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The United States Army Special Forces requires support personnel to execute a variety of missions and currently a gap exists in the quality of Soldiers assigned in these support positions. An assessment and selection course is not feasible due to the number of positions required to be filled. The Army can utilize initial entry accessions, intra-service recruiting and screening, and a Group level combat course to fill the slots. The Army places the manning of Special Forces Groups as a main priority and needs to emplace systems to ensure the quality of personnel matches the quantity required.

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Right Support Soldier in the Right Job: Options to Fill Special Forces Support-Personnel
Positions


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Executive Summary

Title: Right Support Soldier in the Right Job: Options to fill Special Forces Support Personnel Positions

Author: Major Derek Thompson, United States Army

Thesis: Is there a solution to ensure Special Forces groups receive the best-qualified and capable support Soldiers capable of enabling special operations and increasing unit readiness? The scope includes an analysis of the Special Forces Groups size and organizational structure and comparison to the Army Ranger Regiment assessment and selection. The Ranger Assessment and Selection Program is a similar model for assessment and selection due to the similarities in organizational structure. The desired characteristics and attributes of a Special Forces Support Soldier are a defining issue for the Army and Army Special Operations Command in order to identify those characteristics within the Army population. There are methods that provide possibilities to assign the right soldier with the right characteristics to Special Forces Groups. There is low feasibility for an assessment and selection for support personnel assigned to Special Forces Groups. The Army can implement an initial entry accessions option, adopt intra-service screening methods, and utilize the Special Forces Combat Course-Support as a screening tool for support Soldiers assigned to Special Forces Groups.

Discussion: Special Forces Groups consist of two types of personnel. Special Forces-qualified Soldiers attend an assessment and selection and support personnel assigned by Human Resources Command. Human Resources Command and United States Army Special Operations Command assign personnel without additional screening or assessment methods. Is there feasibility for a Support-Soldier Accessions and Selection Program? What characteristics and attributes are

required to fill these positions and what options does the Army possess? The Army must identify these characteristics and attributes and work within the Army manning guidance to fill these critical positions.

Conclusion: Special Operations personnel continue to deploy around the world at a rapid pace. All Special Operations require support personnel to ensure mission accomplishment. The Army should adopt a combination of accessions, screening, and a combat course to ensure Special Forces Groups place the right Soldier in the right position. The implementation of these methods should occur in reverse order with newly assigned Soldiers undertaking the Special Forces Basic Combat Course-Support. The Special Forces Regiment will use this data to determine the feasibility of expanding the other accessions methods.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. OVERVIEW OF ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Special operations are missions to accomplish strategic objectives where the use of conventional forces would produce unacceptable risks due to friction.¹ The joint doctrine states special operations require "unique modes of employment, tactics, techniques, procedures, and equipment."² United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) is the Army Service Component Command responsible to "man, train, equip, educate, organize, sustain, and support forces to conduct special operations across the full range of military operations and that spectrum of conflict in support of joint force commanders and interagency partners, to meet theater and national objectives."³ The largest sub-component command of USASOC is the 1st Special Forces Command (1st SFC (A)).⁴ All Army Special Operations require both elite operational personnel and support personnel that enable the success of the mission. Support personnel are defined as Soldiers assigned to 1st Special Forces Command who have not completed the Special Forces Qualification Course or are no longer members of the Special Forces career-management field. Due to the politically sensitive and unique character of special-operations, each member of the Special Forces command has an impact on the success of operations; however, there is no assessment and selection for support personnel assigned to 1st Special Forces Command.

¹ Robert G. Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations: The Origin, Qualities, and Use of SOF* (Hurlburt Field: The JSOU Press, 2007), 21.

² The Joint Staff, *Special Operations*, JP 3-05 (Washington, DC: The Pentagon, July 2014), I-1.

³ Army Special Operations Command, *Army Special Operations Fact Book 2018*, www.soc.mil, 3.

⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

B. SCOPE OF PROBLEM

Utilizing the authors time in a Special Forces Group and interactions with other leaders in the Special Forces, there appears to be a divide in the quality of Soldiers assigned to Special Forces Groups. Special Forces Command screens all Green Berets for moral reasoning, ethical standards, medical readiness, and physical fitness.⁵ The Army assigns support personnel to Special Forces Groups from the general population of the Army without additional screening for attributes that can enhance the unit readiness and mission accomplishment of the Special Forces Group. In a survey completed by leaders within Special Forces Groups, six percent of Soldiers arrived non-deployable, eleven percent of Soldiers had legal and ethical issues, and leaders identified physical fitness as the top readiness concern in their formations amongst support personnel.⁶ There is a problem in the quality of support-Soldiers assigned to Special Forces Groups, which affects detachment and company size elements, and the Army has not addressed the issue of the unique mission of Special Forces and the type of Soldiers at all levels required to execute these operations. The moral, legal, and physical factors that reduce unit readiness impacts leaders, as their time is spent concentrating on the issues of a few Soldiers rather than developing plans that enhance the readiness and potential mission success of their formations.

C. THESIS SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION

Is there a solution to ensure Special Forces groups receive the best-qualified and talented support Soldiers capable of enabling special-operations and increasing unit readiness? An analysis of the Special Forces Groups size and organizational structure in comparison to the Army Ranger Regiment provides analytical data on the feasibility of an accessions and selection

⁵ Dick Couch, *Chosen Soldier: The Making of a Special Forces Warrior*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008), 47-54.

⁶ fiSurvey conducted by author amongst eight company and detachment level commanders. nSurvey conducted 15 February to 15 March 2019.

program. The desired characteristics and attributes for a Special Forces Support Soldier are critical to identify in order to screen all potential candidates for assignment to a Special Forces Group. The Army should use multiple methods to find these characteristics in the Army population. There is low feasibility for an assessment and selection for support personnel assigned to Special Forces Groups. The Army can implement an initial entry accessions option, adopt intra-service screening methods, and utilize the Special Forces Combat Course-Support as a screening tool for support Soldiers assigned to Special Forces Groups.

Chapter I addresses the strategic definition of special operations, offers the scope of the problem, and the motivation for addressing it. Chapter II delivers an overview of United States Special Forces Command and Special Forces Groups organization and structure. The Ranger Assessment and Selection Program as a model for an assessment and selection program for support personnel is addressed in Chapter III. Comparing the Ranger Regiment to the Special Forces Groups offers the answer to the feasibility of an assessment and selection in Chapter IV. Since there is low feasibility for an assessment and selection for support personnel, Chapter V explores the characteristics of special-operations and ties the mission characteristics of special-operations to the desired characteristics of a Special Forces support Soldier. Chapter VI presents initial entry recruit accessions, Army-wide screening, and Group level screening options. Due to the inherent flaws in administrative screening for support personnel, Chapter VII explores the possibility of the Special Forces Basic Combat Course – Support as a tool for Special Forces leaders to determine an applicant's potential for service in a Special Forces Group. Chapter VIII will provide insight into why this topic has precedence for future special-operations.

II. ARMY SPECIAL FORCES COMMAND

1st Special Forces Command is the headquarters responsible for the “organizing, equipping, training, validating, and deploying forces to conduct special operations across the spectrum of conflict, in support of U.S. Special Operations Command, regional commanders, American ambassadors, and other governmental agencies through an indigenous approach, precision targeting operations, crisis response, and developing understanding and wielding influence.”⁷ Four regiments comprise the command: Special Forces, psychological operations, civil affairs, and sustainment. The Special Forces Regiment is the largest of the Regiments and consists of five active-duty Special Forces Groups and two National Guard Groups. The Special Forces Groups maintain headquarters across the United States and each has a regional geographic specialty covering the globe.

Each Special Forces Group contains a Headquarters company, a Group Support Battalion, and four Special Forces Battalions. Each Special Forces Battalion consists of one Support Company and three Special Forces companies. The authorized strength of a Special Forces Group is approximately 4500 Soldiers.⁸ There are approximately 900 Special Forces-qualified personnel assigned to each Special Forces Group. Each Special Forces group has nearly 3600 support personnel assigned to its authorized end strength. There is approximately 18,000 support Soldiers across a variety of Military Occupational Specialties collectively within all active-duty Special Forces Groups. Currently Special Forces groups do not assess or select support personnel before assignment to the Special Forces group; however, the 75th Ranger Regiment can provide a model for the assessment and selection of support personnel.

⁷ Army Special Operations Command, *Army Special Operations Fact Book 2018*, 5.

⁸ Command Sergeant Major Marc Eckard, CSM Eckard is the Senior Enlisted Advisor at United States Army Special Operations Command, telephone conversation with the author, March 21, 2019.

III. RANGER REGIMENT MODEL

The 75th Ranger Regiment is the United States Army's premier large-scale special operations force. The Regiment consists of nearly 3000 Officers and Soldiers. The Rangers specialize in large-scale joint-forcible-entry operations and surgical-strike operations. All members of the Ranger Regiment must pass either Ranger Assessment Selection Program (RASP) 1 or RASP 2. First term junior enlisted members attend RASP 1. RASP 2 is a selection course for noncommissioned officers, commissioned officers, and warrant officers. Any member of the Regiment, who leaves due to reassignment, attends extended school, or wishes to attain a new position and wishes to return to the Regiment must attend RASP 2.⁹

Before attendance at RASP 1, Ranger Regiment recruiters screen applicants for general suitability including United States citizenship, volunteer for the assignment, and possess a General Technical Score of 105 or higher.¹⁰ They must display indications they can pass the physical requirements, including the Ranger Physical Fitness Test, the Water Survival Assessment, and a 12-mile march with a 35-pound rucksack and weapon in fewer than three hours. All volunteers must qualify and volunteer for airborne training, have no pending legal actions or alcohol-related incidents in the previous two years, and able to attain a secret clearance. Enlisted members attend RASP 1 following their advanced individual training. RASP 1 consists of two phases.

Phase 1 of RASP is the testing phase which exams the candidate's physical and psychological traits and tests candidates strength of character and leadership ability. The

⁹ 75th Ranger Regiment, *Ranger Assessment and Selection Program 2*, <https://www.benning.army.mil/tenant/75thranger/RASPII.html>.

¹⁰ 75th Ranger Regiment, *Ranger Assessment and Selection Program 1*, <https://www.benning.army.mil/tenant/75thranger/RASPI.html>.

candidates experience physical examinations through forced ruck marches and long runs against set standards. Failure to pass these runs and ruck movements will result in removal from RASP 1 and reassignment to general-purpose forces. This phase also includes testing on land navigation, medical first-responder training, and psychological screening. Regimental psychologists screen for behavioral traits that vary from unit norms.

Phase 2 of RASP 1 is Ranger Skills Training. The purpose of the phase is to learn the skills necessary for experiences in the Ranger Regiment. The skills focus upon combat driving, ranger marksmanship, and explosives and breaching. At the end of Phase 2, all RASP graduates receive certification to drive and operate in a deployed environment. RASP serves as an assessment that screens for the ability to pass the exams and continue through the physical stress without quitting. All successful graduates of RASP 1 earn the tan beret and assignment into the Ranger Regiment.

RASP 2 is a 21-day course for soldiers in the rank of Staff Sergeant and above, and all officers volunteering for assignment to the 75th Ranger Regiment. This course assesses the suitability of mid-and senior grade leaders for transfer to the Regiment and teaches them the operational techniques and standards of the Ranger Regiment. This course provides training in the special tactics, equipment, and missions that make the Regiment unique. Upon successful completion of this course, applicants receive an assignment to one of five battalions in the 75th Ranger Regiment.¹¹

To fill the required positions in the Ranger Regiment, the Regiment screens an average of 1269 junior-enlisted Soldiers for RASP 1 and 216 Officers and Noncommissioned Officers for

¹¹ 75th Ranger Regiment, *Ranger Assessment and Selection Program 2*.
<https://www.benning.army.mil/tenant/75thranger/index.html>.

RASP 2 every year. ¹²RASP 1 selects an average of 595 Soldiers every year while RASP 2 selects an average of 56 Officers and Noncommissioned Officers each year. RASP 1 success rate is 46.89% for those who enter RASP 1. RASP 2 has a success rate of 25.93%. The 650 members selected each year between RASP 1 and RASP 2 represent 21.67% of the Regiment's authorized strength. A study done by the Ranger Regiment determined success rate in support -military occupational specialties. These specialties fall outside the infantry career-force-management field, which comprises the largest field in the Regiment. Infantry soldiers in RASP 1 have a 56% graduation rate while support personnel experience between a 36% to 40% success rates. ¹³

IV. FEASIBILITY OF SPECIAL FORCES SUPPORT ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION

Special Forces Groups administrative and support echelons are organized similarly to the Ranger Regiment, so the Ranger Assessment and Selection Program data provides insight into the feasibility of a Special Forces Support Assessment and Selection. The number of support personnel in Special Forces Groups is approximately 18,000 or six times the overall size of the Ranger Regiment. The Ranger Regiment successfully assesses 21% of its end strength every year, using the same metric, 1st Special Forces Command would need to fill approximately 3900 positions every year. Ninety-one percent of those assessed for the Ranger Regiment are junior enlisted, and nine percent are Officers and Noncommissioned officers. Special Forces Command would need to fill 3549 enlisted positions and 351 officer positions.

¹² Directorate for Joint SOF Development, *USSOCOM Implementation Plan Progress* (Tampa, FL: USSOCOM, 2018), 5.

¹³ Anthony D. Smith, "Predicting Ranger Assessment and Selection Program 1 Success and Optimizing Class Composition" (masters thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, June 2017), 15-19.

RASP 1 data provides a baseline of 46.89% graduation rate for enlisted members. To fill 3549 enlisted positions, 1st Special Forces Command requires 7377 Soldiers to enter a selection program. RASP 2 data provides a 25.93% selection rate for Officers and Noncommissioned officers. The command would need to assess 1354 Officers every year to fill 351 officer positions. 1st Special Forces Command would require 8731 Officers and Soldiers to assess every year. Over five years, that is the equivalent of two Army Divisions. While there is no unclassified data on officer success in support-career-force-management fields, RASP 1 data provides insight on support military occupational specialties. In support fields, success ranges from a low of 36.6% to a high of 43%. 1st Special Forces could average these rates to determine support personnel experience a 39.49% success rate. The lowered success rate would require 8987 enlisted members to assess for open positions and 10,341 totals per year. Over five years, the command requires 51,705 Officers and Soldiers for assessment for positions.

The command needs to account for monetary obligations to run an assessment and selection. Temporary Duty (TDY) costs are a fluid factor when determining the cost to the command. Based on Ranger Regiment and 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment assessment and selections, each individual that attends selection TDY carries an average price tag of \$950.¹⁴ That average accounts for transportation, incidental costs, and lodging costs. Temporary Duty for Soldiers attending an assessment and selection would cost the command roughly \$10 million per year. If the command accounts for civilian or contractor personnel to help run the program, facility costs, and other overhead costs, the total cost every year can easily reach \$25 million to \$30 million per year.

¹⁴ Command Sergeant Major Marc Eckard, telephone conversation with the author, March 21, 2019.

The total number of personnel required to assess every year combined with the costs of running an assessment and selection make the decision unfeasible. Currently, there are assessments for four special-operations units, the asymmetric warfare group, and Security Forces Assistance Brigades. These groups assess roughly 6000 Officers and Soldiers every year. If the Army added a Special Forces Support Assessment program, the Army would have nearly 16,000 Officers and Soldiers attending some assessment every year, which is 3.3% of total Army strength. If an assessment and selection is unfeasible, United States Army Special Operations Command should implement a combination of other options to ensure it places the right person in the right job in a Special Forces Group.

V. RIGHT SOLDIER IN THE RIGHT POSITION

A. CHARACTERISTICS OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS

The characteristics of special-operations missions are unique, and general-purpose forces often cannot execute these missions.¹⁵ Many of the characteristics of special-operations require direct involvement from support personnel. It is imperative that Special Forces Groups identify the attributes in a support Soldier that enhance mission success of the organization. A defining characteristic of special-operations is detailed planning and intelligence at the lowest operational level.¹⁶ In 1st Special Forces Command, the lowest operational level is the team level or the Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA). The ODA will not be able to provide a detailed plan for mission approval without the subject matter expertise of the support personnel.

¹⁵ William H. McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare Theory and Practices* (Novata, CA: Presidio, 1995), 8-10.

¹⁶ U.S. Special Operations Command, *Special Operations Forces Reference Manual*. (MacDill Air Force Base, FL: United States Special Operations Command, Center for Plans, Operations and Training, 2015), I-1.

A significant characteristic of special-operations is the political and strategic sensitivity of special-operations missions. The missions undertaken by Special Forces groups require maturity and an understanding of the mission impact on national security. Each member of the organization has the potential to create strategic level success or failure. Another defining characteristic is units conduct operations at great distances from supporting operational bases and may require support personnel.¹⁷ Special Forces personnel need to operate alongside foreign forces or operate unilaterally without large operating bases. They require logistical, communications, and defense capabilities from support personnel. These Soldiers must be able to live and thrive in austere living conditions alongside Special Forces-qualified personnel while providing the necessary services.

A final characteristic of special-operations is the sophisticated means of insertion, support, and extraction to penetrate and successfully return from hostile, denied, or politically sensitive areas.¹⁸ Insertion can take the form of ground mobility, air insertion, parachutes, water insertion, or foot movement. The characteristics of special-operations are unique as are the Special Operations Forces truths, which are the espoused values through which all special-operations forces live, train, and operate.¹⁹

B. SOF TRUTHS

SOF truths were originally called Special Operations imperatives by John Collins, a retired Army colonel who worked a second career in the Congressional Research Service and in 1987 wrote a publication titled "The United States and Soviet Special Operations" for a House

¹⁷ Ibid, I-1.

¹⁸ JP 3-05, Special Operations, I-1.

¹⁹ Stephen G. Fogarty and Jaime O. Nasi, "Special Operations Forces Truths-Cyber Truths." *The Cyber Defense Review* 1, no. 2 (2016): 19-20.

Armed Services Committee subcommittee chaired by Rep. Earl Hutto, D-Fla. In 1988, Brigadier General Dave Baratto, the commander of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, N.C., was wrestling with the challenge of how to codify special-operations unique “operational considerations.”²⁰ For nearly two decades, there were four SOF truths until 2011 when Admiral Olsen, the commander of United States Special Operations Command codified the fifth truth.

The first SOF truth is that humans are more important than hardware.²¹ This truth is a crucial difference between general purpose and special-operations forces. The proper personnel who are highly training and working together will accomplish the mission. The most technological and sophisticated equipment in the world does not replace the lack of the right people. The second SOF truth is that quality is better than quantity.²² Small numbers of people, carefully selected, well trained, and well led, are preferable to larger numbers of troops, some of whom may not be up to the task. The third SOF truth states Special Operations Forces cannot be mass-produced.²³ The guidance outlining SOF truths states, "It takes years to train operational units to the level of proficiency needed to accomplish difficult and specialized SOF missions. Intense training – both in SOF schools and in units – is required to integrate competent individuals into fully capable units. This process cannot be hastened without degrading ultimate capability."²⁴ The truth states fully capable units require competent individuals. Special Operations defines competency as the ability to do something successfully or efficiently.²⁵

²⁰ Ibid, 19.

²¹ USSOCOM, Special Operations Forces Reference Manual, I-1.

²² Ibid, I-1.

²³ Ibid, I-1.

²⁴ Ibid, I-1.

²⁵ Ibid, I-1.

The fourth SOF truth states that competent special-operations forces cannot be mass-produced after emergencies occur. ²⁶Creation of competent, fully mission capable units takes time. Employment of fully capable special-operations capability on short notice requires highly trained and continuously available SOF units in peacetime. The last SOF truth states most special-operations require non-special-operations forces support. ²⁷The operational effectiveness of our deployed forces cannot be, and never has been, achieved without enabling by joint service partners. Support for special-operators increases the lethality and success of special-operations.

C. CHARACTERISTICS DESIRED FOR SPECIAL FORCES-SUPPORT

Special Operations require Soldiers who support operations in austere environments and operate alongside operational detachments. Two factors are indicators of a Soldiers ability to support the operation physically. A Soldier on permanent profile cannot deploy and therefore take a slot of a healthy Soldier within the organization. The second indicator is a Soldiers physical fitness score. If a Soldier does not have the physical strength, stamina, or endurance to operate in an austere environment, that Soldier becomes a liability for Operational Detachments.

In addition to physical factors, Soldiers supporting Special Forces should have the cognitive ability to support dynamic operations in a politically sensitive environment. In 2010, The United States Army Research Institute for Behavioral and Social Sciences conducted a study to determine the impact of cognitive abilities and physical fitness on Special Forces Assessment and Selection Candidates and their probability of success. The study found a correlation factor of the higher deviation above the entry-level General Technical score, the higher likelihood of

²⁶ Ibid, I-1.

²⁷ Ibid, I-1.

success for selection to the Special Forces Qualification Course.²⁸ Adding the Arithmetic Reasoning and Verbal Expression scores on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) determines the General Technical score.²⁹ The entry level score into Special Forces Assessment and Selection and the Ranger Regiment is 105.³⁰ Due to the larger size of the Special Forces Regiment, a General Technical Score of 100 would identify those who perform above average compared to their peers. From 2015-2017, the average General Technical for those joining the Army was 95.³¹ A score of 100 would identify those who have aptitude above the norms.

All personnel in Special Forces Groups receive an assignment to airborne positions. The reasoning for the entire organization being airborne qualified is the ability for all members to participate in all training events and for any subcomponent of the Special Forces Group execute an insertion quickly and in mass on an objective anywhere in the world.³² Airborne school is three weeks in lengths and teaches all students the fundamentals of static line parachute operations.³³ The course challenges students physically and psychologically through physical fitness and the final week when students complete five static parachute jumps. The course

²⁸ U.S. Army Research Institute, *The Roles of Perseverance, Cognitive Ability, and Physical Fitness in U.S. Army Special Forces Assessment and Selection*, 2010, 7.

²⁹ Headquarters Department of the Army, *Regular Army and Reserve Components Enlistment Program*, AR 601-210 (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, August 31, 2016), 79.

³⁰ Command Sergeant Major Marc Eckard, telephone conversation with the author, March 21, 2019.

³¹ Master Sergeant Davy C. Chick, Operations Sergeant Major Army Recruiting Command, telephone conversation with the author, March 9, 2019.

³² Headquarters Department of the Army, *Special Forces Air Operations*, ATP 3-18.10, (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, February 24, 2016), 1-5.

³³ Fort Benning, *Basic Airborne Course*, <https://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/artb/1-507th/Airborne/>

provides a foundation for Soldiers to demonstrate physical fitness and their ability to overcome psychological fears for the accomplishment of a mission.

Due to the extremely sensitive missions and the requirement for operations in austere environments, Soldiers who display exceptional leadership ability are ideal for Special Forces Groups. Specific positions enhance leadership abilities, but Soldiers must demonstrate leadership traits outside of key billets. A Soldier assigned to a Special Forces Group should be a self-starter, capable of operating with minimal direction, and an understanding of strategic implications of the assigned mission.

The last characteristic required for Special Forces personnel is a background defined by morals and ethics. Soldiers who have moral or legal troubles take valuable time from leaders and present potential embarrassment to the Command. Soldiers should not have a history of non-judicial punishment or a history of ethical violations.

The six core competencies required for support Soldiers to a Special Forces group, therefore, fall under two distinct categories. The first category is the physical features of the Soldier. The competencies under this category are the medical criteria and physical fitness required for Special-Operations. Psychological attributes are the second category required in Soldiers for Special-Operations. The competencies needed under psychological include cognitive abilities, airborne qualification, leadership, and moral standing.

There are three options to find the right soldier for the support positions in a Special Forces Group. Special Forces may use these options unilaterally or in combination. Since there is no feasibility for an assessment and selection, an initial screening is the first option. The second option is post wide recruitment and screening by each Special Forces Group. The final option is utilizing the Special Forces Basic Combat Course- Support as a scaled assessment of personnel.

VI. SCREENING

Screening for support Soldiers to Special Forces Groups outside of the home installation has two categories. The first category is for initial-entry applicants to fill the junior-enlisted positions. United States Army Recruiting Command is the Army agency responsible for initial entry screening of applicants. The second category is screening for Soldiers already assigned to positions throughout the Army. Army Human Resources Command and United States Army Special Operations Command conduct the screenings.

A. INITIAL ENTRY ACCESSIONS

Applicants to the United States Army do not have an option to select Special Forces Support as an enlistment option.³⁴ First-term Soldiers assigned to Special Forces Groups receive their assignment during their time at Advanced Individual Training. Training cadre select Soldiers for assignment to Special Forces Groups based off class ranking or receive assignment by a talent manager at Human Resources Command to fill the necessary slots across the Army.³⁵ Army Recruiting Command currently provides options to Soldiers to enter the Army under six distinct options that serve as incentives to recruits. Two of these options provide a foundation for which Recruiting Command can provide incentives to recruits for assignment to Special Forces Groups.

Applicants who show interest can qualify for the Option 4, Army Airborne or Option 40, Army Airborne Ranger.³⁶ Applicants receive a contractual guarantee of Airborne School with an assignment to an airborne unit under Option 4. An option 40 contract, guarantees a recruit

³⁴ Headquarters United States Army Recruiting Command, Enlistment and Accessions Processing, USAREC Regulation 601-210 (Fort Knox, KY: Headquarters United States Army Recruiting Command, July 20, 2018), 108.

³⁵ USASOC G-1, telephone conversation with the author, March 19, 2019.

³⁶ Headquarters Department of the Army, *Regular Army and Reserve Components Enlistment Program*, 93.

Airborne School and a Ranger Assessment and Selection Program slot. Army Recruiting Command and Army G-1 can fill low-density military occupational specialties through a new Option for assignment to Special Forces group. Recruits must meet strict medical fitness standards to qualify for Option 4 or Option 40.³⁷ The new option for assignment to Special Forces Groups would require the same medical fitness standards, which would ensure the likelihood that Soldiers assigned, do not have profiles that prevent deployments. Additionally, Soldiers receiving option 4 or 40 contracts must pass the standard Army Physical Fitness Test.³⁸ All other recruits must pass a modified physical fitness test only. Soldiers entering under a Special Forces assignment need to pass the full Army Physical Fitness test. The addition of having to pass a full Army Physical Fitness Test would ensure that these Soldiers attain physical fitness before Initial Entry Training. It is a positive indicator of physical fitness and meets the competencies of physical fitness required for the Special Forces community.

Army Recruiting Command possesses the ability to screen for three of the four psychological competencies required for Special Forces assignment. The first competency is cognitive ability. All recruits complete the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, which provides the line scores used for the General Technical score. A recruit should receive a General Technical Score of 100 to qualify for assignment to Special Forces Command. The second competency is moral and ethical being. Military Entrance Processing Stations maintain the ability to assess recruits utilizing the Tailored Adaptive Personality Assessment System (TAPAS). The assessment is a computerized test that evaluates recruits traits in 21 facets of the

³⁷ Headquarters Department of the Army, *Standards of Medical Fitness*, AR 40-501(Washington DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, June 14, 2017), 52-53.

³⁸ Headquarters Department of the Army, *Regular Army and Reserve Components Enlistment Program*, 93-94.

big five personality factors.³⁹ The five personality factors are an openness to others, emotional stability, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extraversion. The computer compares the results of each recruits answers to a series of 800 questions to a standard mean to determine if the applicant possesses or fails to possess the characteristics of the big five personality factors. Army Special Operations Command and Army Recruiting Command can determine the TAPAS results required for entry into a Special Forces Organization.

A series of incentives mitigate the requirement of extra steps to qualify under a Special Forces option contract compared to a general forces contract. Special Forces Groups often find difficulty filling low-density military occupational specialties that are critical to mission success.⁴⁰ Contract bonuses for low-density occupational specialties with a Special Forces option attached provide an incentive for recruits to choose these contracts. A four-year contract versus a five or six-year contract entices recruits to select this option as well. If a recruit fails to graduate airborne school, the recruit receives an assignment based on the needs of the Army and forfeits the signing bonus.

B. INTRA-SERVICE SCREENING

Filling junior enlisted positions with initial entry recruits provides one screening, but Army Human Resources Command and Army Special Operations Command will provide screening for Soldiers preparing for Permanent Change of Station moves. Human Resources Command completes the first screening step with the secondary screening completed by Army Special Operations Command. The Army G 3/5/7 identifies units in three categories. The

³⁹ U.S. Army Research Institute, *Assessing the Tailored Adaptive Personality Assessment System (TAPAS) as an MOS Qualification Instrument*, August 2012, 5-7.

⁴⁰ LTG Kenneth E. Tovo, former commander United States Army Special Operations Command, telephone conversation with the author, March 18, 2019.

categories by precedent are urgent forces, rotational units, and essential forces.⁴¹ Urgent forces receive priority for assignment of personnel. Army Special Operations Command qualifies as an urgent force. This manning guidance provides Human Resources Command with the directive to fill the necessary slots.

Human Resources command can screen the entire Army for three factors that will determine suitability for assignment to a Special Forces Group. The command needs to filter for qualified airborne Soldiers, general technical score, and the additional skill identifier. Computer screening completes the screening for airborne qualification, by scanning all enlisted and Officer Record Briefs for the “P” additional skill identifier. Soldiers and Officers who have completed the Basic Airborne Course receive this identifier and the servicemember's record brief maintains this identifier. This first screening step will ensure Special Forces Groups receive qualified airborne personnel. The second factor that Human Resources Command can screen is the General Technical Score. The score is on all enlisted Soldiers records, and the system can screen for all personnel who reach the minimum score of 100. The final screening factor for Human Resources Command is the additional skill identifier of "S." Soldiers that have completed a combat deployment with Special Forces, been in a Special Forces Group for two years, and completed personnel action paperwork they receive an additional skill identifier. Merit or completion of specialized training or assessment are not factors for the awarding of the skill identifier.⁴² Army Special Operations Command will receive the results of these screenings to conduct a secondary screening.

⁴¹ Department of the Army, *HQDA EXORD 165-16 ISO FISCAL YEAR 2016-2019 (FY 16-19) ACTIVE COMPONENT MANNING GUIDANCE*, April 5, 2016, Annex A.

⁴² Headquarters Department of the Army, *Military Occupational Classification and Structure*, DA PAM 611-21 (Washington DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, January 22, 2017), 20.

Army Special Operations Command is the Army Service Component responsible for the manning requirements and priorities for 1st Special Forces Command.⁴³ Army Special Operations Command can determine if they want all three factors met or a combination of the three factors. Once Army Human Resources sends the results of initial qualifiers, Army Special Operations Command can screen for physical and psychological characteristics. Army Special Operations Command will screen for leadership, moral standing, and ethical standing. Noncommissioned Officers and Officers receive evaluations yearly through a Noncommissioned Evaluation Report or Officer Evaluation Report. The Soldiers permanent file keeps these reports and is accessible by the USASOC G-1. The G-1 will determine who receives evaluations that indicate a record of leadership and psychological factors. USASOC will then prioritize these Soldiers to Human Resources Command. Human Resources Command will meet the manning guidance of filling USASOC positions by placing Soldiers on orders that USASOC identified as meeting the characteristics required for service in a Special Forces Group. While this screening will identify the Soldiers who qualify for Special Forces assignment based on administrative records, each Special Forces Group should execute different testing of other resources.

C. GROUP LEVEL SCREENING

Soldiers receive orders to move to new installations, and this provides an ideal recruiting ground for Special Forces Groups. A Soldier arrives at a new installation with an assignment to a Brigade level command; however, intrapost transfers can occur with simple paperwork.⁴⁴ The replacement company at each installation is responsible for these Soldiers during their in-processing week. Each Special Forces Group can utilize this week to conduct initial screenings of Soldiers assigned to the installation. A representative from the Special Forces Group would

⁴³ USASOC G-1, telephone conversation with the author, March 19, 2019.

⁴⁴ USASOC G-1, telephone conversation with the author, March 19, 2019.

administer a physical fitness test and screen the Soldiers record looking for psychological characteristics. If the Special Forces Group identifies a Soldier as a need for the Group, a 4187, personnel action form can divert the Soldier from the original assignment to the Special Forces Group.⁴⁵ In addition to Soldiers in-processing the installation, the Special Forces Group can recruit from other units on the installation. Each Special Forces Group has certain military occupational specialties requiring immediate fills. Special Forces Groups should establish relationships with general-purpose forces and provide briefings and screenings to Soldiers assigned to other units for an opportunity to receive an assignment to a Special Forces Group.

In addition to screening on installations with Special Forces Groups, United States Army Special Operations Command should actively recruit Soldiers from each Army Center of Excellence and from installations that do not possess a Special Forces Group. Army Centers of Excellence house the institutional programs that educate the force in their specific specialties. The institutions train Soldiers across all levels from E-1 to O-3. The Ranger Regiment currently utilizes a recruitment model to attract low-density specialties to the Ranger Regiment by assigning liaisons to these Centers of Excellence.⁴⁶ Special Forces Groups should implement a similar liaison program at these centers. Special Forces would benefit from this program by attracting interested individuals to Special Forces. These liaison Soldiers could identify Soldiers with the desired characteristics of a support Soldier for Special Forces. The Centers of Excellence will benefit from the arrangement by incorporating these liaison Soldiers into their

⁴⁵ Headquarters Department of the Army, *Military Human Resources Management Administrative Procedures*, DA PAM 600-8 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, April 6, 2016), 26-27.

⁴⁶ Command Sergeant Major Marc Eckard, telephone conversation with the author, March 21, 2019.

education programs. Soldiers attracted to the Special Forces and screened for suitability still need to show their suitability to Special Forces through demonstrated potential.

VII. Special Forces Basic Combat Course – Support

Soldiers arriving at a Special Forces Group through all types of accessions need to demonstrate their capability to operate and contribute to Special Forces missions. Each Special Forces Group should place Soldiers arriving at the unit in the Special Forces Combat Course-Support (SFBC-C-S) in their first month. Each Special Forces Group currently utilizes the course as preparatory training before deployment.⁴⁷ The two-week course instructs Special Forces Group members in advanced rifle marksmanship, first aid, land navigation, maritime operations, airborne operations, and combatives. The Special Forces Group should utilize a similar training schedule. However, leaders should use the course to determine the Soldiers assigned to the Group who have strengths and weaknesses. The addition of an endurance event that tests a Soldier's stamina, mental agility, and physical fitness provides a glimpse into Soldiers who can handle Special Forces missions.

If a Soldier fails to demonstrate characteristics desired by Special Forces, a board should convene to determine the future of the service member. The committee will decide on two options for the Soldier. The first option is to develop a training plan that bridges the weaknesses of the service member. The Soldier's immediate supervisor will implement the official training plan. After executing the training plan, the Soldier will attend the SFBC-C-S a second time. The Soldier should demonstrate growth in their capabilities. If the Soldier fails to achieve the growth required, a personnel action reassigns the service member to general-purpose forces. If the board

⁴⁷ Richard Rzepka, "Special Forces Enablers Endure Combat Course," US Army, November 15, 2015, https://www.army.mil/article/158628/special_forces_enablers_endure_combat_course.

determines the service member is not suitable for Special Forces following their initial SFBCC-S, the Soldier receives a transfer to another unit on the installation.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Special-Operations forces operate in over 140 countries across the globe.⁴⁸ As the United States transitions to a focus on great-power conflict, Special-Operations forces will likely see a steady operational tempo to bridge the gap that the conventional troops fail to provide. The core missions of counterinsurgency, unconventional warfare, countering weapons of mass destruction, foreign internal defense, special reconnaissance, hostage rescue, civil affairs, and military information operations will be the focus of special operations.⁴⁹ The primary personnel responsible for these operations are those assessed and selected special operators. These operators, including Green Berets, will require the assistance of support personnel. Support personnel who specialize in weapons of mass destruction, communications, and maintenance of equipment will deploy at the same rate as operators due to their subject matter expertise required for mission accomplishment.

The Army and Army Special Operations Command must make a conscious effort to place the right support Soldiers in Special Forces Groups. The Army staff has identified these units as critical fills, but currently, the assignment of support Soldiers has capability gaps. The Army should incorporate the screening and accessions processes outlined to ensure open position fulfillment and will be filled by servicemember's who possess the characteristics required for assignment to Special Forces. The nature of conflict continues to change, but the psychological factors and physical factors required for special-operations have remained near constant. A

⁴⁸ Senate Armed Services Committee, *Statement of General Raymond Thomas III U.S. Army Commander United States Special Operations Command*, 116th Cong, 2019, 2-9.

⁴⁹ JP 3-05, *Special Operations*, II-3.

service member to succeed in Special-Operations is a Soldier who can understand strategically sensitive missions requiring mental agility followed by the physical capability to execute without inhibiting mission accomplishment.

The Army can implement these recommendations in reverse. The least expensive and ease of transition is utilizing the Special Forces Basic Combat Course-Support as a test to determine the amount of Soldiers assigned to Special Forces Groups that meet the criteria under pressure. The course also provides objective data to Special Operations Command to refine what criteria continue to be absent from Soldiers assigned to the command. Human Resources Command easily implements the intra-service screening with software available to branch managers. The initial-entry accessions and initial-entry training recruiting will be the most difficult to implement due to regulatory and financial considerations. The Army must take an active approach to filling Special Forces Groups with the right Soldiers to properly enhance the capability of Special Forces Groups.

APPENDIX A SPECIAL FORCES SUPPORT PERSONNEL READINESS SURVEY

The author sent the following survey to Officers that commanded detachment and company-size units in various Special Forces Groups. The author collected survey between 1 February 2019 and 1 April 2019. The author keeps the individual electronic results of the survey. The leaders remain anonymous due to ongoing service with the Army. The tabulation of findings appears in Appendix B.

SPECIAL FORCES SUPPORT PERSONNEL READINESS SURVEY

Duty Title:

Years spent in a Special Forces Organization:

1. What was the overall readiness rate of your company/detachment during your time in command?
2. What percentage of your detachment/company had moral/legal issues?
3. Did Human Resources Command assign personnel who arrived in a non-deployable status? If so, what percentage of the force arrived non-deployable?
4. For those who contributed to your lowered readiness rate, what factors were the biggest influences? (Body composition, APFT, permanent profile, legal/moral, clearance, etc.)
5. Were you able to remove any of these Soldiers from your organization? If so, what was the average time to execute a reassignment?
6. Do you believe a screening or assessment and selection would mitigate the lowered readiness rate?

APPENDIX B SPECIAL FORCES SUPPORT PERSONNEL READINESS SURVEY
TABULATION

Duty Title:

Years spent in a Special Forces Organization: AVG 14 MONTHS

1. What was the overall readiness rate of your company/detachment during your time in command?

R1: 90

R2: 94

R3: 91

R4: 97

R5: 91

R6: 93

R7: 90

R8: 90

TOTAL: 92

2. What percentage of your detachment/company had moral/legal issues?

R1: 5

R2: 18

R3: 12

R4: 9

R5: 13

R6: 10

R7: 10

R8: 7

TOTAL: 10.5

3. Did Human Resources Command assign personnel who arrived in a non-deployable status? If so, what percentage of the force arrived non-deployable?

R1: Y, 4

R2: Y,2

R3: Y, 5

R4: Y,8

R5: Y,6

R6: Y,9

R7: Y,5

R8: Y,4

TOTAL: 5.38

4. For those who contributed to your lowered readiness rate, what factors were the biggest influences? (Body composition, APFT, permanent profile, legal/moral, clearance, etc.)

R1: APFT

R2: UCMJ

R3: APFT

R4: APFT

R5: UCMJ

R6: APFT

R7: PROFILE

R8: PROFILE

TOTAL: APFT

5. Were you able to remove any of these Soldiers from your organization? If so, what was the average time to execute a reassignment?

R1: YES, 15-18 MONTHS

R2: YES, 12-18 MONTHS

R3: NO

R4: YES, 12-15 MONTHS

R5: NO

R6: NO

R7: YES, 10-12 MONTHS

R8: NO

TOTAL: AVG 12 -15 MONTHS

6. Do you believe a screening or assessment and selection would mitigate the lowered readiness rate?

R1: NO

R2: YES

R3: YES

R4: NO

R5: YES

R6: YES

R7: YES

R8: YES

TOTAL: 75% RESPOND YES

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