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Cover Photo: Military Free Fall Jumpmaster Course students land on Sidewinder Drop Zone.
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Winter 2026 Special Warfare Journal Vol. 39, No. 1

As professionals dedicated to the art and science of special warfare, our strength lies not only in our skills and equipment but also in our ability to communicate, analyze, and learn through robust professional discourse. Writing and sharing ideas are vital tools that fuel our collective growth, inspire innovation, and shape the future of ARSOF. When we challenge assumptions and explore new ideas with thoughtful dialogue, we cultivate a culture of continuous improvement that keeps us ahead of our adversaries.

In this era of rapid change, force modernization and transformation initiatives are at the forefront of maintaining our competitive edge. From leveraging cutting-edge technology to integrating new tactics, our success depends on our willingness to adapt and evolve. In this issue of *Special Warfare Journal*, you'll find articles on cyberspace integration, foreign language proficiency, mobility, ARSOF training, artificial intelligence, airborne operations, innovation, and instructor qualification. These thought-provoking papers enable us to think critically and adapt at the speed of relevance.

Education and training are the foundation upon which leadership is built. As ARSOF professionals, we must prioritize lifelong learning—whether through formal schooling, realistic training, or informal mentorship. Strong leaders inspire innovation, foster resilience, and uphold the values that define our community. The *Special Warfare Journal* is more than a publication; it is a platform for ideas that drive change. We challenge each of you to contribute your insights and participate actively in our professional dialogue. Your words can ignite new strategies, reinforce our culture, and ensure that ARSOF remains agile, adaptive, and lethal. Together, through shared knowledge and unwavering commitment, we will continue to shape the future of special warfare.

- Veritas et Libertas -

- *Special Warfare Journal* Editors-in-Chief

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Supporting the Army Special Operations Forces-Space-Cyberspace Triad: Selection Criteria for Army Space Officers Supporting U.S. Special Operations Command

By Brig. Gen. Donald Brooks and Maj. Brian Hamel

Introduction

The preponderance of special operations forces (SOF) missions requires non-SOF support.[01] There is only one Army Space officer (Functional Area 40) at every theater special operations command (TSOC) and Special Forces Group (SFG).[02] These officers have an outsized impact on what commanders and units of action can accomplish operationally, or when preparing units of action to deploy forward (organizing, training, and equipping). At a TSOC, developing and directing lines of effort against an adversary's communications architecture demands as much analytical rigor as ensuring units of action are properly equipped and trained to successfully contribute to a TSOC's campaign support plan. While the Army's talent management system has made positive strides in recent years, screening Army Space officers for service at SFGs or TSOCs warrants additional scrutiny. The suggestions below are scoped to Army Space officers due to the backgrounds of the authors, but this model could be applied to other low-density jobs in SOF, such as cyberspace or electronic warfare.

The screening and interview process needs to move beyond a 20-minute engagement in which the gaining command is unsure of the criteria, key skills, and attributes they should be assessing for. Selecting the appropriate Army space officer to serve at the TSOC or SFG will deliver outsized relative advantages to the joint force across the competition continuum and at all levels of war. This proposed assessment may sound costly, but it is much less expensive than having the wrong person lead and synchronize an entire domain of warfare for three years within that SFG or TSOC. United States Army Space and Missile Defense Command (USASMDC) needs to work in cooperation with the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) to develop a two-phase assessment for Functional Area 40s (FA40s) electing to serve at TSOCs and SFGs. This proposed assessment is based on the assessments already under the purview of the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS). USAJFKSWCS is a two-star command that conducts three of the five assessments

and selections for USASOC.[03] This assessment, based on historical precedent, will highlight weighted attributes regarding operational planning acumen, previous experience with special operations forces (SOF), relevant space experience, cognitive agility, and courses that lend themselves to facilitating interoperability with SOF. While USASMDC and USASOC will develop the assessment, it will still be executed by the gaining unit's FA40 and select staff members. This will enable leadership at the TSOC or SFG to better assess FA40s. It should be emphasized that not having the skills or attributes below would not be considered derogatory towards the applicant; rather, graduates of the courses below may find themselves more successful within SOF, given the unique mission set. The suggested weighted criteria will be examined in two macro phases: virtual and in-person.

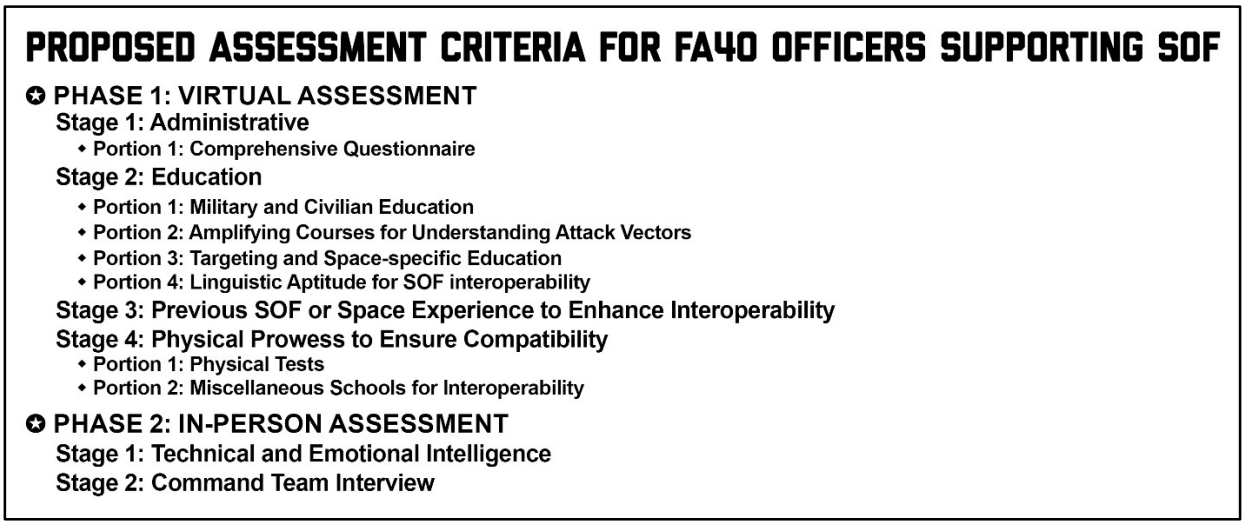

Figure 1: This graphic represents an outline of the proposed FA40 assessment for those Army Space officers electing to serve at TSOCs or SFGs.

Phase 1: Virtual Assessment

Comprehensive Questionnaire: Phase one of the virtual assessment is broken down into four stages, each warranting additional analysis: administrative, education, experience, and physical. The first sub-step of the virtual phase should be an administrative packet that is sent to the incumbent FA40, deputy commander, or chief of staff of that TSOC or SFG. These individuals will be responsible for assessing packets and coordinating with the Army's Human Resources Command. That packet will include a questionnaire that probes the intricacies of that officer's personal and professional life, their approach to learning, short-answer questions to assess their capacity for effective written communication, financial stability, outcomes of past leadership roles, moments of failure, and how that officer maintains a work-life balance. Other portions of the administrative packet should include score cards from physical events, a performance assessment from the officer's current commander (colonel equivalent), the officer's last five evaluations, and the officer's Soldier Talent Profile (STP). All civilian and military education suggestions from the Army space officer professional development guide, as delineated in the Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3, have been accounted for in

subsequent sections; however, additional courses should be favorably considered when assessing the interoperability of space officers with SOF formations.

Military and Civilian Education: Within this second stage of the virtual screening process, how does the applicant ingest and synthesize information? Have they attended any meta-cognition courses such as Red Team Member, Red Team Leader, the School of Advanced Warfighting, the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, or the Advanced Military Studies Program? Graduates of these schools spend a year learning how to think and how to campaign at an operational level by synchronizing tactical actions across time, space, and purpose. They are equally adept at campaigning against an adversary as they are at preparing units for deployment, and would be a value-added team member at a TSOC or SFG. Does the space officer have a relevant undergraduate degree, advanced degree, or certification(s) related to their career field? Has the officer completed the second phase of joint professional military education, thereby increasing their effectiveness in a joint environment? While not a requirement for success, space officers who elect to continue advancing their education through opportunities presented by the Army or on their own are demonstrating the intellectual tenacity necessary to thrive in the SOF community.

Amplifying Courses for Understanding Attack Vectors: The second portion of the education stage examines the other military or civilian schools the applicant has graduated from. Courses focused on military deception, network development, and cyberspace all provide supplemental knowledge for an FA40 to integrate amongst the staff. Gaining units should understand that war is still a human endeavor, and satellites are therefore a means to target the adversary end user in the terrestrial segment. Space warfare, especially in competition, is as much a cognitive battle as it is a kinetic one.[04] Finally, space warfare can be thought of in part as a war of information, as a struggle between the effective collection and dissemination of bytes to the appropriate user. This becomes pivotal when examining vulnerabilities in the terrestrial segment. Not only does it enable the FA40 to propose additional access vectors to create dilemmas, but it also allows them to pose more effective questions to staff members with a background in cyberspace operations.

Targeting and Space-specific Education: The third portion of the education stage explores the officer's understanding of joint targeting, foreign electronic warfare assets, and space-based platforms. Can they apply that knowledge to web-based services that can facilitate the targeting cycle? Can they integrate technical operations to augment SOF operations, activities, and investments? FA40s will be asked to contribute to the targeting cycle across the competition continuum, so being able to support the fires warfighting function should remain at the forefront of the gaining unit's weighted criteria. The STP will only indicate their graduation from these courses. However, the commander's assessment and evaluation reports may indicate whether the officer applied that knowledge during the pre-mission training cycle, during named exercises, while deployed, or concurrently with their time on staff.

Linguistic Aptitude for SOF Interoperability: The fourth portion of the education stage is linguistic capability. Can the space officer speak an additional language that would advance the mission set of that SFG or TSOC? Cultural fluency affects every warfighting function and will continue to decrease the efficacy of theater-strategic campaigning if not adequately accounted for. The space domain is not an exception to this. Coupled with technical knowledge, the ability to speak the target language(s) for that SFG or TSOC will enhance Army Space Officers' support in deriving a space-centric approach to the operational variables and their impact on operations, activities, and investments throughout the competition continuum. In the near future, space officers will conduct tactical and operational-level engagements with host nation counterparts alongside their SOF partners during Joint Combined Exchange Training or, more broadly, under the auspices of building partner-nation capacity. Tactical U.S. Space Force elements will have a small role to play in developing a nation's orbital warfare portfolio, and the preponderance of nations where SOF has access and placement are "emerging space powers" at best, predicated on the fact that they have the scientific and industrial base to build a satellite at all.[05] These nations are more interested in delivering effects to space, or receiving effects from space, to support their warfighters. For that reason, the FA40 is the appropriate officer to facilitate those engagements in the host nation's language. This will be an evolution of building partner nation capacity, and FA40s should rise to meet this challenge.

Previous SOF or Space Experience to Enhance Interoperability: The third stage of the virtual phase is screening for prior experience within SOF and in the space community. Officers within special operations are held to a high degree of professional acumen, and space officers assigned to special operations units should be held to the same standard. SOF officers are expected to brief all levels of war—from tactical schemes of maneuver to theater-strategic campaigns— and to address equities across the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, multinational, and commercial environment. Suppose SFGs or TSOCs can find Army Space Officers who were previously Army Special Operations (ARSOF) officers. In that case, those officers may be better postured to serve the USASOC enterprise as space professionals, having previously worked in the community. Conversely, tenacious FA40s who spent their captain time being involved in space control may prove just as valuable to advancing SOF OAIs. FA40s who oversaw space control planning teams, or managed the staffing of those products, and participated in relevant exercises or deployments, may prove more fruitful than an FA40 who has had a different career track. In the years to come, this recruitment pool will extend to the FA40s assigned to the multidomain effects battalions and the theater strike effects group. As a final consideration, space control planning teams are regionally aligned, similar to ARSOF units of action. This sustained regional alignment fosters familiarity with the pacing and acute threats outlined in the National Security Strategy while enabling the SOF community to leverage a different vantage point.

Physical Prowess to Ensure Compatibility: The fourth stage of the virtual phase is

assessing how well the officer can perform a variety of physical tasks. Most of the current interview process is conducted digitally to maintain a semblance of fairness. This will have to continue until the top three candidates are chosen to attend the in-person assessment with their respective gaining units. An Army Fitness Test scorecard should be part of the applicant's packet, along with the finished time for events such as a 12-mile road march with 35 pounds, a five-mile run, and a grade sheet for the upper body round robin test.[06] A senior non-commissioned officer at the officer's current unit will administer and grade these events. All events will be re-administered to the top three candidates upon their arrival for the in-person selection. The physical events should be weighed more heavily for FA40s electing to serve at the SFGs versus the TSOC.

Miscellaneous Schools for Interoperability: The second portion of the fourth stage captures a set of skills that is admittedly between the physical and the mental, but should be assessed, nonetheless. Acknowledging that paid parachutist positions are being reduced, SOF units remain airborne units that specialize in operating in denied or politically sensitive environments.[07] Favorable criteria would then extend to the FA40 applicant being airborne qualified, a static line jump master, ranger-qualified, other advanced ARSOF courses, or a graduate of advanced iterations of the Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape school. FA40s applying to work within SOCOM, who are graduates of these schools, are postured to maximize interoperability. Having the requisite capability to support the unit of action would allow the team to focus on their core tasks instead of learning the intricacies of a new piece of equipment. With all the weighted preferences to consider, the incumbent FA40, deputy commander, or chief of staff, will have to evaluate the criteria as they see fit against their mission set and invite the top three candidates to phase two, the in-person assessment.

Phase 2: In-Person Assessment

The second phase in the screening process involves the applicant traveling to the gaining unit. The screening lasts no longer than three days to afford the command the most holistic assessment of the candidate without placing undue stress on the staff. No more than three candidates should be assessed to the final stage to avoid overburdening the operational psychologist (OpPsych). The candidate will be administered a series of personality tests and cognitive assessments. The cognitive assessments will include essay questions, short answer questions, ethical queries, and space-centric technical questions. If the gaining unit is short on money, these tests could be administered virtually, with the original fitness metrics being placed in the candidate's final file for the command team. The number of potential candidates could also be reduced to two to alleviate financial burdens.

Technical and Emotional Intelligence: During this three-day assessment, the candidate will interview with the OpPsych assigned to that SFG or with the TSOC to determine whether that officer is an appropriate fit for that organization. The OpPsych will compile a dossier that includes all the officer's evaluation reports, the initial administrative packet, a third-party social media scrape, cognitive test outcomes, writing samples, and

results from the candidate's personality tests.[08] Questions during the OpPsych's interview will explore the officer's tenacity, intellectual humility, moral parameters, ethical boundaries, and self-awareness. The OpPsych will provide their assessment to the command team regarding whether that officer is a good fit for the unit and its culture, whether the officer can operate as part of a team, and how they respond to external stressors. In addition to the OpPsych's interview, the candidate will conduct an oral technical interview, chaired by the incumbent FA40, to supplement the written technical questions. This allows the unit to gauge the officer's ability to brief, cognitive dexterity, mastery of doctrine, and to observe any non-verbal tics that would otherwise not be readily apparent. The candidate will also be re-administered the same series of physical tests if the assessment is conducted in person.

Command Team Interview: The results of the technical interview are compiled with OpPsych's assessment and combined with the other dossier components for the command team to conduct its final interview with the candidate. At the conclusion of all three interviews, the commander will make a hiring decision and inform the chosen candidate.

Conclusion

Special Forces groups and theater special operations commands should establish weighted preferences and a selection process for Army Space officers. Favorable characteristics include cognitive agility, previous SOF experience, relevant space experience, cultural acumen, physical fitness, and technical capability. The correct Army Space officer has the capacity to facilitate multiple dilemmas on the periphery, or in the strategic deep of adversaries delineated in the National Security Strategy. A three-day assessment for three officers may sound costly, but it is much less expensive than having the wrong person lead an entire domain of warfare for three years within that SFG or TSOC. The weight of each attribute and quality discussed in this paper will vary by command, depending on the operational variables for that area of responsibility. While this proposal is admittedly scoped to Army Space Officers, it could serve as a model for other low-density skills across the USASOC enterprise to ensure SOF leaders have enablers who are as professionally impatient and resourceful as their operators.

Authors' Note:

Brigadier General Donald Brooks, U.S. Army, is the deputy commander for operations at the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command. He was the first FA40 to serve at a TSOC, and established USSOCOM's Joint Integrated Space Team. Brigadier General Brooks commanded the Army's 1st Space Brigade and advanced Army Space equities in support of Lt. Gen. Jonathan Braga's Space-SOF-Cyber Triad initiative. He holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the U.S. Military Academy and a master's degree in earth remote sensing/ hyperspectral imagery from the Florida Institute of Technology. He completed the U.S. Army War College as a Fellow at the Georgia Institute of Technology in 2020. Brooks previously served as commandant of the Space and Missile Defense Center of Excellence.

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The views, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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The Lethality of Relationships: Understanding Culture is a Necessary Skill

By Mark Koopman, Command Sergeant Major (ret.) and Emily Stranger, PhD

Picture this: China launches a bold amphibious invasion against a small Indo-Pacific island that is a close U.S. ally. Waves of missile and air strikes smash the island's air defenses and command centers. Electronic warfare scrambles communications and cyberattacks paralyze coordination, creating an island-wide blackout. A naval blockade cuts the island from outside resupply, while the People's Liberation Army Navy successfully holds U.S. forces at a distance. Airborne and heliborne units secure beachheads and chokepoints, and Chinese troops surge ashore in massed formations. The situation looks dire.

Yet, despite meticulous planning, Beijing confronts an unexpected obstacle: the island's people. Hardened through years of training by U.S. special operations forces (SOF), both the military and civilian population mount a ferocious resistance. Their tenacity rivals that of the Ukrainians in defending their homeland.

The cost for China is staggering. Casualties mount, supply lines falter, and the prospect of a quick victory evaporates. Unable to withstand the relentless backlash, the People's Liberation Army withdraws. The island's resilience prevails, and its defiance becomes a symbol of national resistance in the face of enormous adversity; David slays Goliath once again. The islanders' army proved to be the most lethal force of them all.

Special Operations is about the People

U.S. Army Special Operations Soldiers are crucial to establishing cooperative security partnerships and supporting U.S. ally resilience. Autonomous systems, dual-use technologies, and a cutting-edge arsenal may defeat the enemy kinetically, but they won't win the hearts and minds on the ground or leave a lasting footprint. There is a reason that one of the SOF Truths is "Humans are more important than hardware" and that "the best equipment in the world cannot compensate for a lack of the right people."[01] If the population is the center of gravity – a claim often made by irregular warfare practitioners[02] - then understanding that population is

imperative. It is also in these “gray zones” where relationships will matter the most. Blinded by hardware's brute promise, McNamara and LeMay plotted to pulverize Vietnam into the Stone Age, oblivious that resilient minds—rooted in cultural grit—forge the true victors on the battlefield. Apply this to military operations since 9/11 and you can see the dangers of ignoring culture more clearly.

Since World War II, special operators have been instrumental in theaters where conventional military forces could not meet operational demands. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Shane W. Shorter has pointed to the role of SOF in the Ukrainian conflict, which he said was vital to stopping Russian forces during their invasion of Ukraine in 2022.[03] Although Shorter has acknowledged the importance of technology, he still maintains that relationships are paramount. “It’s always going to come down to a special operator talking to a partner. The special operator has to know the culture, the language, the likes and dislikes and more.”[04]

Drawing on Col. John Boyd’s assertion that “people, ideas, and hardware—in that order” matter most, we can further refine our previous idea. Equipment is important, but not more important than ideas, and the ideas are not more important than the people. Assuming we assess and select the best people, and we have the best equipment, wouldn’t it be a good idea to educate our forces beyond a practice of rote memorization and multiple-choice tests? Instead, of such a banal educational experience, we aim to broaden the perspective beyond the idea of “cultural sensitivity training,” arguing that a dynamic education of the forces who interact with local populations will enable these forces to better understand what they are experiencing, and ultimately enhance their ability to influence their environment.

Case in point: Forging partnerships requires more than showing up with shiny equipment and a rigorous training regimen. Knowing the regional culture and local dynamics in the operational environment is imperative. An understanding of the socio-political landscape enables operators to appreciate the complexities of engaging with foreign populations whose worldviews differ from their own. This knowledge comes in handy when establishing a fruitful and trusting partnership.

Neither cultural competencies nor regional knowledge are inherent skillsets or easily researchable topics that can be mastered through a Google search or an artificial intelligence interface. Simply providing our personnel with a list of cultural “Dos and Don’ts” and a country study flipbook to pack in their rucksack is not sufficient. Foreign travel experience to faraway lands and frequent exposure to foreign peoples and cultures are helpful, but they are also not enough to become a master of intercultural knowledge.[05] We have found that a comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis - integrated through classroom instruction – to be most effective. In addition, teaching and practicing universal cultural skillsets provides Soldiers with a cultural “toolbox” that enables them to interface successfully with other cultures. The 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne) Regional Expertise and Culture (REC) Program is here to provide these tools.

The 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne) Regional Expertise and Culture Program

Our program provides pre-deployment support to 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne) units prior to their departure for their areas of responsibility or to their assigned countries. There are Regional Expertise and Culture instructors assigned to each of the command subordinate units to provide support at all levels of training to include the smallest teams. The Regional Expertise and Culture training hinges on a broad interdisciplinary approach. In addition to the vast military experience of some of our instructors, we also come with backgrounds in anthropology, conflict analysis, political science, international relations, and area studies. Our instructors have traversed the globe, touching every continent and most countries where they have either lived, conducted research, or deployed – often all three. We bring over 70 years of combined military experience, including retired Special Forces officers and senior enlisted with years of advise-and-assist combat experience, an anthropologist with three Afghanistan deployments, a former Civil Affairs reservist, a former Psychological Operations cultural analyst, and a former Marine cultural instructor with 15 years of experience. Our senior instructor spent over five years studying Iran in addition to living in and working in China, Vietnam, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan. Collectively, our experiences and expertise are extensive. We believe that no amount of education can replace real-world interactions with the people and places where our Soldiers live and operate daily.

Our holistic training provides ARSOF Soldiers with a better understanding of intrastate conflict where they may deploy and highlights the complexities they face in the operating environment. We focus on anthropocentric considerations—such as people, culture, values and motivations, institutions, organizations, narratives, governments and political systems, historical context, relationships and networks, national identity, and leadership—and integrate this information with current doctrinal concepts. We believe it is important for Soldiers to understand the root causes of conflict and human security challenges.

Cultural Competencies are Essential Skills

With the current focus on technology, we worry these essential skills and knowledge will be seen as parochial pursuits during USASOC's force modernization efforts. Although there is doctrine (DoDI 5160.70 and CJSCI 3126.01C) that recognizes the importance of Regional Expertise and Culture capabilities to address priorities outlined in the National Defense Strategy, the enforcement of these policies is lacking. Perhaps that is because these "soft skills" are intangible and hard to track.

Yet, there is an art and a science to learning about culture. There are theories that are concrete and measurable. For example, Hofstede's six dimensions of national culture[06] can explain why mission command does not work in many places around the world. This applies to our partners who haven't embraced the empowerment of subordinates. As simple as this may seem, the introduction of these dimensions has proven effective for an audience of Special Forces noncommissioned officers and officers who are skeptical of spending more time on "soft skills" that aren't tracked by their command. There are other theories in the same vein that a Soldier

may put in their "cargo pocket" and apply on the ground, including determining the origin of conflict along five moral precepts. This is not just knowledge for its own sake; Special Forces students use it to determine the viability of a resistance force in practical exercises. The 5th Special Forces Group's Regional Expertise and Culture instructor has gone a step further and created a comprehensive training program that integrates highly accessible and easy to understand concepts such as the Big Five personality traits[07] and Robert Cialdini's Principles of Persuasion.[08] This program replicates interactions from previous teams deployed in theater, giving students credibility by showing what actually occurred. Our Psychological Operations instructor teaches students the socio-cultural analysis framework (SCAF)[09] to enhance their ability to thoroughly analyze the human terrain. She is well qualified to do so, as one of the framework's original researchers. Paired with her experience assisting human terrain teams in Afghanistan, she can adapt SCAF to the unique needs of Psychological Operations units of action.

In addition, our program has developed an assessment tool to evaluate Soldiers on their cultural competencies during scenario-based training. Called the adaptive readiness for culture (ARC), the rubric is designed to evaluate five specific cultural competencies identified as crucial for building relationships and working with partner forces. The skills[10] were identified during an enterprise-wide qualitative study that involved critical incident and scenario-based interviews with service members.[11] The assessment includes mastery level definitions and precise behavioral statements to support evaluation.[12] When integrated into exercises, Soldiers receive precise feedback to help them improve their intercultural skills. We have utilized this tool during and after exercises, and the appraisal has been enthusiastic and positive. If adopted by the Department of War, it will be the first assessment tool of its kind that can measure cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities.

As the United States continues to confront global challenges, a human-centric approach to conflict will remain necessary, especially for ARSOF. In today's security environment, irregular warfare will be necessary to thwart power competitors like Russia and China, whose "strategies do not fit into conventional paradigms of conflict."[13] The ability for our Soldiers to engage with partner forces and foreign civilian populations is more important than ever to build intrastate resilience against insurgencies and prevail in great power conflict. For this reason, not only should there be more emphasis on Regional Expertise and Culture training for our forces, but it should be prioritized.

Authors' Note

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Dr. Emily Stranger is the senior Theater Engagement and Regional Expertise instructor for the 1st

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The views, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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Modern Warfare and Risk

By Chief Warrant Officer 2 Matthew van der Graaff

Introduction

To maintain its decisive edge, the Army must shift its culture from a constraint-based mindset to one that strategically embraces prudent risk in decision-making. This recalibration is especially true for Special Forces commanders at lower echelons, who often operate with limited support and high autonomy. The Global War on Terror (GWOT) created a risk-averse culture and a lack of empowered leadership at lower echelons, which will limit the effectiveness of United States Special Operations Forces (SOF) support to conventional forces during future large-scale combat operations (LSCO). This article provides historical context for SOF risk tolerance, examines the challenges and benefits of high-risk operations, and identifies ways to develop risk-tolerant leaders.

Historical Context

During the GWOT era, technological advances allowed commanders at higher echelons to maintain continuous oversight, enabling them to scrutinize tactical operations. The nature of counterterrorism (CT) operations against an adversary that presented a myriad of asymmetric threats, such as improvised explosive devices and insider attacks, combined with the political pressure to minimize casualties, drove advancements in command-and-control systems and command oversight requirements. Constant blue force tracking and the standing requirement to utilize intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets during operations provided persistent situational awareness for higher echelons of command. This allowed commanders to micro-manage operations and led to the implementation of a series of controls to reduce risk to the force. Excessive control fostered a risk-averse culture in which constant operational oversight limited tactical commanders' decision-making and, at times, led to decision paralysis due to fear of reprisal from higher.

As the shift towards LSCO becomes prevalent, tactical commanders must be empowered to

make sound decisions based on their own risk analysis and knowledge of the operational environment. Commanders at higher echelons must become comfortable with less visibility of maneuver elements in a communications-denied environment against a near-peer adversary. As SOF seeks to support conventional forces in LSCO, this mindset shift must be embraced at all levels to empower subordinate commanders and ensure mission success.

Challenges and Benefits of High-Risk Operations

There are many challenges with high-risk operations conducted during LSCO, foremost among them a projected increase in casualties during combat operations. As SOF strives to provide value to conventional forces in LSCO, they will likely be tasked to provide effects on the periphery and in the deep space, contrary to the conduct of CT operations during GWOT. In an article posted on War on the Rocks, Spencer Reed discusses how future combat operations in denied areas will create dilemmas for commanders by writing, "The Golden Hour concept undoubtedly saved hundreds if not thousands of lives in Iraq and Afghanistan by decreasing the time between injury and medical care. However, the concept assumes the existence of resources and access that will not be present during a future fight with a strategic adversary."[01] Limited air superiority will degrade medical evacuation capabilities and reduce friendly force freedom of maneuver. This will force commanders to balance risk acceptance with mission success while facing critical resource limitations with potential strategic consequences. As the focus of SOF operations shifts toward LSCO, subordinate leaders face the additional challenge of convincing commanders at echelon to break the mold and adopt a culture that supports calculated risk to overcome future dilemmas.

There are significant benefits to commanders embracing calculated risk during LSCO. Calculated risk-taking provides opportunities for decisive action against strategic competitors, increasing overall lethality and effectiveness. A key to empowerment is the refinement of rules of engagement (ROE), which, during GWOT, were typically viewed as a constraint. Lieutenant General (retired) Milford Beagle Jr. writes, "Considering the scale, scope, and violence of LSCO—as envisioned by TRADOC[02]—the ROE will need to be permissive to effectively execute mission command with the appropriate level of control."[03] Fostering a culture that grooms tactical leaders to take calculated risks based on a comprehensive understanding of ROE, refined for LSCO, will encourage them to adapt and respond quickly to evolving threats in an ambiguous environment.

A modern-day example of the effectiveness of reducing risk-adversity is demonstrated by Ukrainian SOF tactical commanders in the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Doug Livermore emphasizes this in an article in Small Wars Journal, "Ukrainian SOF have consistently shown their ability to quickly adopt new technologies and tactics based on battlefield feedback. Perhaps most importantly, they have implemented flexible command structures that enable decentralized decision-making at tactical levels, allowing for rapid response to emerging threats and opportunities."[04] A decentralized decision-making process encourages outside-the-box thinking and reinforces the development of ground-breaking solutions to address complex problems. Additionally, an unencumbered decision-making process allows leaders to gain

experience in high-risk situations, which enhances their ability to make quick assessments that enable rapid decisions.

Reducing Risk-Adversity

There are several ways that the SOF enterprise can develop the next generation of effective tactical leaders, the first being training and education. As the force transitions from GWOT to LSCO, it is imperative that units focus on realistic, high-risk training that will force subordinate commanders to make decisions in an uncertain environment. The Army's Combat Training Centers must ensure their scenarios offer realistic, complex dilemmas that force junior leaders to adapt and develop innovative solutions. With this in mind, it is essential that commanders at echelon promote a culture that encourages leaders to learn from their failures. Subordinate leaders must be allowed to make mistakes and learn from them without fear of reprisal. In today's ever-changing environment, adaptability is the key to success. An example of this is training in communications denied environments that replicate projected conditions during LSCO. As SOF seeks to support LSCO by conducting operations in the deep fight, it is imperative that commanders are comfortable with minimal oversight and communication with tactical elements. Gone are the days of constant situation reports. Commanders must have full trust and confidence in their subordinate leaders' ability to make sound decisions in the face of adversity.

Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0 defines mission command as the Army's approach to command and control that empowers subordinate decision making and decentralized execution appropriate to the situation.[05] The principles of mission command (competence, mutual trust, shared understanding, commander's intent, mission orders, disciplined initiative, and risk acceptance) and their implementation are critical to success during SOF operations in support of LSCO. Commanders must clearly define their intent and have trust in their subordinates to seize the initiative to successfully accomplish high-risk missions. It is critical to instill the tenets of mission command at all levels while encouraging tactical leaders to take risks that could have strategic implications.

Conclusion

The importance of creating a culture of calculated risk-acceptance at all echelons is critical to keeping pace with near-peer competitors during LSCO. While GWOT created a culture of risk-adversity, the focus must shift to empowering subordinate leaders. These leaders must be taught to be adaptable so they can make timely, well-informed decisions about actions which may have strategic implications. A shift in mindset, realistic training, and the instillation of the tenets of mission command from senior commanders will breed a new generation of capable leaders, flexible and confident in their decision-making. We must embrace change if we are to be successful in modern conflict.

Author's Note: Chief Warrant Officer 2 Matthew van der Graaff is a Regular Army Special Forces Officer with more than 19 years of service. He wrote this as part of the Warrant Officer

Advanced Course graduation requirements. The view, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the position of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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Perspectives: Parachute and Jumper Recovery (and Why the Army Should Care)

By Sergeant First Class Nathan Berry

Editor's Note: This perspective from the force highlights an often overlooked component of airborne operations. It details the findings of a dedicated NCO who, after identifying a problem, invested significant personal effort to gather facts and propose a viable way forward. We encourage all Jumpmasters, leaders, and Air program managers to not only read this analysis but also to discuss its findings and recommendations within their organizations.

The Problem

The U.S. Army has an opportunity to enhance both fiscal stewardship and soldier safety during airborne operations by developing a more formalized capability for parachute and personnel recovery. The financial impact of equipment losses from events like tree landings is significant. Concurrently, the established recovery procedures for treed jumpers needlessly endanger service members. This article explores these challenges and recommends a path forward to create a standardized, safe, and cost-effective recovery capability that better aligns with the Army's operational needs and its commitment to its personnel.

The Financial Burden

Parachutes that cannot be recovered from trees, or are damaged during the landing and recovery process, represent a significant and recurring financial burden to the Army. Each individual parachute is a piece of high-value, life-support equipment with a substantial replacement cost. Thus, the cumulative effect of these incidents across all airborne units is considerable. Every unrecovered system diverts funds that could otherwise support other operational and modernization priorities. Even moderate losses aggregate into a substantial annual expense for the Army as a whole.

Risk Mitigation

In addition to the financial impact, I contend that risk mitigation and response regarding jumpers in trees is insufficient. For commanders (including designated airborne commanders presiding over an airborne operation), three proverbial blocks are universally checked, which serve primarily to mitigate liability rather than the risks to a soldier. The first mitigation is via Sustained Airborne Training (SAT), during which every jumper rehearses Chapter 3, section 80, from TC 3-21.220, *Static Line Parachuting Techniques and Training.* Every jumper mimics procedures, step-by-step, for the controlled activation and lowering of their reserve parachute, exiting of their parachute harness, and free climb. The second block is checked by the fact that no one *orders* a jumper to conduct self-recovery procedures. One who makes the attempt does so of their own volition, thus assuming the risk. The final block is checked when a jumper is unable or unwilling to self-recover, after which risk is outsourced entirely, usually to a fire department or utility company with a vehicle-mounted aerial lift (AKA cherry picker or bucket truck). Responsibility moves further away from leaders the more involved or time-consuming the issue becomes.

Pickin' Bones

ARSOF prides itself as a premier force in which "humans are more important than hardware." This notion should also reflect in our approach to personnel recovery during airborne operations. Tree landing training during SAT amounts to mimed hand gestures—akin to "learning" to tie your shoes by imitating the motions, then being forced at a random point in time to do it correctly on your first try with a two-story fall as the penalty for error. Research conducted by the British Royal Army Medical Corps shows that falls of 34 feet or more resulting in either head or chest injury carry a 50% mortality rate.[01] A 2020 study found that the probability of death increases by 7% per foot of fall height. [02] Another study found falls over 18 feet present a 50% chance of ER-level injury, with nearly half of those injured involving spinal trauma. [03] Yet the standard prescription is to descend 35–40 feet down paracord and canopy silk without fall protection, even for "Private Snuffy" fresh out of Airborne School.

For those suspended in harnesses awaiting rescue, risks mount. A study of 20 healthy adults in sit harnesses found that 30% experienced presyncope within an hour. [04] Case reports note rhabdomyolysis and neurological complications within four hours. [05] Venous pooling in a circulation-restrictive harness can form microclots within 10 minutes and fully formed clots within 30. [06] Parachute harnesses, unlike sit harnesses, are not designed for prolonged suspension, compounding the danger. As a medic on the drop zone, I have seen jumpers left hanging for four hours and, on a couple of occasions, up to six hours. It has never failed to amaze me that the consensus is, "It's out of our hands."

"We Already Have Recovery Kits…"

Every airborne battalion I've served in has a "recovery" kit typically maintained by the battalion air program manager. In practice, they have been widely useless: common items have included

short ladders incapable of reaching, twist-braid rope unsafe for climbing (and non-conducive to modern climbing, rescue, or mechanical advantage system hardware), axes irrelevant to the issue at hand, and climbing spurs that require training and additional equipment. These kits raise bigger questions: If units are responsible for recovery, who performs recovery, and how are they trained? If units are not responsible, why do we have kits at all? If units are responsible, but the kits consistently fail to produce results, why is "the kit" the *kit?* I posit that unit recovery kits offer little more than the illusion of preparedness.

Lack of Appetite and the Precedence to Challenge it

Most commanders I engaged on this topic seemed to view the notion as extraneous, with the following justification being the most prevalent: airborne operations are a combat capability, and there will be no "time-out" for recovery procedures in a contested environment. I concur with this sentiment. However, I am not advocating for the elimination of self-recovery procedures, which the confident and competent already execute. However, the argument stands: we still end up with people stuck in trees, and funds are still lost annually to replace unrecoverable chutes.

Illuminating the seriousness of the issue, in 2022, the Ranger Training Battalion at Fort Benning, Georgia, made a series of organizational and individual mistakes, resulting in the premature release of a jumper roughly 1,800 meters short of the leading edge of the drop zone. He ended up suspended in densely forested terrain approximately 800 meters off target at a height greater than the length of his reserve parachute and suspension lines, thus unable to self-recover. It was determined that the only recourse was to rely on the Fort Benning Fire Department to access and recover the soldier. The engine crew had no training for this task, as (unsurprisingly) jumper recovery is not part of their Fire Academy training, and none of the individuals had relevant secondary training.

The fire crew set up and ascended a ladder, affixed a pulley system to a branch above the soldier, and manually lowered him to the ground. Immediately upon activation of his canopy release assemblies, the branch snapped, resulting in a 50+ foot fall. The service member sustained serious injuries, including multiple major fractures, leaving RTB and the Fire Crew with a critical patient half a mile into the brush. After a lengthy investigation, corrective actions were recommended to the unit, Fort Benning Garrison Command, and the Army. Recommendations to the Army included developing and implementing standardized recovery training, resourcing, and processes.

What Solutions Exist?

Importing solutions from the civilian sector is not uncommon for the conventional military or SOF. Unfortunately, seemingly relevant conventional rescue models, such as High-Angle Rescue (HAR), are mismatched. HAR doctrine assumes fixed anchors and ergonomic rescue harnesses—conditions absent in tree landings. From 2020 to 2022, I attended several rescue-related courses alongside civilian rescuers and asked how they would retrieve a paratrooper 50

feet up or higher. Every response was the same: “Call an arborist.”

While researching this article, I was put in touch with a member of another special operations unit who stated that, mere weeks before our discussion, his organization had contracted an out-of-state tree company for exactly this type of training and resourcing, recognizing the need to adopt arborist skills to address this issue. Their conclusion: the Army only needs the most basic “crawl” level of arborist climbing techniques, with the “walk” and “run” being the intermediate and advanced rigging techniques used for the safe, controlled lowering of hundreds, or even over a thousand, pounds at a time. The relevant skills are far less risky than the complex tasks arborists perform daily with chainsaws aloft without any qualification or training course.

Arboriculture lacks a national or even generally recognized certification or standard. OSHA regulates cross-industry safety requirements, not arborist-specific standards or skill qualifications. E.g., whether inspecting a warehouse, construction site, or arborist site, OSHA inspects general safety items such as the hard-hat requirement for workers 6 or more feet from the ground and marking and PPE requirements based on proximity to traffic. The American National Safety Institute (ANSI) publishes best-practice guidance but is not a regulatory authority over *any* industry or profession. Thus, there is no readily available civilian course or an off-the-shelf solution for a recognized qualification. The Army’s fixation on qualifications over demonstrated ability is the real hurdle.

Recommendation

Ultimately, a complete institutional solution will likely require military-internal development of standards and material inventory, borrowing expertise from arborists and rope-work professionals. Initial civilian training cadres of inter-disciplinary professionals could inform baseline procedures, equipment lists, and safety measures, even in the absence of a universal civilian credential. A tiered model could mirror levels of medical training within ARSOF (e.g., Tactical Combat Casualty Care, SOF Austere Critical Care, and Special Operations Combat Medic):

- Basic: parachute recovery
- Intermediate: jumper recovery
- Advanced: enhanced self-recovery (e.g., military freefall personnel)

A complete mobility kit would likely cost around $3,500 or less, outfit a collective unit, last for years, and pay for itself after a single recovered system. To be clear, this recommendation offers an expansion of mobility capabilities, not an exclusively airborne-supportive concept. Airborne operations present an initial case for justification and recurrent instances through which vertical mobility capabilities can be exercised, refined, and standardized institutionally. However, such skills and equipment are not solely applicable to vertical mobility. If the Army were to minimize or delete airborne capabilities altogether, this would be irrelevant to the utility inherent to rope-based mechanical advantage systems and omnidirectional mobility. For

instance, demand for drone recovery capabilities may soon exceed that for jumper and parachute recovery. Decision makers face a choice: sustain a status quo that tolerates unknown financial losses and unnecessary risk to their personnel or establish a professional recovery capability that aligns with the Army's stated values and operational needs.

Author's Note: Sergeant First Class Nathan Berry serves as an Instructor / Writer at the US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. The view, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the position of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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Artificial Intelligence: The New Force Multiplier in Training Exercises

By Maj. Joshua Corson and Maj. Paul Kuemmerlein

Editors' Note: The authors highlight the effectiveness of integrating artificial intelligence (AI) tools into military exercise design. They highlight several examples that they have implemented in the Civil Affairs Qualification Course culmination exercise, named Operation Sluss-Tiller. By enhancing efficiency, scalability, and flexibility, AI systems redefine training environments to deliver tailored, immersive experiences. These tools enable the creation of responsive and detailed simulations, resulting in amplified outcomes for Soldiers preparing to fight on the modern battlefield.

Introduction:

The U.S. Army is beating the drum of modernization and transformation. From combatant commands to the squad and team, every unit and Soldier feels the pace of change. Yet many training exercises remain tied to legacy formats developed during the Global War on Terror, producing scenarios and control processes that are increasingly misaligned with the demands of large-scale combat operations (LSCO), contested information environments, and accelerated decision cycles.

Exercise professionals know the problem. Updating scenario products can be a colossal task conducted by a small number of people working against hard timelines. Even after revision, execution strains the bandwidth of the exercise control group (ECG). White cell and red cell personnel must answer requests for information (RFIs), adjudicate events, inject master scenario events list (MSEL) actions, manage role-player networks, and still sustain the administrative workload that keeps an exercise running. In many exercises, the limiting factor is not imagination or training intent — it is manpower and time.

The hard truth is that outdated design approaches and rigid exercise management methods stall transformation. They limit scenario depth, reduce responsiveness, and drive exercises toward static "scripted theater" rather than dynamic training.

Artificial intelligence changes that equation. AI does not replace human planners. It amplifies them.

Thesis: *AI empowers small exercise control teams to deliver the realism, responsiveness, and depth of large-scale exercises by scaling scenario management, stakeholder engagement, content generation, and knowledge delivery—while preserving critical human judgment.*

Before detailing each use, it is worth stating the most important principle of AI integration in training: AI outputs are drafts. Humans remain the release authority. AI enables speed and scale, but exercise realism and instructional alignment require judgment, restraint, and governance.

1. AI as a Cognitive Partner in Complex Scenario Design

A large-scale special operations forces (SOF) exercise is an interactive narrative ecosystem with hundreds of characters, intersecting plotlines, and a deep repository of scenario "lore." The core challenge for human designers is continuity: keeping timelines coherent, maintaining consistent actor motivations, and ensuring injects align with established ground truth across thousands of pages of scenario material.

In practice, scenario complexity can overwhelm even experienced exercise planners. Integrating operational orders, character backstories, area studies, intelligence threads, and the MSEL creates a volume problem. When design teams change one event, they must account for downstream effects across multiple training audiences, role-players, and operational timelines.

AI solves this problem by serving as a deputy scenario manager: a continuity engine that reduces cognitive load and keeps the exercise coherent.

Most leaders are familiar with exercise libraries that have grown one page at a time into an unmanageable, unreadable blob. These piles become impossible for students or even managers to learn. Now, AI optimizes onboarding processes by condensing massive amounts of information into clear, concise summaries. Whether tasked with providing a strategic overview of factions or delivering contextual insights on historical sites and relevant personnel, AI systems bridge knowledge gaps quickly and effectively.
Operation Sluss-Tiller vignette 1

By training a Large Language Model (LLM) on the full body of exercise materials — operational orders, character backstories, area studies, and the master scenario events list — design teams gain a reliable partner for rapid fact-checking and scenario control. The AI tracks relationships across key actors, monitors simulated resource status, and flags timeline conflicts when new events are introduced. This offloads the burden of managing thousands of interdependent details, allowing the human team to focus on higher-value work: designing challenging problems, adapting to trainee decisions, and driving learning outcomes.

- **AI Prompt:** *"If we introduce an enemy assassination on Day 3, which previously planned friendly meetings on Day 4 would be logically canceled or altered?"*

Takeaway: AI provides the volume capacity to manage massive scenario ecosystems, enabling small teams to build and maintain complex exercises without sacrificing narrative consistency or instructional intent.

2. AI to assist in Reachback and Exercise Depth

Exercises become immersive when trainees can leverage credible reachback: expert networks, professional stakeholders, and institutional actors who respond in ways that feel operationally authentic. In the real world, commanders and staff do not operate alone. They call higher headquarters, consult legal advisors, reach engineers, coordinate logistics, and negotiate with civilian leadership under constraints. In traditional exercise design, realistic reachback requires extensive staffing. Without that staffing, interactions degrade into generic role-player responses, delayed answers that disrupt tempo, hand-waved solutions that reduce realism, and unconvincing stakeholder behavior that undermines training. AI solves this by generating credible reachback and stakeholder responses at scale, without expanding the exercise control staff.

With minimal input, AI can simulate key figures with accurate expertise, consistent tone, and realistic priorities — producing nuanced responses that feel operationally authentic. By integrating profession-specific decision frameworks and referencing large bodies of doctrine, regulations, laws, and policies, AI can respond like a diligent police chief operating under legal constraints, a division G4 balancing logistics under stress, a mayor navigating competing interests and adversarial pressure, or a student activist shaping momentum through public sentiment. This embeds expert-level realism into the scenario and allows small teams to deliver depth and responsiveness once only achievable with a large, specialized role-player roster.

- **AI Prompt**: *List the key information the XO of the 602nd SMC would require to assess and approve the request to fabricate component X for a civilian generator.*

- **AI Prompt:** *Generate a tactful and guarded response from Fire Station 12's chief regarding how enemy sabotage has affected their response effectiveness*

3. Dynamic Content Generation

Modern warfare is a battle of narratives. Training exercises must reflect that reality. Units operate inside contested information environments shaped by propaganda, misinformation, rumor cascades, and competing truths. Manually generating a high-fidelity information environment is labor-intensive; even a strong ECG red cell struggles to produce enough content quickly enough to match trainee tempo. The result is often static: a handful of pre-scripted articles and social posts that fail to evolve with trainee decisions.

AI solves this by generating high-fidelity information injects at scale, allowing control cells to stay responsive and adaptive throughout execution.

In the culminating Civil Affairs Qualification Course exercise, Operation Sluss-Tiller, scenario managers use AI to maintain key personalities that students develop during the competition phase. Students who engage with the real-world county fire chief or engineer at a hydroelectric dam, can now reach back and leverage that relationship/network.

- *A fire station chief writes a quick email between missions.*
- *A student activist sends a theory-saturated report of what she sees on campus.*
- *A US Army logistician asks detailed RFIs to support a tasker.*

Operation Sluss-Tiller vignette 2

Beyond individual messages, AI allows scenario managers to simulate entire audiences — thousands of people observing, interpreting, and reacting to events in real time. Scenario managers pre-build audience profiles with demographics, interests, historic references, loyalties, and speaking styles, enabling organic outputs like social media posts, local news stories, and comment-section engagement. As trainees conduct civil engagements, counter adversary messaging, or create unintended effects, these factions detect changes, form narratives, and respond immediately. This creates rapid feedback loops that allow trainees to assess measures of performance and effectiveness and adjust their operational approach under realistic pressure.

- **AI Prompt:** *"Generate 10 simulated social media posts reflecting the visibility and response of Factions A, B, and C to ongoing protests from 0300–0800 in specified neighborhoods."*

- **AI Prompt:** *"Draft a 200-word article for the Republic Herald attributing the cause of local protests to US presence. Include a comment section reflecting viewpoints from Factions B, D, and E, featuring statements from Influencer [X]. Provide estimated audience engagement metrics."*

- **AI Prompt:** *"Write a biased news article from an anti-American perspective describing the aftermath of the friendly forces' artillery strike last night."*

Takeaway: AI allows the ECG to create a reactive and dynamic information environment that responds directly to trainee actions, forcing units to fight for control of the narrative in a way that is almost impossible to achieve manually.

4. Democratizing Knowledge for Agile Exercise Management

One of the most persistent problems in exercise management is the single point of failure: one or two members of the ECG become the sole keepers of critical scenario knowledge. When trainees ask detailed questions or role-players need fact-checking, execution slows while the

correct “guru” is found.
The solution is not necessarily more personnel, but better AI and better tools that distribute scenario knowledge across the team.

By making large repositories instantly searchable, AI enables the entire exercise control staff to answer RFIs with confidence and adjudicate events consistent with the established “ground truth” of the scenario. New personnel can review and internalize historical and strategic premises from extensive area studies in minutes, then apply those insights without breaking continuity. This reduces scenario acclimation time, accelerates decision-making, and allows the team to stay focused on operational objectives. Instead of relying on a single “guru” who wrote or memorized the scenario, exercises become resilient, scalable, and sustainable, even through routine turnover.

- **AI Prompt:** “*What is the name of the police chief in the town of Pineland?" or "Summarize all intelligence reports related to the UFWDs activity in the last 2-months."*

Takeaway: This empowers the entire exercise control staff, eliminates information silos, and enables sustainability by accelerating onboarding and reducing fragility when key personnel rotate out.

5. Data-Driven Trainee Analysis

To truly train modern staff work, trainees must wrestle with raw data—not pre-digested narrative summaries. Units today operate inside “data fog”: massive volumes of partial information, ambiguous indicators, competing reporting, and uncertain trendlines. Yet many exercises still rely on simplified reporting because producing complex datasets by hand is slow and unsustainable.

AI solves this by rapidly generating complex, realistic datasets that trainees must analyze using real tools and methods.

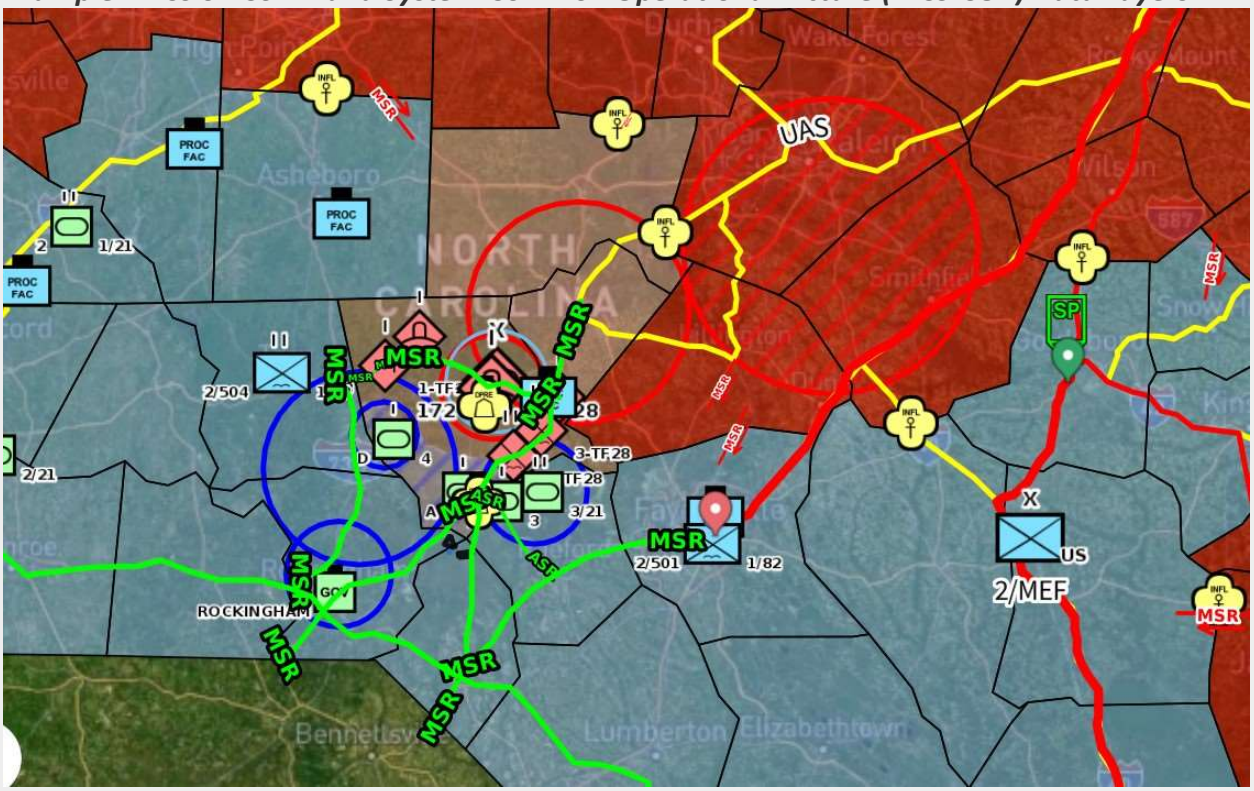
Information Warfare (IWar):
Using AI tools like ChatGPT and DALL-E, the ECG generated a high volume of realistic ION (information operations network) media injects, including articles from sources like The Washington Post, tweets from OsintTV, and other simulated news reports with competing narratives.
Operation Sluss-Tiller vignette 3

AI can produce large data products — public opinion surveys, economic indicators, service delivery metrics, atmospheric and infrastructure data — that simulate operational ambiguity at scale. Trainees then use tools like Power BI or Python to clean the data, identify trends, and deliver defensible, data-driven recommendations. Scenario designers can depict sentiment shifts, political leanings, and population vulnerabilities tied to shortages, disruptions, intimidation, or governance gaps, forcing students to build conclusions that enable decision-

making. AI can also support scenario management by introducing indicators of adversary proxy activity, staging, and sabotage preparations, creating deeper intelligence problems and tighter alignment to measures of performance and effectiveness.

- **AI Prompt:** *"Identify indicators in Sites A, B, and C that suggest adversary SOF proxies are preparing sabotage activities ahead of Joint Forcible Entry operations."*

Example: Mission Command System-Common Operational Picture (MCS-COP) Data Layers



Scenario managers update a common to all "layer" on MCS-COP. This layer includes enemy attacks and friendly maneuver graphics that students can analyze and make real-time decisions / reactions. AI products are integrated into the reports and assist with building layers based on enemy TTPs and training objectives.

Operation Sluss-Tiller vignette 4

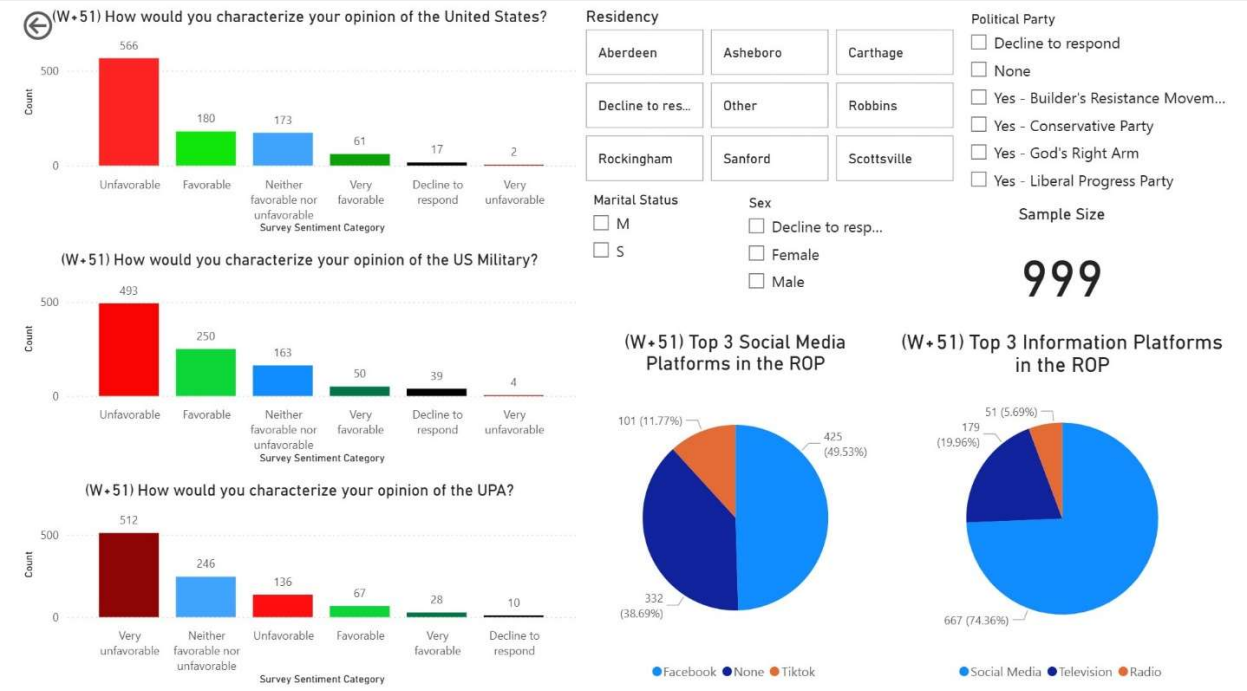
- **AI Prompt:** *"Outline indicators within Area C's civil component that signify Adversary TF 2-12 staging to penetrate Host Nation forces located 10 km south."*

Takeaway: Data is the language of today. AI enables scenario managers and trainees alike to generate, analyze, and interpret complex datasets with speed and accuracy — supporting objective, measurable training outcomes with a human-in-the-loop controlling the data inputs and prompts.

Integrating AI into other Platforms

AI is a phenomenal tool, and the five uses of AI described in the article are useful if you have the programs and platforms available to harness the content. Army programs of record, such as Palantir's MCS-COP or Maven, provide an excellent venue to update AI-produced outcomes in real-time. In Operation Sluss-Tiller, MCS-COP layers are updated daily to provide real-time enemy and intelligence updates. These updates are dropped onto the students' common operating picture and provide higher echelon data, enemy activity, and operations that must be analyzed and included in their daily battle rhythm. This provides the students with immediate consequences and feedback from their previous day's operations. In the layer, enemy icons and reports include information on the activity or intelligence summary. It is the student's responsibility to then incorporate this information into their effects working group and commander's priorities.

Example: Survey Data



Students used Microsoft Power BI to analyze and draw conclusions from the survey data. Power BI can turn raw data into easily digestible information in the form of graphs and percentages. Students were able to use this analysis to better understand the population's bias, opinions, influences, most popular social media outlets, and political leanings.

Operation Sluss-Tiller vignette 5

The information operations network is equally important in replicating a synthetic, exercise internet. This open-source forum provides students with the ability to query and analyze the information space. These articles, tweets, posts, and videos in the information domain create opportunities to train students on information warfare. It also allows them to combat misinformation, disinformation, and create their own content. AI enables a few scenario

managers that have the capacity to keep up with a much larger training audience and provide near-instantaneous products based on student actions and external actors.

The Transformation of Operation Sluss-Tiller

The modernization of Operation Sluss-Tiller, the capstone exercise for the U.S. Army Civil Affairs Qualification Course, serves as a powerful proof-of-concept for these five principles. Tasked with rewriting over 2,000 pages of material to shift from a counterinsurgency focus to a LSCO scenario, a small two-person team turned to AI as a force multiplier.

Their experience provides a concrete example of the five points in action:

01 **As a cognitive partner,** the team used AI to manage the sprawling narrative, tracking hundreds of characters and events, which allowed them to focus on instructional quality rather than administrative minutiae.

02 **To assist with reachback and exercise depth,** the team developed a separate email thread for students to reachback to their network. Civil engagement and civil reconnaissance in the competition phase became operationally relevant in the conflict phase but also had the potential to overburden the two-man scenario design team. AI provided the bandwidth and expertise necessary to quickly respond and answer students attempting to leverage their network.

03 **To democratize knowledge,** the team used SOFChat to make all 500-plus scenario documents instantly searchable by the entire ECG. This eliminated the historical single-point-of-failure and resulted in student critiques reporting zero scenario contradictions for the first time in years.

04 **The red cell used AI to generate dynamic content,** creating a rich information environment with simulated news articles, tweets, and propaganda from competing factions, forcing students to navigate a realistic battle of narratives.

05 **Finally, the exercise enabled data-driven analysis,** by providing students with the "Gabroc Longitudinal Survey," a detailed but fictional dataset on the local population. Students used Microsoft Power BI to analyze this raw data and develop precise, data-informed messaging campaigns.

Conclusion

The integration of artificial intelligence into exercise design and management is not about replacing the human planner but empowering them. The transformation of Operation Sluss-Tiller demonstrates that these five principles are not theoretical; they are practical, field-tested methods for creating training that are more rigorous, efficient, and relevant. By leveraging AI as a cognitive partner, a knowledge manager, a content generator, a data provider, and a persistent assistant, we can build training environments that truly prepare our military forces for the complex challenges of the future battlefield.

Authors' Notes:

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The views, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent those of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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Getting Small: Institutionalizing Split-Team Operations for Large Scale Combat Operations
By Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jonathan Scharnhorst

Introduction

Successful technology companies ruthlessly focus on how customers will use their products. Likewise, the best tool for senior leaders to determine where to invest constrained research and development (R&D) budgets is their soldiers. Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) soldiers at all levels are learning from the evolving pace and technology of modern warfare, as seen in recent conflicts from the clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan to the war in Ukraine. Our formation is struggling to visualize how this evolution will change future conflicts. A significant challenge is the potential disconnect between leaders who make critical technology acquisition decisions and the tactical teams who will ultimately employ the new tools. To correct this imbalance, ARSOF leaders should involve soldiers at the tactical level in wargaming the potential employment of new and emerging technologies, thereby ensuring our formations receive the right tools and have a well-thought-out plan for integrating them appropriately.

Innovation at the Tactical Edge

Innovation is in soldiers' DNA. In Normandy in 1944, the Army spent weeks pushing through hedgerows. The hedgerows were huge mounds of dirt dating back to Roman times, topped with dense, impassable foliage. German defenders fortified these natural obstacles, laying in heavy weapons and target reference points on channelized crossing points. Neither Army senior leaders, Pentagon planning teams, nor procurement offices were able to solve the problem. Sergeant Curtis Grubb Culin III, a tanker from the New Jersey National Guard, designed a "Rhino" attachment that senior leaders immediately adopted, enabling their forces to break out of Normandy and continue through western Europe.

As improvised explosive devices (IEDs) proliferated in Iraq, individual soldiers modified their vehicles with armor plating before the military developed up-armored kits. When insurgents adopted passive infrared triggers, soldiers at the tactical level developed the first systems that

evolved into the Rhino passive infrared Defeat System. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam – Studies and Observations Group soldiers constantly experimented with tactics and equipment, adapting everything from cutting-edge chemicals to bows and arrows for their unique mission. Son Tay Raiders used the first reflex sights in combat, ordering them from a commercial hunting catalog when none of the Army's specialized R&D programs proved adequate. However, current procurement processes and resource constraints prevent ARSOF soldiers at the tactical level from independently acquiring the drones, machine learning models, and robotics necessary to drive similar bottom-up innovation. Instead, ARSOF leaders should harness the natural innovation and inquisitiveness of their tactical units of action to focus and inform R&D prioritization.

Mechanisms to Generate Bottom-Up Feedback

There are three general ways ARSOF leaders can do this. They should employ both lessons learned and acquisition specialists to capture insights from exercises, new technological prototypes, and narrative-form wargaming.

Designated lessons learned personnel should record after action reviews (AARs) with tactical units of action within two days of exercises lasting a week or longer involving a company or higher headquarters. These exercises use robust scenarios with complex planning factors leading to impactful insights. Formal AARs focus on near-term impacts over long-term R&D. Lessons-learned specialists will capture ideas that may not be included in formal reviews. Verbal AARs will be easier for units with other recovery and reporting requirements. Conducting AARs with each unit separately, without its headquarters, when the exercise is still fresh, will yield candid and raw insights. Lesson-learned specialists would quickly develop standardized agendas for efficient AARs, in person or virtually, to capture relevant data. An AAR after every exercise would be impractical, but as soldiers realize the value, the most motivated contributors would create a demand signal to aid prioritization.

Acquisitions specialists should also expand their efforts to facilitate widespread interaction with emerging technologies and the companies developing them. R&D planners should prioritize "customer feedback" above all, ensuring that at least 20 representatives from diverse ARSOF units—including Special Forces operational detachments, Civil Affairs teams, Psychological Operations detachments, aircraft crews, and Ranger platoons—engage with the physical design or planned application of new technologies at every stage from initiation to adoption or termination. ARSOF leaders should provide a clear purpose for the project, and both lessons learned and acquisition specialists should focus discussions/testing on that purpose to glean applicable insights. Detailed tactical customer feedback at every stage will limit time and money spent on projects that units will not use and will provide our soldiers with a tangible sense of where senior leaders are driving development.

Wargaming, the Army's primary tool for imagining future operations, can be adapted to drive innovation. Rather than a top-down simulation, acquisition personnel should facilitate these as structured brainstorming sessions for the tactical soldiers who will actually use the technology.

In these thought experiments, a facilitator would present a realistic future problem to a group of operators—such as an ODA, Ranger platoon, or Psychological Operations team. Unconstrained by existing technology, the soldiers would then use their real-world experience to define the practical requirements for new tools, such as the need for a drone to be modular, disposable, or capable of operating in swarms. The output is a concise narrative that captures these user-defined requirements. This narrative provides a clear demand signal for senior leaders and industry partners, ensuring that R&D investments focus on solving clearly identified tactical problems.

Conclusion

We are at an unusual inflection point, where our formations contain some of the most knowledgeable experts in the cutting-edge technologies that will shape future conflicts. However, the tactical units that employ them have limited access to those technologies or the time to experiment with them. The high cost of R&D necessitates a top-down approach to future conflict technologies; however, the bottom of our formations often has the most creative ideas. To optimize resource allocation and maximize returns on our investments, we must ruthlessly prioritize "customer feedback" and leverage our tactical experts to drive our strategic technological investments. If we fail to harness the power at both ends of our formation, we risk being stuck in the hedgerows for weeks.

Chief Warrant Officer 2 'Jonathan Scharnhorst' is a pseudonym for an active-duty Special Forces warrant officer who has served over 20 years in Special Forces. The view, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the position of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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Beyond Words: Rethinking Language's Role in Special Operations
By Sergeant Major Michael Dean

Introduction

In an era characterized by complex global dynamics and multifaceted threats, the United States Special Operations Forces (SOF) 's ability to engage effectively across diverse environments is paramount. For decades, a central tenet of special operations has been the importance of cultural and regional expertise. The ability of SOF to build relationships, navigate complex social terrains, and operate below the level of armed conflict is foundational to their success. While this requires a deep understanding of the operational environment, the specific role of language proficiency within that understanding has become a subject of intense debate.

While official doctrine emphasizes language, regional expertise, and culture (LREC) as a unified capability, language training has consistently been a low priority for many deploying units. Despite this, SOF has successfully executed missions and built partner networks for decades. This paradox raises a critical question: How should SOF reconcile its emphasis on language with a multi-decade history of success that has often occurred without it?

Language as Mission-Essential, Not Mission-Critical

The strategic value of language skills within SOF could be viewed as mission-essential (or, even mission-enhancing) rather than a mission-critical requirement. While direct communication in a partner's language is undoubtedly an asset that can accelerate the process of building trust and rapport, its absence does not automatically lead to mission failure. The long history of successful SOF operations globally demonstrates that forces can effectively achieve operational or strategic objectives by leveraging other critical competencies.

When SOF operators lack specific language skills, they face challenges that can be mitigated through the skilled use of interpreters or translators, a deep understanding of cultural norms, and a reliance on non-verbal communication. The primary risk is not a guaranteed failure to

build partnerships, but rather a potential for friction as a result of communication inefficiencies. In a competitive environment where adversaries seek to exploit any perceived gap, a reliance on intermediaries can slow the speed of influence and require greater effort to ensure the clarity and authenticity of the message.

Therefore, language proficiency should be viewed as a tool that optimizes engagement and strengthens the application of U.S. power. It makes a culturally astute soldier even more effective and can provide a distinct advantage in nuanced interactions. However, the true foundation of SOF's success remains its deep regional expertise and cultural acumen, which enable operators to build credible, lasting relationships, regardless of shared language.

Policy vs. Practice: The Enduring Language Dilemma

The de facto treatment of language as mission-essential, rather than mission-critical, is not a new phenomenon. The decades-long gap between formal policy and operational reality is the most compelling evidence that the force has intuitively understood this distinction.

A 2023 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that language training is not completed equally across the SOF enterprise, with many elements focusing on other training to prepare for deployments (GAO, 2023). The report noted that while services have standards for language capabilities, there are limited consequences for failing to meet them.

These findings echo a 1991 Inspector General report on the Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) language program, which identified similar challenges; the ARSOF language training program failed to provide sufficient training for Special Forces Soldiers (Office of the Inspector General, 1991). The findings of both the 1991 and 2023 reports reveal a continuity: language training remains an advanced skill that is treated with less urgency than other mission-critical tasks. This trend is further solidified by high-level policy changes. The Department of the Army's Fiscal Year 2025 Command Plan Guidance explicitly directed a shift in how language-coded positions are managed (Department of the Army, 2023).

Proposed Solutions: Flexibility and Mission Command

Instead of fighting against this decades-long institutional reality, USSOCOM should formally embrace it. The solution is not to abandon LREC, but to rebalance its components and evolve beyond a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach to language training. The goal should be an environment in which SOF leaders at the lowest echelons can implement language requirements based on operational necessity while ensuring their forces maintain a deep understanding of culture and regional dynamics. This can be achieved through four primary lines of effort:

> **1. Synchronization:** USSOCOM should synchronize LREC opportunities across the service components. This involves assessing current programs to identify gaps and strengths and integrating LREC to reduce often redundant service-specific programs.

2. Customization of Language Programs: Develop tailored language programs that match the specific operational needs of deploying units, focusing on the languages and dialects relevant to current and potential areas of operation.

3. Embracing Technological Solutions: To bridge the immediate communication gap, aggressively field and integrate cutting-edge translation technologies. Portable, real-time translation devices and applications can provide on-demand linguistic support, enabling communication in environments where no team member possesses language proficiency.

4. Accountability: Centralized oversight can track progress and ensure that all LREC training, whether focused on language, regional studies, or technology, directly supports mission readiness.

Conclusion

The success of SOF in a complex global environment hinges on its ability to understand and influence that environment. While language can be a powerful tool, it is only one component of the LREC puzzle. For decades, SOF has demonstrated its ability to operate effectively with or without specific language skills, relying instead on a strong foundation of cultural acumen and regional expertise.

By fostering an agile and adaptive system built on synchronization, needs-based training, technological adoption, and proper accountability, USSOCOM can cultivate a force that is culturally adept and fully prepared for the demands of modern strategic deterrence. The future of SOF effectiveness lies not in rigid adherence to requirements that are disconnected from operational reality, but in redefining language as a mission-essential capability.

Author's Note: Sergeant Major Michael Dean is a regular Army Psychological Operations noncommissioned officer with more than 24 years of service. He has served more than 18 years in various Psychological Operations formations, and he wrote this as part of the Joint Special Operations Forces Senior Enlisted Academy graduation requirements. The views, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the position of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL MEDIA ON U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: CHALLENGES, PERCEPTIONS, AND CULTURAL SHIFTS

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The Impact of Digital Media on U.S. Special Operations Forces: Challenges, Perceptions, and Cultural Shifts

By Chief Warrant Officer 2 Frank Ayala

Introduction

Digital media, including podcasts and video media platforms, has become a powerful industry with a substantial and consistent audience. Many different fields have tapped into the power of this type of messaging, resulting in a continually broadening range of publicly accessible information. The United States military has also turned to digital media to reach a wide audience. Podcasts and social media are now a key source of information about the military for many Americans. This information comes not only from Department of War (DoW) entities but also from former service members and others with an interest in the military.

Podcasts hosted by veterans from the special operations force (SOF) community provide insights into the work and lives of those who serve. YouTube and TikTok offer a visual media platform with similar content. Interviews and stories shared via SOF-centric social media include a variety of information from combat scenarios to the struggles of SOF veterans during and after their service. Though this type of media has raised public awareness of SOF professionals, it can also be accompanied by inflated personalities, political bias, and misinformation that can influence public opinion and recruitment. The lack of editorial control on many online platforms allows unfiltered and often unverified narratives to go unchallenged with audiences accepting them without questioning their truthfulness or accuracy. One 2021 commentary noted, “in a preliminary analysis of more than 8,000 episodes of popular political podcasts, approximately one-tenth include potentially false information” (Wirtschafter, 2021). This indicates that podcast hosts can, intentionally or unintentionally, spread misleading information or unsubstantiated personal viewpoints.

The Problem – Digital Media’s Impact on the Public Perception of SOF

This type of broadcasting can create significant issues, particularly because viewers and listeners

increasingly rely on these platforms for news and cultural information. At times, SOF-related shows enter the political realm, either directly or via discussions about military or social topics. As a governmental department sworn to defend the United States Constitution, the public expects the military to project an apolitical stance and to avoid public endorsements of political candidates or parties while serving. The Department of War's long-standing policy on political activities prohibits active-duty personnel from engaging in partisan politics (Department of Defense Directive 1344.10, 2012). This policy supports a healthy civil-military relationship and gives policymakers confidence in the institution's role in defending the country's freedoms rather than influencing political matters.

While the policy provides service members with explicit guidelines, these rules do not apply to veterans. Though usually coming from programs featuring prior service members, some SOF-centric programming has skirted or breached DoW guidance and the purpose it was intended to serve. This dynamic is critical, as these shows represent a significant source of military information for the public. Veterans are typically featured on shows, but there have been instances of active service members being interviewed, which included discussions that enter the realm of partisan politics. Although service members may avoid directly engaging in politically-sensitive conversations, the political views of hosts are often public knowledge. Discussing social concerns through the host's lens, without the guest's direct rebuttal, may lead the audience to perceive agreement. In many cases, simply appearing on the show can lead listeners to believe the guest shares the host's views. While many digital media hosts invite diverse perspectives, some strongly partisan shows reinforce their viewpoints by discussing issues with like-minded guests.

Another point to consider is the effect of SOF-centric media on young people who consider military service. Podcasts like Pineland Underground, hosted by Soldiers at the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS), provide information about the training and service of Specia Forces and other Army SOF soldiers. This podcast sheds light on the mystique surrounding the Green Berets, potentially enhancing public understanding and recruiting efforts.

However, other SOF-specific digital media may present content that could harm public perception and recruiting. Hosts often interview operators who glamorize combat. While this type of programming could boost recruiting numbers, the possibility of direct combat never becomes a reality for many service members. What *does* become a reality for all service members, including those who do see combat, is day-to-day military service that may consist of long periods of inactivity, administrative requirements, and varying amounts of training depending on unit requirements. This reality comes fast, leaving some disheartened by their experience, often leading them to choose to move on from the military.

The ever-evolving role of SOF is also a factor in recruiting. SOF are currently undergoing modernization and working to market its impact in large-scale combat operations. As stated by retired Gen. Richard Clarke, a former commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command, "It may no longer be that the most important person on the mission is actually the Special Forces

operator who is kicking down the door, but it could be the cyber operator that the special operations team actually has to get to the environment and make sure that he or she can work his or her cyber tools into the fight" (Military.com, 2020). Although this statement might appeal to a tech-savvy recruit, these critical, evolving roles are rarely the focus of popular digital media.

Current digital media is facilitating the public airing of concerns regarding military leadership. The U.S. military has experienced scandals tied to senior leader misconduct. Both those directly involved and the wider community bear the consequences. An article featured in the Modern War Institute at West Point posits, "Instances of ethical lapses, resource misuse, and sexual harassment have eroded confidence in military leadership, tarnishing its image as a bastion of professionalism" (2024).

Not all opinions about problems with military leaders constitute clear violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and many discussed on digital media platforms may be unsubstantiated. However, public airing of perceived leadership faults can shape public opinion and lead some would-be recruits to rethink their desire to serve. While there are undoubtedly leaders who don't perform as well as expected, these complaints may be better suited for conversations within the units affected rather than for public consumption.

Defining a Way Forward

Though this article presents a generally negative view of SOF-centric digital media, there may be ways to minimize its negative impacts. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, a cornerstone of our democracy. For that reason, these podcasts and other media won't disappear any time soon. One possible response is for the community to produce interesting, realistic content that enhances the image of SOF and the military as a whole. Current podcasts produced from within the actively-serving SOF community are directed towards the operators who do the work discussed in each segment. This group typically believes in what they do, leading them to formulate their own experiences and perspectives to develop informed discourse rather than relying on outside information to form their opinions. However, when compared to popular media, the content is bland and doesn't capture the attention of the wider audience that has come to expect a shock factor in programming.

Popular podcasts typically interview interesting people with charismatic personalities to boost viewership. They also discuss a range of topics related to culture and current events. Smith (2022) notes that podcasts "allowed creators from all walks of life to make shows that appeal to the masses." Another skill that popular podcasters possess is their ability to engage with their guests and the audience. Yorganci and McMurty (2025) highlight that appearing ordinary and imperfect allows listeners to feel a friendship-type bond with hosts. Conversely, DoW-sponsored podcasts are often perceived as sterile and scripted, lacking the authentic engagement that builds a loyal audience.

Another option to moderate the content of SOF-specific programming would be to change the policy surrounding the disclosure of military subjects. This would be extremely difficult to

navigate because many popular podcasts feature former service members, who aren't bound by the same rules as those currently serving. Even enacting policy changes for currently-serving members would skirt the First Amendment, which service members are sworn to defend. Current U.S. Army social media guidance informs soldiers, who are off duty and not in uniform, they are permitted to express their personal views on public issues or political candidates via social media platforms, much the same as they would be permitted to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper (Department of the Army, n.d.). This guidance is not only open to interpretation but also largely obsolete, referencing an era of public discourse that has been eclipsed by social media.

The best solution to this dilemma involves a grassroots approach. At one time, a key aspect of being a SOF operator was accepting the profession's inherent operational secrecy. The Green Berets call this being a "Quiet Professional" (a term used by Col. Charles Fry in a 1979 article about "quiet professionalism" and Special Forces). Other SOF entities have similar mottos that represent this idea. Being a "Quiet Professional" was once a shared value that instilled pride in the job, understanding that the hard work put forth may never leave the countries in which those efforts occurred. This foundation of the SOF culture has changed since the Global War on Terrorism. Books and movies on SOF exploits roused the public's imagination, and the evolution of media technology met this thirst for SOF stories, leading to the current landscape of podcasts and digital content. The days of working in the "Quiet Professional" culture clashed with the celebration of individualism highlighted on social media.

Leading Cultural Change

The U.S. military has undergone cultural changes that affect all members, regardless of branch, rank, or occupation. According to a literature review on culture and climate, Meredith et al., (2017) point out, "The U.S. Army is facing challenges stemming from behavioral health issues, misconduct, and adjustment to changing demographics. Long-term solutions to these problems very likely require changes in the Army's organizational culture and climate, but institutional change in large organizations is typically very difficult." From this perspective, the Army needs its own cultural change, which leaves SOF with the added challenge of creating organic cultural change, along with adapting to overall departmental change. The type of change necessary for SOF requires leaders who support a cultural shift. In addition to issuing directives, leadership should support two-way conversations with subordinates to assess the current situation, identify the desired state, and design the roadmap to get there. One book on culture and leadership explains that effective communication is crucial for cultural change, yet misalignment between leadership messaging and day-to-day practices can undermine efforts (Schein, 2010). With this in mind, a clearly defined plan of action will allow any deviation to be quickly recognized and addressed.

In contrast to the leadership-led approach, an alternative model of cultural change starts from the ground up. While this may be a challenge in the military due to the structure, an example of a bottom-led approach from an organization involves the National Football League (NFL). The NFL's current stance on head injury prevention was initiated by players who expressed concerns

about their health. Those concerns ushered in changes to the NFL's approach to the issue, as well as rule changes and equipment innovations. Initially dismissive of concussion risks, the NFL now implements strict concussion protocols, mandates baseline neurocognitive testing, and has invested millions in concussion research (Fainaru & Fainaru-Wada, 2013). Based on the NFL model, initiating change from within the units of action presents an effective long-term solution. According to Cameron and Quinn's (2011) guide to changing organizational culture, "cultural change involves the modification of the collective norms and values that guide behavior within an organization." This implies that the introduction of these norms begins during indoctrination at the beginning of SOF-specific training. Ideally, this cultural indoctrination would begin even before recruitment, by shaping the public narrative through strategic use of social media.

When considering policy change versus cultural change, Schein (2010) asserts, "culture has a more enduring and significant impact on behavior in organizations than formal rules or structures." These findings suggest a change in the warrior culture would be more successful than policy changes or attempts to challenge current media personalities for viewership. Stories of combat and heroism will always have a place in American culture. However, a shift in culture could allow those stories to be viewed as valuable historical references, rather than as opportunities for individual recognition or profit.

Conclusion

Social media and other widely available public media have shaped a portion of the American public's understanding and perception of SOF. While the perception is largely positive, there are risks posed by digital media platforms that could damage the credibility of SOF serving the country as a mission-focused force. Currently, our armed forces have transitioned from the Global War on Terror and placed a department-wide renewed emphasis on strategic competition and large-scale combat operations. This shift presents an opportunity for SOF to return to working away from public view, focusing on presenting commanders with unique deterrence and response options. This is an opportune time to return our formations to the belief that being a SOF operator isn't about the image, but about working with others who share the desire to challenge themselves as team members and live as Quiet Professionals. It's not too late for the SOF community to return to its roots, providing an important tool with a highly respected force who quietly and enthusiastically answer the call – wherever, whenever, and whatever it may require.

Author's Note: Chief Warrant Officer 2 Frank Ayala is a pseudonym for a Regular Army Special Forces Officer with more than 16 years of service. The view, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the position of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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Perspectives: The Weight of War and Reclaiming Combat Agility

By Chief Warrant Officer 2 Aaron McClendon

The United States Army is currently undergoing a transition and restructuring period, which historically occurs at the end of prolonged conflicts, such as World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Global War on Terror (GWOT). During this transition period, the U.S. Army seeks to, once again, modernize its force structure and conduct a thorough review of its doctrine. Many experienced combat leaders will inevitably retire or leave the military, creating a heavy reliance on doctrine and institutional learning to fill the gaps left by these experienced veterans. As the U.S. Army conducts force-modernization and doctrinal changes, an emphasis should be placed on combat agility regarding the mission-essential equipment soldiers are required to carry into combat. Over the last few decades, rucksacks, personal protective equipment, and vehicles have become increasingly larger and heavier, increasing the weight and bulkiness of a soldier's equipment. The increase in weight and bulk degrades the mobility, sustainability, and lethality of U.S. Army soldiers, as additional carried weight increases fatigue, elevates sustenance consumption, and significantly reduces their ability to maneuver quickly and over long distances on the battlefield. This article examines mobility, sustainability, and lethality, and it provides recommendations for consideration during the U.S. Army's current transformation period.

Throughout the history of warfare, movement and maneuver played an important role on the battlefield. Mobility was a key element of the German campaign strategy during World War II, as they employed Blitzkrieg tactics. Blitzkrieg, translated into English as "lightning war," enabled the Nazis to invade France and the majority of Europe, completely overtaking territories at a speed never encountered before. Fundamental to the strategy is ensuring a force is light, mobile, and self-sustaining for a period, which allows a force the agility to overwhelm an enemy before the enemy can react to offensive operations. When examining this form of warfare, it is critical to examine the loadout and accompanying equipment these forces brought into denied enemy territory. Typically, Allied and Axis infantry would carry their weapons, ammunition, one to two quarts of water, an extra pair of socks, a raincoat, one to two days of rations, and their load-bearing vest.

Compare this loadout to what the typical packing list or loadout is for modern U.S. infantry soldiers, which includes an extra pair of boots, two pairs of uniforms, five pairs of socks, five shirts, five to ten meals ready to eat, four quarts of water, a sleep system, a poncho, a tool, a double basic combat load, a plate carrier, a helmet, night vision devices, etc. The distinct differences between these loadouts are clear, and it shows how the ounces turn into pounds (and pounds turn into pain) rather quickly. It illustrates the severity of reducing a soldier's ability to maneuver for extended periods and requiring more water and food, which increases reliance on logistical lines of communication. For modern military forces to increase their mobility, leaders must become comfortable with prioritizing speed and agility over preparing for every possible contingency. Commanders must be willing to accept the risks of not being able to prepare for every possible outcome and to trust the intelligence provided to them before committing forces in a large-scale combat operations (LSCO) environment, where sustainment will be severely reduced or restricted.

While the conventional U.S. Army has been reorganizing its force structure and capabilities to address the modern threat, the question of how Special Operations Forces (SOF) will integrate into LSCO has become a key area of focus. Not only must the U.S. Army contend with modern electronic warfare or cyber threats, such as drones, unsecured communications, and direction-finding capabilities, but it must also determine how SOF will integrate with conventional forces and sustain themselves while operating in the deep area. Upon historical review, the depth and breadth of the Allied forces in World War II were remarkable, yielding lessons that inform fundamental frameworks for modern-day military sustainment. However, despite the vast industrial backing of military sustainment at the time, forward offensive forces (e.g., Jedburgh teams operating in denied areas) still relied on battlefield recovery to sustain their forces and maintain offensive momentum. This concept of battlefield recovery not only allowed the Jedburgh teams and the whole of the Allied forces to reduce the overall weight they carried but also to outmaneuver and extend their operational reach, which would not have been possible if they were reliant solely on standard military logistics.

This concept is often referred to as non-standard logistics and is typically associated with unconventional or irregular warfare and guerrilla units. This concept not only allows an offensive force to maneuver but also reduces the enemy's ability to sustain its forces and deny it the ability to recover these supplies, thus reducing the enemy's combat effectiveness. The application of non-standard sustainment to offensive forces vastly increases their ability to maintain combat agility and, overall, provides a fundamental increase in a military's lethality.

A military's fire and maneuver fighting functions are essential to its overall lethality and combat effectiveness. However, leaders and equipment designers will often sacrifice mobility for efforts to increase protection. U. S. Army casualties sustained during the Global War on Terror led to rapid advancements in personal protective equipment and up-armored vehicles. This rapid increase in historically lightweight military vehicles saw their weight nearly double their original design weight. These innovations in military protection equipment and vehicles ultimately increased survivability; however, the enemy also adapted its tactics, techniques, and procedures by developing new munitions and improvised explosive devices to defeat these

countermeasures. As a result, the U.S. military and the insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan were locked in a vicious cycle, where one side spent more to protect its forces and the other side spent less. Additionally, this protective equipment required additional logistical support and resourcing, which contributed to the workload of an already stressed logistics team.

The Army continues to search for technological solutions to address the problem of maintaining combat agility. Despite advances in robotic solutions, such as the small multipurpose equipment transport or "Mule" for the logistical sustainment of ground forces, these solutions bring their own associated challenges. The increased utilization of robotics on the battlefield would likely lead to an increased electronic signature, which the enemy could use to direction-find U.S. forces. Additionally, these robotic initiatives, while designed to alleviate supply issues, would likely make U.S. ground forces *less* agile and dependent on technology that has yet to be battle-proven.

During this pivotal transition, the U.S. Army must empower its commanders to trade the illusion of perfect protection for the battlefield advantage of superior speed. This requires fostering a culture where calculated risk is not just accepted but seen as essential for seizing the initiative in a contested LSCO environment. The future battlefield will be won not by the force most burdened with contingencies, but by the one that can out-think, out-maneuver, and out-pace its adversary. The lessons from the Jedburghs and the philosophy of Blitzkrieg are clear: The ultimate form of force protection is the ability to overwhelm an adversary before they can effectively react, and that can only be achieved by an unburdened, agile, and relentlessly lethal force.

Author's Note: Chief Warrant Officer 2 Aaron McClendon is a Regular Army Special Forces Officer with more than 18 years of service. The view, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the position of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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Resistance in Total Defense: The Role of Citizens in LSCO

By Captain Ryan Davis

During the opening moments of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a local source reported that Russian troops were seen in Chernihiv to a local editor at a Kyiv publication. The editor - whose family and friends lived near Chernihiv, just 30 miles from the Belarus border – used the Ukrainian public service application, 'Diia', to upload videos of the Russian Troops advancing (Druziuk, 2022). Diia allows citizens to speak with a chatbot about what they are seeing in current time. The chatbot then uploads the information to a database verified by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and, once reviewed, provides military leaders with real-time open-source intelligence (OSINT). "In the first month of the invasion alone, 260,000 individuals used Diia to report Russian activity" (Cronin, 2023). This information allowed Ukrainian military leaders to make decisions on troop movements based on open-source reporting corroborated with other intelligence sources.

The Argument

Citizens can and should illuminate the enemy by reporting the locations, disposition, and composition of an invading force through any means necessary.

Ukraine Case Study:

Since the 2022 invasion, Ukraine has weaponized smartphones and the pervasiveness of social media to erode the opacity of the battlefield. In this model, Ukrainians have turned every citizen into a sensor. During the initial invasion and the following months, the United States Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) states that about 80% of its intelligence today comes from open–source material (Tau & Volz, 2021). The ability of the Ukrainian government, military, and people to tap into this wealth of information has helped shape the war in Ukraine's favor (Smith-Boyle, 2022). Citizens now have the means to provide geolocated enemy information to the Ukrainian Army directly from their smartphones. In the opening days of the invasion, Ukrainian citizens began posting on Twitter with images and videos of Russian convoys and

fighting. OSINT analysts used this information to identify the size and locations of Russian troops. Twitter users @GirkinGirkin and @no_itsmyturn identified more than 400 vehicles in the first ten days of the invasion alone (Vandersmith, 2023). Additionally, UAWarData, an open-source website, created a map of Russian troop movements along the front line, updated every 3 days (Vandersmith, 2023). In parallel, a MapHub user created the Eyes on Russia project (Vandersmith, 2023). This project created a database of images taken in Ukraine and organized them by content, location, and date. The conglomeration of open-source information enabled Ukrainian supporters' ability to discern the adversary's current movements and disposition.

Prior to the war, Diia was launched as a Ukrainian government app that provided public services, including payment centers for speeding fines and pothole reporting. However, after the invasion, the Ukrainian government added a feature that "allowed members of the public to send geolocated images of Russian military equipment and movements" (Milmo, 2023). Users also shared, "intelligence on officials collaborating with Moscow" (Milmo, 2023). Due to the government-produced app's previous popularity and public familiarity, citizens could report Russian activity with ease. The ability to report enemy locations was quickly added during the initial Russian invasion. The Ukrainians' successful implementation provides a powerful argument for other governments to build a similar hidden feature into widely used apps. The pre-emptive decision to add this feature would be beneficial during an enemy invasion, because it could be quickly enabled and utilized. This information is crucial not just for military decision-making but also for ensuring that governments can effectively disseminate it to citizens seeking safe passage or refuge.

Total Defense

Governments need to develop the capability and promote the willingness of all members of society to contribute in their own way. Total Defense is a concept that states "the government should enhance and institutionalize collaboration among and across governmental organizations, civic organizations, and the larger public in order to prepare the society for resistance as part of building societal resilience" (Fiala, 2023). Total Defense is not a new term or thought process. In 1980, Horst Menderhausen wrote '*Reflections on Territorial Defense'* for The Rand Corporation. In this article, he discusses the importance of a Total Dense concept and why a mix of conventional alliances, national military forces, and the ability to harness the untapped potential of a nation's population planning is the three-legged stool that nations should build their sovereign defense around. Total Defense is vital for countries that face a more powerful adversary. Governments need to prepare for a conflict by leveraging the country's greatest strength: its own population. With proper planning and implementation, citizens can be used as sensors during the initial stages of an invasion, when information is needed and vital to supporting national defense.

It is important to emphasize that there is an ethical messaging component that must be communicated to civilians; reporting enemy movements will categorize citizens as direct participants in hostilities. This is something not everyone will be willing to do, but for those who are, it will help them defend their country. Additionally, a concept to understand in the context

of citizens participating in armed conflict is *levée en masse.* "The law of Armed Conflict recognizes that a *levée en masse* occurs when inhabitants of a non-occupied territory spontaneously take up arms to resist an invading force without an opportunity to form into a regular armed unit. *Levée en masse* participants are neither required to be commanded by a person responsible for their subordinates nor wear a fixed distinctive sign recognizable at a distance, but gain combatant status" (NATO, 2020). "Article 4A(6) of GC III explicitly entitles inhabitants participating in a *levée en masse*, upon capture, to prisoner-of-war status (NATO, 2020). Under this article, citizens who participate in the early stages of an invasion gain all prisoner-of-war status without having to join a military unit. This status would protect citizens from being treated as criminals. This legal protection could help push citizens to act as sensors, knowing they are protected under the Geneva Convention.

Other Case Studies

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is not the only example of countries relying on citizens to report enemy movements. In 1940, during the Battle of Britain in WWII, the Observer Corps, composed almost entirely of volunteers, was used to spot and report German aircraft flying over the countryside and to prepare cities for incoming bombing runs (Kerrison, 2020). During this period, the volunteers were required to receive training to identify whether incoming aircraft were friendly or hostile (Kerrison, 2020). This in-depth training to identify enemy equipment has been rendered obsolete by the creation and development of AI. Now, citizens can quickly upload descriptions of what they are seeing, and the AI can identify the type, country of origin, and suspected unit of the uploaded information.

The Baltic countries are already calling on their patriotic citizens to support their National Defense Plans. In 2015, the Lithuanian Ministry of National Defense issued the third edition of its citizens' guide, *Prepare to Survive Emergencies and War: A Cheerful Take on Serious Recommendations*. This 75-page manual focuses on a realistic invasion scenario and ways for citizens to survive and help resist the invaders. The manual primarily focuses on a Russian invasion of the country and provides Lithuanian citizens with ways to report suspicious Russian activity, basic first aid, and survival instructions. The manual specifically calls on the Lithuanian Government to "recognize that citizens are a crucial part of the country's early warning system" and for citizens to "take video footage of the aggressive actions of enemy forces and use media available (e.g., the Internet) to transfer it to international media outlets (CNN, BBC, etc.)"(Lithuania's Ministry of National Defense, 2015). Additionally, "as part of its early warning system, the government has even established a telephone hotline for Lithuanian citizens to report suspected foreign spies" (Fiala, 2020, 19). This is an important step; it lacks the development of current modern technology to create a more robust and reliable reporting system. Overall, this manual is a very overt and transparent form of strategic communication used to deter aggression.

The Way Ahead

Governments need to leverage existing systems to enable all citizens to rapidly report

information; then they can use AI to scrub the data and provide real-time enemy information to commanders to make decisions. Many governments already have apps, phone lines, and booklets that are used to inform citizens about resistance concepts and to receive reports; however, efforts need to be made now to harness the power of a country's patriotic population. Military commanders must take steps to harness the potential of this important intelligence asset. This will enable better Common Intelligence Picture (CIP) and Common Operating Picture (COP) development, reduce the fog of battle, and enable the elimination of adversaries in accordance with the military's Joint Prioritized Target List (JPTL). Enabling this shift allows citizens to serve as sensors, providing real-time situational awareness of the world around them.

Military Commanders need to be prepared to operationalize OSINT reporting from their nation's citizens. This system will not replace the traditional means in which militaries gather intelligence; it can be another means to contribute. It is crucial that users can upload detailed information quickly, which will encourage the development of a user-friendly application. The app will also need to mitigate misinformation and be able to handle a large volume of data without overloading the database. It is unnecessary for citizens to identify the exact tank nomenclature, placing the onus on AI to determine both the equipment type and origin. This information will be routed to a certified analyst who can use OSINT reporting to queue other forms of intelligence gathering. Once all the information is gathered, this now corroborated intelligence can feed the CIP/COP that commanders will use to make military decisions. It is equally important that the information be disseminated to the local government to inform civilians of current military movements and locations. This enables civilians to seek shelter or safe passage in contested conflict areas.

Author's Note: Captain Ryan Davis is a Regular Army Special Forces Officer with more than 8 years of service. The view, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the position of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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PROFICIENT AT IRREGULAR WARFARE?

TIME TO EMPHASIZE 'METHOD OF INSTRUCTION' IN THE U.S. ARMY SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT

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Proficient at Irregular Warfare? Time to Emphasize 'Method of Instruction' in the U.S. Army Special Forces Regiment

By Dr. Daniel W. Ross, DM, MS, NRP

The United States (U.S.) Army Special Forces (SF) Regiment should strongly consider making "method of instruction" (MOI) a more prominent aspect of entry-level Green Berets' education to remain competitive within the irregular warfare domain. The crux of the problem is that aspiring Green Berets attending the Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC or Q-Course) receive only a small block of instruction concerning MOI. In basic terms, MOI is a type of activity used in conjunction with an instructional strategy to facilitate the accomplishment of specific learning objectives.[1] Green Berets are expected to be the military's premier warrior-teachers. They serve as the Army's unconventional warfare (UW) experts and force multipliers due to their ability to train, advise, and assist foreign military forces.[2] They are also tasked with executing foreign internal defense (FID), security force assistance (SFA), and counterinsurgency (COIN), and with fulfilling combat advisor roles across every area of responsibility (AOR).[3] Yet, instilling the essential skills necessary for these SF advisors to teach, coach, and mentor their teammates, as well as eventually foreign partner forces (PF), remains a deprioritized effort during the initial SF training pipeline.

The purpose of this article is to present an argument for the importance of MOI as an irregular warfare tool for the SF Regiment, to outline the MOIs most relevant to SF conducting irregular warfare activities, and finally to offer a recommended course of action (COA) for improving the SFQC with increased MOI education and training.

First, certain MOIs are more useful to irregular warfare activities. Mastery of these methods enables SF advisors to:

1. Develop cross-cultural competence
2. Generate force-multiplying effects
3. Support enduring host nation (HN) resistance and resilience efforts
4. Strengthen the legitimacy and strategic influence of PFs in the context of irregular warfare

Second, by providing aspiring Green Berets with a more robust understanding of how to pair instructional strategies with suggested MOIs, the SFQC will enable them to be more effective teachers while conducting various missions under the irregular warfare umbrella.[4] Lastly, the article offers a COA to enhance the SFQC, emphasizing the importance of instructional competence within the UW and FID core tasks central to the SF Regiment's expertise in the irregular warfare realm.[5] If the SF Regiment strives to achieve a higher level of supremacy in irregular warfare, it is time to prioritize MOI and develop future SF advisors as highly effective instructors from the outset of their careers.

Diving Deeper into the Problem

Teaching is an inherent function of military service.[6] Entry-level SF soldiers are expected to report to their assigned Special Forces Group and be capable teachers. Yet they do not receive any substantive formal instructor or teacher training until many years later. This typically only occurs if they return to the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS or SWCS) for a broadening assignment to become a highly qualified cadre. As it stands, there are numerous points in the recent evolution of the SFQC that highlight this problem.

SFQC selectees attend only a one-week orientation to the training pipeline and no longer receive the training course "Introduction to Unconventional Warfare" that existed circa 2010. Education on method of instruction only occurs at the beginning of the small unit tactics (SUT) portion of the Q-Course. The brief PowerPoint lecture has effectively become a perfunctory, check-the-box requirement that allows SF students to receive Advanced Leader Course (ALC) credit (a noncommissioned officer professional military education (PME) requirement) upon graduation from the SFQC. Furthermore, FID training was removed from SUT shortly before the Q-Course reverted from the optimized model in 2021. Robin Sage, the SFQC's two-week CULEX, remains the sole UW-based experience that students navigate during their initial training.[7] Consequently, SFQC students do not receive a specific course that meaningfully develops proficiency in MOI.

After graduating from the SFQC, SF noncommissioned officers do not receive formal PME on the SF principal tasks until they attend the Senior Leader Course (SLC), years after earning the Green Beret. Formal instructor training that emphasizes MOI is not undertaken until they return to SWCS for a tour as cadre many years later. Once at SWCS, incoming cadre are required to complete the Common Faculty Development-Instructor Course (CFD-IC) within 60 days of arrival through the Staff and Faculty Development Division (SFDD).[8] Regrettably, this task is sometimes hard to accomplish due to certain training committees' workflow demands not synchronizing with course availability. The current environment forces some incoming instructors to spend their initial six months to a year onboarding and training to become fully certified and qualified instructors.

For example, SUT requires a new instructor to attend onboarding, a master trainer course, CFD-IC, and observe a class before becoming an assistant instructor (AI) and progressing to primary

instructor (PI) status. The shortest amount of time to accomplish these certifying and qualifying tasks is approximately six months, but it may sometimes be longer if a new cadre must first complete other PME, such as SLC. Occasionally, this process accounts for as much as one-third of the typical SWCS tour, with the instructor returning to the operational force after only two years of actual instructor time. Mitigating these inefficiencies and placing a greater emphasis on MOI in SF entry-level training generates an advantage for U.S. Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) during future irregular warfare campaigns.

MOI: An Irregular Warfare Advantage

A thorough understanding of the MOI tools at an SF advisor's disposal provides an irregular warfare advantage to ARSOF. The intersection of important SF principal tasks (UW, FID, SFA, COIN, and CT) with named irregular warfare activities underscores the importance of developing SF advisors as effective teachers and instructors early in their careers.[9] Foremost, new Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha (SFOD-A) team members need the capability to plan, develop, and teach all aspects of their primary military occupational specialty (MOS), as well as other individual SF skillsets, to the rest of the team. Cross-training allows each member of the detachment to become a master of the basic tasks required of ARSOF soldiers. By mastering the basics, each team member gains the ability to effectively teach fundamental soldiering tasks to PFs worldwide. Proficiency in MOI equips SF advisors with the capacity to cultivate cross-cultural competence, achieve force multiplication, contribute to long-term resistance and resiliency efforts, and enhance the legitimacy and strategic influence of PFs during irregular warfare activities.

Effective collaboration with allies and partners requires cross-cultural competence.[10] An SF advisor's level of cultural intelligence (drive, knowledge, strategy, and action) in cross-cultural situations determines whether success or failure will result from operating with partners in complex and unstable environments.[11] Some MOIs are better suited to different partners and different cultures. SF Advisors apply different MOIs to adjust instruction based on local contexts, thereby avoiding a one-size-fits-all mentality. During FID, tailoring the correct MOI to a PF's culture and overarching population dynamics helps to iteratively refine enduring HN SOF capabilities by establishing relationships and rapport. This enables SF advisors to have an outsized impact through force multiplication and indigenous capacity-building efforts.[12]

SF advisors enhance PF capacity by teaching and training indigenous forces. They leverage these relationships as force multipliers to advance mutual security objectives while reducing the U.S. government's footprint, operational risk, and overall cost.[13] Effectively employing MOI permits SF advisors to indirectly enhance partner combat power and create dilemmas for an adversary without engaging in unilateral direct action. For example, teaching guerrilla tactics and mission command through an effective multi-MOI approach facilitates PF capability to fight on their own terms. Coupling an understanding of MOI to the "through or with" concept central to many aspects of irregular warfare remains paramount for cultivating long-term, deep relationships.[14]

Many SF principal tasks under the irregular warfare umbrella involve building capacity or

sustaining long-term resistance and resiliency efforts in partner nations. Instructional competence and understanding the correct methods to employ based on the operational environment contribute to a resistance movement or PF's ability to retain skills after SF advisors depart.[15] For example, the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne)'s early FID efforts in 2015 Ukraine produced the first cadre of Ukrainian SF capable of teaching subsequent iterations of the Ukrainian SFQC.[16] U.S. SF advisors employing a diverse array of MOIs during the nascent Q Course were critical to building Ukrainian military capacity and to sustaining HN resistance and resilience efforts.[17] Producing a cadre of local SOF trainers who continued to transmit irregular warfare knowledge and tactics across future cohorts of fighters eventually helped undermine and diminish Russia's 2022 attempt at conquering Ukraine.[18] Overall, the ability to train indigenous forces to train themselves remains decisive to fortifying partner nation legitimacy and developing the capacity to succeed over the long term.[19]

The concept of legitimacy stands at the core of irregular warfare.[20] The effectiveness of an HN's political and military efforts ultimately depends on state or non-state actors' ability to secure and sustain the consent of relevant populations.[21] Professional SF advisors understand that MOI is not merely a technical formality, but a means to demonstrate credibility and a desire to invest in their partners. Empowering a PF reinforces the legitimacy of the military and, subsequently, the governing body in the eyes of the populace.[22] Building partner trust and confidence through joint training and shared experience strengthens irregular warfare outcomes and creates strategic effects.[23] Therefore, the time has come to emphasize and integrate MOI as a crucial aspect of irregular warfare practice within the SF Regiment.

Integrating Irregular Warfare, Instructional Strategy, and MOI

A starting point involves increasing exposure to the Army Learning Model in the SFQC and allowing aspiring Green Berets more practice in effectively employing different MOIs for specific instructional strategies. Instructional strategies organize and identify learning activities, methods of instruction, and content delivery to emphasize learning concepts, theories, and ideas. There are five identified instructional strategies under the Army Learning Model designed to impart knowledge using specific MOIs.[24] MOIs are the activities used in conjunction with an instructional strategy to facilitate the accomplishment of identified learning objectives. Some instructional strategies are more appropriate for executing irregular warfare activities than others.[25] Nevertheless, a basic understanding of all available instructional strategies and the MOIs best suited to executing them remains important for SF advisors who teach, coach, and mentor partners in ambiguous environments across the globe.

Instructional Strategies

The Army Learning Model focuses on outcome-oriented instructional strategies to foster critical thinking and initiative. Five main strategies allow instructors to tailor operationally relevant information to the learning audience and desired outcomes. Selecting a strategy ultimately influences the instructor's choice of MOI, media, and learning environment. The five

instructional strategies include: direct instruction, independent study, indirect instruction, collaborative or interactive instruction, and experiential learning.[26]

Direct Instruction

Direct instruction emphasizes modeling expert performance to guide learners in mastering specific tasks or problem-solving approaches. This method assumes that learners can replicate expert behavior when material is presented systematically in a structured, part-to-whole sequence.[27] Direct instruction organizes and sequences content into smaller, manageable segments, integrating new knowledge with learners' prior understanding through demonstrations, lectures, and guided practice. Additionally, instructors often supplement lectures with a variety of instructional tools, including case-based readings, handouts, and interactive multimedia resources, to reinforce critical information and enhance learner engagement.[28]

Independent Study

Independent study acknowledges that learning can be a personalized process, allowing students with diverse learning preferences and varying schedules to progress at their own pace. The learning experience is supervised by a subject matter expert, but the learner studies the subject autonomously. This strategy shifts responsibility for learning from the instructor to the learner.[29] For example, Army Credentialing Opportunities On-Line helps soldiers find information on certifications and licenses related to their military occupation. The Army Credentialing Assistance Program then pays for them to achieve that credential, typically through various independent study programs.[30]

Indirect Instruction

Indirect instruction encourages learners to actively construct their own understanding rather than simply receiving information from an instructor. The knowledge they develop emerges through personal interpretation, differing from both the presented content and their prior responses. Like independent study, this approach places the primary responsibility for learning on the learner rather than the instructor.[31]

Collaborative or Interactive Instruction

Collaborative or interactive instruction emphasizes participant discussion and knowledge sharing as central components of the learning process. The instructor must clearly define the topic, allocate appropriate discussion time, determine group composition, and establish methods for reporting or sharing outcomes. The effectiveness of this instructional approach largely depends on the instructor's expertise in organizing and managing group dynamics to foster meaningful engagement.[32]

Experiential Learning

Based on Kolb's experiential learning model, this strategy prioritizes inductive, learner-centered, and activity-based approaches that involve personal reflection on experiences and the creation of plans to transfer learning to new contexts. Experiential learning operates as an iterative process consisting of five essential phases.[33] The five phases include: concrete experience, publish and process, generalize new information, develop, and apply (check on learning).[34]

Among these five instructional strategies, direct instruction, collaborative or interactive instruction, and experiential learning emerge as the three most effective approaches for supporting SF irregular warfare initiatives. Direct instruction is the primary means by which SF advisors internally improve the organization and train foreign PFs. SF advisors are expected to be masters of the basics and subject matter experts in special warfare. They model expert performance and expect learners to replicate expert behaviors. SF also employs collaborative and interactive instruction to conduct MOS cross-training and facilitate mutually beneficial learning exchanges with partner nation militaries. Experiential learning represents the bedrock of SF instructional efforts. Special Forces remain the partner of choice for U.S. irregular warfare efforts in many regions due to their unparalleled experiential knowledge gained through decades of concrete special warfare operations.[35] The effectiveness of these strategies depends on understanding the appropriate contexts for their application and selecting MOIs that most effectively align with and achieve the intended learning objectives.

Method of Instruction

To be successful at irregular warfare, SF advisors must employ cross-cultural awareness to establish rapport with HN counterparts and then teach a wide array of technical military skills, often in a foreign language or through an interpreter. They need to foster mutual understanding and navigate numerous challenges, including miscommunications and mistrust, that inevitably arise when cultures vastly different from one another collaborate on complex military tasks. Success in tasks such as FID, SFA, and UW hinges on an SF advisor's credibility and power to develop partnerships.[36] These potential gains stem from SF's ability to demonstrate technical and tactical mastery and then effectively teach, coach, and mentor partners to achieve similar levels of accomplishment. An important irregular warfare tool contributing to this success is the appropriate selection of MOI, paired with the appropriate instructional strategy (in this case, direct, collaborative, or experiential learning). Deliberate MOI selection, informed by a nuanced understanding of the learning environment and the characteristics of adult learners, facilitates the accomplishment of specified learner objectives during both SF MOS cross-training and training foreign PFs (See Figure 1).

Instructional Strategies with Methods of Instruction

Instructional Strategy	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages	Best Used When	Appropriate MOIs
Direct Instruction	**Instructor-led** instruction with explanations, examples, and *opportunities for guided practice and targeted feedback* to enhance retention and transfer of learning.	• Can teach large groups • Best with low instructor: student ratio • Can supplement other instructional strategies • Can make good use of SMEs	• One-way conversation is used excessively • No student interaction with subject matter • Student retention is not optimal	Teaching knowledge acquisition involving facts, rules, and action sequences	• Compare and contrast • Demonstration • Drill and practice • Guided reading/thinking • Lecture • Structured overview • Tutorial
Experiential Learning	Emphasis on the *process* of learning *not the product*. Inductive, **learner-centered**, *activity-oriented, personalized reflection* to apply learning to other contexts.	• Learner-centric • Application to future learning and other contexts • Balances the cognitive and affective domains for optimal learning	• Requires detailed lesson plans that describe all ELM phases • Assumes student experience with subject	Developing inductive reasoning, analysis, formulating plans, speaking and writing, and life-long learning attitudes	• Case Study • Experiments • Gaming • Model Building • Practical Exercise • Role Playing/Simulation • Storytelling
Collaborative/ Interactive Instruction	Students learn from peers and instructors to develop social skills, organize their thoughts, and develop rational arguments. **Facilitator- and/or peer-led, student-centric**	• Learner-centric • Refines classroom management skills • Exposure to diverse perspectives • Creates trust • Real-world applicable	• Increased time • Potential for *Group Think* • Strong personalities may dominate group • Learning speeds differ • Tend to get off-topic • Potential for conflict	• Learners contribute diverse experiences • Refines observation, listening, and intervention skills (instructor & learner)	• Brainstorming • Debate • Discussion (Sm./Lrg. Grp) • Interviewing • Peer-Partner Learning • Problem Solving • Role Playing • Seminar/Panel
Independent Study	Generally involves research outside of a school setting. Can be self-paced and can overcome geographical barriers. **Shifts responsibility** for learning *from the instructor* ***to the learner***.	• Learners can self-pace • Some students learn better through written communication • Not subject to geographic proximity • Less instructor time	• Requires self-discipline • Lack of face-to-face interaction • Not effective for some learners • More involved instruction set-up	Effective with research projects, when instructor and student are apart, or students have experience in subject	• Interactive Multimedia Instruction • Tutorial • Writing Assignments
Indirect Instruction	Influences the student to construct knowledge rather than learning material from an instructor. Learner-constructed response differs from the material presented and any previous response. **Shifts responsibility** for learning *from the instructor* ***to the learner***.	• Accommodates all types of learners • Assists development of problem-solving skills • Provides opportunities for self-assessment • Helps learners understand cause and effect	• May get off-task due to lack of structure. • Must scaffold to be effective • May overwhelm students • Need sufficient targeted audience analysis • Instructor workload	Best when presenting concepts, abstracts, or patterns, and when the learning process is inquiry-based, the result is discovery, and the learning context is a problem.	• Brainstorming • Case Study • Concept Mapping • Inquiry • Problem Solving • Reflective Discussion • Tutorial • Writing Assignments

Figure 1. Instructional Strategies and Methods of Instruction Overview (chart provided by the Staff and Faculty Development Division of the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School).[37]

MOIs for Direct Instruction

Direct instruction should be employed to teach facts, rules, and action sequences. The best MOIs for direct instruction include: compare and contrast, demonstration, drill and practice, guided reading and thinking, lecture, structured overview, and tutorial (See Figure 2).[38] Direct instruction by SF involves structured, hands-on teaching methods in which Green Berets explicitly model, demonstrate, and guide PFs in skills or tasks. Direct instruction is highly focused on replicating expert performance through systematic explanation and practice. For example, SF soldiers demonstrate the proper firing techniques for various weapons systems, followed by guided practice with PFs. Other examples include providing step-by-step instruction on small unit tactics, close quarters battle, demolition, breaching, combat medicine, and communications. Direct instruction fosters confidence, standardization, interoperability, and operational readiness on each SFOD-A and between partner military units.

Method of Instruction	Definition	Applied IW Example
Compare and Contrast	Comparing two things is telling how they are alike; whereas, contrasting two things is telling how they are different.	Block of instruction to the PF on the similarities and differences between an ambush and a raid.[39]
Demonstration	Performing an activity so that learners can observe how it is done to help prepare learners to transfer theory to practical application.	SF advisors leading by example and demonstrating how to conduct specific battle drills.[40]
Drill and Practice	Drill and Practice, like memorization, involves repetition of specific psychomotor or cognitive skills (addition and subtraction, spelling, marksmanship).	SF-supervised practice of basic rifle marksmanship (BRM) by an irregular partner force during a UW campaign supporting large-scale combat operations.[41]
Guided Reading and Thinking	Learner's comprehension of a selection is guided and developed by instructor/facilitator questions. The focus is on the use of context to predict meaning.	Providing PF reading material on the principles of mission command during FID to help build partner capacity.[42]
Lecture	An oral presentation intended to present information about a particular subject within a limited time frame.	Didactic instruction on how to counter threat networks within the HN.[43]
Structured Overview	Verbal, visual, or written summary or outline of a topic.	Providing a structured overview or summary of how to use Troop Leading Procedures to HN students for use in planning small-unit operations.[44]
Tutorial	A form of remedial or introductory assistance provided to a learner or a small group of learners with maximum learner interaction.	An interactive "talk-through, walk-through" with a guerrilla or surrogate force on how to emplace and execute a linear or L-shaped ambush.[45]

Figure 2. Methods of Instruction suited to Direct Instruction (Chart provided by Dr. Daniel Ross).[46]

MOIs for Collaborative or Interactive Instruction

Collaborative or interactive instruction provides many peer-based learning benefits to SF operators. Some of the most appropriate MOIs include: brainstorming, cooperative learning groups, debates, discussion (small or large groups), interviewing, peer partner learning, problem-solving, role-playing, seminars, and tutorials (See Figure 3).[47] Some examples include

guiding PFs through collaborative planning sessions or workshops concerning troop leading procedures or the military decision making process (MDMP). After action reviews also represent an important aspect of learning following joint training exercises or operational missions where SFOD-As and their partners can discuss what went well and what can be improved. Moreover, intelligence sharing and target analysis between the SFOD-A and the PF create collaborative learning environments. Field Training Exercises (FTX) and Tabletop Exercises (TTX) are also collaborative and interactive learning methods that SF can employ with PFs.

Method of Instruction	Definition	Applied IW Example
Brainstorming	A method of generating ideas to solve a problem. This can be done by an individual or by a group.	SF advisor facilitating open communal discussion with a PF on MDMP Step III: Course of Action (COA) Development.[48]
Cooperative Learning Groups	A method in which small teams, each with learners of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject.	Bilateral knowledge-sharing between SF advisors and HN troops to enhance unconventional deterrence, partner nation resistance capability, and security cooperation activities.[49]
Debates	A structured contest of argumentation in which two opposing individuals or teams defend and attack a given proposition.	Structured oppositional wargaming or scenario-based planning exercises between an SFOD-A and a PF.[50]
Discussion	An oral exploration of a topic, object, concept, or experience.	Deliberative case study discussions of local culture, power structures, politics, and norms of conflict.[51]
Interviewing	An interview is a structured conversation between two people (the interviewer and the interviewee) where questions are asked by the interviewer to obtain information.	Strengthening Human Intelligence (HUMINT) training with external partners to obtain information and integrate intelligence into all operational levels.[52]
Peer Partner Learning	Peer partner learning is a collaborative experience in which learners learn from and with each other for individual purposes.	Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) to enhance interoperability, build relationships, and improve understanding of different cultures and tactics.[53]

Problem Solving	Focuses on knowing the issues, considering all possible factors, and finding an acceptable solution.	Subject matter expert exchanges (SMEE) with classroom instruction, FTXs, and collaborative problem-solving sessions to enhance interoperability, build partnerships, and improve overall readiness.[54]
Seminars	A small, focused group of people who come to talk and learn about a particular topic.	Annual seminars or symposia on IW that bring together SF operators and partner nation representatives.[55]
Tutorial	A form of remedial or introductory assistance provided to a learner or a small group of learners with maximum learner interaction.	SF advisors guide PF officers through case-based scenarios on building and sustaining decentralized covert or clandestine support networks in preparation for a UW campaign.[56]

Figure 3. Methods of Instruction suited to Collaborative or Interactive Instruction (Chart provided by Dr. Daniel Ross).[57]

MOIs for Experiential Learning

Experiential learning fosters the development of inductive reasoning and analytical skills. It also supports self-reflection and a lifelong learning mindset. The focus of this approach lies in the learning process itself rather than the outcome. MOIs important to the SF operator include: case studies, conducting experiments, field observations, field trips/site visits, gaming, model building, practical exercises (both hands-on/written), role-playing, simulation, and storytelling (See Figure 4).[58] These MOIs emphasize hands-on, scenario-based activities where PFs learn by doing, reflecting, and applying lessons to future operations. Using the correct MOI helps students build critical thinking and decision-making skills that are essential for effective performance in irregular warfare environments.

Method of Instruction	**Definition**	**Applied IW Example**
Case Study	The instructor/facilitator presents a description of a situation, and the learners must solve problems or identify actions related to the situation.	Presenting HN forces specific IW case studies, allowing them to develop their own COAs to contrast against those in a historical example.[59]
Conducting Experiments	A methodical trial-and-error procedure of collecting observations or observing actions with the goal of verifying,	Experimenting with novel or progressive technology in conjunction with PFs to

	falsifying, or establishing the validity of a hypothesis.	enhance remote advising capabilities, collaborative mission planning, and increase interoperability for joint special operations missions (Special Operations as an Innovation Laboratory).[60]
Field Observations	A method of observing and recording information through written notes, sketches, recordings, and photographs in a limited amount of time.	Field exercises with opportunities for HN forces to practice special reconnaissance in enemy deep areas against role-playing opposing forces (OPFOR).[61]
Field Trips / Site Visits	Learners visit a place away from their regular environment to acquire information needed to support a specific learning objective.	Use of physical or virtual staff rides to explore past or contemporary battlefields or campaigns through an "IW lens" highlights the complexities of the modern battlefield and concepts such as resistance, resiliency, and legitimacy.[62]
Gaming	Learners apply the concepts of a game (physical or digital) to a learning situation.	Digital military gaming programs to develop and refine "split-second decision-making, seamless coordination among distributed teams, the ability to see without being seen, and tools capable of quickly processing vast amounts of information."[63]
Model Building	Involves the creation of models either from kits or from materials and components acquired by the builder.	Building accurate, to-scale micro and macro terrain models of a raid objective in a platoon patrol base with irregular forces in a hostile or denied territory.[64]
Practical Exercises	An activity in which the learner practices a new concept or process, usually following the observation of a demonstration from the instructor/facilitator, to master this process or concept.	U.S. SOF-supported guerrillas use practical exercises to train and rehearse for missions at a permanent base, then return to their mobile base to complete the plan and launch

		an attack or raid against enemy targets.[65]
Role Playing	Learners act out a simulated situation, position, or job.	SFOD-A conducting exercises with PF similar to Robin Sage, the U.S. military's premier UW exercise that relies heavily on robust role-playing support and activities to immerse SF candidates in a simulated environment of political instability and armed conflict.[66]
Simulation	Any representation or imitation of reality simulating part of a system, the operation of a system, and the environment in which a system will operate are the three common types. There are virtual and constructive simulations.	Use of Javelin simulators and detailed classroom instruction to prepare Ukrainian forces prior to Russia's large-scale invasions in February 2022.[67]
Storytelling	The conveying of events in words, images, and sounds, often by improvisation or embellishment.	SF advisors share experiences with HN forces through storytelling and self-disclosure to lend credibility to their professionalism and expertise.[68]

Figure 4. Methods of Instruction suited to Experiential Learning (Chart provided by Dr. Daniel Ross).[69]

Way Forward

Earlier in their careers, SF advisors require more formalized and systematically structured training in instructional competencies, particularly in the effective application of MOI. All the SF principal tasks that dovetail with irregular warfare activities necessitate SF advisors to be professional and credible teachers.[70] The ability to provide tailored instruction, navigate diverse learning environments, and address a broad spectrum of adult learning needs enables operators to effectively train their peers and PFs alike. Understanding instructional strategies and MOI enhances the ability to develop cross-cultural competence and generate force-multiplying effects. Moreover, these skills enable SF advisors to support enduring HN resistance-resilience efforts and strengthen HN legitimacy by enhancing the strategic influence of partner forces operating in complex, contested irregular warfare environments. Based on the preceding analysis in this article, a COA emerges as a viable recommendation to make MOI a renewed priority in irregular warfare practice and SF organizational culture.

Proposed Solution: Irregular Warfare Instructor-Operator Course

The USAJFKSWCS SFDD's mission is to train the SOF community to become world-class facilitators. They accomplish this mission by providing training and education to produce military and civilian instructors for ARSOF.[71] The recommended COA for improving SF instructor skills earlier in their career involves expanding the purpose of the SFDD to facilitate a five-week program of instruction (POI), during which recently graduated Green Berets can develop into certified instructors and operators before they report to their assigned SF Group. In years past, SF students received up to six months of language training before graduation from the SFQC. Rightfully, language qualification training is currently a post-graduation requirement to prevent fully language-qualified students from attriting throughout the Q-Course. Similarly, all SF graduates could receive an "Irregular Warfare Instructor-Operator" course before or after completing their language training and reporting to their first assignment.

This proposed five-week POI (See Figure 5) provides newly minted Green Berets with CFD-IC certification, the Instructor Leader Course (ILC), Evaluating Instructors Course (EIC), Instructor Writer Course (IWC), and the Assessment Construction Workshop (ACW). CFD-IC is the basic instructor course required to receive USAJFKSWCS instructor certification.[72] The ILC focuses on program and instruction evaluation, while the EIC focuses on instructor development. The IWC assists instructors in writing lesson plans, and the ACW helps instructors develop assessment procedures for their classes. The CFD-IC currently requires two weeks (80 hours) of instruction, and the four listed workshops require a total of seven days of training.[73] Between CFD-IC and the four workshops, instructors receive a complete foundational understanding of instructional strategies, MOIs, and adult learning theory and practice.

Prototype Irregular Warfare Instructor-Operator POI

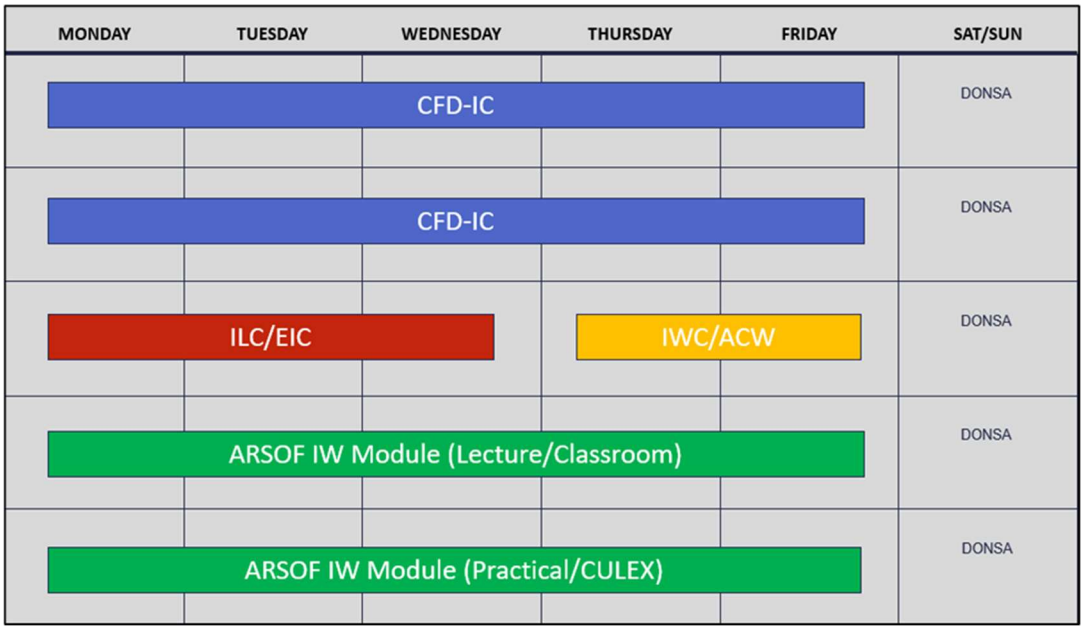

Figure 5. Example of proposed Irregular Warfare Instructor-Operator POI to incorporate into the post-graduation phase of the SFQC (Graphic provided by Dr. Daniel Ross).

Students complete CFD-IC during the first two weeks of the "Irregular Warfare Instructor-Operator" course. Realistically, all four workshops can be combined to be completed in a one-week POI during week three. Once CFD-IC and the instructional workshops are completed, students then spend the remaining two weeks learning foundational knowledge about their new profession as SF operators. Weeks four and five encompass an ARSOF Irregular Warfare Module similar to the UW POI in SLC and the 'ARSOF Module' in the Special Forces Warrant Officer Technical and Tactical Certification Course (SFWOTTCC). Week four includes a classroom-based introduction to irregular warfare, covering where the SF principal tasks intersect with named irregular warfare activities. The final week incorporates practical exercises in which students select and employ instructional strategies and various appropriately identified MOIs in UW or FID environments to instruct and train a PF.

The key benefit of this COA is that all Green Berets achieve instructor certification early on in their careers. This allows them to hone and practice their craft throughout their entire career, not just during their SWCS tour and beyond. Having already completed CFD-IC certification prior to arriving at SWCS, instructors can focus immediately on qualifying in their new, unique instructor assignment, rather than waiting to attend an upcoming course to become fully qualified. The COA further allows mid-career instructors to more quickly concentrate on earning their U.S. Army basic instructor badge, making it reasonably attainable to achieve their senior instructor badges during a three-year assignment at SWCS. Having already completed these courses, they can focus on brief instructor-refresher training, followed by more advanced workshops or seminars offered by the SFDD.

Additionally, having already attended all four of the listed initial workshops affords each Green Beret exposure to and experiential knowledge of instructional strategies and MOIs early in their career. Students in the SFQC would greatly benefit from having a cadre already exposed to instructor training, rather than having instructors learn "the ropes" during their first year of teaching. Incorporating this new POI into the post-graduation phase of the Q-Course, rather than during, reduces the potential for it to become a sunk financial cost if students do not successfully complete the SFQC. Finally, placing the course in the last phase of training also ensures that the introduction to irregular warfare remains fresh in students' minds when they arrive at their SF Group.

Counter Arguments

The preceding argument emphasizes the inclusion of a new irregular warfare-based instructor POI in the SFQC to provide entry-level Green Berets with an understanding of instructional strategies and MOI from the outset of their careers. However, critics of this suggestion might highlight certain obstacles given the current operating environment. Adding an additional POI to the SFQC certainly produces time, resource, financial, and personnel burdens. Of course, the proposed COA must undergo a future comprehensive capabilities-based assessment and analysis of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTMLPF-P) to rigorously assess the feasibility of mitigating the capability gaps identified in this article.

There may also be resistance by the current SFDD or key stakeholders at the Special Operations Center of Excellence (SOCoE) to undertake this proposed COA. Furthermore, the SF Regiment has recently faced significant shortfalls in recruiting and production.[74] Lengthening the SFQC may be the last thing on leaders' minds, given the amplified focus on getting Green Berets to the force as quickly as possible. Though all valid concerns, solutions to these challenges exist. They merely require the appropriate strategic foresight, collaborative conversation, and deliberate adaptation to ensure that the SF Regiment lives up to its reputation as being wholly comprised of expert advisors and instructors.

Conclusion

The U.S. Army SF Regiment has an opportunity to make MOI a more prominent aspect of entry-level Green Berets' education to help the organization remain competitive within the contemporary irregular warfare domain. The identified problem in this article is that aspiring Green Berets receive minimal instruction concerning MOI during the SFQC. The importance of MOI as an irregular warfare tool for the SF Regiment can be understood in two critical ways. First, providing aspiring Green Berets with a more robust understanding of how to pair instructional strategies with suggested MOIs enables them to serve as more effective instructors, teachers, and advisors across the full spectrum of irregular warfare activities. Second, certain MOIs are particularly well-suited to irregular warfare activities, and mastery of MOI equips SF advisors to develop cross-cultural competence, generate force-multiplying effects, sustain HN resistance and resilience, and reinforce the legitimacy and strategic influence of PFs. Finally, the article provides a clear COA for enhancing the SFQC, underscoring the centrality of instructional competence within the UW and FID core tasks that anchor the SF Regiment's irregular warfare expertise. Ultimately, if the SF Regiment seeks to strengthen and maintain its mastery of irregular warfare, it must prioritize MOI and deliberately cultivate future advisors as highly effective instructors from the outset of their careers.

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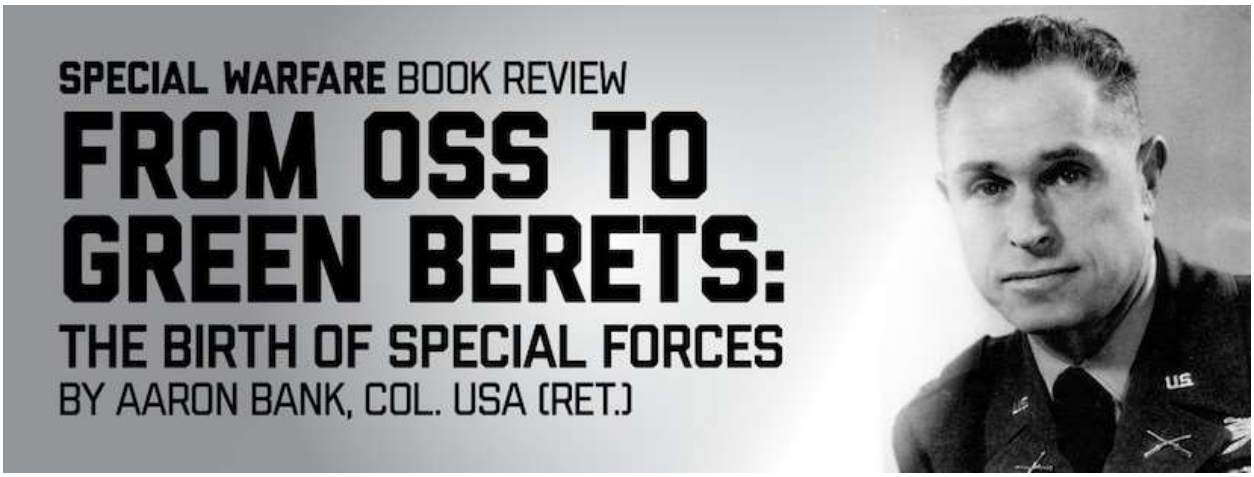

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Book Review: From OSS to Green Berets: The Birth of Special Forces by Col (Ret.) Aaron Bank
Reviewed by Maj. John Byrnes

"Walk into every room like your ancestors sent you to be there."

This saying carries profound implications. However, to truly appreciate them, one must have a sense of the history leading up to his existence. For Special Forces soldiers, such history is so often emphasized that it often becomes an afterthought. Still, understanding the context behind the creation of the Green Berets reveals lessons as relevant today as ever. Retired Col. Aaron Bank's memoir, *From OSS to Green Berets: The Birth of Special Forces,* offers just such an understanding. As such, this book should be required reading for every Green Beret in the formation today.

Aaron Bank is known as the father of Special Forces. He was the first Director of Special Forces and was the first Commander of 10th Special Forces Group when it was activated in 1952. Before standing up Special Forces as the Army's premier unconventional warfare capability, Col. Bank served in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) as a Jedburgh during WWII. In writing the book, Col. Bank wanted to tell the story of the OSS's operational groups conducting unconventional warfare in WWII, and of the subsequent development of the Green Berets. His purpose in telling this story was to emphasize that the OSS and its legacy are intrinsically tied to that of the Green Berets as the "operational predecessor" of U.S. Army Special Forces.

There is no grandiose introduction in this book. Instead, Col. Bank lets his experiences speak for themselves. From the first sentence, he dives right into the fascinating story of how he applied for a position with the OSS to get out of a boring position as a training officer for a tactical railroad battalion in Camp Polk, Louisiana. He wanted to liven up his career and exercise his foreign language capabilities, which the unit required. Needless to say, he had little idea of what lay in store for him. The memoir covers his training in clandestine activity, weapons and explosives, tradecraft, sabotage, and small unit tactics, which became the backbone of the Jedburgh's skills. From there, he recounts his operational successes aiding resistance groups and guerilla networks in operations against the Nazis behind enemy lines in France.

After France's liberation, Bank recalls an attempt to commence an unconventional warfare campaign in Germany, including a vague directive from "Wild Bill" Donovan, the head of the OSS, to capture Hitler. However, the OSS canceled the mission just before it began. Equally fascinating are Bank's vignettes from postwar Indochina. He details the complexities of a changing world order, his relationship with Ho Chi Minh, and their discussions about Vietnam's future. He also describes run-ins with the French and British, highlighting uncertain alliances and shifting policies after the war.

Bank's detailed account of the Army's force development of an unconventional warfare capability provides valuable context on the process that led to the creation of Special Forces. These sections of the book are as close to the horse's mouth as you can get, offering valuable insight into what Bank and his contemporaries were thinking. Interestingly, Bank went to great lengths to differentiate Special Forces from the Rangers, which senior leaders at the time consistently conflated. He painstakingly explained at every opportunity that, while Rangers offered a limited, direct-raid capability into enemy lines, Special Forces operated in the deep, behind enemy lines for extended periods to develop, train, and fight alongside guerilla forces.

Additionally, Bank faced a myriad of challenges from senior leaders using doctrinal terms interchangeably, which obscured his vision for the branch. He lamented the fact that "the terms unconventional warfare, clandestine operations, unorthodox warfare, and special operations were being used interchangeably" (Bank 1986, 151). The incorrect use of doctrinal terms and definitions still plagues special operations today and will be a problem for Conventional Forces and Special Operations Forces Integration, Interoperability, and Interdependence **(**CF-SOF I3) in large-scale combat operations (LSCO) without sufficient SOF integration into plans and operations before crisis.

From OSS to Green Berets is both entertaining and informative. The book's first part, detailing Bank's operations during and after WWII, reads like a military adventure novel. The section on Special Forces' development is drier but packed with relevant insights for the regiment and the broader special operations community. One disappointing aspect is the lack of mention of the First Special Service Force, from which Special Forces claims official Army lineage. This may have been intentional as the First Special Service Force had little in common operationally with the OSS, whom Bank used as the model for the Special Forces Groups.

Ultimately, all Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operations interested in expanding knowledge of unconventional warfare and special operations history should read this book. For newly-minted Green Berets, I would consider this required reading. One must know an organization's past to effectively chart its future. For the modern Special Forces regiment, I believe this will be an enlightening addition to one's own professional library.

Note: Currently, this book is out of print. Copies are available online, but they are somewhat expensive. I recommend searching for copies of the book at local or professional libraries. It is also a worthy collector's item if you have funds available.

Book Reviewer's Note: Major John Byrnes is a pseudonym for an active-duty Regular Army Soldier and Civil Affairs Officer with a background in Infantry and Special Operations. He is a graduate of the United States Military Academy and the National Defense University, and he currently serves as an editor for the Special Warfare Journal. The views, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent those of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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