post. May 5, 2015. Accessed January 4, 2016. <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Israel-intercepts-40-diving-suits-en-route-to-gaza-403399>. **05.** Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka). "Attempt to disrupt poll thwarted." May 16, 2008. LexisNexis Academic. **06.** "Sri Lanka learns to counter Sea Tigers' swarm tactics." *Janes Navy International* March (2009): 25. **07.** "Worldwide Corporate Statistics 2015 Worldwide." Professional Association of Diving Instructors. Accessed January 4, 2016. <http://www.padi.com/scuba-diving/documents/2015-WW-Statistics/>. **08.** "Maansoor Dive Club." Maan-Soor Hotel. June 22, 2008. Accessed January 4, 2016. <http://maan-soor.com/berbera/index.php/East-African-Dive-Club-Maansoor-Hotel-Dive-club-somaliland-dive-club-first-dive-club-african-PADI.html>.