

Guatemalan Marines complete counter-drug training with U.S. counterparts

by Staff Sgt. Westin Warburton
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3/17/2016 - **GUATEMALA CITY, Guatemala** - Guatemalan Marines conducting a counter-drug training partnership with U.S. Marines graduated a class from a basic infantry course March 10, 2016, in Guatemala, giving the country's counter-drug forces a greater capacity to focus their operations on operating in urban environments and in small teams.

The Central American nation sent marines and sailors to the course, instructed by trainers with a U.S. Security Cooperation Team, to receive live-fire proficiency training, practice small-team tactics and learn to operate in urban environments.

"The main goal for the Guatemalan marines is to counter transnational crime," said U.S. Marine Corps Capt. Joe Thiel, Guatemalan SC Team officer in charge. "We are providing them with basic infantry skills [and] moving into more advanced urban combat skills to help them accomplish their mission."

During the SC Team's six-month deployment, the Marines will train military members from Belize, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, who requested trainers with various skills to help them build their counter-drug capabilities.

The training blocks are divided into two courses, a four-week infantry training course and a two-week instructor course, which provides the people who complete the courses the ability to conduct more advanced infantry maneuvers and instruct other members.

"This is a great experience for the individual Marine because they get to meet our [partners] in [Central America]," said Thiel. "It also establishes the fact that we are still an expeditionary force in readiness and can affect any corner of the world. It keeps our relationships alive with our [partners] so that we may fight against the common enemy. It is a great responsibility."

Each SC Team advises, mentors, and trains their counterparts depending on the specific needs of their mission.

For the final exercise, the Guatemalan marines traversed through a thick jungle to reach an objective point. The objective, a house staged with opposing forces and mock narcotics, tested the team's ability to navigate to the house and tactically assault it.

The team withdrew to the jungle once they cleared the house, only to encounter an ambush by another opposing force. At this point the Guatemalan marines implemented their training to counter the simulated attackers and conducted mock arrests.

"For the Guatemalans, they specifically wanted infantry Marines to train them on urban combat, land navigation, and an overview of what you would see at a basic infantry level," said U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Josh McDonald, Guatemalan team lead instructor.

Having such tailored training allows the Marines to tune in on exactly what skills and requirements are needed to better teach each partner nation.

"It's not only about training though, this allows us to establish [a] rapport with our partner nations," said McDonald. "We are giving them power to stand up for themselves and not be dependent on the U.S. in times of need. I take away a great sense of pride from training the Guatemalan marines because they want to protect



Guatemalan marines conduct water assault training under the supervision of U.S. Marines March 9, 2016, Guatemala, as a part of a U.S. Security Cooperation Team. The Guatemalan marines completed a final exercise before their graduation, testing skills they learned during the four-week training course, which taught them how to more effectively combat drug trafficking criminal organizations. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Westin Warburton/RELEASED)

their families and country and that reminds me of why I joined myself."

After the current team's deployment comes to an end, new teams will arrive to help continuing to reinforce skills where previous teams left off.

This year marks the fourth iteration of SC Teams supporting the Central American militaries and is a part of a continuing effort between Central American nations to deter the operations of drug-trafficking organizations in the region.