

*Below is the full text of the command response to an anonymous letter whose author claims to be a Green Berets trainer. Maj. Gen. Kurt Sonntag, author of this response, is commanding general of the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School in Fort Bragg, North Carolina.*

To the Men and Women of the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School,

Many of you have seen the anonymous letter calling into question the integrity of our training standards and the quality of the Soldiers being produced. Let me be clear, I would be proud to serve with each and every one of our Special Forces Qualification Course graduates, and I stand behind the quality of every Soldier we are sending to the operational force.

The U.S. Army Green Berets have been at the tip of the spear in defense of our nation for more than 70 years. The U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, the proponent for Special Forces, is charged with professional training and development of the force throughout a Soldier's career.

Since 1952, Soldiers seeking to enter Special Forces have attended a qualification course to learn advanced warrior skills. In 1988, a Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) was introduced to the course, which was based on the Assessment and Selection process of the Office of Strategic Services. SFAS evolved into a proven, challenging process that allows the regiment to better predict a candidate's ability to succeed in training as well as operate successfully in their respective operational environment. The consistent achievements of our operational force across the globe is a testament to the quality of the effectiveness of the assessment, selection, and training model.

The SFAS process ensures candidates successfully demonstrate the qualities of the Army Special Operations Force Attributes under dynamic and stressful conditions. To join the Special Forces Regiment, each candidate must demonstrate they possess the required strength, cognitive flexibility, and willpower to thrive in challenging and uncertain Special Operations environments. Students are evaluated using a holistic and multidiscipline approach, supported by a range of military and scientific experts to include psychologists, physiological experts and experienced combat veterans who select candidates who are physically strong, mentally tough and possess the character necessary to serve in the regiment.

If SFAS is correct, and we believe it is, the SFQC is not a place where high attrition rates should occur. Instead, the mission of the SFQC cadre is to train to standard. Without a doubt, if you were to take five Green Berets who attended the course at different periods of time, none of them would have had to meet the same standard as those Soldiers who are now in the course. Since 9/11, the SFQC has had at least eight significant modifications, each resulting in new or modified Tasks, Conditions, & Standards throughout the respective programs of instruction. These modifications are made to keep training relevant, efficient and effective, with the needs of the operational force driving each one. Today, the SFQC consists of six distinct phases (Orientation, Small Unit Tactics/Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE),

Military Occupational Specialty, Unconventional Warfare, language and graduation; followed by Military Free Fall training), which takes a minimum of 62 weeks in length if a candidate is not recycled.

Let me address some of the concerns in the anonymous letter.

- No fundamental SF standard has been removed.
- No academic or character performance standards have been adjusted.
- Previously, the Special Forces Physical Fitness Assessment (instituted as a 'must-pass' standard in 2012), rope climb, and ruck march were evaluated in the first phase of SFQC. Cadre will continue to administer diagnostic evaluations of these events throughout the SFQC with the final evaluation occurring in the last phase of the course. This shift gives the Cadre more time to prepare the students for these events. Students must meet these standards prior joining the operational force.
- Training in the SFQC remains among the most difficult in the Department of Defense. In 2017, more than 2,000 Soldiers attempted SFAS and 541 graduated the SFQC.
- I value our Cadre's input and have not, and will not, issue a gag order. The CSM and I have visited each unit and conducted more than 10 town hall meetings with each subordinate unit within this command. We will continue to solicit feedback from each and every individual. My open door policy remains in effect.
- Language and cultural awareness training remain an essential part of the qualification course. All students must achieve a 1+/1+ rating in their assigned language before entering the operational force; which is above the operational force minimum standard of 1/1. Up until 2006, students earned their Green Beret after successful completion of Robin Sage.
- As an institution, SWCS has moved language instruction several times to optimize the flow of course instruction. I've recently adjusted the phasing of the SFQC, by moving graduation ahead of language training. By doing this, Soldiers who are already language qualified go directly to the Operational Groups after attending the Military Free Fall School; while those who are not qualified will attend language school and MFF before going to their Group assignment.

We work closely with 1SFC (A) leadership to ensure we are producing the Green Berets needed by the 1st SFC (A), and to the standards to which they need them trained. As we speak to Operational Groups, we consistently receive positive feedback.

- "They are well-trained, physically fit, and ready to join their teams from day one."
- "Highest quality graduates we've seen in years."

1st SFC (A) sets the standard and SWCS trains, coaches and mentors the students to achieve them. SWCS has always produced highly-qualified Soldiers who meet the expectations of the operational formations as they tend to the Nation's business. That will not stop. Every decision is made, not only by looking forward, but with the utmost respect for our Special Forces legacy, to ensure we maintain the integrity and standards of those who have come before us.

As the operational environment changes, we will continue to adjust instruction to fulfill our obligation to produce fully-qualified Army Special Operations Soldiers. Some of the comments in the email warrant further evaluation, and we are doing that through formal inquiries and a number of existing institutional forums.

Let me reiterate, CSM Arrowsmith and I seek healthy dialogue as a means of improvement. Every level of the command has been encouraged to challenge the current process, phasing and training methodology to ensure SWCS' training remains relevant to meet the needs of the 1st SFC (A). Training at SWCS will continue to evolve to meet the needs of the Army. We will remain relevant while upholding the highest academic, military and physical standards. SWCS strives for a professional, rewarding experience for its students, cadre and families.

v/r,

KLS

MG Kurt L. Sonntag

Commanding General