THERE IS AN IDENTITY CRISIS IN SPECIAL FORCES:

WHO ARE THE GREEN BERETS SUPPOSED TO BE?

COL. EDWARD C. CROOT
U.S. ARMY SPECIAL FORCES

On the cover: President John F. Kennedy meets Brig. Gen. William P. Yarborough, Commanding General, U.S. Army Special Warfare Center, during his visit to Fort Liberty (then Fort Bragg), NC, in October 1961. Source: JFK Presidential Library and Museum

Acknowledgements

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About the Author

COLONEL ED CROOT is an Army Special Forces officer from Long Valley, NJ, and a Deputy Operations Officer (DJ3) for the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). He and his wife Tracy have two sons, Scout and Zach, a daughter, Kaylee, and live in Fayetteville, NC.

Croot is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh (bachelor of arts in business and bachelor of science in psychology), the Army School of Advanced Military Studies (master of arts in theater level operations), and Kansas State University (master of science in education). Most recently as a Fellow at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, he won the U.S. Army War College 2020 Special Operations Research and Writing Award for his work titled "There is an Identity Crisis in Special Forces."

Croot joined the Army in 1995, earning his commission in the Infantry through ROTC. He has commanded at the company and battalion levels and served on operational assignments in Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Yemen, Zambia, Iraq, Bangladesh, South Korea, the Phillippines, and Jordan. He has interagency and policy experience from two U.S. embassy assignments in Sanaa (Yemen) and Dhaka (Bangladesh) and multinational experience on both a UN and NATO staff. His most recent assignment from 2022-2024 was as the Operations Officer (SOJ3) for Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC), responsible for all U.S. Special Operations across the Indo-Pacific Theater. He has focused on national security threats in the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific, and Africa for more than 29 years.

Foreword

The ongoing exploration of identity in Special Forces is particularly relevant as Army Special Operations redefines its purpose in a new era of integrated deterrence. This research by Army Special Forces Colonel Ed Croot adds an informative perspective that is highly prescient to the identity formation of the largest population of the SOF profession. As Col. Croot argues in **There is an Identity Crisis in Special Forces,** *recognizing that there is an identity crisis in this fourth age of SOF in general, and within the Special Forces branch in particular, is essential for two primary reasons.*

First, professional Special Forces Soldiers of all ranks should think deeply about their experiences over the past two decades and ask the truly tough questions about the future of our profession. Each year, hundreds of Army SOF professionals attend mid-career and senior-level professional education schools in which they partner with academia to conduct meaningful research. Although time away from the operational force might seem risky, there is greater risk in allowing our formations to fall victim to overconfidence and continuation bias. In a highly complex and rapidly changing global security environment, professional education is essential to developing and shaping the intellectual capital of our profession. Thus, if we are to outpace the People's Republic of China, our nation's most significant strategic challenge, members of Army Special Operations must remain open to reflexive academic approaches in how we learn as a profession. I encourage all SOF leaders to think critically about our profession and have the personal courage to provide us with your findings. It is important AND we are listening.

Second, I want to acknowledge that although many senior SOF leaders do not fully concur with all of Col. Croot's conclusions, the data derived from the 1,200 active-duty Green Berets who responded to his surveys unveils some troubling information. Specifically, the data found that almost a third of the participating Green Berets are not committed to long-term partnership approaches, regional alignment,

or language skills. Moreover, a full 10 percent of respondents do not believe unconventional warfare (UW) is an appropriate or relevant Green Beret mission. The survey also found that an alarming number of Green Berets are not prepared to conduct irregular warfare (IW) as a necessary part of America's strategy of integrated deterrence. Given the modern threats from strategic competitors resident the last several years in Ukraine, in the Red Sea, and in the South China Sea, it is undeniable that Special Forces' UW/IW skills are in much higher demand now than they were over the past two decades. This level of misalignment with our most essential core skills, competencies, and missions within our profession is an integral part of Col. Croot's identity argument and something we must all address.

In closing, I commend Col. Croot's academic and empiric rigor in addressing the Special Forces' identity and how we understand the distinctive qualities that make us unique and valuable to the Joint Force. Although some may disagree with Col. Croot's arguments and conclusions, his research methodology and subsequent findings remain sufficiently valid and serve as a claxon that demonstrates a need for introspection that we cannot afford to ignore. As such, I recommend that all stakeholders in SOF, supporters and critics alike, explore the impact that "Green Beret identity" has on the SOF profession and how we must continue to adapt to successfully compete against, deter, and defeat our adversaries now and in the future. Once again, I want to encourage all Green Berets to explore this research and think critically about our profession. Our role as irregular warfare professional practitioners, with and through our interagency, international, and joint partners, remains critical to achieving integrated deterrence against China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. As such, every member of our profession must understand our essential strategic value to the nation, and we owe it to future American generations to learn, adapt, and appropriately apply our skills to sufficiently protect it.

Lt. Gen. John W. Brennan
Deputy Commander, U.S. Africa Command
August 2024

Chapter 1: Defining the Problem

> At the heart of the Green Berets' identity crisis… is a generation only knowing the Global War on Terror (GWOT), with the next generation recruited on the promise of door-kicking raids, dynamic entries, and kill/capture methodologies.
>
> —Green Beret[1]

INTRODUCTION

U.S. Army Special Forces quickly adapt to emergent threats that face the Nation; this is expected. What is unexpected, however, is when these temporary adaptations disfigure a unit and create *mission drift* away from its unique capabilities. In fact, Special Forces, known commonly as "Green Berets" or simply "SF," is experiencing this now. Strategic shifts over the last two decades have changed expectations of SF twice, from peacekeeping operations in the late 1990s to counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations post-9/11, and then to competition with Russia and China circa 2015–2017. These changes have left an impact.

Public and congressional questioning of Green Beret activities renders recent Department of Defense (DoD) decisions to modify Army and SF capacity, and SF's slow transition from the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) leaves the Green Berets unrecognizable. There is an identity crisis in SF, and it is influencing the culture and behavior of Green Berets. The result of multiple changes in the expectations of SF post-9/11, the identity crisis is no one person's fault—it has manifested over two decades. However, strong leadership must address the identity crisis now to restore the morale and honor of the force, enable modernization, and recapture readiness.

SPECIAL FORCES: A UNIQUE AND NECESSARY FORCE

As the Nation's only special warfare force trained and educated to operate within the "human terrain," SF have long served with valor at the vanguard of our Nation's irregular warfare conflicts. The reader may recall bearded men on horseback, arm-in-arm with the Northern Alliance, conducting unconventional warfare to overthrow the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Others will remember SF again conducting unconventional warfare with the Iraqi Kurds during the invasion of Iraq, or even their counterterrorism/counterinsurgency support to Syrian Kurdish forces in their struggle against ISIS. At this very moment, across the Baltic nations and SF stand shoulder to shoulder with their allies, empowering them through security force assistance (SFA) and foreign internal defense (FID), ready to transition to unconventional warfare if Russia dares more encroachment. This service has not been without tremendous cost to the "quiet professionals." Since September 11, 2001, 188 Green Berets have been killed in action (KIA).[2] 2019 was especially fraught with sacrifice—of the 24 U.S. servicemembers listed as KIA, 11 were Green Berets.[3] This price has not gone unnoticed. Since 2001, three Green Berets have been awarded the Medal of Honor.[3] However, recent moral–ethical transgressions risk overshadowing their sacrifices.

GREEN BERETS IN THE MEDIA

SF have provided the media plenty of headline material over the years. Accordingly, in 2018, Congress mandated a full review of United States Special Operations Command's (USSOCOM's) culture and accountability; this led to the 2019 publication and issue of formal ethics guidance to all 66,000 SOF servicemembers within USSOCOM.[4] In January 2020, General Richard Clarke, the former commanding general (CG) of USSOCOM, directed a "comprehensive review" of the culture and ethics of all SOF.[5] The review did not find

"a systemic ethics problem."[6] However, it did find in units, including the Green Berets,:

> **a culture overly focused on force employment and mission accomplishment create[ing] the contexts or situations allowing for misconduct and unethical behavior to develop...The Review Team uncovered not only potential cracks in the SOF foundations at the individual and team level, but also through the chain of command, specifically in the core tenets of leadership, discipline and accountability.[7]**

> **...Many individuals across the USSOCOM enterprise—at all levels—identified this cultural problem...perpetuating [SOF] focus on COIN [counterinsurgency] and CT [counterterrorism] while not developing SOF and SOF leaders for the full spectrum of SOF core activities and Component specific skills and capabilities.[8]**

Less than one month after the review's publication, retired Army Lt. Gen. David Barno and Dr. Nora Bensahel of Johns Hopkins University called for another review, this time a congressional commission, to further investigate SOF culture and ethics.[9] These criticisms are to be expected given the ultimate finding in USSOCOM's comprehensive review regarding culture and core activities.

MISSION DRIFT AWAY FROM CORE COMPETENCY

Over the past two decades, SF have experienced mission drift and have only begun to address it. USSOCOM disbanded the SF Crisis Response Forces in March 2020 to support the wider DoD's move from counterinsurgency operations to "a near-peer conflict with adversaries such as Russia and China."[10] The Army's transformational decision, perhaps owing in part to SF mission drift, to build Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFABs) signals a paradigm shift toward conventional military partner capacity building.[11] In February 2018, the Army established 1st SFAB, the first of six 800-soldier units intended to train, advise, and assist foreign nation military partners overseas.[12] Since 1952, this mission was the sole domain of the uniquely manned, trained,

and equipped Green Berets.[13] These decisions demonstrate senior leadership's perception of SF's utility and effort to redirect mission drift back toward traditional, appropriate, and relevant missions.

In October 2019, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) CG, Lt. Gen. Fran Beaudette, acknowledged the mission drift, stating in his Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) Strategy that "to shake off the strategic atrophy...we must evolve."[14] He directs the force to "shift the mindset and bring about evolutionary change"[15] through a three-pronged approach: prioritize people and build trust, focus readiness to support the Joint Force in conflict, and modernize to be the Army's force of choice in competition.[16] For SF, this means returning to its unique, globally postured partnership role. It also means moving away from "inhabiting secure forward operating bases to one of surviving and thriving in large-scale combat operations"[17] and "[operating] on the increasingly lethal multi-domain battlefields of today."[18]

Finally, career SF officers likely found it disconcerting to watch traditional partnership missions entrusted to other SOF and conventional forces in Syria and Yemen instead of SF. Beaudette's call for change is justified. In struggling with the effects of "mission drift" for two decades, SF have drifted away from complex, long-duration partnerships toward more linear, short-term, transactional combat operations. Despite Beaudette emphasizing partnership, many Green Berets who responded to this project believe that partnership with indigenous forces—the very foundation of SF's existence—is simply not important. A senior warrant officer stated: "If we use indigenous people, it is for our sustainment, our protection, or to multiply our ability to employ force. We are not trainers. Conventional forces can do that."[19] This misguided perspective is a symptom of a much larger problem: the actual SF organizational and individual identity is not aligned with the expected identity.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

It is necessary to define the problem and clarify definitions, concepts, and ideas that have become confused and entangled in this public

discussion. What is expected of SF? What is not expected of SF? What does it mean to have an identity crisis?

What is Expected of the Green Berets?

Title 10 law requires SF to possess unique capabilities that support USSOCOM roles, missions, and functions as directed by Congress.[20] Doctrine requires SF to build, partner, and fight "alongside indigenous combat formations in permissive, uncertain, or hostile environments."[21] They are uniquely trained and educated in special warfare, which requires a "deep understanding of cultures and foreign language"[22] proficiency to prepare them for the "human domain" of military operations. In the most complex irregular warfare environments, SF are expected to leverage indigenous forces, understand relevant actors, build and maintain partnerships, and create access for interagency partners.[23] SF provides options to leadership through core special warfare activities: SFA, FID, UW, counterinsurgency (COIN), and counterterrorism (CT).[24]

> **In struggling with the effects of "mission drift" for two decades, SF have drifted away from complex, long-duration partnerships toward more linear, short-term, transactional combat operations.**

Policies at multiple levels of government direct SF to support interagency partners by providing long-duration interactions that develop allied military capabilities, reassure partners, maintain influence, and gain important access. The National Security Strategy authored by the President[25] and the National Defense Strategy authored by the Secretary of Defense[26] cite partnership 199 times, cementing it as a vital component of our national security. The Army recognizes the importance and value of partnership in its operating concept, multi-domain operations that direct forward presence for competition (with Russia and China), which "deter[s] armed conflict by preventing adversaries from attempting a *fait accompli* attack on favorable terms."[27] In turn, the USASOC CG directly supports the

Army, Joint Force, and interagency partners by directing SF to posture forward "on the leading edge of the Department of Defense"[28] and "remain ready and engaged against violent extremist organizations, [while] also adapting to compete against Russia and China, and preparing for war."[29]

SF can and will support "traditional" warfare efforts. But once those efforts are complete, SF are expected to return to their primary form of warfare, "irregular" warfare, which is the "violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations."[30] "Resistance"[31] against governing bodies, oppressive groups, or occupying powers may never grow to full traditional warfare. Resistance is the subject of their profession[32] and what makes SF *special*.

What is not Expected of the Green Berets?

Since 2001, strategic leadership expectations have driven SF from their traditional global partnership missions toward more unilateral direct action (DA) missions. However, the organization expected to return to traditional special warfare activities. After nearly two decades of shouldering a disproportionate number of combat

U.S. Army Green Berets assigned to 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) teach Beninese soldiers from the 1st Commando Parachute Battalion how to identify signs that an improvised explosive device (IED) may be present in Ouassa, Africa, March 11, 2022. U.S. engagement comes with mutual benefit, upholds international norms, and treats partners as equals. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Jael Laborn)

rotations, some Green Berets now believe surgical strike is their expected core competency. Surgical strike is the precise capability in "hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover or damage designated targets, or influence threats."[33] Surgical strike activities are typically unilateral, short duration, and executed by specially selected small units with extensive training for extreme risk and precise execution. The activities of surgical strike include hostage rescue (HR), unilateral DA, kill/capture operations against designated targets (K/C), unilateral special reconnaissance (SR), counterproliferation (CP), and counter weapons of mass destruction (CWMD).[34] Although required at times to conduct unilateral DA missions, SF are not expected or trained to execute surgical strike missions.[35]

How to Model Green Beret Culture and Identity?

Any discussion of identity must begin with culture. The Army frames culture as beliefs, values, norms, and behavior.[36] Dr. Edgar Schein of the MIT Sloan School of Management undergirds the Army's definition of culture, arguing that culture is composed of a group's shared *basic assumptions,* which inform accepted *beliefs* and *values*.[37] These, in turn, inform accepted *norms* for members to adhere and enforce—and, ultimately, manifest in behavior.[38] Schein's "Model of Organizational Culture" establishes "any group's culture can be studied at three levels,"[39] from a shallow outer level (*artifacts*), commutable middle level (*espoused beliefs and values*), and deeply embedded core level (*basic underlying assumptions*).[40]

In 2013, the Army used Schein's model to frame its organizational model for culture and its influences on defining the Army as a profession. The Army adapted Schein's model, adding *The Army Profession* to the outer layer and *The Army Ethic and Identity* to the core layer.[41] The Army Ethic "defines the moral principles that guide us" and "is the heart of our shared professional identity, our sense of who we are, our purpose in life, and why and how we serve the American People."[42] *The SF model* featured throughout this monograph

incorporates both Schein's and the Army's model to buttress the model with a strong academic and professional base (see Figure 1.1).

The Outer Layer: Artifacts and Behavior Army Profession-Special Forces Profession

Schein defines the artifact layer as "visible and feelable structures and processes" and "observed behaviors" of an organizational culture that are easily viewed but difficult to decipher.[43] The Army model considers this outer layer the Army Profession, visible in the Army flag, uniform, equipment, and practice of soldiering.[44] The SF model considers symbols (beret, flashes, patch, and dagger), legend (e.g., President John F. Kennedy establishing the headgear, bearded men on horseback, John Wayne, Barry Sadler's song),[45] and mottos ("De Oppresso Liber" and "quiet professionals") as the outer layer. This layer also captures their service and sacrifice, transgressions, and the mission drift outlined earlier. Though this outer layer is plainly visible, it is difficult for those outside of the organization to decipher causation[46] (see Figure 1.2).
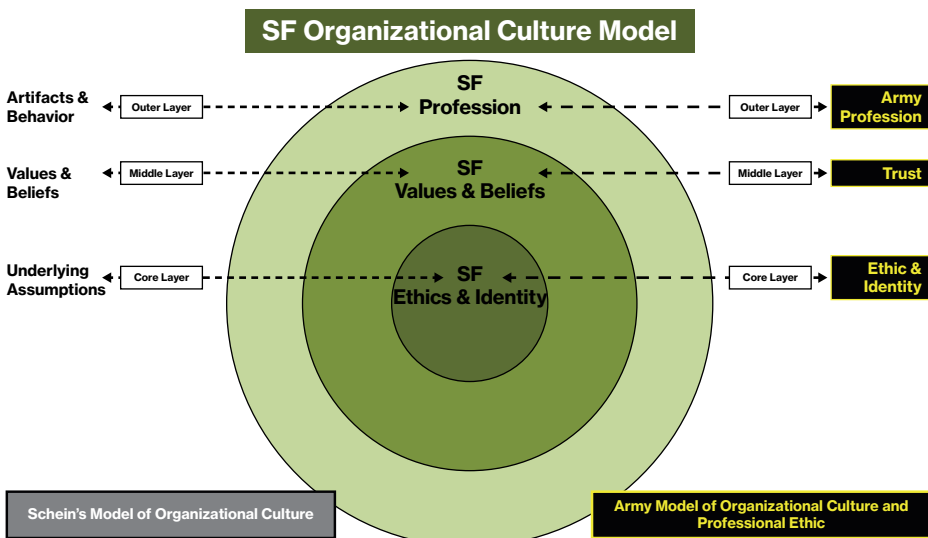
Figure 1.1. Special Forces Organizational Culture Model. Source: Author
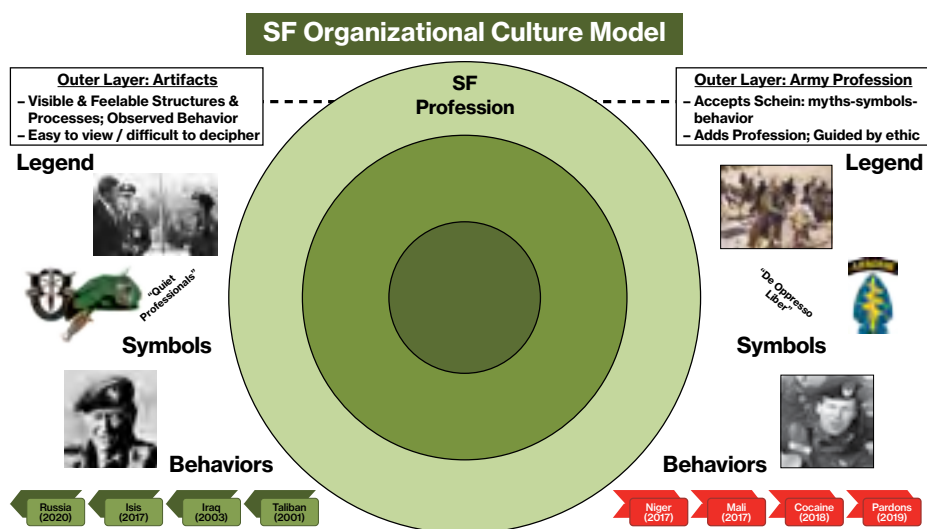
Figure 1.2. Special Forces Organizational Culture Model Outer Layer: Artifacts–Army Profession–Special Forces Profession. Source: Author

The Middle Layer: Values and Beliefs-Trust-Special Forces Values and Beliefs

Schein defines this layer as the "shared, espoused [beliefs], values, norms, and rules of behavior" that can be modified through interactions and experiences but "may only reflect rationalization or aspirations."[47] The Army model includes in this middle layer the "laws, values, and beliefs embedded within the Army Culture of Trust [by codes and creeds] that motivates and guides the conduct [behavior] of Army professionals."[48] For The SF model, the middle layer considers the individual and group ideals, goals, sense of what rules ought to be, what beliefs are right or wrong, what techniques to value, and what strategies will work or not work.[49] To have an organizational culture, the members must be trained in the same way, using the same doctrine, and to the same skill set and values.[50] Espoused culture and actual culture may not, and in SF's case *are not* in agreement/harmony.[51] For example, a Green Beret trained and educated in special warfare skills may not believe language proficiency is important, nor

value long-term partnership approaches. This is a key aspect of group culture and foreshadows the importance of the dense central core layer, the basic underlying assumptions and identity (see Figure 1.3).
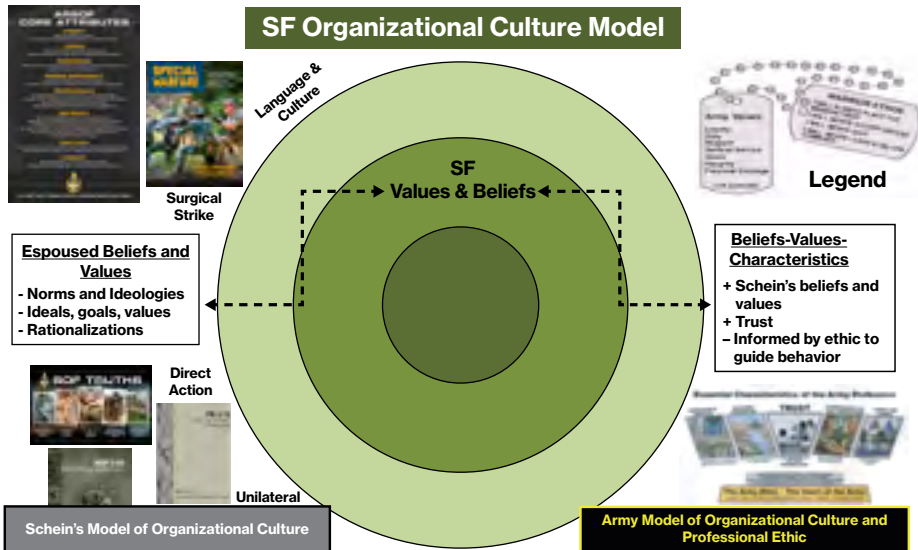
Figure 1.3. Special Forces Organizational Culture Model Middle Layer: Values–Beliefs–Trust. Source: Author
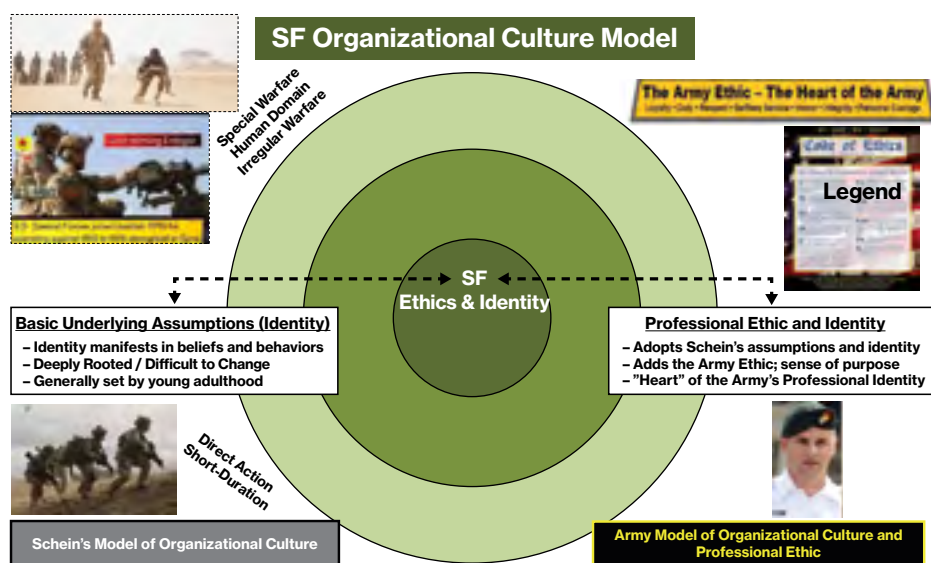
The Core Layer: Underlying Assumptions-Identity and Ethic

According to Schein, when beliefs and values are consistent and repeated, they come to be taken for granted and are ingrained in the unconscious as underlying assumptions and absolute truths.[52] At the individual level, core identity (underlying assumptions of one's self) is generally set by young adulthood.[53] At the group level, individual identities coalesce, contributing to (and influenced by) the organizational identity.[54] This "group identity [is a] key component of culture,"[55] and the shared assumptions are strongly held, guide behavior, and "tell group members how to perceive, think about, and feel about things."[56] The assumptions are so strongly held, members find any other behavior inconceivable.[57] Within an individual and culture, "changing basic assumptions is difficult, time-consuming, and highly anxiety-provoking."[58]

The Army's model adds The Army Ethic to the core layer. Soldiers arrive to the organization with their core identity formed and are further guided by this ethic, which informs their values and beliefs, and influences their professional behavior.[59] The SF model assumes that a recruit's identity and ethic are likely formed prior to attending Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS). Individual identities gravitate to corresponding recruiting messages congruent with their underlying assumptions. An identity attracted to danger, action, and combat, or an identity attracted to partnership, autonomy, and irregular warfare, will be difficult to modify later. Also, the professional ethic will only influence the Green Beret's beliefs and behaviors if it is congruent with the individual's formed identity and ethic (see Figure 1.4).

Culture: Structurally Binding Individuals for Protection

Cultures structure. An individual's identity, ethic, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors are inextricably linked within that individual; the SF model adds the premise that like-identity individuals seek to form cultures that provide structure. People need stability

SF Organizational Culture Model

Special Warfare
Human Domain
Irregular Warfare

The Army Ethic – The Heart of the Army
Loyalty • Duty • Respect • Selfless Service • Honor • Integrity • Personal Courage

Code of Ethics

Legend

SF
Ethics & Identity

Basic Underlying Assumptions (Identity)
– Identity manifests in beliefs and behaviors
– Deeply Rooted / Difficult to Change
– Generally set by young adulthood

Professional Ethic and Identity
– Adopts Schein's assumptions and identity
– Adds the Army Ethic; sense of purpose
– "Heart" of the Army's Professional Identity

Direct Action
Short-Duration

Schein's Model of Organizational Culture

Army Model of Organizational Culture and Professional Ethic

Figure 1.4: Special Forces Culture Model Core Layer: Core–Underlying Assumptions–Identity and Ethic. Source: Author

to make sense of their world and to create order in their lives.[60] "Disorder [and] senselessness" lead to anxiety, so people cope with that anxiety by cultivating cultures that support "consistent and predictable views of how things should be."[61] Culture ties together group assumptions, ethic, identity, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors into a coherent whole.

Cultures protect. Individuals and groups deal with conflict and ambiguity by striving toward integration that satisfies the human need for stability, consistency, and meaning.[62] Once a group of like-identity individuals achieves a sense of group identity, this culture becomes the "major stabilizing force and will not be given up easily" because group members value that stability.[63] Any challenges to identity produce anxiety and trigger cognitive and behavioral defense mechanisms.[64] Ultimately, the group culture mutually supports an individual's defense mechanisms to ensure that the status quo remains intact, for better or worse.

> **As the only uniquely trained and educated special warfare force in the military, SF are expected and directed to return to their traditional partnership roles across the globe to deter jihadist groups, compete with Russia and China, and prepare for conflict or crisis.**

What is an Identity Crisis?

An *identity crisis* is defined as "a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's [or group's] sense of *identity* becomes insecure, typically due to a *change* in their *expected aims or role* in society."[65] As previously established, each time the strategic environment changed over the last two decades, the expected "aims or roles" of SF changed. Research shows that uncertainty and confusion are present in SF's culture. The question remains: Have these strategic-level changes caused the SF culture to become insecure, and if so, what are the consequences and implications?

SUMMARY

As the only uniquely trained and educated special warfare force in the military, SF are expected and directed to return to their traditional partnership roles across the globe to deter jihadist groups, compete with Russia and China, and prepare for conflict or crisis. They are not expected or directed to conduct unilateral strategic strike operations. However, there are identity issues present within SF's culture, which likely contribute to eroding trust and negative impacts to modernization and readiness.

Chapter 2. Research and Design

At the individual level, an SF recruit is attracted to a recruiting message congruent with their already-formed ethic and identity. This deeply rooted identity will produce cognitive dissonance when confronted with incongruent organizational culture. If an individual Green Beret does possess a different identity than that of the expected and desired SF identity and culture, they will seek the stability and protection of a like-identity sub-culture...if one is tacitly allowed or explicitly encouraged to exist. And, if sub-identities and sub-cultures do exist at various echelons within SF, there can be no guarantee that individual and collective behavior will be consistent with any espoused (though not codified) overarching organization identity and ethic.

> ...strong leadership must address the identity crisis now to restore the morale and honor of the force, enable modernization, and recapture readiness.

THESIS

There is an identity crisis in SF, and it is influencing the culture and behavior of Green Berets. It is the result of multiple changes in the expectations of SF post-September 11, 2001. The identity crisis is no one person's fault—it has manifested over two decades. However, strong leadership must address the identity crisis now to restore the morale and honor of the force, enable modernization, and recapture readiness.

METHODOLOGY

Comparing the espoused with the actual Green Beret identity and associated values, beliefs, and behaviors will illuminate any misalignment between the two identities. Ultimately, this will establish if the overall culture is contributing to an identity crisis. The model of a
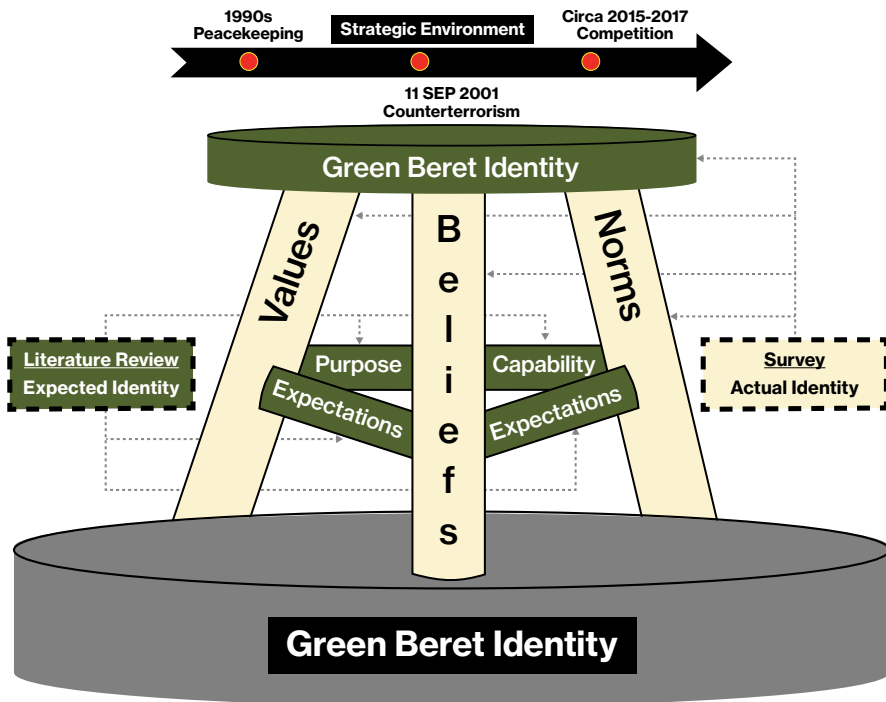
Figure 2.1: Research model: 3-legged stool. Source: Author

"three-legged stool" of Green Beret culture assists in conceptualizing the espoused and actual Green Beret identities (see Figure 2.1).

The gray base represents the Green Beret organizational identity, providing a deeply rooted foundation. Each "leg" represents the actual Green Beret of values, beliefs, and norms; informed by identity and ethic, they influence and guide behavior. The legs support the "seat," which represents behavior at the point of interaction between values, beliefs, norms, and the outside world. Finally, the "stretchers," aligning and securing the legs, represent the established purpose, capabilities, and expectations of Green Berets. The stretchers are the independent variables of the project and are established in legal, policy, doctrinal, and professional documents. The legs are the dependent variables and are established by a survey of active-duty Green Beret values, beliefs, and behaviors.

Psychologist Carl Jung's culture and identity concept of *archetypes* is used to define the independent and dependent variables. Jung explains that individual and collective identities consist of bunches of individual strands (values, beliefs, and norms) that, when combined, form a distinctive visual or audible emanation (behavior).[66] Jung names these identity strands "archetypes" and describes them as human thought strands that identify what a person is (i.e., what someone might do, say, feel, or desire).[67] Documented Green Beret capabilities (attributes, standards, and skills), purpose (competencies, activities, and tasks), and expectations (contemporary mission requirements) form the archetypes. When the archetypes are uniquely arranged and structured, they define the expected Green Beret identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Analysis of 18 legal, doctrinal, policy, and strategy documents determined which archetypes form the established identity (see Table 2.1). Of note, there is not a single source document that holistically defines the SF profession; this key issue will be addressed later.

The review of the 18 documents yielded 95 possible criteria for consideration as archetypes of the Green Beret identity. Based on a weighting of leadership priority, consistency, and frequency across the documents, 25 essential archetypes were chosen to define the expected identity and form the foundational survey questions that expose discontinuity between espoused and actual identity (see Table 2.2).

DESIGN

A six-part research design explored the thesis for USASOC; 1st Special Forces Command (SFC); and the Army's Special Operations Center of Excellence, John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (SWCS) at Fort Liberty, NC (formerly Fort Bragg):

(I)   Survey of the SF regiment to measure misalignment between established and actual organizational identity;

(II)   Survey results;

(III)   Principal finding;

Green Beret Identity

Survey

Values

Beliefs

Norms

Purpose

Capability

Expectations

Expectations

Survey

Survey

Survey

Strategic Leader Expectations (5):

Special Warfare (Long-Term/Partner Enabled):

1. Reassure Partners and Allies

2. Disrupt Jihadist Terrorist Groups

3. Compete against Russia and China

4. Prepare for Crisis

5. Prepare for War

Activities and Tasks (8):

Special Warfare (Long-Term/Partner Enabled):

1. Unconventional Warfare (UW)

2. Foreign Internal Defense (FID)

3. Counterinsurgency (COIN)

4. Security Force Assistance (SFA)

5. Partnered Counterterrorism (CT)

6. Partnered Direct Action (DA)

7. Partnered Special Reconnaissance (SR)

8. Preparation of the Environment (PE)

Attributes, Standards and Skills (12):

Recruited, Assessed and Selected for:

1. Above Average Physical Fitness

2. Above Average Intellect

3. Mature in Years and Experience

4. Trustworthiness

Individual Special Forces Skills:

5. Expert in MOS
   (Weapons/Engineer/Medical/Communications)

6. Specialty Skills

7. Competent in Small Unit Infantry Tactics

Special Warfare Skills:

8. Master Trainers

9. Proficient in Assigned Language

10. Culturally Astute in Assigned Theater

11. Commited to Long-Term Partnership Approaches

12. Trusted to Operate in Sensitive and High-Risk
    Environments

Figure 2.2. Research model: 3-legged stool with archetypes. Source: Author

(IV) Analysis;

(V) Implications, and;

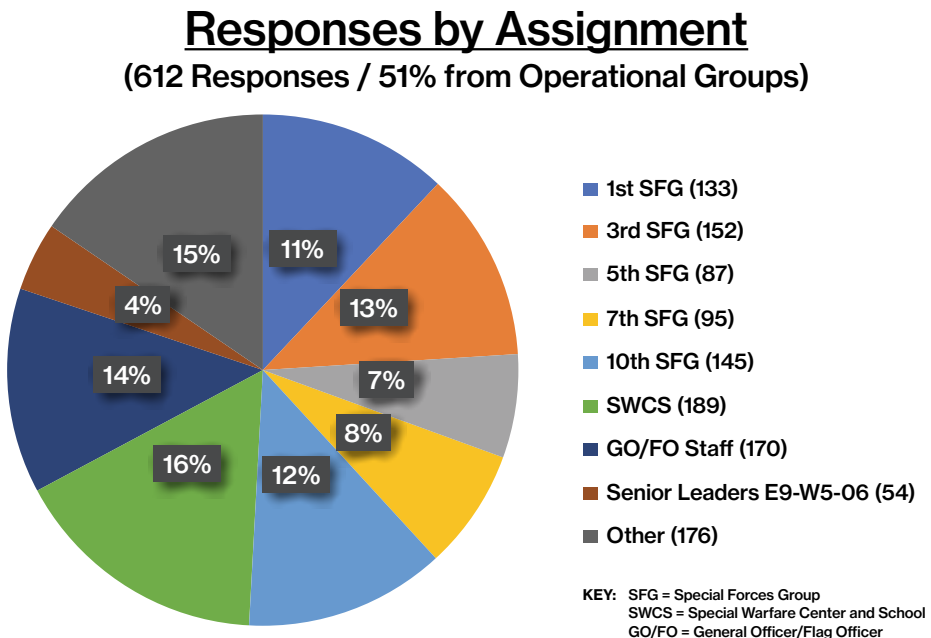(VI) Recommendations for further action and research.

SURVEY

In consultation with the U.S. Army War College, Duke University, and USASOC, the 2020 Green Beret Survey was a mixed-methods comprehensive survey that included 42 quantitative and two qualitative questions based on the 25 selected archetypes (see Figure 2.2). The survey was distributed via email twice over a 30-day period, from December 2019 to January 2020, to all 6,906 Green Berets on active duty.

SURVEY RESULTS

Demographics and Statistical Significance

The 2020 Green Beret Survey received 1,201 responses, or 17.3 percent of the total population, yielding both statistically significant quantitative data and more than 100 pages of qualitative data.

Responses by Assignment
(612 Responses / 51% from Operational Groups)

- 1st SFG (133)
- 3rd SFG (152)
- 5th SFG (87)
- 7th SFG (95)
- 10th SFG (145)
- SWCS (189)
- GO/FO Staff (170)
- Senior Leaders E9-W5-06 (54)
- Other (176)

KEY: SFG = Special Forces Group
SWCS = Special Warfare Center and School
GO/FO = General Officer/Flag Officer

Figure 2.3. 2020 Green Beret Survey responses by assignment.

Sergeants first class (E-7s) responded the most of any grade with 291, or 24 percent (see Table 2.3), and survey responses represented all possible duty assignments with 612, or 51 percent of responses coming from the operational Special Forces Groups (see Figure 2.3). Duke University recognized 1,100 responses and 5 percent population segment participation as the thresholds for statistically significant research results.

Results

For the purposes of this study, misalignment is indicated when 15 percent or more of the population demonstrates inconsistent values, norms, beliefs, or behaviors with the espoused identity archetypes. There are 19 misalignments recorded, and each misalignment is identified below and in Table 2.7 at the end of this section.

Twelve Individual Archetypes (Attributes, Standards, and Skills)

Seven of 12 archetypes recorded 15 percent or higher quantitative results indicating belief or behavior misalignment. Two archetypes reveal qualitative misalignment (see Table 2.4).

Eight Special Warfare and Surgical Strike Archetypes (Competency, Activities, and Tasks)

Unanimous alignment, and strongest agreement, was expected from Green Berets and the special warfare partnership approaches of UW, FID, COIN, SFA, and CT. However, Green Berets responded that UW (89 percent), FID (88 percent), COIN (77 percent), SFA (57 percent), and CT (64 percent) were appropriate activities; far from unanimous agreement. Five of eight special warfare archetypes recorded quantitative results of 15 percent or higher indicating belief

Strategic leaders expect SF to provide a persistent global presence that contributes to five contemporary missions: reassure partners and allies, deter jihadist terrorist group threats, compete against Russia and China, prepare for conflict, and prepare for crisis response.

misalignment, and all four surgical strike archetypes inappropriately recorded 15 percent or higher belief misalignment (see Table 2.5).

In contrast, the other ARSOF core competency, surgical strike, is intended for other specifically identified ARSOF small units with extensive training for extreme risk and precise execution. The unilateral strike activities of HR, K/C, CT, SR, and DA, and the highly technical activities of CP, CWMD, and PE to enable strike and technical activities are not appropriate or expected of SF. Therefore, alignment with
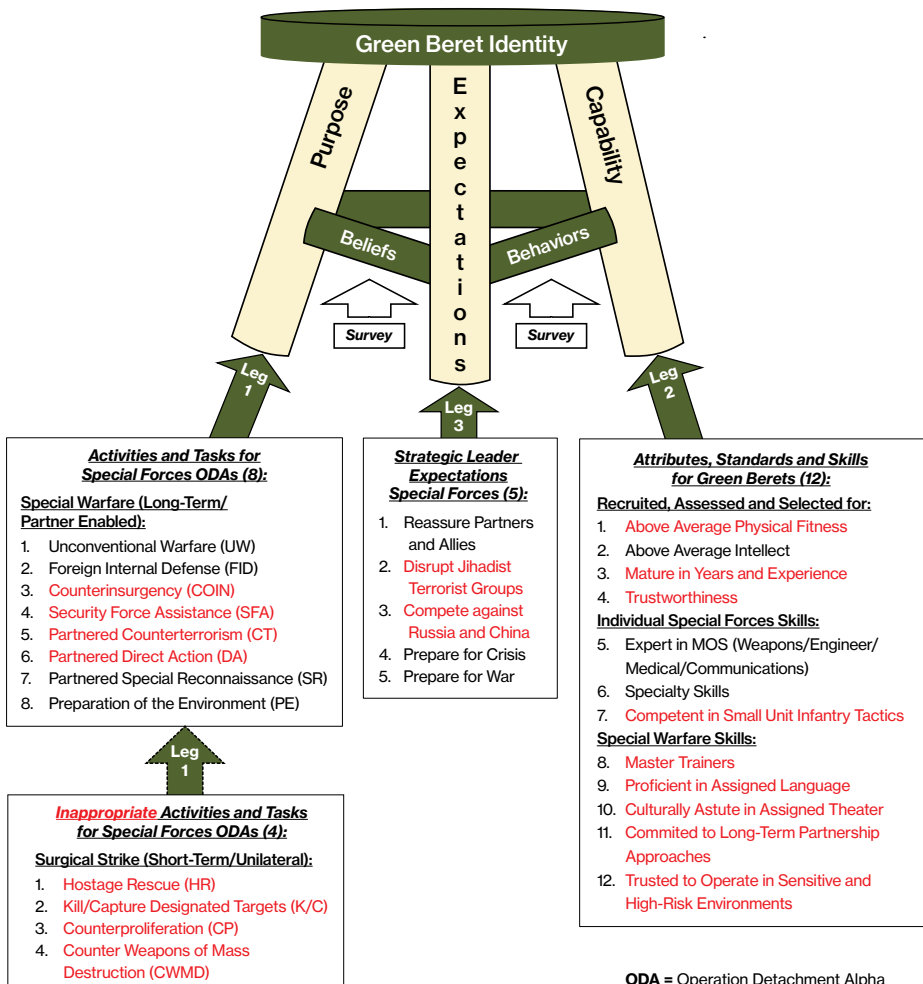
Figure 2.4. 2020 Green Beret Survey archetype misalignments.

unilateral surgical strike activities was not expected. However, Green Berets responded that HR (24 percent), K/C (47 percent), CP (30 percent), and CWMD (29 percent) were appropriate SF activities.

Five Strategic Leader Mission Expectations

Strategic leaders expect SF to provide a persistent global presence that contributes to five contemporary missions: reassure partners and allies, deter jihadist terrorist group threats, compete against Russia and China, prepare for conflict, and prepare for crisis response. Green Berets are expected to recognize that all five requirements are appropriate missions, with the reassurance of partners and allies as the top priority. Further, survey results were expected to produce unanimous understanding that SF's contribution to all five missions is through partnership approaches and a nuanced understanding that the access and placement gained by any of the five partnership approaches (UW, FID, COIN, SFA, and CT) enable SF to contribute to all five missions at once. Finally, USSOCOM leadership expects that Green Berets are prepared for the five contemporary missions upon graduation from the Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC).

The 2020 Green Beret Survey results illuminated unexpected misalignment between SF beliefs and leadership expectations of SF toward the contemporary missions. Sixteen percent of respondents indicated that they do not believe degrading jihadist terrorist groups and competition with Russia and China are appropriate SF missions. When asked to rank order the missions by priority, only 15 percent of respondents ranked the foundational mission for SF, reassurance of partners and allies, as the most important. Degradation of jihadist terrorist groups and competition with Russia and China are best accomplished unilaterally, according to 16 percent and 18 percent of respondents, respectively. Finally, 67 percent of Green Berets believe they are least prepared to compete with Russia and China, with many qualitative responses stating that they do not understand how Green Berets compete with Russia and China (see Table 2.6).

Table 2.1: List of Documents Analyzed to Determine Archetypes for 2020 Green Beret Survey

LAW

Title 10, United States Code: Section 164, Commanders of Combatant Section 167, Unified Combatant Command for Special Operations Forces (SOF)

DOCTRINE

– Joint Publication (JP) 3-05 Special Operations (May 2014)
– Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-05 Special Operations (January 2018)
– Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-05 Army Special Operations (June 2019)
– Army Field Manual (FM) 3-18 Special Forces Operations (May 2014)

JOHN K. KENNEDY SPECIAL WARFARE CENTER AND SCHOOL (SWCS) COMMANDING GENERAL (CG) POLICY LITERATURE ON CAPABILITY (ASSESS-SELECT-TRAIN-EDUCATE)

– SWCS Placemat (16 October 2019)
– SWCS Academic Handbook FY 2019
– SWCS CG Talking Points NCR (6 November 2019)
– SWCS CG Strategy FY 2020 (21 November 2019)

USASOC CG POLICY LITERATURE

– United States Army – Special Forces Qualifications - GOARMY.COM
  https://www.goarmy.com/special-forces/qualificatios-and-benefits.html
– United States Army – Special Forces Training - GOARMY.COM
  https://www.goarmy.com/special-forces/training.html (accessed 21 November 2019)
– United States Army – Special Forces Missions - GOARMY.COM
  https://www.goarmy.com/special-forces/qualificatios-and-benefits.html

USASOC CG POLICY LITERATURE

– United States Army Special Operations Forces Strategy (2019)
– USASOC – Office of the Command Historian (Veritas) – Definition of a Special Forces Soldier (CG directed Calling Card):
  https://arsofhistory.org/articles/v14n3_calling_cards_page_1.html

STRATEGIC LEADER STRATEGY LITERATURE

– National Security Strategy of the United States of America (2017)
– National Defense Strategy of the United States of America (2018)

NOTE: SWCS = Special Warfare Center and School; CG = commanding general

Table 2.2. Archetypes Selected for the 2020 Green Beret Survey that Define the Special Forces Identity	
SPECIAL FORCES CRITERION	
Individual: (Attributes-Standards-Skills)	
Recruited-Assessed-Selected For	
Above-average physical fitness Above-average intellect	Mature in years and experience Trustworthiness
Trained & Educated in Special Forces Skills	
Expert in military occupational specialty (MOS) Competent in specialty skills	Competent in small unit infantry tactics (SUIT)
Trained & Educated in Special Warfare Skills	
Master trainer Proficient in assigned language Culturally astute in assigned theater	Committed to long-term partnership approaches Trusted in sensitive and high-risk environments
Collective: (Competencies-Activities-Tasks)	
Core Competency: Special Warfare (SF)	
Unconventional warfare (UW) Foreign internal defense (FID) Counterinsurgency (COIN) Security force assistance (SFA)	Partnered counterterrorism (CT) Partnered direct action (DA) Partnered special reconnaissance (SR) Preparation of the environment (PE)
Core Competency: Surgical Strike (Other ARSOF)	
Hostage rescue and recovery (HR) Kill/capture designated targets (K/C)	Counterproliferation (CP) Counter weapons of mass destruction (CWMD)
Strategic Leader Missions by Priority	
Reassure allies and partners Deter Jihadist terrorist group threats Compete against Russia and China	Prepare for conflict Prepare for crisis response

Table 2.3. 2020 Green Beret Survey Demographic Data by Rank and MOS.				
	SF Population	Survey Responses Received	% of Rank-MOS Population	% of Total Response Population
NCO (Rank)	**4,922**	**553**	**11%**	**46%**
Sergeant		34	6%	3%
Staff Sergeant		94	17%	8%
Sgt. 1st Class		291	53%	24%
Master Sgt.		105	19%	9%
Sgt. Major		29	5%	2%
NCO (MOS)	**4,922**	**553**	**11%**	**46%**
18B	1,053	79	8% / 14%	7%
18C	900	80	9% / 14%	7%
18D	775	101	13% / 18%	8%
18E	833	91	10% / 16%	7%
18F	452	68	15% / 12%	6%
18Z	909	134	15% / 24%	11%
180A	**523**	**109**	**21%**	**9%**
W1		11	10%	<1%
CW2		36	33%	3%
CW3		29	27%	2%
CW4		21	19%	2%
CW5		12	11%	<1%
18A	**1,461**	**539**	**37%**	**45%**
Captain	470	146	31% / 27%	12%
Major	547	188	34% / 35%	16%
Lt. Colonel	294	148	50% / 27%	12%
Colonel	150	57	38% / 11%	5%
TOTAL	**6,906**	**1,201**		**17%**

Table 2.4. 2020 Green Beret Survey Alignment and Misalignment of Individual Archetypes	
Attributes-Standards-Skills	**Beliefs / Behaviors**
Recruited-Assessed-Selected For	
(1) Above Average Physical Fitness	Behaviors (physical fitness) -54% no unit or leadership accountability
(2) Above Average Intellect	+
(3) Mature in Years & Experience	Behaviors (Not mature enough to accomplish mission) -27% describe peers -72% describe 5-12 SFOD-A teammates
(4) Trustworthiness	Qualitative misalignment only
Uniquely Trained & Educated in Individual Special Forces Skills	
(5) Expert in MOS	+
(6) Competent in Specialty Skills	+
(7) Competent in SUIT	**Behavior** -49% describe 5-12 SFOD-A teammates not competent
Uniquely Trained & Educated in Individual Special Warfare Skills	
(8) Master Trainer	**Behavior** -91% do not feel prepared -77% never trained in this skill -57% skill not assessed by organization or leadership
(9) Proficient in Assigned Language	**Belief** -29% do not believe an important skill **Behavior** -62% do not regularly practice -52% did not speak their language on their last deployment
(10) Culturally Astute in Assigned Theater	**Behavior** -42% not currently regionally aligned with assigned theater
(11) Committed to Long-Term Partnership Approaches	**Belief** -69% describe 5-12 SFOD-A teammates not committed -34% report it is better to conduct mission unilaterally
(12) Trusted to Operate in Sensitive & High-Risk Environments	Qualitative misalignment only

Table 2.5. 2020 Green Beret Survey Results for Special Warfare and Surgical Strike Archetypes		
Competencies-Activities-Tasks	**SF Survey Responses**	
	Believe Appropriate Activity for SF	**Believe Activity Expected by Strategic Leadership**
Core Competency: Special Warfare (SF)		
Expected Result	*100%*	
Unconventional warfare (UW)	89%	**81%**
Foreidefense (FID)	88%	85%
Counterinsurgency (COIN)	**77%**	**78%**
Security force assistance (SFA)	**57%**	**61%**
Partnered counterterrorism (CT)	**64%**	**63%**
Partnered direct action (DA)	**68%**	**69%**
Partnered special reconnaissance (SR)	**79%**	**67%**
Preparation of the environment (PE)	86%	**72%**
Core Competency: Surgical Strike (Other Army SOF)		
Expected Result	*0%*	
Hostage rescue and recovery (HR)	**24%**	7%
Kill/capture operations against designated targets (K/C)	**47%**	**32%**
Counterproliferation (CP)	**30%**	10%
Counter weapons of mass destruction (CWMD)	**29%**	9%

Table 2.6. 2020 Green Beret Survey Results for Contemporary Mission Archetypes				
MISSION REQUIREMENTS BY PRIORITY	**SF SURVEY RESPONSES**			
Special Warfare long-term partnership approaches (UW, FID, COIN, or SFA) provide access and placement platforms to:	**Believe appropriate mission**	**Chose as mission priority**	**Believe mission best achieved unilaterally**	**Believe least prepared to accomplish**
1. Reassure allies and partners		**15%**	Not surveyed	3%
2. Deter Jihadist terrorist group threats	**X (16% No)**	25%	**16%**	7%
3. Compete against Russia and China	**X (16% No)**	25%	**18%**	**67%**
4. Prepare for conflict	✓	26%	Not surveyed	9%
5. Prepare for crisis response	✓	9%	Not surveyed	14%

Table 2.7. 2020 Green Beret Survey Results by Archetype			
SPECIAL FORCES CRITERION			
Individual: (Attributes-Standards-Skills)	**Belief**	**Behavior**	**Description**
Above average physical fitness	+	**-43%**	Fitness lower post Special Forces Qualification Course
Above average intellect	+	**+**	
Mature in years and experience	+	**-27%**	Peers immature
		-72%	5-12 teammates immature
Trustworthiness	+	**-**	Qualitative responses
Trained and Educated in Special Forces Skills			
Expert in MOS	+	**+**	
Competent in specialty skills	+	**+**	
Competent in SUIT	+	**-50%**	5-12 teammates not competent
Trained and Educated in Special Warfare Skills			
Master trainer	+	**-24%**	Not a master trainer
		-53%	Never taught or assessed
Proficient in assigned language	**-29%**	**-62%**	Practice
		-52%	Try to use
Culturally astute in assigned theater	+	**-17%**	Do not maintain
		-45%	Assignment not aligned
Committed to long-term partnership approaches	**-34%**	**-28%**	Not committed
Trusted in sensitive and high-risk environments	+	**-**	Qualitative responses
Collective: (Competencies-Activities-Tasks)	Belief		Description
Core Competency: Special Warfare (Special Forces)			
Unconventional warfare (UW)	**-11%**		Believe inappropriate: DA identity
Foreign internal defense (FID)	**-12%**		Believe inappropriate: DA identity

Continued on next page

Table 2.7. 2020 Green Beret Survey Results by Archetype *(continued)*			
SPECIAL FORCES CRITERION			
Individual: (Attributes-Standards-Skills)	**Belief**	**Behavior**	**Description**
Counterinsurgency (COIN)	**-23%**		Believe inappropriate: DA identity
Security force assistance (SFA)	**-43%**		Believe inappropriate: DA identity
Partnered counterterrorism (CT)	-36%		Believe inappropriate: legacy identity
Partnered direct action (DA)	-32%		Believe inappropriate: legacy identity
Partnered special reconnaissance (SR)	+		
Preparation of the environment (PE)	-12%		Believe inappropriate: DA identity
Core Competency: Surgical Strike (Other Army SOF)			
Hostage rescue and recovery (HR)	24%		Believe appropriate: DA identity
Kill/capture designated targets (K/C)	47%		Believe appropriate: DA identity
Counterproliferation (CP)	30%		Believe appropriate: DA identity
Counter weapons of mass destruction (CWMD)	28%		Believe appropriate: DA identity
Strategic Leader Missions by Priority	**Belief**		**Description**
Reassure allies and partners	+		
Disrupt Jihadist terrorist Group Threats	-16%		Believe inappropriate: Legacy identity
Compete against Russia and China	-16% -67%		Believe inappropriate Do not feel prepared
Prepare for conflict	+		
Prepare for crisis response	+		

Chapter 3. Principal Finding

To summarize, the 2020 Green Beret Survey confirms a total of 22 misalignments between expected and actual archetypes of the Green Beret identity (see Figure 2.4 and Table 2.7).
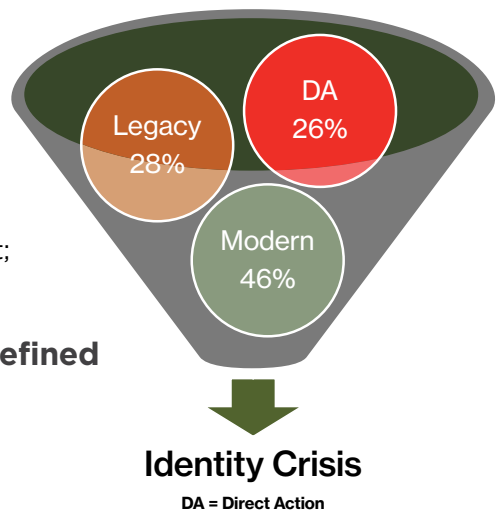
PRINCIPAL FINDING: AN IDENTITY CRISIS IN SF

Quantitative and qualitative survey data reveal misalignment between the espoused Green Beret identity with actual Green Beret values, beliefs, and behaviors. This misalignment is causally linked to the formation of an uncertain, confused, and insecure Green Beret identity. Unexpectedly, the uncertainty and confusion enabled individuals to self-determine their professional beliefs and behaviors; left unchecked by leadership and absent a professional identity-anchoring document, like-identities aggregated into three distinct identity sub-groups: Direct Action identity (26 percent), Legacy identity (28 percent), and Modern identity (46 percent; see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Identity crisis in Special Forces: three sub-identities. Source: 2020 Green Beret Survey

The Three Sub-Identities Defined

Direct Action Identity

Approximately 26 percent of the SF population makes up this segment. This group is aligned with all four individual attributes, and all three SF skills, established for Green Berets. However, this group does not believe in the individual skills of language (29 percent) or long-term partnership approaches (34 percent) that build the human

domain expertise required for special warfare. They also undervalue or reject the established Special warfare activities of UW (11 percent), FID (12 percent), COIN (23 percent), SFA (43 percent), and PE (12 percent). Further, this group believes that the unilateral surgical strike activities of HR (24 percent), K/C (47 percent), CP (30 percent), and CWMD (28 percent) are appropriate and expected activities of SF. Regarding the contemporary missions, this segment believes that the deterrence of jihadist terrorist groups (16 percent) and competition with China and Russia (18 percent) are missions best conducted unilaterally.

Legacy Identity

Approximately 28 percent of the SF population makes up this segment. This group is aligned with all four individual attributes, all three SF skills, and all five special warfare skills established for Green Berets. This group also accepts the established special warfare partnership activities of UW, FID, COIN, SFA, and PE and appropriately recognizes that the unilateral surgical strike activities are inappropriate for SF.

While this group believes SF are overinvested in CT (36 percent) and DA (32 percent), 16 percent do not believe deterrence of jihadist terrorist groups, and competition with Russia and China are appropriate missions. This group calls for a shift away from deterring jihadist terrorist groups and cautions against supporting ongoing efforts to compete with China and Russia. This group advocates a return to the pre-GWOT mission focus on the special warfare partnership activities of UW, FID, COIN, and SFA and are focused only on reassuring partners and allies and preparing for war or crisis.

Modern Identity

Approximately 46 percent of the SF population makes up this segment. This group's beliefs are aligned with all established SF archetypes surveyed. This group believes the expectations established by law, doctrine, SOF senior leaders, the SFQC, and strategic leaders are appropriate for SF. This group understands how the 12 individual archetypes build expertise in the human aspects of military operations (special warfare) and how to leverage indigenous partners through the contemporary missions of reassuring partners and allies, deterring jihadist terrorist group threats, competing against Russia and China, preparing for conflict, and preparing for crisis response. This group

understands that the access and placement gained by any of the four partnership approaches (UW, FID, COIN, or SFA) enable SF to contribute to all five missions at once (see Table 3.1).

Sub-Identity Group Rank and Unit Distributions

No single rank or unit dominates a sub-identity. The sub-identities generally reflect ranks and units equivalently, consistent with survey population segment sizes. A 2 percent tolerance value was used to measure rank and unit variance between survey population and sub-identity group sizes. Minor variances are highlighted below (see Table 3.2).

The DA identity group was 11 percent higher for NCOs (7 percent from the Sergeant 1st Class segment) than expected, with warrant and commissioned officer segments within 2 percent tolerance for their respective population sizes. This sub-group was 5 percent higher for 7th SFG (A) and 3 percent lower for 3rd SFG (A) segments.

The Legacy identity group was 21 percent higher for NCOs (14 percent from the sergeant first class segment and 6 percent from the Staff Sergeant segment) and 20 percent lower for officers than expected; warrant officers were within 2 percent tolerance for their respective population sizes. The Legacy group was 13 percent higher for the "Other" category and 4 percent higher for 7th SFG (A) segments. 1st SFG (A) (7 percent) and 10th SFG (A) (8 percent) were lower than expected for their respective population sizes.

Summary

One in four Green Berets identifies with short-term and unilateral DA approaches; one in four identifies with long-term partnership approaches, but does not believe they are appropriate for the contemporary deterrence and competition missions; and two of four identify with long-term partnership approaches and recognize that traditional skills and activities demonstrated by SF are necessary and applicable to the contemporary missions required today. Green Berets evince the sub-identities without respect to rank or unit. This identity crisis and the presence of three sub-identities is consistent with Schein[68] and other leading experts' organizational culture models. But does this matter? Should three sub-cultures be allowed to coexist within SF? Part IV analyzes the implications of the identity crisis for SF.

Table 3.1. 2020 Green Beret Survey Results by Sub-Identity (+Aligned)			
SPECIAL FORCES CRITERION	**Identity**		
Individual: (Attributes-Standards-Skills)	**DA**	**Legacy**	**Modern**
Recruited-Assessed-Selected For			
Above Average Physical Fitness	+	+	+
Above Average Intellect	+	+	+
Mature in Years & Experience	+	+	+
Trustworthiness	+	+	+
Trained & Educated in Special Forces Skills			
Expert in MOS	+	+	+
Competent in Specialty Skills	+	+	+
Competent in SUIT	+	+	+
Trained & Educated in Special Warfare Skills			
Master Trainer	+	+	+
Proficient in Assigned Language	**-29%**	+	+
Culturally Astute in Assigned Theater	+	+	+
Committed to Long-Term Partnership Approaches	**-34%**	+	+
Trusted in Sensitive & High-Risk Environments	+	+	+
Collective: (Competencies-Activities-Tasks)	**DA**	**Legacy**	**Modern**
Core Competency: Special Warfare (SF)			
Unconventional warfare (UW)	-11%	+	+
Foreign internal defense (FID)	-12%	+	+
Counterinsurgency (COIN)	**-23%**	+	+
Security force assistance (SFA)	**-43%**	+	+
Partnered counterterrorism (CT)	+	**-36%**	+
Partnered direct action (DA)	+	**-32%**	+
Partnered special reconnaissance (SR)	+	+	+
Preparation of the environment (PE)	-12%	+	+
Core Competency: Surgical Strike (Other Army SOF)			
Hostage rescue and recovery (HR)	**24%**	+	+
Kill/capture designated targets (K/C)	**47%**	+	+

Table 3.1. 2020 Green Beret Survey Results by Sub-Identity (+Aligned)			
SPECIAL FORCES CRITERION	**Identity**		
Collective: (Competencies-Activities-Tasks)	**DA**	**Legacy**	**Modern**
Core Competency: Special Warfare (SF)			
Core Competency: Surgical Strike (Other Army SOF)			
Counterproliferation (CP)	30%	+	+
Counter weapons of mass destruction (CWMD)	28%	+	+
Strategic Leader Missions by Priority	**DA**	**Legacy**	**Modern**
Reassure allies and partners	+	+	+
Deter Jihadist terrorist group threats	16%	-16%	+
Compete against Russia and China	18%	-16%	+
Prepare for conflict	+	+	+
Prepare for crisis response	+	+	+

Table 3.2. 2020 Green Beret Survey Sub-Identity Characteristics by Rank and Unit			
TABLE 9. SUB-IDENTITY CHARACTERISTICS (RANK AND UNIT)[1]			
Identity by Rank and Unit	**Identity (2%>X>2% Tolerance)**		
Rank **Total**	**DA** **312 Total**	**Legacy** **336 Total**	**Modern** **553 Total**
Non-Commissioned Officer	**57%** (46%)	**67%** -46%	
Sergeant/E5	6%	4%	
Staff Sgt./E6	7%	**14%** -8%	
Sgt. 1st Class/E7	**31%** -24%	**38%** -24%	
Master Sgt./ E8	9%	10%	
Sgt. Major/ E9	4%	1%	
Warrant Officer	9%	8%	
Warrant 1	2%	1%	
Chief Warrant 2	3%	4%	
Chief Warrant 3	1%	2%	
Chief Warrant 4	1%	1%	
Chief Warrant 5	2%	0%	
Commissioned Officer	34%	**25%** -45%	
Captain/O3	6%	**6%** -12%	
Major/O4	9%	**10%** -16%	
Lt. Colonel/O5	15%	**7%** -12%	
Colonel/O6	4%	**2%** -5%	
Unit	**DA**	**Legacy**	
1st SFG (A)	9%	**4%** -11%	

Table 3.2. 2020 Green Beret Survey Sub-Identity Characteristics by Rank and Unit		
TABLE 9. SUB-IDENTITY CHARACTERISTICS (RANK AND UNIT)[1]		
Identity by Rank and Unit	**Identity (2%>X>2% Tolerance)**	
Unit	**DA**	**Legacy**
3rd SFG(A)	10% -13%	15%
5th SFG(A)	6%	9%
7th SFG(A)	13% -8%	12% -8%
10th SFG(A)	10%	4% -12%
SWCS	18%	15%
GO / FO Staff	15%	13%
Other	19%	28% -15%

Note: SFG (A) = Special Forces Group (Airborne); SWCS = Special Warfare Center and School; GO/FO = general officer/field officer

Chapter 4. Analysis

I was recruited to SF with the promise of killing or capturing terrorists; my NCO assessor at selection described our purpose as partnership; I participated in the ROBIN SAGE UW Exercise; upon arrival at my SFOD-A, my Team Sergeant focused on DA, Team Leader on UW, Company Commander on competition with China and Russia (whatever that means), and my Battalion Commander seemed most concerned with language currency. "Who am I supposed to be?"

—Notes from interview with departing Green Beret[69]

ANALYSIS

The frustration in this Green Beret's response captures the essence of the identity crisis in SF. His organizational socialization experience and confusion at multiple echelons by key influencers, each with a different identity narrative, highlights the central problem for SF: There is no single established definition of the SF profession accepted across all components of the institution. The absence of a common organizational purpose, formalized in a manner such as doctrine, has several major implications. Without a centering mechanism, institutional components project their sub-identity over the profession's desired identity and self-determine how best to support objectives. Since there is no unity of purpose across the recruiting command, training base, and operational force, the resulting degraded organizational socialization aggravates the identity crisis. The USASOC CG cannot realize the three focus area goals absent a coherent organizational socialization process.

Special Forces Socialization Model

Before addressing the implications, it is necessary to establish a new model as a framework to help visualize the convergence of the identity crisis, organizational socialization, and institutional components and the resulting impact on the USASOC focus areas (see Figure 4.1). The three sub-identity groups were brought forward from the findings and represented across the new model: DA (26 percent), Legacy (28 percent), and Modern (46 percent). Remember,

> **There is no single established definition of the SF profession accepted across all components of the institution. The absence of a common organizational purpose, formalized in a manner such as doctrine, has several major implications.**
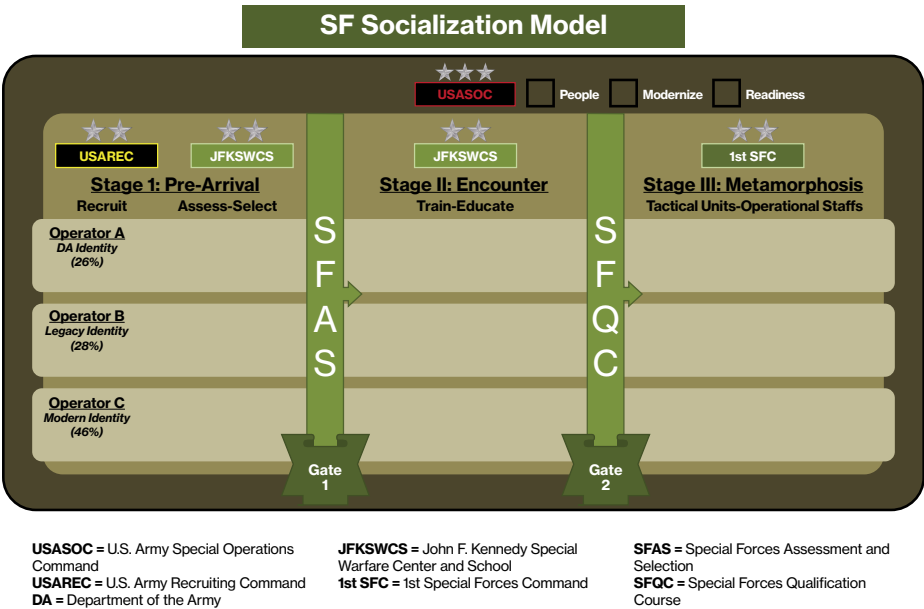
the DA identity rejects special warfare as a core competency, the Legacy identity accepts special warfare but rejects the contemporary

Figure 4.1. Special Forces Socialization Model. Source: Author

deterrence and competition missions, and the Modern identity is fully aligned with the desired organizational identity.

It is also important to apply these concepts from the SF Organizational Culture Model: (1) an individual's identity is formed by early adulthood; (2) the individual will be drawn to like-identity recruiting messages; (3) despite enculturation by the organization, the individual's core identity and ethic will remain difficult to modify, and; (4) when faced with an incongruent culture, the individual will seek a congruent sub-culture if one exists, remain in the culture albeit frustrated and unsatisfied, or reject and depart the culture altogether.

Organizational Socialization

Organizations enculturate through socialization, the process of moving a "naïve outsider to a fully socialized insider" of the organization.[70] This is how the organization "transmits" its desired identity and culture to the members.[71] Socialization occurs in three stages: pre-arrival,[72] encounter,[73] and metamorphosis.[74] Within the SF Socialization Model, the SF socialization elements are organized within the established academic stages: recruitment, assessment, and selection (prearrival); training and education (encounter); and organization integration (metamorphosis).

Institutional Components

As the three-star headquarters, USASOC oversees the three two-star headquarters responsible for SF's stages of socialization: The United States Army Recruiting Command (USAREC), SWCS, and the 1st SFC. USAREC is responsible for the non-prior service recruiting or 18X Program (approximately 40 percent of the annual recruiting mission). Within SWCS, the Special Operations Recruiting Battalion (SORB) is responsible for in-service recruiting (approximately 60 percent of the annual recruiting mission). SWCS has overall responsibility for assessment, selection, training, and education. The prearrival stage assessment and selection occur in the 24-day SFAS Course and serve as the first socialization gate. The encounter stage occurs throughout the 54-week SFQC and serves as the second

socialization gate. 1st SFC is responsible for the metamorphosis stage of organizational integration. With the SF Organizational Culture and SF Socialization Models established as guideposts, it is time to consider implications of the identity crisis.

Chapter 5. Implications

The identity crisis will continue unless it is countered by an established, understood, and shared definition of the SF profession. Without a centering mechanism, institutional components self-determine how best to support objectives, which in many instances are not congruent with the organization's desired identity, and this degrades the socialization process. Without proper socialization of the desired SF organizational culture, the identity crisis will continue to thrive and prevent the USASOC CG from fully realizing his goals to prioritize people and build trust, modernize to be the Army's force of choice in competition, and focus readiness to support the Joint Force in conflict.

FAILING TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN THE NATION'S BEST SPECIAL WARFARE TALENT

The USASOC strategy directs a focus on "21st Century Talent Management" that attracts and retains the Nation's best performers,[75] and for SF, this means the best special warfare talent. Lacking a shared professional definition to guide marketing, the nearly five-minutes long official U.S. Army SF recruiting video repeatedly dramatizes direct action skills but only hints at irregular warfare, unconventional warfare, and the concept of partnership.[76] Also, the recruiting pages present a total of 16 pictures; one portrays SF engaging with indigenous peoples, while 15 display unilateral and direct action activities.[77] These initiatives to recruit Green Berets present misleading direct action themes in lieu of more desirable partnership themes (see Figure 5.1).

The conflicting recruiting messages and goals set conditions for SF socialization failure.

Figure 5.1. GoArmy.com Special Forces recruiting pictures from 4 April 2020.

The conflicting recruiting messages and goals set conditions for SF socialization failure. In the pre-arrival stage, individuals form their expectations of an occupation and determine congruence between the organization and their needs and desires.[78] In turn, the organization establishes its "organizational selection"[79] criteria to include desired member identity and marketing strategy to attract the right applicant. Finally, effective matching of the individual's desires and expectations with organizational reality will simplify "the transition from nonmember to member."[80] Within SF, this stage serves as the first gate to the organization and includes the recruitment of Green Berets by USAREC and the SORB and assessment and selection by SWCS in the 24-day SFAS course.

However, because Green Beret socialization does not begin with an authentic recruiting message, and, given only 24 days to assess candidates, SFAS cannot accurately select all individuals with the desired organizational identity. It is likely that many in the 26 percent DA sub-group were attracted by a DA recruiting message, entered SF already valuing and desiring a DA profession, and will not modify this DA identity in the future.

Many survey respondents confirmed this assessment by describing the SF recruiting narrative, pictures, and videos as "disingenuous" and

"biased" toward direct action and surgical strike. A master sergeant currently serving in SWCS proclaimed, "While doctrine states that we are looking for people to do [the special warfare activities], that is not who we select. The current assessment and selection system is broken. As is recruiting. We are recruiting the wrong people, for the wrong reasons."[81] A CW3 on staff stated: "We acquire soldiers under [the] false premise of DA/CT/HR. Our posters and recruiting [are] focused on the kinetic activity and not the professional soldier who is selected to run guerrilla or counter-guerrilla operations and integrate or fight directly against a resistance/insurgency by enabling partners."[82]

A sergeant 1st class serving on a Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha (SFOD-A) summarized the impact of failed socialization in the prearrival stage and its impact:

> **It seems most SF Soldiers are recruited with the promise of conducting DA against terrorists. This causes frustration and a lack of desire [and] appreciation for Irregular Warfare. Many...don't care about the Human Domain. This marks a failure to understand what SF's role and purpose is. The culture and values of SF have been slowly eroding due to this. The professional implication is that the force doesn't know what its purpose is. And if it doesn't know its purpose, then how can it be effective?83**

Another sergeant first class from the operational force stated: "We have forgotten what we were designed to be. Recruiting and retention are less than stellar for CMF-18 [SOF career progression plan]. Why are the NCOs of the regiment disgruntled? Maybe it is because they were recruited to become door kickers with beards and not overthrowing strategic level entities. When was the last time someone said 'De Oppresso [Liber] with pride?"[84] Yet another sergeant first class commented: "Special Forces is experiencing an identity crisis in a few ways. [New] SF soldiers coming to the regiment today believe they are joining something that mirrors [a special mission unit]. This is affecting the quality of individuals we are receiving and is largely affecting retention."[85]

Authentic recruiting messages and accurate selection practices are necessary to ensure congruence between personal and professional identities. One must recruit, assess, and select the congruent identity that will imbue the beliefs, values, and norms of the profession. One cannot simply overlay the beliefs, values, and norms of a profession on a person with an incongruent and preformed identity. Failure to get recruiting right in the prearrival stage of socialization will not attract now, or retain later, the best special warfare talent.

At this point in the socialization process, the identity crisis begins for the DA identity group, who joined the organization under false pretenses. Conversely, the Legacy and Modern identity groups were attracted to the organization by different influences and are aligned with the desired identity at this stage.

FAILING TO MODERNIZE FOR COMPETITION

USASOC strategy directs the force to "sustain Counter-VEO [violent extremist organizations] operations while shifting focus to near-peer competition"[86] and "out-maneuver adversaries in the competition space."[87] But without a shared professional definition to center the training base, the misguided DA identity group continues to reject special warfare's approaches, and the uninformed Legacy identity group struggles to appreciate special warfare's relevance to the deterrence and competition mission requirements; both tendencies indicate inadequate SF socialization.

> **Failure to get recruiting right in the prearrival stage of socialization will not attract now, or retain later, the best special warfare talent.**

The underlying principle of socialization is that the organization repeatedly exposes the individual to the desired culture that includes expected identity, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors. If an individual is exposed to contrary versions of the culture, such as DA identity, or is not exposed to critical components of the culture, such as contemporary missions, effective socialization cannot occur. A major and recent company commander observes

the effects of the identity crisis on his formation and its impact on modernization objectives:

> **Across my company, it is not universally clear what our purpose is. Some are very comfortable with the counterterrorism mission, some believe our purpose is to remain focused on Unconventional Warfare readiness, and some believe we should be spread across our theater competing with Russia and China in the grey zone. What [should] set us apart from all other military forces is our unique ability to establish lasting and meaningful partnerships. With partnership as our foundation, we should be viewed as an enormous strategic asset and the [U.S. Government's] force of choice for deterring jihadist groups, competing in the grey-zone, and preparing the environment for war. Unfortunately, the Green Berets in my company didn't graduate the SFQC with this understanding, and they don't hear it from leadership.[88]**

Failure to orient the force toward contemporary missions during the encounter stage sets conditions for reduced readiness and modernization. In the encounter stage, individuals begin to learn their role, master tasks, develop relationships, and confirm or deny their expectations of the organization.[89] This stage is considered the "most crucial for effective socialization"[90] because the individual's primary goals are learning the rules of the culture and gaining acceptance, and most frequently leads to "blind obedience and conformity."[91] Within SF, this stage serves as the second gate to the organization and includes training and education by SWCS in the 54-week SFQC.

From the survey, 42 percent of respondents claimed not to have received adequate training or education on the contemporary operating environment and were not prepared upon graduating from the SFQC. They cited a lack of advanced strategic studies and education to help them bridge cultural awareness with the nuances of the strategic environment. Many NCOs share this master sergeant's belief that officers should not have a monopoly on strategic

education and opportunities at SFQC, universities, or abroad and surmise that the lack of strategic study opportunities limits their appreciation of the contemporary deterrence and competition missions. This claim is consistent with 20 percent more NCOs populating the Legacy group (as highlighted in Table 9). A master/team sergeant from Group

> **From the survey, 42 percent of respondents claimed not to have received adequate training or education on the contemporary operating environment and were not prepared upon graduating from the SFQC.**

lamented, "The SF operators are expected to know and understand the current operating environment, however, in the SFQC they do not teach the National Security Strategies and U.S. priorities to the operators"[92] and only to the officers.

A large group of survey respondents, CT (36 percent) and DA (32 percent), believe SF is overinvested in deterring jihadist groups and should shift away from these activities and missions. A sergeant first class from the Legacy identity group demonstrated this sentiment:

> **Deter jihadist terrorist group threats should be other organizations like [national units], SEALs, MARSOC, and Rangers. They train on Direct Action. Green Berets have unique and special skills of working with people. Quit chasing the shiny and cool object we call counter-terrorism. A successful GB doesn't even have to go on the objective to have desired effects. If a GB wants to shoot people, then he should just go to a SMU [special mission unit].[93]**

Further, 16 percent of survey respondents do not believe competition with Russia and China is an appropriate mission for SF, and a much greater 67 percent do not understand or feel prepared for the competition mission. A master sergeant from Group stated, "In my opinion, zero SFQC graduates are fully prepared to execute competition with Russia and China...the base-line trained Green Beret

graduate of the SFQC does not get this training."[94] A captain from a different group noted:

> **I rank order preparation for competing against Russia and China as low...we do not discuss how this is accomplished (against near peer enemies) in the Q-course. [I understand] there are ways to accomplish this task through actions we are already conducting, but we did not discuss this as a critical focus during the course.[95]**

A third Green Beret noted, "We need to have the SFQC teach that DoD is not the government agency [with] primacy to compete against China and Russia. We support the interagency competition efforts...right now, most GBs I meet [still] think killing people is [all that] we do."[96]

At this point in the socialization process, and, given that 46 percent of the surveyed population (Modern identity group) is fully aligned with the desired Green Beret identity, it is apparent that the SFQC successfully socializes nearly one half of SFQC students. Also, drawing from the SF socialization model, the DA identity group (26 percent) will not modify their identity even under proper socialization conditions. Finally, socialization in the SFQC is not adequately integrating the contemporary irregular warfare environment, which largely manifests in the Legacy identity group (28 percent).

FAILING TO IMPROVE FORCE PRESERVATION AND READINESS

The USASOC CG is focused on improving readiness by protecting and preserving a healthy force that "no longer deploys to redline," with a goal of "1:2 deployment to dwell ratio."[97] To achieve this, he directs leadership and staff to "[maximize] predictability, [reduce] uncertainty, protect [soldier's] time...divest of legacy missions, and exercise discipline in sourcing [missions]."[98] Unfortunately, identity-conflicted leaders and planners over-employ and misallocate the force and thus disrupt the CG's goal of improving readiness through more disciplined force employment. As cited earlier, this is also

a major finding of the USSOCOM Comprehensive Review. These practices have strategic consequences for SOF and other services, as summarized by these comments from a sitting team sergeant and major on staff, respectively:

> **We are deployed all over the world doing missions outside of our scope. Generals and policymakers seem to think that USASF can do anything... SOCOM on down either agrees or doesn't know how to say no...SF is trying to be too many things to too many people...we have become jack of all trades and masters of none."[99] ... "By taking the approach of 'we'll do it! what is it?' we cannot reliably deliver what we sell as our capabilities to senior leaders, and we are undercut by other services who more narrowly scope their capabilities and then perform them better.[100]**

Drawing from the SF socialization model, 1st SFC is responsible for the metamorphosis stage of organizational integration and is expected to cultivate an individual identity and culture congruent with the desired organizational identity and culture. In the metamorphosis stage, individuals learn how things "really work" on the inside and are most concerned with what it takes to become a "fully accepted member of the organization."[101] The individual "settles into new values and behaviors consistent with prevailing norms" of the organization.[102] It is in this stage that if new members find congruence with their individual identities, they are satisfied.

However, if faced with an incongruent identity and culture, the individual will seek a congruent sub-culture if one exists, remain in the culture albeit frustrated and unsatisfied, or reject and depart the culture altogether. An SF organization that fails to synchronize unified purpose, personnel assignments, and appropriate missions, prevents individuals from ever becoming special warfare experts. This reduces the organization's effectiveness and leads to job dissatisfaction.

Many survey respondents are frustrated with the incongruent organizational culture within the operational force. Leaders and planners with the DA mindset value short-term, transactional relationships. Moreover, this mindset gravitates toward unilateral

actions and seek missions with promise of enemy contact such as counterterrorism operations against jihadist terrorist groups. Many in SF are frustrated with leaders from the DA identity group (26 percent), as expressed in the following sentiments:

> **"SF is the National Partner Force, not the National Mission Force."**

> **"We have a holdover era of leaders from Iraq [and Afghanistan] that wants to spend 90 percent of their [training] time on CT, DA, and SR through [Special Forces Advanced Urban Combat], [Combat Management Marksmanship Skills], and [military free fall]."**

> **"It is really frustrating because our Company has regional engage-ments, not combat rotations, scheduled for the next several years."[103]**

Another Green Beret stated, "One of the greatest frustrations of a Green Beret is that you sign up to do this great task and mission of UW, yet [you] are constantly employed doing [other missions]."[104]

Leaders with the Legacy identity undervalue regional alignment and persistent presence that reassures allies and partners and competes with Russia and China. From the survey, 42 percent of respondents reported that they are not assigned to a regional unit aligned with their target language and 52 percent report their last deployment was to a country not aligned with their assigned region. This misalignment sends the message that language and culture are not important to leadership or mission accomplishment, resulting in 62 percent of respondents not valuing or practicing their language routinely.

> **An SF organization that fails to synchronize unified purpose, personnel assignments, and appropriate missions, prevents individuals from ever becoming special warfare experts.**

A team sergeant explained that "In eight years on an SFOD-A, I deployed to the region of my language one time for a two-month

[Joint Combined Exchange Training]; now, I am a team sergeant in a different Group assigned to a different region. I think language should be important but why bother when leadership doesn't consistently assign us to units or missions aligned with our language?"[105] A sergeant first class currently serving on an SFOD-A commented, "We, as a force, are not committed to long-term anything because we infrequently deploy to the same place/mission twice. How can anyone become a master in their field if they can't even devote sufficient time...to one [area of responsibility]?"[106]
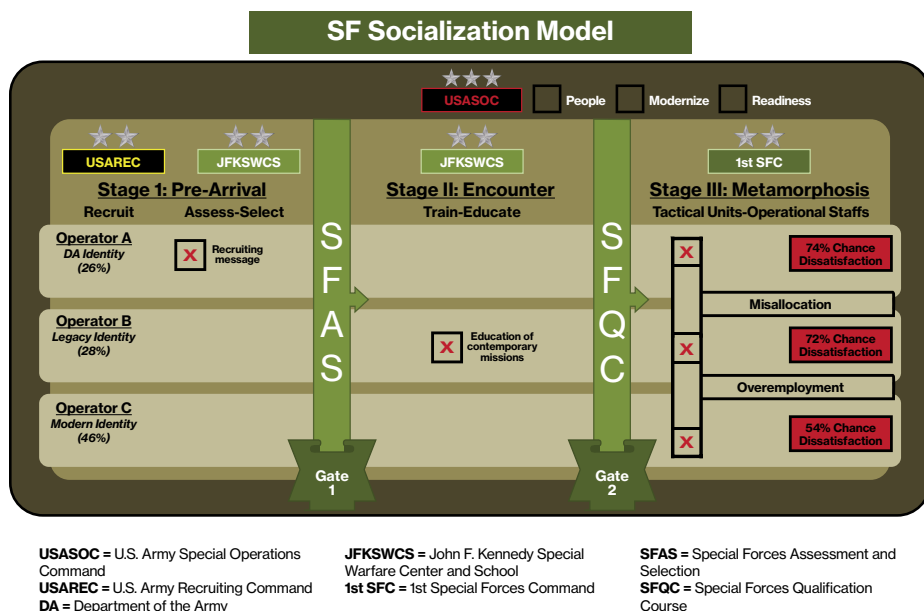
The DA and Legacy identities are at variance with the contemporary special warfare missions and activities and incur opportunity costs. Energy expended toward activities not assigned to, or expected of, a unit will compete with opportunities to increase readiness in those activities that are assigned and expected to be performed. When SF are used for non-SF missions, there are several undesirable effects: SF does not divest from legacy missions, leaders and planners do not exercise discipline in sourcing, and SF are not available for appropriate SF missions. The identity crisis adversely impacts all USASOC's readiness objectives.

At the conclusion of the socialization process, members from the DA identity will migrate to a DA sub-identity group, if one exists. If not, they will become dissatisfied, increasing the likelihood of their departure. The Legacy identity group will behave in the same manner as the DA group, albeit for different reasons. Members of the Modern identity group have the best chance (46 percent) of working with and for like-identity individuals. However, even though this group is aligned completely with who and what a Green Beret is expected to be today, it may not matter; when they are smothered by misaligned leaders or teammates with DA and Legacy identity group paradigms, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors, they also experience frustration and job dissatisfaction.

SUMMARY

To summarize, without a sanctioned *common definition* of the *SF profession*, the identity crisis within SF will continue. Without a

centering mechanism, institutional components self-determine how best to support objectives, which are in many instances not congruent with the organization's desired identity, and this weakens the socialization process (see Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2. Identity crisis impact on Special Forces socialization. Source: Author

The DA sub-identity prevents authentic recruiting efforts to attract the right talent and causes damaging effects on trust and soldier wellness. The identity crisis disrupts modernization goals by preventing some from gaining a nuanced understanding of special warfare in the contemporary environment. Finally, the DA and Legacy sub-identities undermine special warfare readiness with issues of opportunity cost and degrade force preparation and readiness through overemployment and misallocation.

Where does USASOC begin to address the identity crisis within SF? Are there potential lessons for other cohorts within USSOCOM who are possibly struggling to understand their identity, culture, and ethical transgressions? These questions are the subject of Part VI, which provides initial recommendations for consideration by USASOC and USSOCOM leadership.

Chapter 6. Recommendations for Further Action and Research

USASOC leadership must assess and define the Green Beret profession in a foundational doctrinal document similar to the Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 1 and Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 1 to ensure alignment across all institutional components of the SF enterprise. Defining the profession in ADP 1-18 *Special Forces Profession* will establish one identity "down and in" to recalibrate and unify SF.

For a military profession to lose its sense of identity and purpose is nothing new. A decade of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan and Iraq left the Army underprepared for land warfare with nation–state peer armies, and the Army's Chief of Staff, retired Gen. Raymond Odierno, recognized the "period of strategic transition" and that change was necessary.[107] When faced with changes in the strategic environment, Army leadership acknowledged it had lost its sense of purpose and identity. It then boldly and holistically initiated recovery and transformation by focusing on reassessing and redefining its core[108] and promulgated ADP 1, *The Army,* which included a chapter specifically defining *Our Profession.*[109] Subsequently, in 2013, it published ADRP 1, *The Army Profession*, to reassess its purpose, redefine its profession, and describe Army culture.[110] It further addressed questions about the Army Ethic as the foundation for developing the moral *identity* of Army Professionals.[111] The Army White Paper notes "that the essential characteristic *Trust* is based on adherence to the Army Ethic in the performance of *Duty* and in all aspects of life."[112]

Anchoring the profession in ADP 1-18, *Special Forces Profession,* will provide the centering mechanism to ensure unity of purpose and effort across the institutional segments. It will ensure authentic recruiting messages are rooted in the profession's core purpose and align recruit expectations with the SF profession. It will remove ambiguous

readiness requirements for SF by directing the organization's attributes, skills, competencies, activities, and missions. It will enable leaders and planners to analyze contemporary mission requirements and decline tasks and missions misaligned with special warfare capabilities, ultimately protecting the force from inappropriate commitments. Finally, ADP 1-18 will build consensus at higher levels by accurately and coherently communicating the value of SF "up and out" to the Army, Joint Force, and interagency partners. Only when the profession is clearly defined, and shared, by all SF Green Berets, can the organization overcome the identity crisis and fully realize the USASOC CG's objectives for the force.

USSOCOM should consider organizational identity in any future reviews of cohort culture or ethics. Although this was an active-duty Green Beret research project, the lessons likely apply to other USSOCOM cohorts struggling to understand their identity, culture, and ethical transgressions. General Clarke's comprehensive review of the culture and ethics of SOF did not find a systemic ethics problem,[113] but it did find cultural problems.[114] This seems inconsistent with published academic studies and the Army's understanding of the interdependence of identity, culture, and ethic.

Only when the profession is clearly defined, and shared, by all SF Green Berets, can the organization overcome the identity crisis and fully realize the USASOC CG's objectives for the force.

Therefore, understanding the beliefs and behaviors of the individual, and how they impact the shared beliefs and behaviors of the individuals that make up the group's identity and culture, are essential to changing a culture[115] and not mutually exclusive from ethical decision-making. "Professionals are guided by their ethic; the set of principles which they practice, in the right way, on behalf of those they serve—demonstrating their *Character*...this [ethic] is their *identity*."[116]

Perhaps the real problem, one that addresses the ethics issues, can only be addressed by taking a hard look at the underlying assumptions and identity beliefs of the cohort cultures across USSOCOM. The existence of a problematic culture, without ethical and identity problems, is unlikely. Identity, culture, and ethical decisions are inextricably intertwined. The identity crisis is impacting SF culture and ethical decision-making. It is likely that similar identity crisis issues exist within other cohorts of USSOCOM and impact their cultures and organization's ethics. The ethic enables the professional to understand the purpose of their profession, "that the ethical practices are *the* professional standard and that unethical practices must not be tolerated."[117]

CONCLUSION

The Green Berets have a proud history, rich heritage, and a historic ethic of service to the Nation and willingness to sacrifice. However, there is one very hard "truth" for senior SF leadership from this research: The Green Berets have an identity crisis.

U.S. strategic leadership reactions to 9/11 and subsequent events resulted in changing expectations for Green Berets, and this dialectic has manifested itself in three distinct identities within the force. Through their beliefs and behaviors, some currently serving Green Berets are no longer embracing the doctrinal role of SF by rejecting long-term partnership operations in favor of short-term unilateral approaches. Others do not understand or accept our current value to the Army, Joint Force, and interagency partners. A third group, even though aligned completely with who and what a Green Beret is expected to be today, is often smothered by misaligned leaders or teammates. How will SF leadership identify the hazards and manage the risks associated with the established identity crisis?

Cultural fragmentation in an organization will eventually tear the organization apart from the inside. Leadership must recognize and acknowledge the dysfunctional elements of the existing culture and manage the necessary cultural evolution in a way that enables the group to survive in a changing environment. If leaders do not become

conscious of the sub-cultures within their organization, "those cultures will manage them."[118] Understanding identity and culture "is essential to leaders if they are to lead."[119]

We must reflect on the experiences of the past 20 years and assess the impact on the identity of the force. If we are a learning institution, it is imperative that we *see ourselves* clearly and honestly so we can determine how we should define our profession. Senior SF leadership must begin by acknowledging this crisis and commit to understanding and defining *who* Green Berets are and what Green Berets *do.* ♠

Author's Note

Maybe you agree with the thesis of this monograph; maybe you don't. Either way, let's continue the conversation! JSOU Press welcomes submissions that rebut or reinforce the concept of an identity crisis in Special Forces. For more information, visit www.jsou. edu/press/publishwithjsou or email press@jsou.edu.

Hear what others in Special Forces have to say on the topic in the following podcasts:

U.S. Army War College War Room podcast, **The Turmoil of Identity Crisis: Special Forces Organizational Culture**, featuring Col. Croot, Maj. Gen. John Brennan, Brig. Gen. Steve Marks, and host Ron Granieri, professor of history at the U.S. Army War College: https://warroom. armywarcollege.edu/podcasts/sfcom-culture

Indigenous Approach podcast, Special Forces Identity Part I, featuring seven sergeants major from across Special Forces: https://www. listennotes.com/podcasts/the-indigenous/special-forces-identity-part-1-HfLnsIlt2yj/

Afterword

I was asked by active-duty Army and Special Forces Col. Ed Croot, the author of the project "There is an Identity Crisis in Special Forces," to write an Afterword for his important and valuable work. As the Vice Commander of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), and leader of the USSOCOM 2020 Comprehensive Review, I am happy to assist for two critical reasons.

First, I believe that Col. Croot's research construct and methodology represents a thorough and honest assessment of U.S. Army Special Forces, providing micro-level analytical details and suppositions that mirrored the macro findings of the 2020 USSOCOM Comprehensive Review. His work provides a lens to be leveraged by USSOCOM leaders across the enterprise as the force steps further away from the global war on terror (GWOT) and its associated impacts on the force – both positive and negative.

Second, I want compliment Col. Croot for taking on a difficult and unpopular topic, knowing that it would create friction and divisiveness within his own formation and across the USSOCOM enterprise. At a time with our nation facing global competition on a scale not seen since the Cold War, much more will be required of USSOCOM. Embracing Col. Croot's work allows SOF leaders to better understand and address the subcultures within their formations, develop effective socialization models, and train their force to apex levels of competency and lethality.

In closing, I commend Col. Croot for addressing this topic head-on, as I know that some agree and some do not. I also recommend that every Green Beret, Air Commando, Ranger, SEAL, and Raider take the time to read this research, recommend it to our Special Operations Forces supporters and critics, and use it to inform their own debates and decisions moving forward. And finally, I want to once again encourage all in the SOF formations to think critically about our profession. We owe this to our nation as the world's premier special operations force.

U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Francis L. Donovan
Vice Commander, USSOCOM
August 2024

Acronyms

ADP – Army Doctrine Publication

ADRP – Army Doctrine Reference Publication

ARSOF – Army Special Operations Forces

CG – commanding general

COIN – counterinsurgency

CP – counterproliferation

CT – counterterrorism

CWMD – counter weapons of mass destruction

DA – direct action

DoD – Department of Defense

FID – foreign internal defense

GWOT – Global War on Terrorism

HR – hostage rescue

K/C – kill/capture

KIA – killed in action

SF – Special Forces

SFA – security force assistance

SFAB – Security Force Assistance Brigade

SFAS -Special Forces Assessment and Selection

SFC – Special Forces Command

SFG (A) – Special Forces Group (Airborne)

SFOD-A – Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha

SFQC – Special Forces Qualification Course

SORB – Special Operations Recruiting Battalion

SR – special reconnaissance

SWCS – [John F. Kennedy] Special Warfare Center and School

USAREC – United States Army Recruiting Command

USASOC – United States Army Special Operations Command

UW – unconventional warfare

Notes

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7   Clarke, *Comprehensive Review*, 5.

8   Clarke, *Comprehensive Review*, 39.

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38   Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*,18. Organizational Culture and Leadership defined:

      Culture: A pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

      Basic Underlying Assumptions: Unconscious, taken—for—granted beliefs and values that determine perception, thought, feeling, and behavior.

      Values: Articulated publicly announced principles and values that the group claims to be trying to achieve.

      Norms: Implicit standards and values that evolve in working groups.

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40   Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 24.

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59   U.S. Army, *ADP-1 The Army Profession,* 2-3.

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63   Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 16.

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66   Valka-Mir Human Security, Psychosocial-Emotional Aspects, 110.

67   Valka-Mir Human Security, Psychosocial-Emotional Aspects.

68   Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership,* 24.

69   Croot. "Green Beret Survey." Post-Survey Phone Interview. December 19, 2019.

70   Cynthia D. Fisher and Jeff A. Weekley, *Socialization in Work Organizations* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, 1982), accessed April 14, 2020, https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a113574.pdf__;!!OToaGQ!4hmTZwO_9-p1a0vEVVMKguHnlvXfAzZyN0WBU1ma6xY-rypNaxSmqp7pU--7gWHll5w$, 28.

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In struggling with the effects of "mission drift" for two decades, Special Forces (SF) have drifted away from complex, long-duration partnerships toward more linear, short-term, transactional combat operations. There is subsequently an identity crisis in SF, and it is influencing the culture and behavior of Green Berets. This study of the identity crisis in Special Forces earned Col. Ed Croot the U.S. Army War College Colonel Francis J. Kelly Special Operations Writing Award.

❝ I want to encourage all Green Berets to explore this research and think critically about our profession. Our role as irregular warfare professional practitioners, with and through our interagency, international, and joint partners, remains critical to achieving integrated deterrence against China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. As such, every member of our profession must understand our essential strategic value to the nation, and we owe it to future American generations to learn, adapt, and appropriately apply our skills to sufficiently protect it. ❞

— **Lt. Gen. John W. Brennan**
Deputy Commander, U.S. Africa Command

❝ I commend Col. Croot for addressing this topic head-on, as I know that some agree, and some do not. I also recommend that every Green Beret, Air Commando, Ranger, SEAL, and Raider take the time to read this research, recommend it to our Special Operations Forces supporters and critics, and use it to inform their own debates and decisions moving forward. ❞

— **Lt. Gen. Francis L. Donovan**
Vice Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command

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