

FORGING EXPERTISE

Enabling Resistance in Tomorrow's Fight.

BY FIRST SERGEANT ROBERT BODE AND
CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 JOSH WILLS AND
CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 NICHOLAS GERIS

In September 2018, a Chinese warship shadowed and threatened to ram the *USS Decatur*, coming within 135 meters before veering off in the last few seconds to avoid an imminent collision. The People's Liberation Army continues to expand and exercise its special operations forces.^{01, 02} Russian forces have built up on the borders of Ukraine, deploying medium and long range missiles into range of NATO allies and fighter aircraft have continuously intercepted NATO and U.S. aircraft.⁰³ Iran beckons for the apocalypse and North Korea continues to defy the international community by developing and testing nuclear weapons. The stage is set for the great powers of the world to collide.

Conventional maneuver warfare and textbook counterinsurgency operations have given way to new forms of hybrid warfare, blurring the lines between military, and civilian; state and non-state; protest and conflict; legal and illicit; intentional and incidental.⁰⁴ In this space between peace and war, the United States Special Forces provide the United States Government with a small-footprint option for influencing unfriendly regimes, addressing insurgencies and containing conflicts that could destabilize U.S. allies and partners.⁰⁵ While conventional units focus on fighting and winning "hot" wars by dominating physical terrain, ARSOF works to expand the competitive phase, operating through and with indigenous forces to deter escalation, defeat hybrid threats, and set conditions for prompt shift to conventional armed conflict when needed.⁰⁶

Special Forces is arguably the best force the Department of Defense has for countering hybrid threats, influencing populations, reporting on enemy rear area activities, and operating behind enemy lines as combat multipliers; recruiting, training and advising indigenous forces to disrupt, coerce or overthrow an occupying power.⁰⁷ **To ensure SF is ready to transition to collaborative, multi-domain support to resistance operations in a denied environment amid great state competition, emphasis must be placed on the development of expertise (through high quality training over many years), human ego development (through development of expertise) and exceptional leadership (through human ego development).**

THE NEED FOR EXPERTISE

According to FM 3-05, a denied area is defined as:

*An area that is operationally unsuitable for conventional forces due to political, tactical, environmental or geographical reasons. It is a primary area for special operations forces.*⁰⁸



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Similarly, the TRADOC Pamphlet on Multi-Domain Operations proposes the following definition for deep fires areas:

*The areas beyond the feasible range of movement for conventional forces but where joint fires, SOF, information and virtual capabilities can be employed.*¹⁰

What will be required of Special Forces Soldiers in denied area support to resistance operations? In unconventional warfare, each Green Beret is expected to organize, train, advise and lead a company of indigenous forces; each Operational Detachment-Alpha a battalion. The battalion should be able to self-sustain its teams and partners through the use of conventional and non-standard logistics, build rapport across cultural boundaries, understand operational variables, and synchronize guerrilla and resistance efforts with adjacent and parent organizations, all while remaining undetected.¹¹ They will be expected to collect and report intelligence, establish and exploit physical and human networks to provide early warning and deter escalation while operating completely in the dark, at times cut off for days or weeks from communication with higher headquarters. Instant and near-real-time communications, ISR soak, and FBCB2s will be impossible in a denied area when facing a peer adversary. Their use will likely result in intercepted, masked and degraded communications, enemy radio direction finding and immediate triangulated fires, as witnessed in Ukraine.¹² Special Forces Soldiers are purpose-built



to be advisors. The nation needs SF Soldiers who have enough experience and high quality repetitions at their required tasks that they can teach and execute them efficiently — not just effectively. Survivability in an austere environment should be central to everything Special Forces do. In short, the nation needs experts.

EXPERTISE AS A FEEDBACK LOOP

Green Berets can currently be assigned as instructors at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, sent to various broadening assignments (drill sergeant, recruiter, staff, etc.) or promoted to E8 after only 36 months of team time.¹³ But are they experts at that point? Do they have the requisite cross training, knowledge and skills to lead a 12-man team consisting of eight different Military occupational specialties across nine principle tasks in a deep-fires area of large-scale combat? Are they ready to produce the next generation of Green Berets?

These are serious questions that require thoughtful deliberation. After 18 years of combat in Afghanistan and Iraq, Green Berets have myriad training and experience in the fields of foreign internal defense, counterinsurgency, counterterrorism and direct action. According to the 1st Special Forces Command(Airborne) portal, that leaves five principle tasks ignored, including unconventional warfare, the capstone of resistance warfare, and preparation of the environment, the principle way we set conditions

in the competition phase.¹⁴ In contrast, to face the emerging threats of great state competition below the threshold of overt armed conflict, 1st SFC(A) needs resistance experts who can be effectively employed by theater and field commanders in the deep-fires area. Soldiers who only spend 36 months on an SFOD-A, predominantly deployed in a non-resistance role supporting the United States Central Command area of operations, do not have sufficient time and exposure for the personal and professional development required to become resistance experts.

Expertise is developed over time as a result of concentrated, high-quality, deliberate practice and world-class education. The time required to achieve an expert level of mastery is debated, but research suggests 10 years of dedicated practice or more.¹⁵ One study suggests that as many as 50,000 to 100,000 hours may be needed to achieve expertise.¹⁶ Assuming 50,000 hours, a Soldier working 10 hours a day, 7 days a week with no holidays would achieve expertise in 13.7 years — but only if the repetitions were consistent, high quality, concentrated and uninterrupted.¹⁷ Expertise will develop more slowly if interrupted by unrelated tasks. Most people don't make it to the expert level for a variety of reasons: motivation, baseline intelligence, access to expert instruction or lack of deliberate practice, to name a few.¹⁸

It may prove infeasible to keep Green Berets on a team for 13.7 years, but providing SF Soldiers the time and resources to achieve true expertise is a worthy investment that will pay dividends for generations. Learners who work for or study under experts learn to solve com-

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A seasoned instructor teaches students at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School's Survival Evasion Resistance and Escape Level-C training (SERE) at Camp MacKall, North Carolina. Expertise is developed over time as a result of concentrated, high-quality, deliberate practice and world-class education. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY K. KASSENS

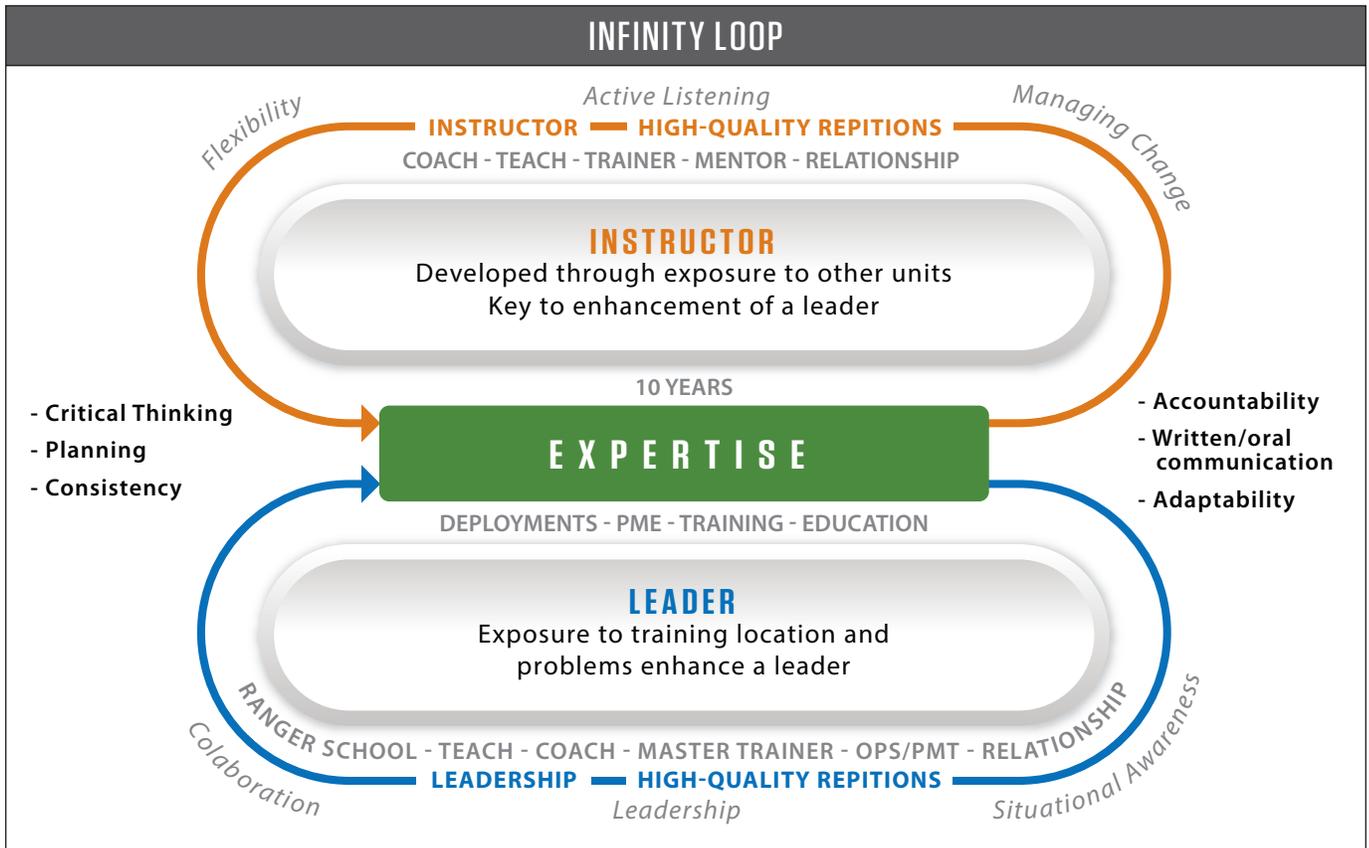


Figure 01

plex problems in their domain faster and more efficiently than those exposed to the same information from non-experts.¹⁹ In other words: expertise begets expertise.

Expertise in a certain field is absolutely necessary for an instructor to produce experts, but does not by itself guarantee that experts will be capable of teaching others. Instructors need to be subject-matter experts *and* expert teachers.²⁰ An expert in long range marksmanship who is a sub-standard instructor will only produce mediocre snipers, at best. Likewise, an expert instructor with no knowledge of underwater operations will only produce average divers. In short, SF Soldiers who are assigned as instructors before they achieve expertise simply cannot produce expert pupils due to reduced knowledge and expertise. Instructors must therefore be selected based on existing expertise, aptitude and a desire to teach. Those selected as instructors should be given the absolute best academic instruction in how to teach, hundreds of high quality repetitions and enough time to become expert instructors.

Although it may take 10 years or more to develop experts, evidence suggests being an expert streamlines the process. The concept of adaptive expertise theorizes that once a person is an expert in one field, they can more easily become an expert in other fields.²¹ Applied to the SF Regiment-SWCS relationship, a Green Beret who is given 7-10 years on a team to develop true expertise before being assigned to SWCS would master the new domain of teaching faster and more effectively than those lacking expertise. If Soldiers who are not yet experts are assigned as instructors, longer and more intense on-boarding is required to prepare them

to teach, and even then the quality will be sub-optimal.

Education and training are both inherently linked to the development of expertise, but they are not the same and one cannot replace the other.²² Close synchronization and integration of the two are required to create synergy as students progress through cycles of education and training with more complex scenarios and skills.²³ As all combat arms Soldiers know, training is one of the most important things units can do to prepare for combat and it is through training repetitions that the potential of education is realized.²⁴ Training provides an opportunity for Soldiers and leaders to take risks, be creative, and learn from their mistakes. This is a key component to both team building and leader development.^{25,26} Expertise is forged on the anvil of challenging, realistic, focused training. It requires high-quality, concentrated repetitions under the tutelage of an expert instructor or leader.

FORGING RESISTANCE EXPERTISE

When repetitions are not concentrated or are interrupted by unrelated tasks, the development of expertise is slowed. Army doctrine echoes this concept, reminding readers that battle-focused units train selectively, and that units who attempt to master all tasks simultaneously generally fail to do so, achieving only average results across the board.²⁷ Which leads back to SF Principle Tasks.

As mentioned above, depending on which manual is consulted, there are as many as 14 core activities for Special Operations Forces. 1st SFC(A) lists nine: COIN,

Figure 01
Many years and thousands of high quality, concentrated repetitions are required for the development of expertise. Soldiers who mature into experts before being assigned as instructors and leaders will be more effective in those positions and more likely to develop their subordinates and students into experts.

FID, UW, CT, counter proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, special reconnaissance, security force assistance and information operations.²⁸ If the Army and Special Forces senior leaders are serious about building the expertise needed for SF Soldiers to succeed at STR operations in a denied area, a deliberate decision must be made to focus training on the core activities of UW (including sub-tasks of SR and DA), preparation of the environment, and IO and an equally deliberate decision needs to be made to jettison or mothball the rest. The benefits of such specialization can be easily observed in the 4th Battalions, Crisis Response Force companies and Special Mission Units.

This focus will permit the development of expertise by requiring every training event that SF Soldiers and ODAs undertake is focused on resistance, and teaching foreign forces as a force multiplier and leader in a denied or deep fire area.^{29,30} Chief Warrant Officer 5 David Holton, Commandant of the SWCS Warrant Officer Institute, expands on the need for focus: "Elements of resistance exist in both the competitive and armed conflict phases, and SF Soldiers' understanding may well determine failure or success. Our understanding of resistance must evolve at the same pace as the operational environment so our Special Forces can dominate in the competition phase and prevent a transition to armed conflict"

To achieve this, SWCS will need to focus courses on resistance-specific tasks, in a progressive and sequential manner. The Special Forces Qualification Course, Professional Military Education and advanced skills courses will provide opportunities for short-term, high-quality training repetitions on leadership, analysis, planning and ARSOF interoperability within a denied area.

Development of commissioned and enlisted leaders is critical to any unit's success and deliberate preparation of SF leaders for the specific challenges they will face in a denied area will be absolutely essential in UW or enabled resistance activities.³¹ Leadership in a denied area will be completely foreign to Army and SF leaders who were raised in the Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom theaters of war. There is no place in the deep fires area for ambiguity surrounding the commander's intent, micro management or risk-averse leadership. Leadership is not a skill learned through on-the-job training or by reading books. Like any profession, it must be practiced repeatedly to be mastered. Professional Military Education is the key institutional component to leader development, and should comprise a balance between academic instruction and high-quality training repetitions in the application of new and enduring concepts.³²

The National Defense Strategy recently called out the neglect of PME, stating that it has "stagnated" and is "focused more on the accomplishment of mandatory credit at the expense of lethality and ingenuity."³³ As an example, consider a SF Master Leaders Course graduate with 15 years of time in service. This senior NCO is likely a team sergeant, or will be soon, and is charged with being the master trainer, coach and mentor for an SFOD-A. Additionally, he is respon-

sible for training, advising, and leading a battalion of indigenous forces in a denied area.³⁴ But when in his PME was he provided high-quality education and concentrated repetitions preparing him for those feats? To equip him for these daunting tasks, he received a total of four months of PME (about 684 hours) over 15 years. This PME, which constitutes roughly 2 percent of his career and which is tens of thousands of hours short of what is required to achieve expertise, is grossly biased towards education, especially at the higher levels of the Senior Leaders Course and Master Leaders Course and only includes roughly 80 hours on resistance — all academic.

Offsetting this deficit will require balanced application of the Army Training Domains (Institutional, Operational and Self-Development), and considerable changes to the training and education outcomes of current and horizon courses. Enlisted PME courses at SWCS should be modified to work in concert with the WOI and the Special Forces Qualification Course and include intensive, successive and compounding education *and training* on resistance, leadership, planning (including Military Decision Making Process and Operational Art and Design) and Army Special Operations Forces integration. Courses should then transition to leadership training, focusing on decentralized platoon (Advanced Leaders Course), company (SLC/ Warrant Officer Technical & Tactical Certification Course) and battalion (MLC/Warrant Officer Advanced Course) combined arms offense, defense, and guerrilla tactics and integration of enablers. The existing course lengths, content and outcomes should be reevaluated through Critical Task Site Selection Boards to synchronize efforts. Courses should focus more on critical thinking, discussion and debate and choreographed failure, and less on rote memorization and rigid performance standards. Consideration should be given at CTSSBs for how leadership training for PME can be integrated into existing SWCS courses, to include PME, SFQC and advanced skills courses. Could SLC and WOTCC students lead multiple student ODAs through their Robin Sage lane to simulate sector command and area complex integration?

Operating in a denied environment will require SF leaders to effectively lead not only their ODAs, but other ARSOF elements and partner nation forces in dire circumstances with little to go off of besides end state and intent.³⁵ SF leaders, both enlisted and officer, need to be well-schooled in the theories, concepts and core activities of Psychological Operations, Civil Affairs and other enablers in order to influence enemy formations, networks and populations to reduce their will to fight.³⁶ This concept could be called ARSOF I3 (Integration, Interoperability, and Interdependence). These Career Management Fields contribute and enhance key capabilities that SF leaders at all levels need to understand so they can effectively request, utilize and command these forces when needed, or generate effects in their absence.³⁷

In addition to brick and mortar training and education, SWCS should develop a Resistance portal page with



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emerging doctrine, case studies, pre-packaged classes covering the fundamentals, components and planning considerations of UW and resistance, articles and news. Delivered through the use of historical case studies in an ODA/small group environment, these classes could provide the Regiment with the tools to conduct deliberate, self-directed study and ODA learning. SWCS should then dispatch purpose-built teams from the NCOA and WOI to rotate to each of the SF Groups, to illustrate the portal resources and provide leaders the most cutting edge doctrine, updates on resistance theories, training outcomes in the SFQC and PME and resources available for resistance training at the unit.

While SWCS and the institutional domain will play a crucial role in training new Green Berets and refreshing existing Green Berets on resistance during PME, the bulk of the burden for building resistance expertise will fall on SF Groups. Command-endorsed operational and training focus will be critical to sustaining and enhancing the skills learned in the institutional domain. Units can accomplish this by capitalizing on Joint Combined Exchange Training events, Combat Training Center rotations, Robin Sage, Ridge Runner and tailored operational deployments.

Joint Combined Exchange Training events are specifically designed to provide mission-essential task training for USSOF, particularly in the areas of FID and UW.³⁸ This has become watered down over the years, but still represents a great opportunity for building resistance expertise across the Regiment. Instead of the current 1:3 ratio of USSF:HN/PN, the ratio should be increased to 1:50 and instead of using near-

peer SOF units that are already proficient at shooting, moving, and communicating, the standard should be the least capable units available. JCETs should truly simulate the challenges of organizing, training and leading a company size element.

The CTCs have recently made a shift from COIN to Multi Domain and Large Scale Combat Operations and have revised their scenarios to include both conventional and hybrid threats. These changes are designed to allow units to fail miserably, reset and use the failure to fuel rapid adaptation to the threat.³⁹ While this long overdue change is a welcome and encouraging step in the right direction, the CTCs still need to better cater to ARSOF tasks. SF units training at the CTCs should not have to adjust their critical tasks and training objectives to the conventional units. Instead, they should both train together to meet collective training objectives. This should consist of a Brigade Combat Team charged with conducting LSCO and at least one SF Company.

At JRTC and NTC, conventional brigade, battalion, company and platoon command teams, focused on MDO, should be paired with SF leaders from the ODA, ODB, and battalion levels (junior Green Berets with platoon and company leadership; team leadership with battalion leadership, etc.). The ODB should shadow the BCT's combat support functions. The remaining SF Soldiers should be deployed in a simulated denied area and required to link up with indigenous forces, consisting of a battalion of opposition forces role players scattered throughout the battlefield. SF should be required to organize them, train them, and lead them in guerrilla

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Green Berets assigned to 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) conduct a raid during a routine training mission at Camp Mackall, North Carolina. A Command-endorsed, operational and training event focus is critical to sustaining and enhancing the skills learned in the institutional domain.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SGT. STEVEN LEWIS

battles synchronized with non-lethal messaging against the BCT in an attempt to disrupt rear area activities, delay planned attacks and prepare the population to resist after invasion. Mistakes made by USSF need to result in catastrophe and should be exploited as learning opportunities. Through the crucible of failure, USSF will identify their weakness, adapt to the dangers of LSCO and mitigate the pandemic of the Dunning-Kruger effect across the regiment.⁴⁰

Robin Sage and Ridger Runner are both specifically built to exercise SF tasks in UW and STR. As Robin Sage transitions to a four-start calendar, resources and time should be made available to allow Groups to send teams to “re-blue” on UW and resistance. Training at Robin Sage and Ridge Runner should include tasks ranging from pre-deployment sight survey to transition, with specific emphasis on developing the area command and having each team prepare their sectors to receive, stage, move onward and integrate conventional forces during a JFE. Additionally, ODAs should be hunted by conventional forces specializing in EW, ISR, military canine operations and espionage.

Finally, units can expand on UW and resistance skill sets by selecting and tailoring their operational deployments to incorporate skills specific to those activities. Special Forces have spent years “building partner capacity.” If the emphasis is to be expanding the competitive space through enabled resistance, commanders at the highest levels should refuse mis-

sions that do not build an organic capacity to operate in a denied area and engage in resistance activities. The schoolhouse can teach UW, but if Green Berets are being deployed to kick doors in the CT fight, they are going to build expertise in kicking doors, not UW.

Expertise cannot be developed overnight, but the combination of longer time on a team, enhanced training and education at SWCS, and more resistance-focused, realistic training and operations at the groups will pave the way to building expertise over the next 10-15 years. Providing enough ODA time and the resources to develop expertise will allow USSF Soldiers and leaders to reach a critical milestone in human ego development, marking a point of maturity at which the needs, desires and opinions of others begin to come into view.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT & EXPERTISE

Human development plays a formative role in leader development. According to Dr. Susanne Cook-Greuter, developmental leadership theorist, there are nine levels of adult ego development: Impulsive, Opportunist, Diplomat, Expert, Achiever, Individualist, Strategist, Magician, and Ironist. For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be the first five. The Impulsive level could be called the survival level: “How will I get the bare essentials (for me)?” The next level, Opportunist, expands on this as selfish ambition becomes

Figure 02
As operators mature through the levels of human ego development, they become more willing to work with others, see the big picture, and enforce ethical standards.

LEVELS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT			
	DIPLOMAT	EXPERT	ACHIEVER
Self/Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on self, and immediate peers • Allegiance is to family, tribe, group; us against the world • Peer pressure is driving force; everything is fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aware of others; immature introspection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aware of others and self; us/we/they, not just me • Respectful of differences between different cultures
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic knowledge on narrow range of subjects; uncomfortable when pushed outside knowledge limits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technically competent at their core occupational requirements • Has it all figured out; nobody can tell an expert anything • Highly susceptible to one-upmanship; wants the last word; may bully others with information; constantly comparing self to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possesses a high level of proficiency and a desire to improve immediate surroundings and coach others to improve through use of expertise. • Tolerance for delay between action and effect;
Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined by the group; ethics are subject to change based on the group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High moral standards; tend to blame the system when things don't meet their expectations • Rationalize away things that don't fit their belief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwavering, well established ethical beliefs • Intrigued by motivation of self and others • Self reliant, conscientious, and efficient
Problem Solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hostile to outside perspectives • Capable of solving simple and repetitive problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capable of seeing alternatives and eager to apply their expertise to internal problems • Highly critical of things they don't understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willing to work with others to improve their surroundings and achieve organizational goals • Interested in problem solving; drawn to root causes • Advocate of logic; convince others through logic
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lives in the now; no past or future effects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on results now; aware of but apathetic about past and future impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considers past, present, and future impacts

Figure 02

the theme: “How can I get more for me?” Diplomats recognize others as being present, but only within the context of “What can I get out of this relationship?” and “How can I be accepted by this group?” At and below this level, problems are blamed on others, ethics are wavering, actions are driven by peer pressure (diplomats desperately desire to be liked), sharing and collaboration are hostilely avoided, and remorse only occurs when caught.⁴¹ Not exactly a recipe for successful leadership. Examined through a resistance lens, an SF Soldier at this level of human development is likely to look down on his counterparts and view their differences as inconveniences rather than assets.

Expert is the first level at which humans see differing opinions and views, become introspective and confident in their ethical stance and consider that bad things may be their fault.⁴² They can be highly critical of things they don't understand and instead of digging for the root cause or better understanding, they tend to blame the structure, tools and the system. Applied to the resistance domain, a Green Beret in the Expert level or below is likely to approach resistance partners with an attitude of superiority, discounting or openly subverting efforts to share and collaborate with joint, interagency and multinational partners and allies. Cultural idiosyncrasies are seen as annoyances and indigenous networks, understanding and unique capabilities are ignored because “they can't be as good at this as we are.” In short, people in the first four levels are only concerned about themselves. Expert is the ideal level for new team guys, and the absolute floor for instruc-

tors and team-level leadership (although not ideal).

At higher levels of human ego development, those who have developed expertise and a concept of self-identity move on to use their expertise to make their immediate surroundings better. As people continue to move up the ladder of human ego development, they increasingly try to apply their expertise to improve their organization, their local community and make the world a better place. The Achiever level is widely considered the target for adult human development and people at this level are very concerned with core reasons, motivations and causes and are no longer as susceptible to peer pressure.⁴³ In resistance, an SF Soldier who has attained the level of Achiever would be more likely to collaborate with partners, allies and interagency counterparts, conceding that others can bring valuable ideas to the table and that achieving maximum success on missions and objectives is unlikely without a cooperative effort. The Achiever level would therefore be an excellent trait for SF Green Berets at all levels, and a qualifying prerequisite for SF leadership and instructors.

It is important to note that there is no time line to human ego development and there can be no one-size-fits-all approach to its progress. There could be an 80-year-old diplomat or a 22-year-old achiever, but the critical constraint is the amount of time required to develop into an expert. When other tasks distract from the specific objectives of training or fail to provide focus, the result is not only a delay in the Soldiers' 10 year journey to expertise, but also their human ego development, counteracting efforts at

Figure 03
Longer tenures for operators and leaders gives more time to develop subject matter expertise. Expert leaders who are allowed to remain in position longer will be more empathetic, more open to collaboration, and less focused on short term results. Their expertise will trickle down and propagate across the force as their expert subordinates ascend into leadership and instructor positions.

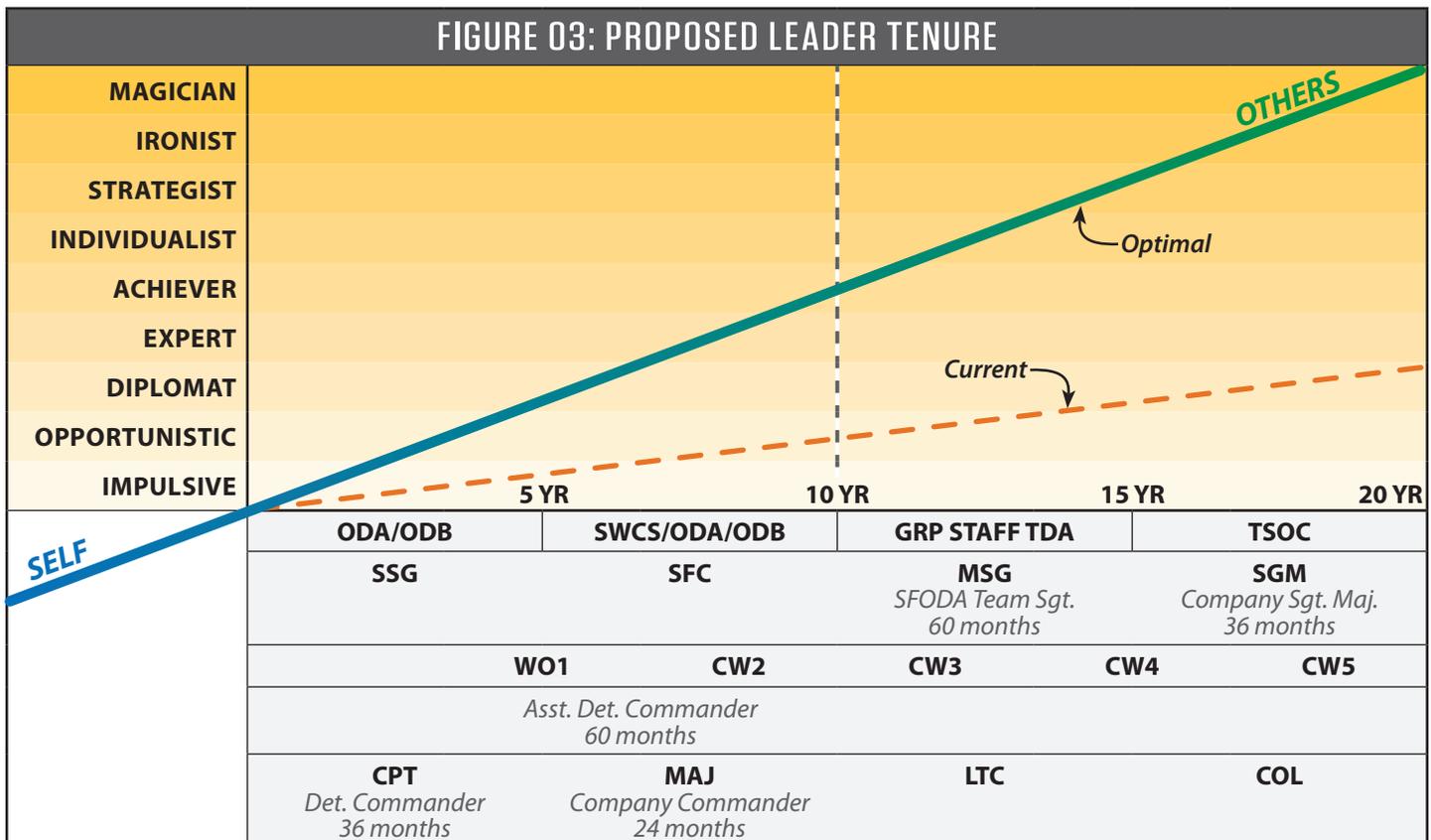


Figure 03

leader development, ethical problem solving, and the accomplishment of strategic objectives. Expertise, in contrast, facilitates the development of the human ego, catapulting Green Berets into a perspective that focuses on the big picture and accomplishment of organizational goals. To be successful in a denied environment, SF needs effective and efficient leaders that have progressed to at least the level of achiever.

LEADERSHIP & EXPERTISE: PAYING IT FORWARD

In much the same way that expert instructors build expertise in their pupils, leaders who have achieved expert status incorporate their expertise into their style of leadership, resulting in a diffusion of knowledge to their subordinates.⁴⁴ Therefore, as mature Green Berets graduate into leadership positions of increased responsibility, it is important that first and foremost, leaders *are* expert Green Berets and afterwards *become* expert leaders. Their expertise will allow their focus to shift from themselves to others and they will no longer swayed by their desire for the acceptance of “the group.”

Leaders who have not reached the level of achiever or higher in their own human ego development will fail to empathize with their Soldiers, be driven by selfish ambition, stand on shaky moral foundations and will be worried more about being liked and achieving short-term effects (that benefit them) than doing the right thing—the antithesis of what leadership should be. Leaders may feign empathy or concern for others to win the praise of their leaders and dazzle their subordinates, but if they have never gotten past the level of expert, it is all showmanship with the intent of taking care of self. On the other hand, leaders at the higher levels of human ego development will be more comfortable trusting and delegating to their subordinates, sacrificing for the greater good and exercising empathy.

U.S. Special Forces deployed to sensitive areas around the world as SFOD-As, split teams or individual operators will need the trust and unfettered empowerment of their commanders to successfully operate on intent. These elite Soldiers will be isolated by physical distance and degraded communications, far removed from command elements and supporting infrastructure in the deep fires area where fast moving, complex problems must be dealt with at their level.⁴⁵ It takes time to build high quality leaders built on the foundation of expertise, much longer than the breakneck pace of modern promotions, but the long-term benefits far outweigh the short term costs.

Ideally, leaders should be selected after they have reached the level of Achiever, rather than selecting them in order to spur development, and it should be a natural progression for them to advance to a leadership position. It should never seem forced or early. Commanders and Sergeants Major should manage talent based on comprehensive analysis of what is best for the unit and the security of the nation, not how

AS MATURE GREEN BERETS GRADUATE INTO LEADERSHIP POSITIONS OF INCREASED RESPONSIBILITY, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT FIRST AND FOREMOST, LEADERS ARE EXPERT GREEN BERETS AND AFTERWARDS BECOME EXPERT LEADERS.

fast a leader needs to be promoted to “stay competitive” with peers. This would also allow leaders to stay at levels where they are effective until they are ready to progress and it is in the unit’s best interests to do so. An interview with the group psychologist to ascertain development levels could be an effective tool for screening the efficacy of assigning Soldiers to positions of increased responsibility.

An important distinction should be made regarding levels of leadership. An expert at the team level is not necessarily an expert at any other level. An up or out promotion strategy replaces effective leaders, removing them from a position where they are impactful and possibly putting them into a position where they will not be. An expert team warrant might be ineffective as a company operations warrant. If he is forced off an ODA (where he is effective) and then forced to compete with his peers for a job he doesn’t want and doesn’t have the aptitude for, he will be as effective as possible, but he will never be efficient and will not develop expert subordinates.

Aside from allowing leaders to first become experts, perhaps the single most important thing that can be done to equip the Regiment with capable leaders for the resistance fight of tomorrow is extending tenures for effective Special Forces leaders. To be effective, Army leaders are charged with intimately knowing their subordinates two levels down, a feat rarely achieved in the revolving door leadership of today.⁴⁶ A typical company commander gets 12 months of command time; company Sergeant Major: 12-24 months; SFOD-A detachment commander: 18-24; and SFOD-A team sergeant: 24-36 months. Leaders in short-term billets will inevitably be focused on short-term results, and worse, do not have time to build relationships with their subordinates causing a bidirectional lack of trust. Without trust, subordinates will deceive, usurp and hide deficiencies from their superiors who will in turn demand redundant risk mitigation measures, implement rigid constraints, have little tolerance for mistakes and manipulate failures and shortfalls into overly optimistic reports of success — and the same phenomenon occurs at every successive layer of command. Like human ego development, some leaders might need more time to



Figure 04

prepare for the next level and some might need less, but all require enough time to learn their subordinates and their duties. Putting time lines on career progression inevitably pushes some leaders too fast, while holding others back. In short, leadership effectiveness is constrained by the amount of time leaders have in leadership position.

The solution is to freeze movement of effective leaders in their current positions. Leader tenures in SF should be extended to afford leaders the time to learn their jobs and their people, building trust and focusing on long term coaching and mentoring. Recommended minimum tenures would include: Company commander: 24 months; company Sergeant Major: 36 months; SFOD-A detachment commander: 36 months; SFOD-A assistant detachment commander: 60 months; and SFOD-A team sergeant: 60 months. Leaders who are effective can be moved to adjacent units, much like a top performing squad leader of the Infantry is moved to the worst squad, disseminating his experience and professionalism across the unit to improve collective lethality and readiness.

As a final note on leadership, investment in the development of expertise in pursuit of a strategic pivot to resistance warfare will require strong command emphasis. As an example, in 2014, in the midst of two wars and open hostilities on the African continent, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel stated that preventing sexual harassment and assault was the military's number one priority.⁴⁷ Training, facilities and resources have been shoveled into SHARP training ever since — as the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Africa remain as competing priorities. The command emphasis is what

made the leaps and bounds of the SHARP program possible in the midst of a three front war on terror. That same level of command emphasis will be needed to make the development of resistance expertise possible.

CONCLUSION

In the emerging global operating environment, SF teams will continue to be deployed early and often to uncertain and austere locations to conduct operations with geopolitical implications. SF Soldiers will need to be both masters of technology and able to operate effectively in its absence. The level of air support, logistics and freedom of maneuver which have become the status quo in Afghanistan and Iraq cannot be expected in horizon competition and conflict. In the deep fires area of tomorrow's engagement area, every aspect of U.S. operations will be contested.

To succeed in this denied environment, education must be balanced with high quality training focused on denied area operations and company and battalion level tactics and leadership. Short ODA stints and a lack of focus preclude the efficient development of expertise, which is a prerequisite for both instruction and leadership. Lack of expertise slows the human ego development of SF operators, limiting collaboration, perspective, and effectiveness. Furthermore, truncated tenures deny leaders at every level the opportunity to master their positional responsibilities and develop a professional relationship with every Soldier in their charge two levels down, virtually eliminating mentorship and encouraging a focus on short-term results.

Special Forces Soldiers need longer tenures and

Figure 03
Operators need time and deliberate development to mature through the levels of human ego development.

concentrated training repetitions to accrue experience and develop psychologically to the level (Achiever) which they can effectively lead and mentor at the unit or teach at SWCS. Units need to focus training on resistance through tough, realistic training on JCETs, Robin Sage, CTCs and on operational deployments with robust top cover from commanders at all levels who support and endorse a reprioritization of training and resources. Effective leaders should be rewarded for their acumen with longer and subsequent leadership duties, with enough time at each assignment to build mastery of their positional responsibilities and develop trust and relationships with their subordinates.

Every conflict is unique. No two insurgencies or partisan groups of yesterday, today, or tomorrow have been the same — and yet, they succeed and fail in spite of their similarities and differences. The complexities which exist now and those which are on the horizon will continue to require extensive use of Special Forces. When they are called upon, there will be no time to prepare them. The force needs to ready itself now by building mature, well developed SF leaders who are truly experts in every art and artifice of war. 

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

1SG Robert Bode serves at the Special Operations Center of Excellence NCO Academy as the Branch Chief for the Special Forces Senior Leader Course. He has over 20 years of both conventional and special operations experience including time as a Long Range Surveillance Detachment team leader, Special Forces Medical Sergeant, Company Medic, and Team Sergeant at 10th Special Forces Group, and working in the Special Operations Command Europe J3. He has participated in numerous working groups on unconventional warfare and resistance, including the USAJFKSWCS CG's Line of Effort 3 Resistance Career Curriculum.

CW3 Josh Wills served as the Director of the Special Forces Warrant Officer Advanced Course and returned to 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) in the summer of 2019 to be the 4th Battalion Operations Warrant Officer. He has 23 years of combined conventional and special operations experience.

CW3 Nicholas Geris is currently serving as the National Guard Liaison to the Warrant Officer Institute (A), USAJFKSCWS. CW3 Geris has more than 18 years of combined conventional and special operations experience. His regional expertise is Eastern Europe and he speaks Russian, German and Spanish. As a Special Forces Soldier, CW3 Geris has deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom-Central Africa and Operation Iraqi Freedom, as well as countless NATO partnered training exercises throughout Europe. As an instructor at the Special Forces Warrant Officer Advanced Studies Branch, CW3 Geris focuses on Unconventional Warfare and Resistance education.

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