

The United States Army Special Forces

A Special Forces soldier is a highly intelligent, highly trained and motivated paratrooper. He is multi-lingual, and experienced in at least one of five specialties – communications, weapons, operations, intelligence, demolitions and medical aid. He is in top physical condition and has met stringent security regulations. He is a triple volunteer who has chosen to join the Army, become parachute qualified, and has met the extremely high standards of the US Army Special Forces.

The basic element of a Special Forces Group is the “A” detachment, which is comprised of two officers and ten enlisted men. The ten are highly proficient in the five basic skills mentioned above. Two members specialize and excel in each of those skills. Each team member is “cross-trained” in at least one skill other than his own.

Special Forces soldiers receive training in geography, language, customs, local foods, political history and diseases prevalent in the area he serves. He trains in jungle and arctic warfare and survival, HALO, SCUBA, and hand to hand combat. An “A” detachment is capable of equipping and training a battalion size force. Divided in half, the team becomes two independent detachments with an equal capability.

To qualify for the Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC), enlisted volunteers must have completed basic training and be qualified in Military Occupational specialty (MOS). They must also be airborne qualified, and pass the rigorous physical fitness test.

A demanding, four week course, Phase I, determines a soldier’s eligibility to advance to Phase II and Phase III, to become Special Forces qualified.

To complete Phase I, a soldier must demonstrate self confidence and the ability to follow instructions and prove he can overcome the obstacles of night time land navigation for 12 consecutive nights in the forest. The Special Forces school prepares him for this with the best land navigation course the Army can offer. The physical conditioning includes running, Calisthenics and a confidence course which is termed one of the most demanding in the Army. It has 28 obstacles, and each student must complete it twice.

The first two weeks of the training include comprehensive instruction for night time navigation: map reading, compass and map orientation, terrain association, and geographic coordinates. Students also receive instruction in combat operation and airborne operations. They learn individual camouflage, patrol planning, and how to record and report intelligence information.

Upon completion of the classroom work, students take part in a field training exercise (FTX) in the North Carolina Uwharrie National Forest.

The first four days of the FTX take place in the relatively easy terrain of the southern Uwharrie, but the last ten days are spent in the extremely rough northern area.

After successfully completing Phase I, the students receive specialized training in the five basic skills of the Special Forces soldier mentioned earlier.

Special Forces medics undergo one of the longest and most intensive courses in today’s Army. Potential medics begin their Phase II training at Brooke Army Medical Centers, Ft. Sam Houston, Texas. During their 13-week stay there students are introduced to diagnosis and treatment of diseases and the manual medical techniques.

Upon completion of their training in Teas, the students go to a number of Army hospitals for on the job (OJT) training, for a period of six weeks. During OJT, the students function as externs in various sections of the hospital under the guidance of the hospital staff.

The students then attend Advanced Medical Training School (AMTS) at Fort Bragg. The six week course is divided into two phases. The first week is spent in the classroom studying medical theory, and reviewing basic Special Forces medical skills. During the five week surgical phase, the students receive instruction pre-operative and post-operative care, as well as recording case histories and physical exams. They also perform as surgeon anesthetists and scrub technicians.

The Special Forces medic is trained as a physician substitute, not as a physician assistant. The Special Forces medic, as well as being trained in the diagnoses and treatment of disease, is also proficient in the related skills, such as hygiene, sanitation, preventive medicine, veterinary medicine, dental care and laboratory duties. The Special Forces medic has to be a "Jack of all Trades".

The health and welfare of his team members and the accomplishment of the overall mission is the SF medic's primary mission. He is also responsible for the health and welfare of any indigenous troops and their families in an assigned area.

The eight week Special Forces Weapons School, located at Fort Bragg, prepares the soldiers to operate anything from a musket loader to a 106 MM recoilless rifle.

The school trains in eighty different weapons, including 46 foreign weapons, as well as Claymore mines and hand grenades. The school also deals extensively with the types of ammunition used in the various weapons.

An eleven day FTX conducted at Fort Bragg affords students the opportunity to put into practical application the skills taught to them during the course. They will "live" fire all the weapons presented, such as the Red-eye guided missile (U.S.); the LAW anti-tank weapon (U.S.); the AK-47 assault rifle (USSR); the Swedish K submachine gun; and the UZI submachine gun (Israel) to name a few.

The Special Forces weapons specialist is able to train indigenous forces in the use of small arms, both obsolete and current in the U.S. inventory, as well as foreign light weapons, and the tactical employment of these weapons in the offensive and defensive role.

He also trains indigenous forces in infantry tactics on the squad, platoon and company levels, to include raids, ambushes, patrolling and map reading.

He is an expert in guerrilla and counter guerrilla warfare, fire planning for infantry direct and indirect fire weapons, and security, maintenance and storage of weapons and ammunition.

The Special Forces weapons leader knows the fundamentals of mine warfare, and is able to read maps and aerial photographs, as well as prepare rough maps, field sketches and overlays which indicate the location of critical terrain features and enemy activities.

Upon completion of this school, the Special Forces soldier will have the capability to pick up virtually any weapon from any battlefield and be able to operate it effectively.

For the Special Forces skill in communications and electronics (COMMEL), that school is also one of the most demanding in the American Armed Forces.

The eight week long school at Fort Bragg is divided into two phases, the academic phase (5 weeks), and the performance phase (3 weeks).

During the academic phase, the soldiers study International Morse Code (IMC), cryptographic systems, Special Forces communications techniques and antennas. The practice in IMC totals five hours a day, and there is homework dealing with cryptography every night.

The performance phase takes place in the remote, mountainous terrain of the Pisgah National Forest, NC. Students are divided into four man teams with an instructor assigned to each team, and are required to operate 24 hours a day. The training is physically and mentally demanding. The students are evaluated for messages received, messages sent and contacts made. A base station evaluation, which includes the assessment of the individual students, is conducted daily. A ground evaluation is also made; which includes such things as personal appearance and keeping an efficiently clean area. The Special Forces COMMEL specialist is able to copy 18 words per minute (IMC). He knows memory based and normal cryptographic systems. He is able to construct field expedient antennas and can operate radios for Special Forces detachments, regardless of their size and mission.

Each detachment has two demolitions specialists, who are taught everything that can be taught about demolitions.

The 8 week demolitions school includes eleven days on the firing range, and a five day FTX. The course stresses "hands on" category. The students also received some seventy hours of night training.

Students also undergo exhaustive training in land mine warfare; explosives and demolitions; and advanced destructive techniques. The Special Forces students undergo field evaluation exercises and placement of charges; the safe handling and transportation of explosives, demolition; and expedient demolitions.

The students also receive instruction in foreign made demolitions.

For the Operations and Intelligence specialist (O & I), qualification means a man must be a staff sergeant (E6) or above, be Special Forces qualified and must have two years experience in an operational detachment. The O & I course is designed to train team sergeants. The course prepares the individual to be an operations and intelligence sergeant from the team to the group level.

The course is divided into two, 8 week phases. The intelligence portion is conducted at Ft. Huachuca, Arizona. The operations phase is conducted at Ft. Bragg. Students receive training in all phases of operations to include operations orders, plans, fingerprint identification systems, training management and photography (including operation of different cameras, film, and development, printing and enlarging). The team sergeant must have a working knowledge of all five basic SF skills.

Phase III of the SFQC trains the soldier in Special Forces doctrine and techniques and unconventional warfare operations to enable him to function as a member of a Special Forces operational team at every level.

The four week phase is divided into two sub phases, and is conducted at Camp Mackall and Uwharrie forest northwest of Fort Bragg.

The first sub phase (14 days) is spent mostly in the classroom and deals with Special Forces/unconventional warfare subjects. The second sub phase (14 days) is an FTX in the Uwharrie.

During the FTX, the students have a chance to apply all the training they received during phases I and II, and the first part of phase III. They infiltrate a simulated UW operations area by parachute at night, establishing contact with resistance forces on the ground and training and directing them in the conduct of UW against aggressor forces. Phase III is the final step of the SFQC training, and the man is awarded his special skill identifier and is authorized to wear a green beret with full identifying "flash" upon successful completion.

Cross-training, including SCUBA and language training, takes place once a Special Forces soldier completes the qualification course and is assigned to an operational group.

For Special Forces officers, there is a 13 week course climaxed by a realistic, 21 day FTX in the Uwharrie forest northwest of Fort Bragg. The 12 man "A" detachments parachute in at night, meet up with their civilian auxiliary of local citizens, and wage a mythical unconventional war. They use all the skills they have acquired in the classroom.

The Smoke Bomb hill area is rich in tradition and history. There is a special warfare memorial plaza, highlighting a 22 foot tall bronze statue of a Special Forces soldier. It reflects the fighting and building spirit of all the men, past and present who serve with the U.S. Army Special Forces.

Today, a Special Forces Group contains 1,225 men and contains battalions and companies. Each group is area oriented and language trained, and when committed, comes under the operation control of the theater commander.

The soldiers of Special Forces are the best trained fighting men in the world. Their motto, "De Oppressor Liber" (To Free the Oppressed) expresses their mission well.

They stand ready to defend free people from the iron hand of oppression anywhere in the world.