



Inside SWCS

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Forward momentum

Soldiers endure Team Week at Special Forces Assessment and Selection



Special Forces candidates push and pull a make-shift vehicle during the Team Week phase of the Army Special Forces Assessment and Selection course Jan. 22 at Camp Mackall in Hoffman, N.C. Team Week is designed to evaluate the candidate's behaviors to determine their potential to be a member of the Special Forces regiment. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Marcus Butler, U.S. Army Special Operations Command Public Affairs Office)

By Staff Sgt. Marcus Butler

U.S. Army Special Operations Command Public Affairs Office

Soldiers from throughout the Army come to Fort Bragg, N.C. with the dream and goal of joining the U.S. military's "tip of the spear" – the U.S. Army Special Forces regiment. To see this dream manifest, the Soldiers must attend the three-week Special Forces Assessment and Selection program at Camp Mackall. SFAS is a physically, mentally and emotionally rigorous test of Soldiers' courage, character and commitment. Within this process is the phase called Team Week, in which the candidates' behaviors are assessed to determine their potential to be members of the Special Forces Regiment.

"Team Week is both dynamic and complex, assessing an individual's ability to navigate uncertainty autonomously and as a member of a team," said Maj. Brian Decker, the Army Special Operations Forces Assessment and Selection company commander.

During this week-long trial-by-fire, the Soldiers have to work in 16-man teams to successfully negotiate and complete various challenges within the deep woods of North Carolina, often with minimal or ambiguous instruction, which allows evaluators to assess a candidate's ability to interpret intent and think for themselves. All the candidates have are their buddies to the left and right to help them make it through.

These challenges may take place at any time throughout a day, including the middle of the evening, and generally involve an entire team transporting equipment and contraptions across long distances of rough terrain. Team Week events are changed for each SFAS iteration, and the specific qualities being assessed are a closely guarded secret held by the SFAS cadre, in order to prevent Soldiers from gaming the selection process.

Approximately 50 percent of candidates who begin SFAS are not selected to attend the Special Forces Qualification Course, and Team Week is one of the candidates' biggest hurdles. During this period, cadre members observe and assess the ways in which each individual interacts with their peers in stressful situations.

The SFAS cadre is made up of experienced Army special-operations Soldiers who have spent years operating as members of highly skilled small teams, and within a couple years, they will complete their assignment at SWCS and return to an operational unit. The cadre members are choosing their future subordinates, peers and leaders.

"[Team Week] has been one of the most physically challenging events of my life," said a candidate attending the January 2012 iteration of SFAS, which is run several times each year. "My body and mind have never been pushed like this before."

While the candidates execute their tasks despite

physical and mental exhaustion, the SFAS cadre keep a vigilant eye on each candidate to make sure that they are conducting their tasks efficiently and maintaining the program's strict safety standards.

"Safety is paramount throughout the selection and assessment process. The course has institutionalized over 20 years of the best practices to manage all aspects of risk, from environmental hazards to the nutritional and hydration needs of the candidates," Decker said.

Despite the pain, the candidates all continue to push themselves and each other throughout the process no matter what challenges that they face.

"I know that the pain is going to be there, we all know it. But that is not going to stop us," said another candidate, after having rolled his ankle during a road march. "The cadre will come and check on us to make sure it is nothing serious, and then we move on with the mission." Teams of experienced Special Forces medics are present for each event throughout SFAS.

At the end of Team Week the candidates will find out whether or not they have earned the right to return to Fort Bragg to attend the Special Forces Qualification Course – the path toward earning a Special Forces tab and a green beret.

"I just hope that I did everything I could to give me the best chance to be selected," said one of the candidates during a brief stop. "No matter what, I am never going to quit. Even if I am not selected this time, I will be back."



Clockwise from top-left: U.S. Army Soldiers attending Special Forces Assessment and Selection form up at Camp Mackall in Hoffman, N.C., for the first day of Team Week, the final week of SFAS.

Above: Special Forces candidates discuss the best way to transport various heavy items across long distances and rough terrain. Team Week allows SFAS cadre to observe Soldiers' interactions, as well as their time management and leadership skills.

Below: A team of Soldiers participating in the SFAS Team Week, pressed to complete their mission in time, opt to carry their load rather than spend time lashing several components together. Teammates are given designated routes and time standards, but are allowed to decide amongst themselves the best way to accomplish their tasks.

Bottom: A Special Forces candidate flexes his shoulders while bearing part of the weight of several pieces of heavy equipment while transporting it alongside his SFAS teammates.

Second from bottom: Soldiers carry a log lashed onto metal poles up and down the sandhills of Camp Mackall Jan. 23 in Hoffman, N.C. SFAS is run by the Special Warfare Education Group (Airborne), part of SWCS at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Left: Three SFAS teams carry their loads, using various techniques, across a field on Camp Mackall during a Team Week exercise.

All photos are U.S. Army photos by Staff Sgt. Russell Lee Klika, SWCS Office of Strategic Communication



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
5	6	7	SWCS Civilian of the Year ceremony	9	10	11
12	13	14	Robin Sage ends	16	Training Holiday	18
19	President's Day	21	22	SFQC Graduation Ceremony 3 p.m. Crown Coliseum	24	25