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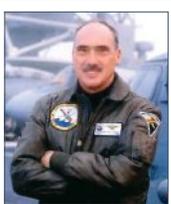


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SPECIAL OPERATIONS INDUSTRY CONFERENCE EXPLORES CUTTING-EDGE UNMANNED SURFACE VEHICLE TECHNOLOGY



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network with SOF community leaders at *other* times during the year will routinely be challenged and asked, "Did you attend SOFIC?" Small wonder that over 350 companies exhibited at the most recent event and that attendance pushed past 11,000.



» The Honorable Ellen M. Lord, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, dons a virtual reality headset during the 2018 Special Operations Forces Industry Conference. SOFIC is the premiere conference for the SOF community to interact with vendors and to collaborate on delivering new technology to warfighters. Photo credit: U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Barry Loo.



» Members of industry and government converge in downtown Tampa, Fla., during the 2018 Special Operations Forces Industry Conference on May 22. SOFIC is the premier conference for the SOF community to interact with vendors and to collaborate on delivering new technology to warfighters. Photo credit: U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Barry Loo.

Once every year, the United States Special Operations Command hosts SOFIC – the Special Operations Forces Industry Conference. The most recent event – held at the Tampa, Florida Convention Center – drew well over 10,000 visitors who came to hear senior leaders from the SOF community share their most compelling needs with industry.

The Special Operations Forces Industry Conference is the premier conference for the SOF community to interact with industry and to collaborate on the challenges, initiatives and way-ahead in delivering the most cutting-edge capabilities into the hands of SOF operators. While other military-industry conferences are important, it's easy to vote this event number one as a "can't miss" event.

Here's the "inside baseball" reason why: The SOF community invests an enormous amount of time, talent and energy in this event. *All* senior SOF community leaders speak and interact with attendees. *All* USSOCOM Program Executive Office program managers spend quality time with attendees. *All* senior SOF community leaders attend an industry panel with senior representatives of companies helping man, train and equip SOF warriors.

Because of the investment in time and talent the SOF community dedicates in putting together SOFIC, there is a strong expectation that industry partners large and small who want to do business with USSOCOM attend and interact during this once-a-year event. This expectation carries over throughout the year to the extent that industry representatives wanting to

One of the things that attracts attendees to SOFIC is the hands-on nature of the event – it includes vastly more than the typical "static" contractor exhibits. At this year's SOFIC, SOF operators had the opportunity to test drive innovative, cutting-edge technologies that could directly support SOF operators who are in the field and in the fight today.

Perhaps the best way to describe the value-added of SOFIC to the military and industry is to relate the experience of one small company that brought its innovative technology – fast, stealthy and modularized unmanned surface vehicles (USVs) – to the event. These USVs displayed and operated at SOFIC were from the MANTAS family of Tactical Autonomous Unmanned Surface Vessels.

Bruce Hanson, CEO of MARTAC (Maritime Tactical Systems Inc.) based in Satellite Beach, Florida, said this about *why* his company brought their MANTAS USV to SOFIC: "SOFIC is an important event for MARTAC because we recognize that our SOF operators are the ones taking the fight to America's enemies *today*."

The MANTAS USV was one of several systems demonstrated at SOFIC and is illustrative of the hands-on nature of the event. Why is hands-on important? It's because today's special operators are



» The MANTAS T-series USVs integrate open-architecture design. The hydrodynamic hull and sleek profile allow higher speeds, with superior maneuverability, while unmanned operation minimizes manpower requirements. Photo credit: Jack Rowley.

in the fight today across the globe and aren't especially interested in long-range development projects that will deliver technology in the "out-years." They need to test-drive gear and determine whether it is something that will help them in their next deployment.

SOF reps from all services were provided with a hands-on demonstration where they were able to test-drive a twelve-foot MANTAS USV and see the real-time surface picture the system provided. In this case, operators drove a twelve-foot MANTAS equipped with a SeaFLIR230 EO/IR Gyrostabilized High Resolution Camera. The system was operated in the bay fronted by the Tampa Convention Center, sending real-time visual imagery to the operators. These SOF professionals then made in-stream command and control decisions regarding where to redeploy the MANTAS USV for additional, or zoom-enhanced, imagery.

In another application, MARTAC demonstrated the ability of a twelve-foot MANTAS USV equipped with a Teledyne Reson T20 High Resolution Multi-Beam Echosounder to map channel boundaries, piers and other structures, as well as image underwater objects on the harbor bottom in the area near the Tampa Convention Center. The MANTAS USV transmitted these images in real-time where they were viewed on multiple devices, including a laptop, a tablet, and a smart phone.

MARTAC also demonstrated a prototype eight-foot MANTAS hybrid/stealth USV that operated at neutral buoyancy to demonstrate the ability of the craft to work in a semi-submersible mode with the upper deck at water level and only the antennas protruding above the water. SOF operators noted that the USV was virtually impossible to see as it made its way throughout Tampa Bay.

The value of these hands-on demonstrations is clear. As Jack Rowley, MARTAC Chief

Technology Officer and Senior Naval Architect/Ocean Engineer noted, "SOFIC is one of the most important military-industry events for MARTAC. The ability to have SOF operators 'test-drive' our MANTAS USVs provides us with invaluable feedback that helps us evolve continuous upgrades to our family of MANTAS Tactical Autonomous Unmanned Surface Vessels. Since our company's founding six years ago, one of our primary goals has been to continually drive creativity and to challenge the technological boundaries of unmanned surface systems."



» Multinational Special Operations Forces aboard an MH-6 Little Bird helicopter and a Special Operations Craft – Riverine boat approach a simulated enemy position during a capabilities demonstration as part of the 2018 International Special Operations Forces week in downtown Tampa, Fla., May 22, 2018. Photo credit: U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Barry Loo.

SOFIC will occur in Tampa again during May 20-23, 2019. For defense industry companies wanting to put their new technology in the hands of the operators who are in the fight today around the globe, SOFIC should be at the top of their list.

For more information, visit www.sofic.org.



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