

Robin Sage: The Making of an Unconventional Warrior  
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As the small aircraft lifts off from Camp Mackall, North Carolina the team of soon to be U.S. Army Special Forces Soldiers anxiously await the unknown that lies ahead. They will head west directly into the heart of Central North Carolina flying low, just above the pines that litter the region simulating the evasion of enemy radar and air defenses. The team leader and team sergeant nervously go over last minute preparations and contingency plans; what to do if something goes wrong in flight or once they are on the ground. What if they miss link up and are unable to make contact with their guerrilla counterparts? What if there is fire on the DZ? All of these contingencies and many more flash through their minds as they skirt just a couple of miles southwest of the famous Pinehurst No. 2, home to the U.S. Open. These Soldiers did not come to Moore County for its famous golf courses. They came here on a quest to become the Army's next generation of Unconventional Warriors. The jumpmaster stands and gives the last minute commands before they jump into the occupied country they have come here to free. Thus living up to their motto, "De Oppresso Liber" which means: "Free the Oppressed".

This essay highlights the event that culminates the training of this special breed of war fighter. It also shows the importance of the civilian population within this area of North Carolina. This event could not possibly be recreated on a military reservation or within another community. It has become a way of life throughout the eighteen counties of the Piedmont Region of North Carolina.

For most of the last fifty years the countryside of central North Carolina has been transformed into the fictitious nation of Pineland as part of the United States Army Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC). The residents of North Carolina know this exercise simply as Robin Sage. The people of central North Carolina open their homes, farms and hearts to the Special Forces students and cadre. They don't do it for the money or the glory; they do it

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because they are great American patriots. They provide land and resources not available on any military installation. They are in their own way providing for the security of their nation by helping train America's newest Special Forces warriors.

The civilian role players, the citizens of the Piedmont region, are a vital resource to our Special Forces community. Many of these residents have been taking part in this exercise for decades. What their grandfathers once did; is now done by the grandson; on the land owned by the grandfather. It is not uncommon to give out one or more award for fifty years of service each year at the Pinelander Day Celebration. In recent history we have seen protests outside the gates of military reservations by citizens that do not understand why a runway needs to be extended or they need to be bothered by the noise of artillery firing in the night or jet aircraft flying overhead. However, in this region we see people willing to open their homes to strangers to provide food, shelter, transportation and most of all a very realistic training environment all in the name of preparing unconventional warfare experts to go forth and fight the nation's toughest kind of war. These people are true patriots and reserve a special place in the heart of all Special Forces veterans.

Robin Sage is the premier Unconventional Warfare (UW) exercise within the Department of Defense. This exercise gives Special Forces students the opportunity to practice their UW skills in a non-hostile environment and prove to their instructors that they have mastered their trade over months of classroom and field training. For some, like the Special Forces Medical Sergeants, their medical training alone is almost a year of intense classroom and clinical training. These students have given up much to be here. Some have given up successful careers in the conventional Army hoping to take themselves one step further in service to their country. Their future success on the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq or in the jungles of South America or

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Southeast Asia has its roots in small towns and on back roads scattered throughout North Carolina. Many of these towns don't even make the state road map. They have names like Foxfire Village, Ellerbe, Derby, Black Ankle and Frog Pond.

The Special Forces students infiltrate Pineland by various means to include air, land and maritime operations. They come to this “country” to support the Pineland Resistance Forces who are attempting to regain control of their homeland that has been invaded by the United Provinces of Atlantica. The students are there to conduct unconventional warfare and support the insurgency. This type of warfare is the primary mission of the United States Army Special Forces. This is the type of war these students will be asked to conduct under extremely dangerous and austere conditions behind enemy lines within weeks of completing their Robin Sage experience.

As a cadre member I had students email me within weeks of graduation from their firebase somewhere in the Afghan mountainside. My hope is that something we gave them to put in their kit bag will bring them success on the battlefield. Sometimes one small gesture or something in the back of your mind at just the right moment means the difference between life and death on the battlefield.

The fictitious nation of Pineland is located on the continent of Atlantica approximately 400 miles off the eastern coast of North America. Atlantica consists of four separate nation states: United Provinces of Atlantica (UPA), Republic of Appalachia, Republic of Pineland and Republic of Columbus. The United Provinces of Atlantica has invaded The Republic of Pineland's northern province; an ally of the United States. The United States has committed to support the Pineland government in their fight against the invading forces from the UPA. Enemy forces have infiltrated the local government to include law enforcement and internal intelligence

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organizations. These organizations are actively attempting to destroy the insurgency led by the Pineland Defense Forces that are supported by the United States Army Special Forces. The mission of the Special Forces operating in Pineland is to disrupt the enemy forces within Pineland in order to report operational intelligence and set the conditions for the Combined Joint Task Force led by the United States to restore the territorial integrity and the legitimate government of the Republic of Pineland.

The purpose of the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School's exercise is to evaluate the student's performance and determine if they are technically and tactically proficient enough to become members of the Special Forces Regiment and be assigned to one of the five active duty Special Forces Groups or the two National Guard Special Forces Groups. These Groups are the Department of Defense's primary weapon for conducting unconventional warfare as well as other special operations missions.

The operational element within a Special Forces Group is the Operational Detachment Alpha or ODA. A Captain along with a Warrant Officer and Master Sergeant commands each ODA. The remaining nine team members each specialize in weapons, engineering, communications, medical and intelligence with redundancy built in amongst the junior and senior practitioner of each specialty. This enables the team to break into two operational elements if the mission requires. In addition to their military occupational specialty each team member speaks a language indigenous to the area in which the group is assigned. These areas are assigned via the combatant command areas of responsibility. The soldiers maintain their language and cultural proficiency as a tool for operating in these areas of responsibility and to become a combat multiplier; especially in the conduct of foreign internal defense and unconventional warfare.

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Recent operations in support of the Global War on Terror highlight the need for these unconventional warriors. These soldiers were called upon by our nation in the immediate wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and have been continually engaged in combat with our nation's enemies ever since. Many missions have highlighted the Special Forces ability to be successful on an irregular and asymmetrical battlefield. The Special Warfare Center prepares these soldiers for this by engaging them in unconventional warfare in support of the Republic of Pineland.

For the students participating in this exercise it quickly becomes very realistic and they will lose their sense of the training environment. As they arrive at their designated infiltration point they must follow the plan they devised during the mission-planning portion of the exercise conducted over the two weeks prior to infiltration. They have been isolated for the last two weeks as each training detachment received it's mission and began planning for it's individual part of the CJTF's overall mission. It is for the safety of the teams and the mission that they do not know what their fellow ODA's missions are. They know that they have other elements operating around them but should they be captured it could lead to catastrophe if they knew the details of their counterpart's mission.

Each training lane has a different scenario. These scenarios are developed by the Special Forces cadre leadership and are developed around the infrastructure, terrain and resources available within their operational boundaries. This also insures that each student that participates in this training event has a similar but different experience that in the long run enables future students to receive the full benefit of the training without the student intelligence network that so often is associated with very difficult training scenarios.

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The trainee's first step is to arrive safely to their designated sector. They then must begin the long task of linking up with their assigned partisan forces. In some cases the partisan forces will have been able to exfiltrate an individual out of occupied territory in order to assist the soon to be arriving American advisors with preliminary planning during their isolation phase. This will also ease the burden of the dangerous task of partisan link-up. If all works well the resistance member will have been able to return home and will likely be on the ground to greet the advisors after their long and dangerous infiltration which for some will be more than 100 miles behind enemy lines.

Once the students have completed the arduous task of linking up with their assigned Pineland Resistance Forces they must immediately set to work building rapport and assisting the resistance leadership in developing a force structure capable of defending their homeland and re-establishing the legitimacy of the local Pineland government. They will do this by developing the sector and area complexes. These complexes are the backbone of the insurgency. It is the organized structure of insurgent bands operating within a geographical area. The area complex also consists of organized logistics and intelligence networks throughout the local area. Many of these resistance members are never seen but assist the ODA and guerilla fighters by providing early warning of UPA troop movements and the movements of enemy intelligence assets that are actively seeking out the Americans and their resistance counterparts.

The insurgency that the Special Forces students support is made up of support Soldiers from within the Army. These support soldiers play the role of guerilla fighters. However, civilian volunteer role players make up the bulk of the resistance support network. These insurgents go about their daily lives as farmers, teachers, police officers and housewives until called upon by the resistance force. The guerilla force is led by the Guerilla Chief or G-Chief

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that in this training scenario is played by a retired Special Forces soldier. The guerilla force has a base of operations known as a g-base located on land owned by one of the local residents. Unconventional warfare operations are waged from this g-base throughout the area complex, typically covering most of a county if not two or more in some cases. However, as with any combat operation the fight can only go as far as the logistical support will carry it. The civilian resistance force role players provide the transportation, intelligence and other logistical requirements to make this exercise as realistic as possible under the guidance and direction of the cadre instructors. The instructors try to be seen as little as possible by the students and only intervene in emergencies or potentially hazardous situations.

The students begin with what would be seen by some as small, insignificant tasks of teaching personal hygiene, camp security and basic soldier skills. Many of the guerilla fighters have no experience in soldiering but have joined the resistance out of a desire to win back their homeland and avenge family members raped, tortured or killed by the invading force. Other times the advisors must reign in their counterpart's eagerness to take the fight to the enemy in order to better train them so that they will live to fight another day. This is the key to insurgent warfare. Small victories are what sustain the insurgency. The students must also teach their counterparts to abide by the law of land warfare and the importance of not violating human rights. If the re-established military and government of Pineland is going to be viewed as legitimate it must uphold international standards of law and governance.

The ultimate goal is for the Special Forces advisors to operate by, with, and through their guerilla counterparts to restore the territorial boundaries and legitimacy of the Republic of Pineland government. Once the students have trained the guerilla fighters to a level of competency which allows them to begin conducting operations; the Americans along with their

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Pineland counterparts will begin executing missions throughout their sector and area complex.

These operations are within the guidance given to the ODA by the CJSOTF commander as well as in conjunction with the resistance leadership's guidance set forth during planning conferences commonly referred to as sector and area command meetings.

These meetings are an opportunity for the G-Chief to meet with his chain of command and the American leadership to meet and plan with the resistance leaders that govern not only the individual band of fighters the ODA is working with but also multiple bands of guerillas operating with other American advisors throughout the area. This is one of the best opportunities for the Special Forces instructors to evaluate their student's ability to build rapport and communicate their operational strategy to the indigenous leadership. An in-role active duty or retired Special Forces soldier typically plays the area commander much like the G-Chief. These individuals are chosen by the Special Warfare Center for their experience and expertise in conducting UW.

The Robin Sage experience last approximately two weeks. It is a common bond shared by all Special Forces Soldiers from the inception of our Regiment. Every member of the Regiment from the Commanding General to the youngest NCO on an ODA has played a part in freeing the people of the nation of Pineland. This experience has paid dividends in operations conducted in hundreds of countries around the world under very dangerous and austere conditions. A young Special Forces Captain will likely at some point in his future be the senior representative of the United States military in a war torn nation and it is his responsibility to not only bring his team home safely but to also have an operational and strategic impact on that nation in accordance with the combatant commander's guidance and intent.

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\* The bulk of the information presented in this paper is based on my personal knowledge and experiences. I served as an unconventional warfare instructor assigned to the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, NC from December 2007 until May 2009. The views expressed herein are those solely of the author and do not reflect the position or policies of the United States Army Special Operations Command (Airborne) or the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (Airborne).