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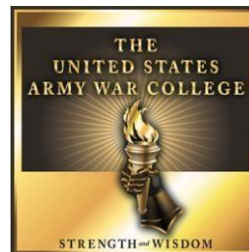
Searching from Within: The  
Challenge of Intraorganizational  
Recruitment  
in Specialized Units

by

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## Searching from Within: The Challenge of Intraorganizational Recruitment in Specialized Units

(9,374 words)

### Abstract

This paper examines the decade long decline of enlisted Soldiers willing to join Army Special Forces. As the nation's largest provider of Special Warfare experts, sustained shortages of Green Berets could profoundly impact our nation's ability to implement national security policy. This recent lack of volunteers is not unique—other specialized organizations also struggle to find enough recruits. Units must credibly convey the desirability of their professions to attract more volunteers and reverse the decline. This study investigates academic literature about the recruit labor market and volunteer intentions, analyzes survey data, and compares other specialized units to gain insights about how to increase the number of enlisted volunteers for Army Special Forces. Recommendations include expanding the labor market, recognizing recruit demographic changes, increasing positive attitudes about volunteering, applying the power of subjective norms, and improving a recruit's perceived control to volunteer for Army Special Forces. These insights have broad implications for other specialized units recruiting from their parent organization.

## Searching from Within: The Challenge of Intraorganizational Recruitment in Specialized Units

Effective recruitment produces a competitive advantage that many consider the most critical function for an organization's success and survival.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, hiring remains the top concern for business executives across the corporate world.<sup>2</sup>

Microsoft's Bill Gates and General Electric's Jack Welch spent fifty percent or more of their available time recruiting.<sup>3</sup>

One of the more difficult recruiting environments today is finding Americans to volunteer for the U.S. military. While 73% of the U.S. public has high confidence in the military as an institution, few are willing to join.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, more than two-thirds of young adults fail to meet the minimum standards to join the Army.<sup>5</sup> Last year, the Army had trouble achieving even modest growth due to recruiting difficulties.<sup>6</sup>

As the Army struggles to find enough civilian recruits, one of their most specialized units has suffered a drop in Soldier volunteers over the past decade (Figure 1). Special Forces, a branch of the U.S. Army since 1987, fills its ranks almost

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<sup>1</sup> Jean M. Phillips and Stanley M. Gully, "Multilevel and Strategic Recruiting: Where Have We Been, Where Can We Go from Here?" *Journal of Management* 41, no. 5 (2015): 1417, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206315582248>.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Cappelli, "Your Approach to Hiring is all Wrong." *Harvard Business Review* 97, no. 3 (May/June 2019): 50.

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey E. Christian, *The Headhunter's Edge* (New York: Random House, 2002): 13.

<sup>4</sup> "U.S. Confidence in Organized Religion Remains Low," 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/259964/confidence-organized-religion-remains-low.aspx>. In 2019, 73% of respondents reported having a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the U.S. military as an institution.

<sup>5</sup> "The Challenges of Recruiting for the U.S. Army," 2015, <https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2015/08/17/army-recruiting-jeffrey-snow>. Young adults are considered ages 17-24.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Cancian, "U.S Military Forces in FY 2020: The Struggle to Align Forces with Strategy," Analyses, Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 24, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-military-forces-fy-2020-struggle-align-forces-strategy>. The Army only grew by only 2,000 soldiers to achieve an active-duty strength of 480,000 in FY 2020 instead of the planned 492,000.

exclusively from volunteers already serving in the Army. This paper addresses the serious problem of declining volunteers for Army Special Forces to determine how to increase the number of enlisted recruits. The future of Army Special Forces may be at risk if the recruiting shortage is unresolved.



Figure 1. Active-duty enlisted Army Special Forces recruits by Fiscal Year.<sup>7</sup>

Colloquially referred to as Green Berets, Army Special Forces are the archetype for all U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) and remains the oldest unit in continued existence.<sup>8</sup> They comprise a specialized force of volunteer Soldiers selected and trained as experts in Special Warfare. While Green Berets make up only 1.5% of the total Army,

<sup>7</sup> Data provided by the Special Operations Recruiting Battalion in February 2020 covering the past decade; the dashed line represents the downward trendline of active-duty enlisted recruits.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Byman and Ian A. Merritt, "The New American Way of War: Special Operations Forces in the War on Terrorism," *The Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2018): 87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2018.1484226>. In this study, the term "Green Berets" is used interchangeably with Army Special Forces and refers to the green wool cap awarded to graduates of the U.S. Army Special Forces Qualification Course.

they provide over 60% of all “operators” for the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), the combatant command responsible for deploying all U.S. Special Operations units.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, a decline in Army Special Forces volunteers could diminish USSOCOM’s ability to implement national security policy in the future. The most recent Army Special Operations Command strategy notes personnel manning as a top challenge, underscoring the importance of recruiting.<sup>10</sup>

This volunteer shortage is not exclusive to Green Berets or the US; other specialized organizations are experiencing fewer interested volunteers. Expert units within the U.S. wildland firefighting community, federal law enforcement, and Marine Corps have noted a recent reduction of interested volunteers. The decline of volunteers has also reached Special Operations units in other western countries, which remain concerned about their overreliance on Special Operations, shrinking population, and ambivalent public unmotivated to join their military, all of which impact their Special Operations units.<sup>11</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to assess relevant academic literature, reexamine survey data on past perceptions of Green Berets, and compare similar organizations to develop recommendations to increase the number of enlisted volunteers for Army Special Forces. This study strictly explores the active-duty enlisted population. The

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<sup>9</sup> The term “operator” is limited to Army Special Forces/Green Berets, Navy SEALs, and Marine Raiders in this paper. There are roughly 8,200 active-duty enlisted operators in USSOCOM, consisting of approximately 5,000 Green Berets, 2,400 U.S. Navy SEALs, and 800 Marine Raiders. Operators comprise just 12% of the total size of USSOCOM (66,000 enlisted, officer, and Reserve troops).

<sup>10</sup> United States Army Special Operations Command, *Army Special Operations Forces Strategy*, (Fort Bragg, NC, October 2019). See (Objective 1.1) 21st Century Talent Management under Line of Effort 1: People.

<sup>11</sup> James Kiras, Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, and Nicolaj Juul Nielsen, "Introduction: Recruiting and Organizing to Meet Future SOF Challenges," *Special Operations Journal* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1-2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23296151.2019.1581423>.

author intentionally avoids assessing other recruit populations (officers, National Guard, and civilians) and does not evaluate current Green Beret recruiters or training. The research follows in six parts: background, literature review, survey analysis, similar organizations, recommendations, and conclusion.

## BACKGROUND

Special Warfare has a rich history in U.S. national defense, with some astonishing feats. In 1944, three hundred members of the Office of Strategic Services led a successful unconventional war using local guerrillas to fight Nazis in occupied Europe to pave the way for the Normandy invasion.<sup>12</sup> Their mission to capture Hitler with a small force of native German operators in the Austrian Alps could have single-handedly ended the war in Europe.<sup>13</sup> Results in the Pacific theater were even more profound. Inside Japanese-occupied Burma, Detachment 101 and their Kachin guerrillas killed over 10,000 Japanese Soldiers, captured or destroyed 3,700 tons of enemy supplies, and rescued 574 Allied personnel while only losing three U.S. fighters to enemy fire.<sup>14</sup> Nearby, U.S. advisors in the Sino-American Cooperation Organization and their Chinese guerrillas killed 27,000 Japanese Soldiers and wounded another 11,000 Japanese Soldiers without losing a single U.S. advisor to enemy fire.<sup>15</sup> Over a

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<sup>12</sup> For an overview of Office of Strategic Services (OSS) operations as Jedburgh teams in German-occupied Europe, see Samuel J. Lewis, *Jedburgh Team Operations in Support of the 12th Army Group, August 1944*, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1991), <https://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/cace/CSI/CSIPubs/lewis.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Aaron Bank, *From OSS to Green Berets: The Birth of Special Forces* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1986), 73-99. Bank describes the mission to capture Hitler, Operation IRON CROSS, and its eventual cancelation due to poor weather in the Alps and concerns from the State Department about the risky mission.

<sup>14</sup> William R. Peers and Dean Brelis, *Behind the Burma Road, the Story of America's Most Successful Guerrilla Force* (Boston, Little, Brown, 1963), 251-258.

<sup>15</sup> Dick Camp, Jr., "SACO-American and Chinese Guerrillas in World War II," *Leatherneck* 86, no. 7 (Jul 2003): 43, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/229982054?accountid=33980>.

half-century later, eleven Green Beret teams infiltrated Afghanistan, partnered with local Afghan fighters, and toppled the Al Qaida-Taliban regime within weeks.<sup>16</sup>

The remarkable results during WWII led to the establishment of Army Special Forces in 1952 to establish a standing force dedicated to conducting Unconventional Warfare. Green Berets have since incorporated several other activities, all grouped under two broad core competencies: Special Warfare and Surgical Strike.<sup>17</sup> Green Berets epitomize Special Warfare, the “mixture of lethal and nonlethal activities by a specially trained and educated force with a deep understanding of cultures and foreign language, proficiency in small-unit tactics and the ability to build and fight alongside indigenous combat formations in a permissive, uncertain, or hostile environment.”<sup>18</sup> The ethos of working with and through foreign partners, often for long durations, permeates the entire Green Beret culture.

Recruiting current Soldiers provides Army Special Forces with experienced volunteers already familiar with the Army, small unit tactics, and leadership skills. An interested Soldier must volunteer to attend Special Forces Assessment and Selection, a twenty-four-day course that historically graduates only one-third of its candidates. If

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<sup>16</sup> Hearing before the Terrorism, Unconventional Threats, and Capabilities Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, 110th Cong., 2nd sess., September 18, 2008, 11 (Statement of Dr. John Arquilla, Professor, Department of Defense Analysis, Naval Postgraduate School).

<sup>17</sup> Joint Publication 3-05 describes Unconventional Warfare on pages II-8 through II-10 and defines it as the “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area.” Also, see Chapter 2 in the Army Doctrine Publication 3-05: *Army Special Operations* (2019) for a better description of the different core activities for Army Special Operations.

<sup>18</sup> United States Army, *Army Doctrine Publication 3-05: Army Special Operations, Change 1* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, August 26, 2019): 1-3. Change 1 included a doctrinal adjustment within ADRP 3-05, specifically removing the alignment of Army Special Forces to Special Warfare activities and subsumed Green Berets into a broader SOF community that posits *any* SOF unit can conduct *any* Special Warfare or Surgical Strike activity. It is the author’s opinion that all SOF units are not homogenous and cannot be experts in both Special Warfare and Surgical Strike. This change is incongruent with the history, recruitment, selection, training, culture, and identity of the Green Berets.



successful, the Soldier moves to Fort Bragg, NC, to complete the rest of Army Special Forces training, sometimes lasting over two years.

Soldiers in any Army unit can volunteer for Special Forces Assessment and Selection if they meet age and rank restrictions and are parachute qualified or willing to attend parachute training. Volunteers must also pass a medical exam to ensure they are healthy enough to attend the rigorous training. An interested Soldier applies through a recruiter from the Special Operations Recruiting Battalion, a global recruiting unit that exclusively recruits current active-duty Soldiers for service in all Army Special Operations units, including Green Berets. In 2019, the average enlisted recruit was twenty-six years old, had five years of service in the Army, recorded a 116 on the General Technical (GT) composite score (minimum of 105), and earned an Army fitness score of 275 (out of a maximum of 300).<sup>19</sup> This recruit profile matches or surpasses previous trends indicating that while recruit attributes have remained stable, interest in Army Special Forces continues to wane.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Considerable research is available on recruiting, hiring, and managing human resources, but most research focuses on post-hire outcomes, like employee performance, satisfaction, and turnover, instead of pre-hire criteria like organizational

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<sup>19</sup> The General Technical (GT) score is one of ten sub-scores provide when an individual completes the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). The GT score measures word knowledge, paragraph comprehension, and arithmetic reasoning. For the use of GT scores to predict success at Special Forces Assessment and Selection, see Michelle M. Zazanis, U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral, and Sciences Social, *Prescreening Methods for Special Forces Assessment and Selection* (Alexandria, Virginia: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, May 1999): 5, <https://permanent.access.gpo.gov/gpo105888/a365003.pdf>.

attraction.<sup>20</sup> Scant literature exists studying the intraorganizational recruitment of specialized organizations, such as Army Special Forces. Intraorganizational recruitment research mostly describes employers identifying current employees for promotions, not finding volunteers for a different subunit or specialty organization. The literature review begins with a brief evaluation of previous studies on Army Special Forces recruitment and then further examines two key topics: the labor market and recruit intentions.

### Previous Studies:

A few scientific reports on Army Special Forces recruitment, published by the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, remain relevant today.<sup>21</sup> Limited numbers of peer-reviewed journal articles offer insight into the traits of Soldiers successful in Special Forces training. A small number of student theses are available for study, written by Soldiers with previous Army Special Forces recruiting experience. All these studies examine crucial topics about Green Beret recruitment: minimum prerequisites, targeted recruitment, minority underrepresentation, and success predictors. An essential goal of this paper is to assemble these forgotten studies for future research about Army Special Forces recruitment.

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<sup>20</sup> James A. Breugh, "Employee Recruitment," *Annual Review of Psychology* 64, no. 1 (2013): 391, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-113011-143757>.

<sup>21</sup> Ann M. Herd and Martha L. Teplitzky, "Special Forces Recruiting: An Overview of Current Procedures and Issues", U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (1992), <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a257031.pdf>. This 28-year-old report describes many of the current recruiting challenges for Army Special Forces, including the poor recruit awareness of Green Berets.

## Labor Market

Each year the Army provides less than 0.5% of its enlisted force as Green Beret recruits. The following section reviews the size and demographics of potential recruits.

### Size

The Army provides the entire labor market for enlisted Green Beret recruits, comprised mostly of Soldiers in the rank of Private First Class through Staff Sergeant. The recent decline of volunteers closely tracks the reduction in the size of the enlisted Army, falling nearly 90,000 Soldiers from 2011 to 2017 (Figure 2). Applying the prerequisites to volunteer for Army Special Forces, such as the minimum GT score allowed, shrinks the recruit population by nearly three quarters.

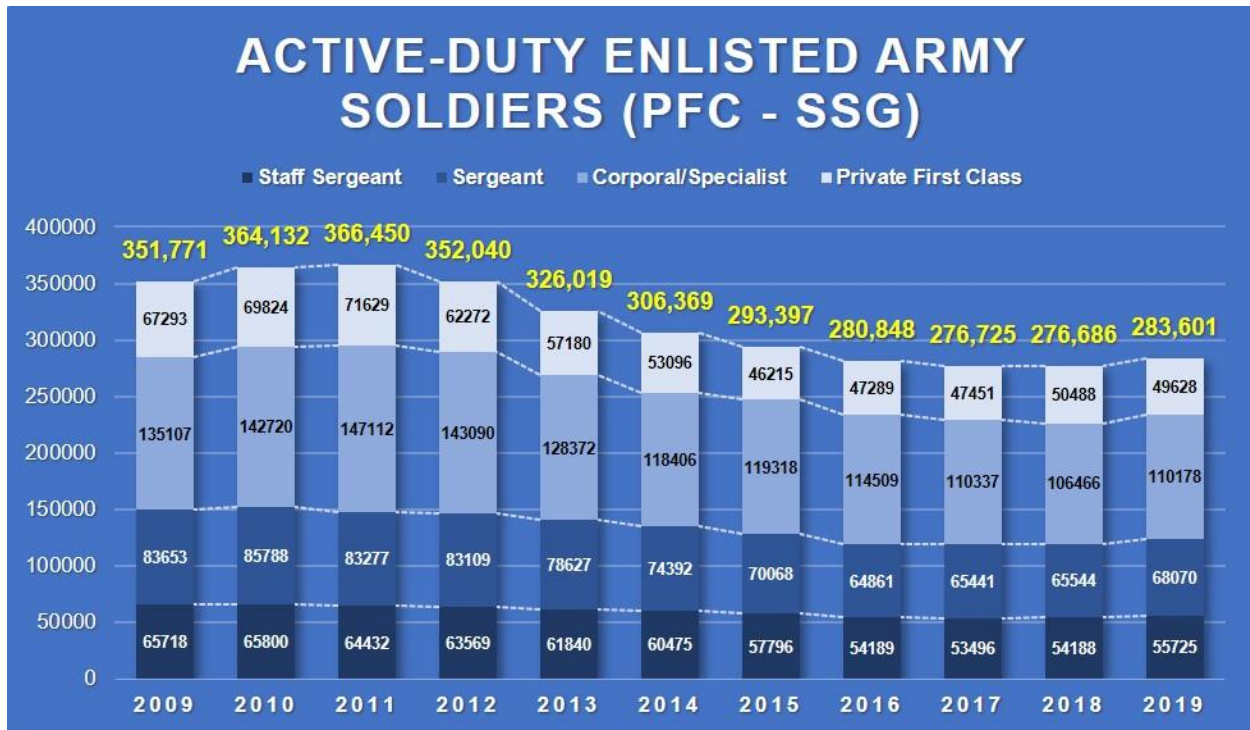


Figure 2. Active-Duty enlisted labor market for Army Special Forces.<sup>22</sup>

### Demographics

Paralleling a shrinking Green Beret recruiting pool is the shifting recruit demographics. There are four generations of Americans currently serving in the active-duty Army, each with distinct views shaped by different generational experiences. The hierarchical and promotion structure of the Army naturally separates these generations by its rank structure. Disparities across generations may lead to conflicts or miscommunications based on different values: the smallest, oldest, most senior generation (Baby Boomer) places importance on organizational loyalty whereas the youngest and most junior (Generation Z) values mobile technology to gain strategic

<sup>22</sup> Data provided by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) in January 2020. Chart excluded soldiers in the rank of PV1, PV2, MSG, and SGM because they cannot join Army Special Forces. The chart excludes SFC because of too few SFC volunteers (less than 3% of all Special Forces recruits).

context and, inherently, to build digital networks.<sup>23</sup> Figure 3 visually depicts the different generations in the active-duty enlisted Army by rank and age.

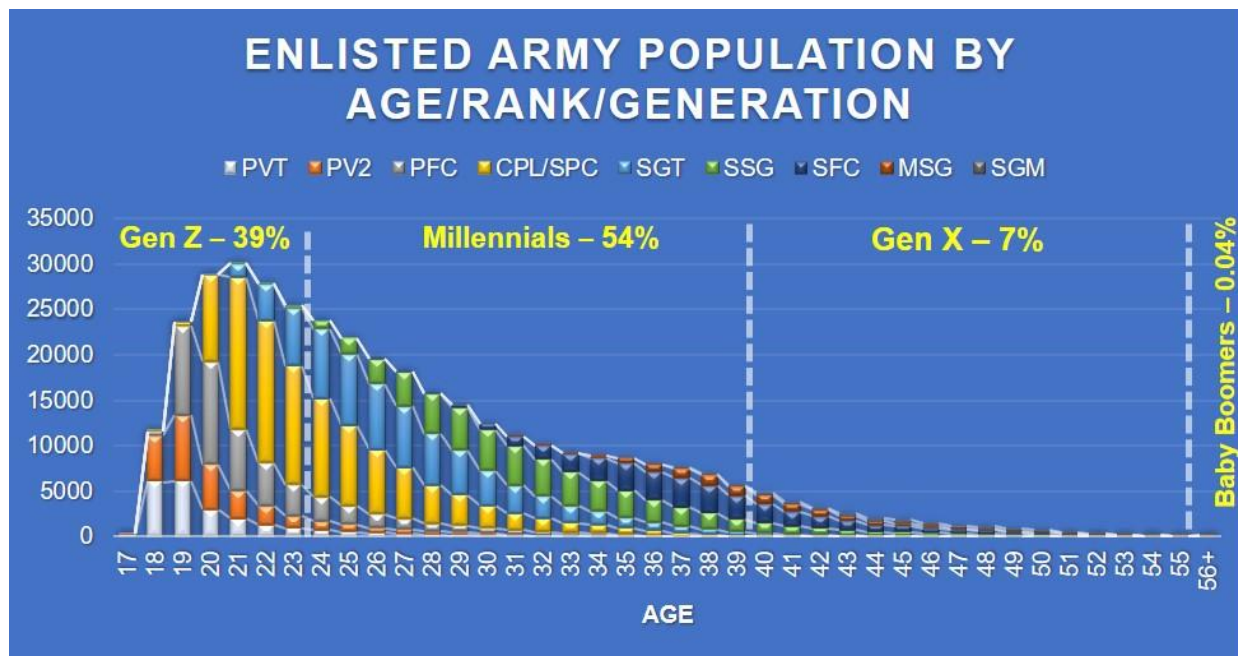


Figure 3. Age/Rank/Generation of the active-duty enlisted Army.<sup>24</sup>

Green Berets are almost exclusively Millennials (82%) and Generation X (17%).<sup>25</sup>

This difference is most significant for Generation Z, which will be the primary source of Green Beret recruits. The number of enlisted Generation Z Green Berets will climb sharply since nearly 40% of the enlisted Army are members of Generation Z.

<sup>23</sup> Scotty Autin, "From the Lost Generation to the iGeneration: An Overview of the Army Officer's Generational Divides," From the Green Notebook, January 7, 2020, <https://fromthegreennotebook.com/2020/01/07/from-the-lost-generation-to-the-igeneration-an-overview-of-the-army-officers-generational-divides/>.

<sup>24</sup> "Generations and Age," 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/generations-and-age/>. Data provided by DMDC in February 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Age/Rank/Generation of the active-duty enlisted Army as of February 2020 (no Special Forces soldiers included). Generation Z = ages 17-23, Millennials = ages 24-39, Generation X = ages 40-55, and Boomer = Ages 56 and older. Data provided by DMDC in February 2020.

Understanding Generation Z may offer positive opportunities for Army Special Forces recruiting. Figure 4 notes the absence of Generation Z and Baby Boomers and the dominance of Millennials now within the enlisted Army Special Forces population.

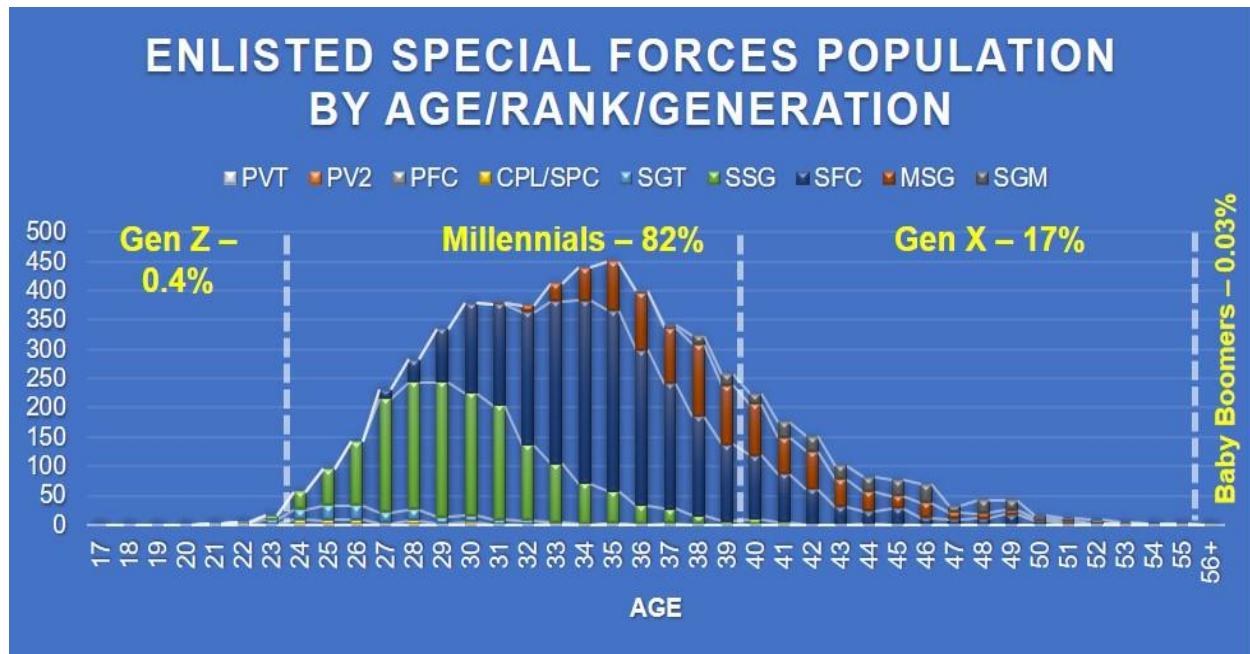


Figure 4. Age/Rank/Generation of active-duty enlisted Army Special Forces.<sup>26</sup>

The Army has also become more diverse due to a racial and ethnic increase to minorities that reflect their broader growth within the overall U.S. population.<sup>27</sup> Minority representation within the enlisted Army grew by almost 10% over the past decade.<sup>28</sup> Female representation within the Army's enlisted population has seen modest growth, and female Soldiers can now join combat arms career fields, including Army Special

<sup>26</sup> Age/Rank/Generation of active-duty enlisted Army Special Forces as of February 2020 (includes only Special Forces enlisted career fields, not 18X). Data provided by DMDC in February 2020.

<sup>27</sup> "6 facts about the U.S. Military and its Changing Demographics," Pew Research Center, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/>.

<sup>28</sup> "Demographics," United States Army, January 16, 2020, <https://www.army.mil/article/219140/demographics>. Minority representation in the Army enlisted population grew from 39% in 2009 to 48% in 2019.

Forces.<sup>29</sup> The diversity increase over the past decade has produced a more culturally diverse recruit population that may become vital in Special Warfare missions of the future.

### Intentions

The intention to volunteer for Army Special Forces requires three factors: the attitude towards volunteering (positive or negative), the subjective norms towards volunteering (social pressure to join or not), and the perceived control of volunteering (perceived ease or difficulty).<sup>30</sup> Each of these three factors can vary for a recruit's situation and actions. In general, the more favorable the attitude about joining Army Special Forces, the more supportive the subjective norms of becoming a Green Beret, and the higher the perceived control for volunteering, the stronger a recruit's intention to join Army Special Forces.<sup>31</sup>

### Attitude

Attitudes about volunteering to join the Green Berets consist of several criteria.

Survey data discussed in the next chapter highlights the motivations (positive factors) and barriers (negative factors) towards joining Army Special Forces as well as

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<sup>29</sup> Data provided by DMDC. Female enlisted soldier representation grew from roughly 12.9% in 2009 to approximately 14.7% in 2019 (+1.8%).

<sup>30</sup> Icek Ajzen, "The Theory of Planned Behavior," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 50, no. 2 (1991): 188-189, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T). The theory of planned behavior was used based on empirical evidence in predicting a wide range of behaviors. For an analysis of the effectiveness of the theory of planned behavior, see Christopher J. Armitage and Mark Conner, "Efficacy of the theory of planned behavior: A meta-analytic review," *The British Journal of Social Psychology* 40 (2001): 489. They analyzed 185 studies and found that the theory of planned behavior could explain roughly 20% of actual behaviors which is considered a medium-to-large effect.

<sup>31</sup> Ajzen, "The Theory of Planned Behavior," 187.



awareness about a potential career as a Green Beret. Attitudes about joining Army Special Forces develop from the salient beliefs a recruit has about becoming a Green Beret and result in a positive attitude if a recruit believes volunteering has desirable results.<sup>32</sup>

One method to enhance recruit attitudes is the inclusion of a realistic job preview. In contrast to traditional advertisements that portray only positive information about a job, realistic job previews intentionally present both positive and negative information. The dual presentation helps a potential candidate apply if a good fit for the organization or opt-out if not.<sup>33</sup> Realistic job previews can produce lower organizational attraction scores due to the inclusion of negative information. However, they also have higher credibility with potential recruits, display better perceived organizational honesty, can improve retention, and encourage higher job satisfaction.<sup>34</sup>

Recruit attitudes about volunteering are also vulnerable to publicity, defined as “information about an organization communicated through editorial media that is not paid for by the organization.”<sup>35</sup> As an external source of general information, publicity is often considered more credible than advertising because of its independence and ability to include negative information. Although not under direct control, organizations can influence publicity using press releases, and other public relations means. Because of

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<sup>32</sup> Ajzen, 191.

<sup>33</sup> William L. Gardner et al., "Attraction to Organizational Culture Profiles: Effects of Realistic Recruitment and Vertical and Horizontal Individualism—Collectivism," *Management Communication Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2009): 438, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318908327006>.

<sup>34</sup> James A. Breugh, "Employee Recruitment," *Annual Review of Psychology* 64, no. 1 (2013): 403-405. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-113011-143757>.

<sup>35</sup> Christopher J. Collins and Cynthia Kay Stevens, "The Relationship Between Early Recruitment-Related Activities and the Application Decisions of New Labor-Market Entrants: A Brand Equity Approach to Recruitment," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 87, no. 6 (2002): 1123, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.6.1121>.



its generalized information, publicity probably has more influence on overall attitudes than perceptions about specific jobs.<sup>36</sup> The entertainment industry is not an editorial entity, but it delivers content, both accurate and inaccurate, that portrays Green Berets to the public. That controlled information creates another independent influence on publicity, albeit strictly for entertainment purposes.

Many recruits remain confused about the Army Special Forces brand: survey results in the next chapter bear this out. The name Special Forces has become synonymous with other Special Operations units, often prevalent in books, movies, and video games. In a prior analysis by the author, the term 'Special Forces' was measured in different news articles across several U.S. newspapers and found to be misused in nearly half of all articles, almost exclusively as a generic replacement term for any U.S. Special Operations unit.<sup>37</sup> This phenomenon, called genericide, occurs when overly successful brands become a generic name for any similar product, like Elevator, Thermos, or Frisbee.<sup>38</sup>

The recent establishment of five Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFAB) with some resemblances to Green Berets' advisory missions confuses Special Forces recruits.<sup>39</sup> These new brigades recruit Soldiers to volunteer for 270 advisory teams, competing with the same labor market as Army Special Forces. SFAB also offers incentives to assist recruitment, including bonuses, fast-tracked promotions, and extra

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<sup>36</sup> Collins and Stevens, "The Relationship Between Early Recruitment-Related Activities and the Application Decisions of New Labor-Market Entrants: A Brand Equity Approach to Recruitment," 1123.

<sup>37</sup> Mourouzis, Michael. "The Genericide of 'Special Forces'", 4 November 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew Dick, "Why you must never Sellotape® a Xerox® into your Filofax," *Journal of Brand Management* 11, no. 6 (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2540195>.

<sup>39</sup> "Replaced? Security Force Assistance Brigades versus Special Forces," February 23, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/02/replaced-security-force-assistance-brigades-vs-special-forces/>.

monthly pay.<sup>40</sup> Even the Chief of Staff of the Army, a former Green Beret himself, had to publicly explain the differences between SFAB and Special Forces, indicating understandable confusion within the Army about mission overlap.<sup>41</sup> The exclusivity of Green Berets is vulnerable to misinterpretation.

### Subjective Norms

Subjective norm is an individual's perception that an important person or group of people (spouse, mentor, family) approves and supports a particular behavior and results in perceived social pressure to behave in a specific manner.<sup>42</sup> Research on job choice has shown that subjective norms exhibit a strong influence on the intentions of an individual with a spouse or significant other.<sup>43</sup> Survey results in the following section of this paper show that spouses and mentors were the most crucial social influence on a recruit's decision to volunteer. Informal and independent word-of-mouth interactions and referrals from Green Berets represent two unique ways to use the power of subjective norm.

Word-of-Mouth refers to "information about an employer that is independent of its recruitment efforts" and is provided by those with no self-interest in promoting the organization.<sup>44</sup> Anyone independent of the organization can offer both positive and

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<sup>40</sup> The SFAB offered a bonus of \$5,000 after 12 months of service, a special promotion category to E-5 upon completion of SFAB training, and Assignment Incentive Pay of \$75 per month.

<sup>41</sup> Meghann Myers, "Army Chief: SFABs will do a completely different job than Special Forces," October 31, 2017, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/10/31/army-chief-sfabs-will-do-a-completely-different-job-than-special-forces/>.

<sup>42</sup> Marija Ham, Marina Jeger, and Anita Frajman Ivković, "The Role of Subjective Norms in forming the Intention to Purchase Green Food," *Economic Research* 28, no. 1 (2015): 740, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1331677X.2015.1083875>.

<sup>43</sup> John Arnold et al., "How well can the theory of planned behavior account for occupational intentions?," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 69, no. 3 (2006): 387, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2006.07.006>.

<sup>44</sup> Breugh, "Employee Recruitment," 404.

negative word-of-mouth information.<sup>45</sup> It has a more significant effect on organizational attractiveness, primarily because it appears more credible, especially if it comes from a strong social connection to the recipient.<sup>46</sup> Thus, information from mentors, friends, and respected peers can have a powerful impact on a recruit's attitude about joining the Green Berets.

Using current employees to identify personnel best suited for their organization is a common and well-researched method to find high-quality recruits.<sup>47</sup> Several studies have shown candidates recruited by current employees outperform recruits from other recruitment methods.<sup>48</sup> Referrals are more likely to complete a training program, and their first job performance surpasses non-referred recruits, possibly from coaching and social pressure from the employees who refer them. When a Green Beret recommends a Soldier, he confers his reputation and influence upon the recruit and increases the social demand for the recruit to volunteer and succeed.<sup>49</sup> During WWII, referrals were one of the primary recruitment methods used by the Office of Strategic Services but were only useful if sponsors were concerned about the welfare of the organization and impartial about the outcome.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Greet Van Hove and Filip Lievens, "Tapping the grapevine: A closer look at word-of-mouth as a recruitment source," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 94, no. 2 (2009): 342, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=pdh&AN=2009-02898-004&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>46</sup> Breugh, 404.

<sup>47</sup> Breugh, 398.

<sup>48</sup> Breugh, 399.

<sup>49</sup> Valery Yakubovich and Daniela Lup, "Stages of the Recruitment Process and the Referrer's Performance Effect," *Organization Science* 17, no. 6 (2006): 710, <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/213826727?accountid=10598>.

<sup>50</sup> OSS Assessment Staff, *Assessment of Men: Selection of Personnel for the Office of Strategic Services* (New York: Rinehart, 1948), 60.

## Perceived Behavioral Control

The perceived ease or difficulty of joining Army Special Forces has a considerable effect on a recruit's intentions. An Army Soldier may revere Green Berets and have friends that join but may believe that his chances of passing the training are so small (low perceived behavioral control) that he never even applies. A recruit's confidence in his ability to complete the training influences preparation for Special Forces Assessment and Selection.<sup>51</sup> Fitness training is one of the most critical aspects of perceived control for a recruit since higher physical fitness is one of the most significant predictors of success.<sup>52</sup> Several preparation guides have been developed for Green Beret recruits to steer their training better.<sup>53</sup> Even if physically prepared, intervening events like deployments or injuries can quickly alter a recruit's perceived control of joining Army Special Forces.

Unit leaders also influence the perceived control of a potential recruit to volunteer for Army Special Forces. Losing units frequently interpret the recruitment of their Soldiers as "personnel poaching." Evidence suggests that some units informally dissuade Soldiers from joining Army Special Forces. Many former and current Green Berets have stories about their prior units penalizing them for volunteering for Army Special Forces. To prevent such overt retaliation, the Army publishes specific guidance

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<sup>51</sup> Ajzen, 184. For a specific assessment of the importance of individual self-efficacy on success in Special Forces Assessment and Selection, see Kerry A. Gruber, Robert N. Kilcullen, and Seppo E. Iso-Ahola, "Effects of Psychosocial Resources on Elite Soldiers' Completion of a Demanding Military Selection Program," *Military Psychology* 21, no. 4 (2009): 439, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08995600903206354>.

<sup>52</sup> Emily K. Farina et al., "Physical performance, demographic, psychological, and physiological predictors of success in the U.S. Army Special Forces Assessment and Selection course," *Physiology & Behavior* 210 (2019): 7, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0031938419303063>.

<sup>53</sup> Herd and Teplitzky, "Special Forces Recruiting: An Overview of Current Procedures and Issues," 25. The most current Special Forces preparation guide published in March 2020 is found at <https://goarmysof.com/documents/sf/SFAS-PT-handbook.pdf>.

strictly prohibiting interference with Soldiers joining Army Special Forces.<sup>54</sup> Very likely, some adverse command reactions induce a positive effect, solidifying a Soldier's decision to leave and increasing motivation to become a Green Beret.

### Literature Review Summary

While the broad academic study of intraorganizational recruitment of specialized units is limited, some Army Special Forces recruitment research remains salient: debating prerequisites, identifying successful recruit qualities, and reversing the lack of minority representation. Examination of the recruit labor market closely follows the recent decline in the overall size of the Army and drops further when minimum qualifications are applied. The growing number of Generation Z volunteers prefer mobile technology and are more diverse than current Green Berets, mostly the Millennials. Better publicity, less confusion about Army Special Forces, and more thorough career information increases positive attitudes about joining. A recruit's social influencers, consumption of word-of-mouth information, and referrals by current Green Berets show the power of subjective norm. Finally, efforts that help a recruit train can improve the perceived control over joining; likewise, interference from an unsupportive unit can reduce this perceived control.

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<sup>54</sup> See Military Personnel (MILPER) Message 19-108, issued 2 April 2019, and more recently MILPER Message 20-076, issued on 10 March 2020, prescribing the only exceptions allowing a unit or commander to defer or otherwise prevent a soldier from attending SFAS.

## SURVEY ANALYSIS

A better understanding of recruit perceptions about Green Berets was necessary to identify the most critical factors for recruits to volunteer for Army Special Forces. Prior survey information was analyzed to characterize two new populations: Soldiers that attended Special Forces Assessment and Selection and Soldiers that graduated. This new grouping helped underscore differences within the entire survey.

In April 2017, the U.S. Army Recruiting Command and the Special Operations Recruiting Battalion conducted an electronic survey of active-duty enlisted Soldiers to identify their perceptions of Army Special Operations, including Green Berets.<sup>55</sup> In February 2020, the author's analysis created three groups. Respondents represented Soldiers that took the survey but had yet to attend Special Forces Assessment and Selection (n=15,637). Survey respondents who attended Special Forces Assessment and Selection between April 2017 and February 2020 were labeled Recruits (n=275). Graduates were survey respondents that graduated Special Forces Assessment and Selection between April 2017 and February 2020 (n=60). While Recruits and Graduates comprise a small sample size, 2%, and 0.4% respectively, the analysis represents the only known longitudinal study of the self-reported perceptions of Soldiers about Army Special Forces and subsequent job choice behavior thirty-four months later.

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<sup>55</sup> U.S. Army Special Operations Recruiting Battalion, "Army Special Operations Forces Survey Report," (Fort Bragg, NC: United States Army Recruiting Command, 2017). This voluntary and anonymous electronic survey was provided to 105,234 active-duty soldiers via their Army email address and resulted in 15,972 soldiers participating in the survey (15.1% response rate). The survey was open from 4-26 April 2017 and included three email reminders. The survey respondents matched the survey population closely.

Awareness:

Graduates and Recruits reported much higher rates of knowing a current Green Beret, likely influencing their better awareness across all topics (Figure 5). They also indicated more knowledge about Green Berets than Respondents, with some considerable differences. Low awareness of the work environment for Army Special Forces was reported in over half of all Respondents, doubling, and tripling self-reporting by Recruits and Graduates, respectively. All groups indicated they were most aware of Green Beret missions and deployments, likely based in part on news reports, advertisements, entertainment media, or personal observations of Green Berets while serving in the Army (Figure 6 – next page).

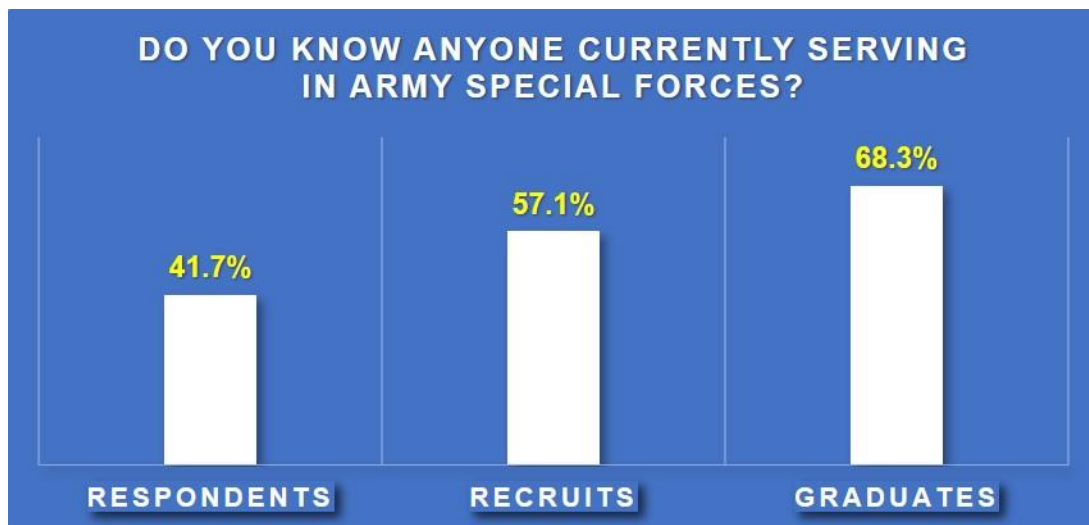


Figure 5. Proportion of Soldiers knew a serving Green Beret.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Comparison of answers for Respondents, Recruits, and Graduates indicating how many knew a serving Green Beret. Data provided by USAREC and SORB in February 2020.

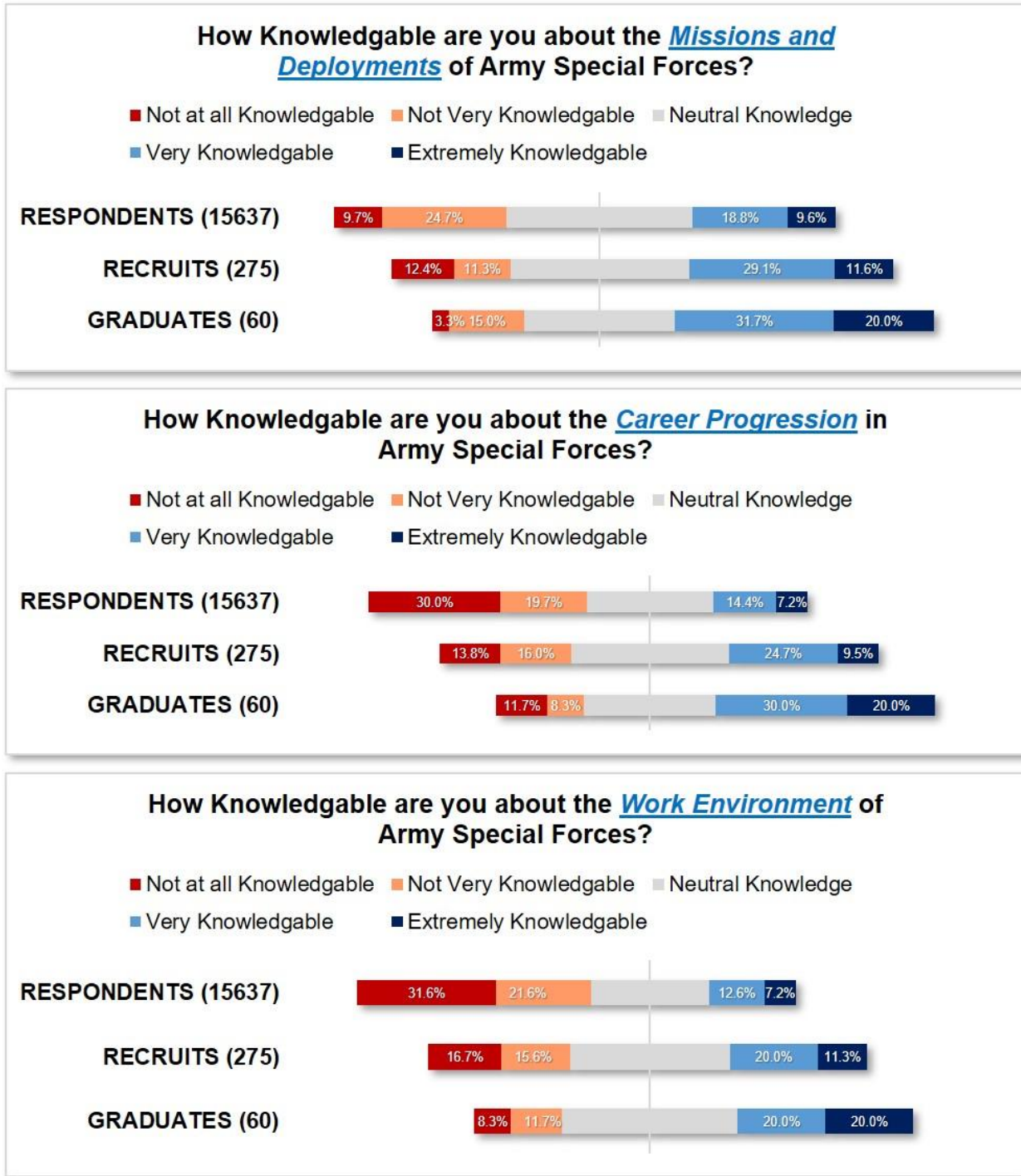


Figure 6. Soldier awareness of Army Special Forces.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Measurement of how knowledgeable each survey group (Respondents, Recruits, and Graduates) was concerning Army Special Forces Work Environment (top chart), Missions and Deployments (middle chart), and Career Progression (bottom chart). Percentages were used because of the differences among sample sizes (*n* value in parentheses on left). Data provided by USAREC and SORB in February 2020.



### Future Career Plans:

This survey provided a unique opportunity to measure future goals and job choice. 54% of Respondents stated they were actively looking for or considering a different Army job within the next year; 80% of Graduates and 83% of Recruits said those same intentions. Of significance, 87% of Recruits and 88% of Graduates reported three years ago that they “definitely will” or “probably will” pursue a career in Special Operations in the next 3-5 years—a significant measure of job choice behavior (actually attending Special Forces Assessment and Selection) (Figure 7). Finally, 82% of Recruits and 78% of Graduates self-reported three years ago that “becoming a Special Operations Soldier” was one of their top two choices (out of seven) for possible future Army career options. In stark contrast, only 26% of Respondents indicating that becoming a Special Operations Soldier was a leading choice.

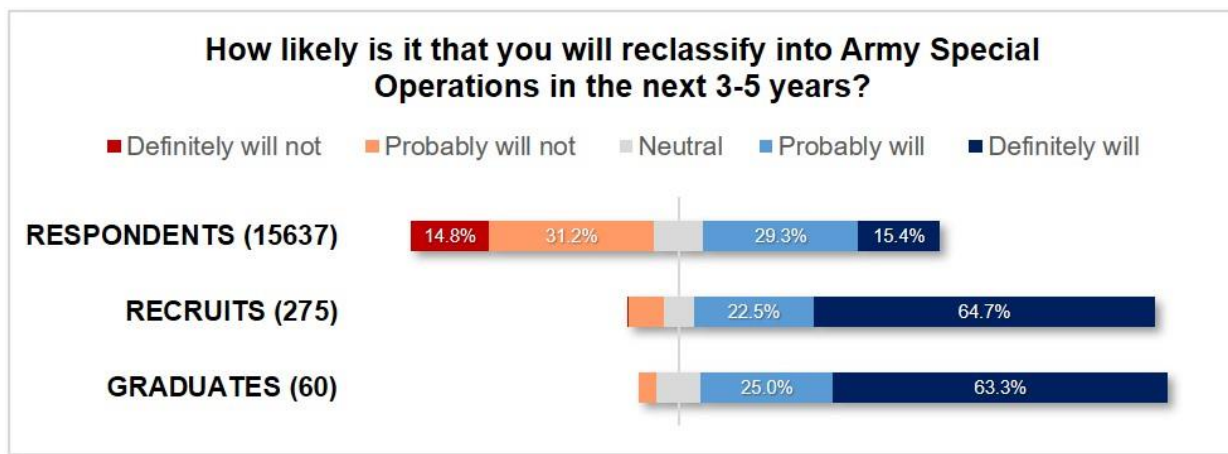


Figure 7. Likelihood of Soldiers to join Army Special Operations in next 3-5 years.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Likelihood of Respondents, Recruits, and Graduates to join Army Special Operations in next 3-5 years. Data provided by USAREC and SORB in February 2020.

### Motivations:

Two motivations ranked in the top three for every group: (#1) “Serving with others who want to be there and want to perform” and (#2) “Conducting unique and relevant real-world missions.” Fewer Respondents (46%) rated, “Only small percentage get selected” as “very important” when compared to Recruits (64%) or Graduates (62%). Other motivations considered significant included “Opportunity to attend advanced skill training” for Respondents, “Be a part of something bigger than myself” for Recruits, and “Having the latitude and autonomy to make important decisions under broad guidance” for Graduates. To underscore its importance for every group, the “Serving with others who want to be there and want to perform” category recorded the highest number of essential rankings for every group, with 100% of Graduates ranking it as “very important.”

### Barriers:

Across all categories and by considerable margins, “hardship on the family and home life” and “loss of normal family life” ranked as the most critical two barriers to joining Special Forces, including Graduates. This ranking accounted for all three groups’ high rates of marriage, with Graduates with the highest number of married (67%). Of note, the “high physical and time demands” noted in the original survey were not barriers for Recruits. Roughly 11% of Recruits reported a lack of support by their chain of command as a primary concern. About one in five Respondents indicated that the difficulty of training and a small percentage of graduates was a significant barrier to volunteering. In contrast, Recruits were only half as concerned, and Graduates were five times less worried about the difficulty of training than Respondents.

### Influencers:

For the importance of key influencers, all groups reported their spouse/significant other was the most crucial individual consulted about future career decisions. However, there was a substantial increase in Recruits and Graduates on how supportive a current/former SOF member was to their future career plans. Both groups relied more on a current/former SOF member than Respondents did—by almost double—and Recruits shockingly recorded more significant support from a current/former SOF member than their spouse/significant other (Figure 8).

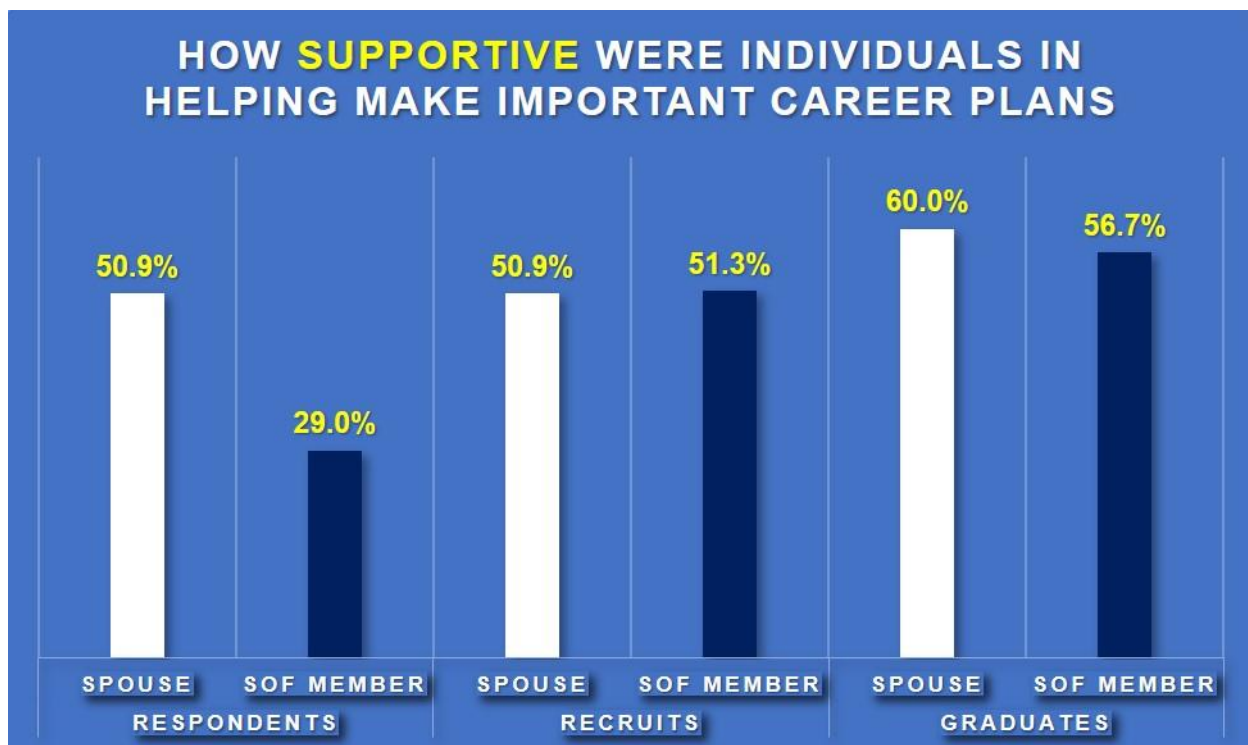


Figure 8. Comparison of the two key influencers on career plans.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Chart comparison of Spouses/Significant Other (white bar) versus Current/Former SOF member (dark blue bar) in how supportive they were to a recruit make important career plans. Data provided by USAREC and SORB in February 2020.

### Survey Analysis Summary:

The reevaluation of this survey reinforced some expectations and identified a surprising trend. Awareness matters. The more aware a recruit about the work environment, missions, and careers of Army Special Forces, the more likely he was to volunteer. Most Respondents were considering a new Army job. Those who ranked becoming a Special Operations Soldier in the next 3-5 years as a top goal were significantly more likely to attend Special Forces Assessment and Selection, even three years later. Every survey group reported, "Serving with others who want to be there and want to perform" as a top motivation. "Hardship on the family and home life" and "loss of normal family life" also ranked as the most critical barriers for all. All groups reported that a spouse or significant other was a vital influencer. However, Recruits and Graduates indicated that a current or former Special Operations member was remarkably influential, in some cases exceeding the support of a spouse. Recruits and Graduates also reported much higher rates of knowing a current Green Beret indicating mentorship by a Green Beret may be a key motivation for many.

### SIMILAR ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations with some similarities to Army Special Forces were analyzed to identify factors that led to or help prevent personnel shortages in their units. These qualitative findings helped identify a few trends to help increase the number of Green Beret recruits.

## Smokejumpers:

Smokejumpers comprise an elite group of wildland firefighters that parachute into isolated terrain anywhere in the U.S. to fight wildfires.<sup>60</sup> Of the approximately 1.1 million firefighters in the U.S., roughly 440 are Smokejumpers (0.04%).<sup>61</sup> Smokejumpers provide highly trained firefighters that can quickly respond to new wildfires, support extended attacks against wildfires that cannot be easily contained, or provide protection at remote sites at risk.<sup>62</sup> They use parachuting as a rapid means to reach fires and can airdrop supplies to remain self-sufficient for up to two days.<sup>63</sup> Smokejumpers must be experienced wildland firefighters, physically fit, emotionally stable, and mentally alert due to their dangerous and challenging job.<sup>64</sup> Approximately 300 Smokejumpers serve at seven different bases operated by the U.S. Forest Service (Department of Agriculture), while nearly 140 Smokejumpers work from two Bureau of Land Management (Department of the Interior) bases.<sup>65</sup>

Only ten Smokejumpers recruits out of one hundred that apply each year gain admittance.<sup>66</sup> Most Smokejumper recruits are older (the mid-30s) and have prior

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<sup>60</sup> William Knarr et al., *Special Operations Forces Mixed-Gender Elite Teams (SOFMET)*, (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: Joint Special Operations University Center for Special Operations Studies & Research, 2014): 86.

<sup>61</sup> Ben Evarts and Gary P. Stein, U.S. Fire Department Profile, National Fire Protection Association (Quincy, MA, 2020): 2-3, <https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/News-and-Research/Fire-statistics-and-reports/Emergency-responders/osFDProfileTables.pdf>.

<sup>62</sup> Phone and email communication in January 2020 with the Chief of Alaska Smokejumpers.

<sup>63</sup> "Smokejumpers," United States Forest Service, Accessed 23 January 2020, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/science-technology/fire/people/smokejumpers>.

<sup>64</sup> "Smokejumpers," United States Forest Service, Accessed 23 January 2020, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/science-technology/fire/people/smokejumpers>.

<sup>65</sup> The seven U.S. Department of Agriculture (U.S. Forest Service) Smokejumper bases are located at Redmond, OR; Winthrop, WA; Redding, CA; Missoula, MT; Grangeville, ID; West Yellowstone, MT; and McCall, ID. The U.S. Department of the Interior (Bureau of Land Management) has Smokejumpers bases at Fort Wainwright, AK, and Boise, ID.

<sup>66</sup> "Only They Can Stop Forest Fires," *Men's Health*, Oct 2019, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2312319865?accountid=33980>. Smaller bases may only have 25-30 Smokejumpers compared to the 65-75 Smokejumpers at larger bases.

experience on a Hotshot crew. Hotshot crews are small teams of wildland firefighters that serve as mobile hand crews for national wildfire management.<sup>67</sup> The recent trend of fewer candidates applying for Smokejumper positions is alarming, with an estimated 5-10% drop in annual applications for the last five years.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, Smokejumpers have focused on improving the success rate of recruits in training by emphasizing fitness preparation before they arrive for training.

The motivations for wildland firefighters to volunteer for Smokejumper duty was the opportunity for unique wildfire training, parachuting, autonomous small team operations, working on larger wildfire missions, and the physical challenge of the job.<sup>69</sup> In contrast, barriers for Smokejumper recruits included the impact on their quality of life, demands of the occupation, and long work hours and days. Several of these motivations and barriers were remarkably like those for Green Berets.

### Hostage Rescue Team

In 1983, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) established a Hostage Rescue Team (HRT) to serve as the federal law enforcement's lead unit for counterterrorism threats.<sup>70</sup> Within four hours of notification, the HRT can deploy under the authority of the FBI Director to anywhere in the U.S. "in response to terrorist incidents, hostage

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<sup>67</sup> "Hotshots - These Hand Crews can really take the heat!," U.S. Forest Service, Accessed January 26, 2020, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/science-technology/fire/people/hotshots>.

<sup>68</sup> William Cramer (Chief of Alaska Smokejumpers) phone interview by author, January 3, 2020.

<sup>69</sup> William Cramer (Chief of Alaska Smokejumpers) email message to author, January 6, 2020.

<sup>70</sup> "Hostage Rescue Team Marks 30 Years," Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013, <https://www.fbi.gov/video-repository/newss-hostage-rescue-team-marks-30-years/view>. The unit was initially formed due to concerns for the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles and preventing a terrorist attack like the 1972 Munich Games where eleven Israeli athletes were taken hostage and murdered by terrorists.

situations, and major criminal threats.”<sup>71</sup> Nearly four decades later, the HRT has expanded its counterterrorism mission to include high-risk arrests, dignitary protection, and deployments with U.S. military partners. The HRT always remains on alert for a rapid response to critical incidents across the US.<sup>72</sup> Since its founding, the HRT has deployed to over 850 incidents involving terrorism, foreign counterintelligence, violent crimes, and other investigations.<sup>73</sup>

The number of recent FBI applicants has dropped significantly, from 68,500 in 2009 to just 11,500 in 2018 (-84%).<sup>74</sup> Additionally, a shift away from recruits with law enforcement backgrounds and more towards those with cyber and technical backgrounds has resulted in fewer agents interested in SWAT or HRT positions. HRT recruits must have served at least three years as an FBI field investigator. Most HRT recruits serve in their local field office’s Special Weapons and Tactics and have previous military or law enforcement tactical experience.<sup>75</sup>

The HRT has one strong incentive—a preferred assignment location—that allows an HRT member to relocate to any FBI field office of their choice once they serve six years. Unfortunately, this incentive is also their top reason agents leave.<sup>76</sup> Most HRT recruits choose to join because of the exclusive missions found in the unit. Since many recruits already have the tactical experience, they may already have an existing attraction when they enter the FBI. While the fast-paced culture of the HRT is appealing

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<sup>71</sup> “Hostage Rescue Team Marks 30 Years,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013, <https://www.fbi.gov/video-repository/newss-hostage-rescue-team-marks-30-years/view>.

<sup>72</sup> “Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG),” Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2020, <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cirg>.

<sup>73</sup> “Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG),” 2020.

<sup>74</sup> “Not so special agent: FBI struggles to attract new recruits,” The Guardian, February 27, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/feb/27/fbi-struggles-to-attract-new-recruits>.

<sup>75</sup> “Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG),” 2020.

<sup>76</sup> (Chief of HRT Recruitment) phone interview by author, February 7, 2020.

to many, the time away from one's family and constant ready-to-go alert status appear to impact the quality of life for some, as does living only in northern Virginia.<sup>77</sup>

### Marine Raiders:

Today's Marine Raiders draw their roots from their namesake commandos of WWII.<sup>78</sup> U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) was established in 2005 against opposition by some Marine Corps leaders that believed all Marines were already elite and a more elite unit was unnecessary.<sup>79</sup> Over time, pressure from the Department of Defense overcame this resistance to establishing a Marine SOF organization, although a divide remains between the MARSOC Marine Raiders and the conventional Marine Corps.<sup>80</sup> When compared with conventional Marines, Raiders emphasize autonomy, integrity, and individual performance over a rank structure, discipline, and tradition. But Marine Raiders still believe themselves to be Marines first and Raiders second.

Because of its more recent creation, the Marine Raiders based much of their training and selection process using Army Special Forces as a model.<sup>81</sup> For interested first-term Marines to apply, they must earn the rank of Corporal or new Sergeant, meet the minimum requirements for GT score, fitness, and swimming tests, as well as pass

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<sup>77</sup> "Training for Every Contingency," Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013,

<https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/hostage-rescue-team-training-for-every-contingency>.

<sup>78</sup> S. Rebecca Zimmerman et al., *Movement and Maneuver: Culture and the Competition for Influence Among the U.S. Military Services*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019), 147,

[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2270.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2270.html).

<sup>79</sup> Zimmerman et al., *Movement and Maneuver: Culture and the Competition for Influence Among the U.S. Military Services*, 147.

<sup>80</sup> Zimmerman et al., 147.

<sup>81</sup> Sean Barrett, "Always Faithful, Always Forward: Marine Corps Culture and the Development of Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018): 249, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/61285>.



an intelligence exam and psychological evaluation. As of January 2020, the Marine Corps had 36,000 Corporals and 26,000 Sergeants (although only newly promoted Sergeants may apply) to serve as the Raider's primary labor market.<sup>82</sup> Because the Marine Corps has a much younger population than other services, it experiences a higher turnover after initial enlistments are complete.

To help Raiders attract additional recruits, the Marine Corps recently instituted a financial incentive for prospective Raider recruits to consider: up to \$90,000 for serving six years as a Marine Raiders.<sup>83</sup> Raider advertising is professionally contracted and at the forefront of digital awareness, likely due to the high number of Generation Z recruits. Recently, the Marine Raiders developed a free, publicly available mobile fitness application for Android and iPhones that focused on physical preparing interested recruits. In addition to improving success, the mobile app provided digital feedback to improve targeted advertising.

#### Similar Organizations Summary:

Recruitment matters for each of these specialized organizations—Smokejumpers, the Hostage Rescue Team, and Marine Raiders will all experience increased operations for the next several years. USSOCOM remains well funded in the 2020 defense budget, a clear indication of a persistent reliance on Marine Raiders (and

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<sup>82</sup> Data available from the DMDC website at <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/rest/download?fileName=rg2001.pdf&groupName=milRankGrade>

<sup>83</sup> Christopher Dennis, "Marines offer up to \$90,000 in bonuses for reenlistments," Stars and Stripes, July 10, 2019, <https://www.stripes.com/news/us/marines-offer-up-to-90-000-in-bonuses-for-reenlistments-1.589689>.

Green Berets).<sup>84</sup> The frequency of wildland fires, particularly in the western US, is expected to grow as will the use of Smokejumpers to counter the spread.<sup>85</sup> Also, growing threats against the U.S. from both foreign terrorists and homegrown violent extremists increases the need of Hostage Rescue Team personnel.<sup>86</sup>

While it was challenging to draw strong correlations with Army Special Forces recruit shortfalls using the limited information gathered, some insights warrant further exploration. First, the decline of volunteers is not unique to Green Berets; all organizations experienced a recruiting shortage recently with varying degrees of impact. The motivations and barriers reported by members of each unit's recruiting team appeared like Army Special Forces, but since no actual recruit survey data was available, it is challenging to measure associations. Two organizations did use incentives for recruitment. Marine Raiders offer a \$90k bonus for a six-year commitment, and the Hostage Rescue Team uses preferred assignment location after six years of service to increase volunteers. Smokejumpers also emphasized fitness preparation to overcome fewer recruits, but only the Marine Raiders designed a mobile phone app to aid recruits with their physical training, likely targeting their Generation Z recruits.

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<sup>84</sup> Travis Sharp, *Did Dollars Follow Strategy? A Review of the FY 2020 Defense Budget*, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (Washington, DC, 13 August 2019): 18, [https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/FY\\_2020\\_Budget\\_WEB.pdf](https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/FY_2020_Budget_WEB.pdf).

<sup>85</sup> Corey Butler et al., "Wildland firefighter deaths in the United States: A comparison of existing surveillance systems," *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene* 14, no. 4 (2017): 3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15459624.2016.1250004>.

<sup>86</sup> Hearing before the House Homeland Security Committee, Global Terrorism: Threats to the Homeland, Part II, 116th Cong., 2nd sess., October 30, 2019 (statement of Christopher Wray, Director of the FBI).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

After a detailed review of Army Special Forces, analysis of the labor market and recruit intentions, reexamining survey data, and comparing similar organizations, several opportunities could help to increase the number of Green Beret volunteers.

### Expanding the Labor Market

Increasing the recruit labor market for Army Special Forces is the best opportunity to increase volunteers without impacting training standards. The Army's drawdown that began in 2012 drastically affected the number of Army Special Forces recruits.<sup>87</sup> In the past decade, the primary labor market for Army Special Forces—Private First Class through Staff Sergeant—dropped 90,000 Soldiers from 2011 to 2017. This drop in the size of the labor market closely correlates with the recruiting decrease (Figure 9).<sup>88</sup> Waiting for the planned expansion of the Army to drive an increase in Special Forces recruits is unacceptable due to the expected slow rate of growth over the next few years. Therefore, minimizing prerequisites, adjusting prescreening methods, recruiting prior military members, and streamlining the current inter-Service recruitment process for all Special Operations is paramount for increasing the Green Beret labor market.

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<sup>87</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Army Drawdown and Restructuring*, Andrew Feickert, 113th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC, February 28, 2014): 1, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42493.pdf>.

<sup>88</sup> Jim Thomas and Chris Dougherty, *Beyond the Ramparts: The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces*, (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2013): 51, <https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/SOF-Report-CSBA-Final.pdf>. This 2013 report predicted a smaller conventional Army would create a smaller pool from which Army Special Forces could recruit.

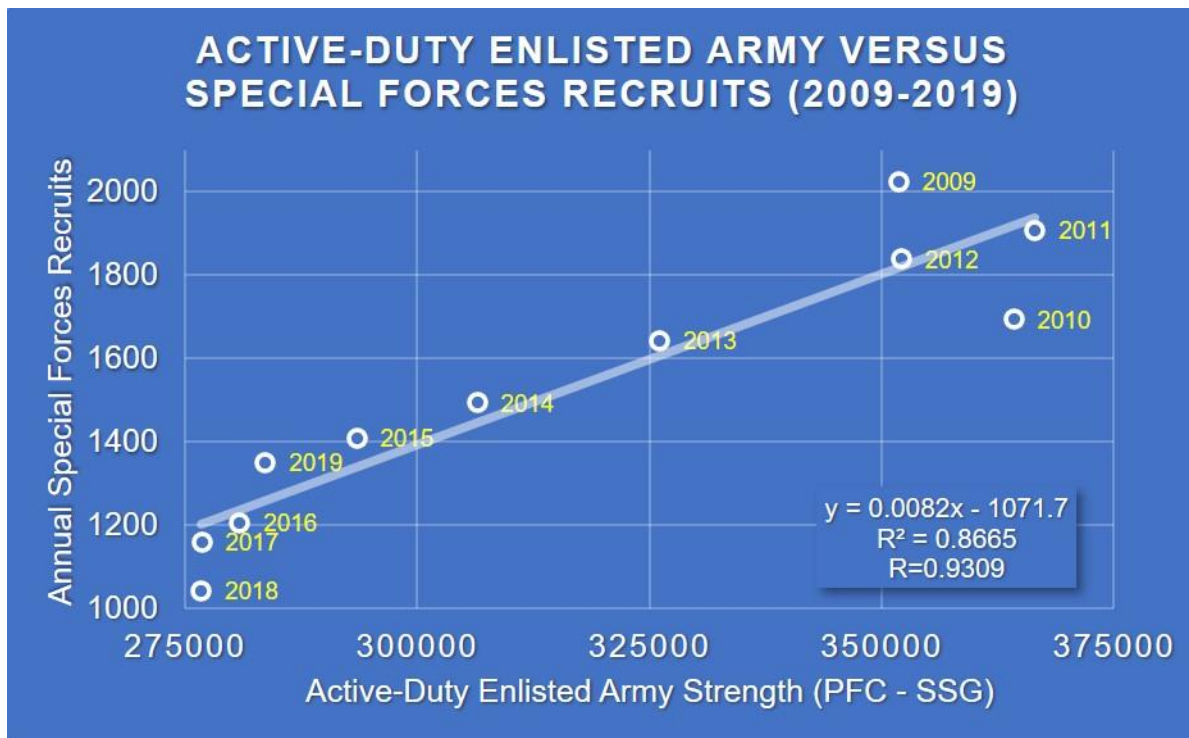


Figure 9. Enlisted Soldiers (PFC-SSG) versus enlisted Special Forces recruits.<sup>89</sup>

Removing the General Technical (GT) minimum cutoff score for Soldiers to apply for Army Special Forces training increases the qualified labor market threefold. The GT score is a subcomponent score of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), the military's entry test usually taken in high school. The GT has been the primary discriminator among prospective Green Beret recruits for decades because it corresponds to one's intelligence quotient (IQ).<sup>90</sup> Many Green Berets oppose removing this prerequisite and consider it an indication of recruit quality. Yet, Soldiers may retake the ASVAB test multiple times to improve their GT score, often considerably, without

<sup>89</sup> Linear regression by the author of Active-Duty enlisted Soldiers (Private First Class through Staff Sergeant only) compared to the number of Active-Duty enlisted Special Forces recruits. The Fiscal Year for each data point is depicted in yellow. Data provided by DMDC and SORB in February 2020.

<sup>90</sup> Gary A. Hazlett and Michael Sanders, "Cognitive and Personality Assessment in Special Forces Assessment and Selection," *Special Warfare* 12, no. 4 (1999): 14. In 1999, the minimum GT score allowed to attend Special Forces Assessment and Selection was 100.

ever altering their actual IQ. Furthermore, some Soldiers take the ASVAB in high school and give minimal effort when a career as a Soldier seems unlikely. Since every Special Forces recruit takes standard intelligence tests upon arrival to training, the GT cutoff score is an insignificant prerequisite that eliminates three-quarters of potential recruits. Removing this cutoff score allows recruiters to prioritize and limit applicants to the most qualified recruits. Less qualified recruits may attend if spots are available. If the increase is significant enough, recruits could be invited based on critical criteria, like fitness levels, reinforcing previous studies associating higher fitness with success at Special Forces Assessment and Selection.<sup>91</sup> Removing the GT cutoff score does not change any training standards but merely allows any interested Soldier to attend training.

Establishing a new Special Forces ASVAB composite score measuring traits considered vital for Green Berets would evaluate all enlisted Soldiers for fitness in Army Special Forces and remove the reliance on the GT score. Each military service already converts raw ASVAB test scores from different test subjects into its composite scores; the Army currently has ten different composite ASVAB scores. Army Special Forces could develop a single composite ASVAB score to assess every Soldier for service in Special Forces. Precedence already exists for composite scores targeting specific career fields: field artillery, combat, clerical, mechanical and maintenance, and surveillance and communication.

The development of a new, easily administered screening tool to measure traits desirable for Army Special Forces would significantly improve screening for all interested candidates. Building a new test independent of the ASVAB and easily self-

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<sup>91</sup> Robert M. Burrell, "Tactics, Methods and Techniques to improve Special Forces In-service Enlisted Recruiting," (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2002): 62, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/5953>.

administered online or by a recruiter improves the screening of interested Soldiers. There are several unique categories to measure, like assessing hardiness, a trait proven significant for Soldiers passing Special Forces Assessment and Selection.<sup>92</sup> This effort aligns well with the Army's new "People Strategy" which asked for novel assessment tools.<sup>93</sup>

Recruiting former military service members to reenlist for Army Special Forces, especially prior combat arms Soldiers and Marines, would expand the labor market with experienced troops. A Prior Service Program was successfully developed in the early 1990s but was deactivated once recruitment improved. Candidates performed as well as their active-duty counterparts in training regardless of their previous military service branch, but especially if they had served in combat arms units.<sup>94</sup> Developing a simplified process to recruit prior-service candidates, prioritizing former combat arms service members, expands the labor market quickly while capitalizing on prior experiences.<sup>95</sup>

Creating a Department of Defense Issuance to simplify the inter-service transfer process for all U.S. Special Operations units opens a new labor market for Army Special Forces consisting of over a half-million service members.<sup>96</sup> The established procedure

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<sup>92</sup> Paul T. Bartone et al., "Psychological Hardiness Predicts Success in U.S. Army Special Forces Candidates," *International Journal of Selection & Assessment* 16, no. 1 (2008): 79, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2389.2008.00412.x>. Also see Salvatore R. Maddi, "Relevance of Hardiness Assessment and Training to the Military Context," *Military Psychology* 19, no. 1 (2007): 66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08995600701323301> for a description of a comprehensive hardiness test that measures stress, strain, hardy attitudes, hardy coping, regressive coping, and hardy social support.

<sup>93</sup> U.S. Army, *The Army People Strategy*, (Washington DC, 2019): 6.

<sup>94</sup> Elizabeth J. Brady et al., *Prior service soldiers in the Special Forces Assessment and Selection Program: Recruitment Issues* (Alexandria, Virginia: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 1993): 18-19, <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/UNCb9346352>.

<sup>95</sup> David Barno and Nora Bensahel, "How to Fix U.S. Special Operations Forces," *War on the Rocks*, February 25, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/02/how-to-fix-u-s-special-operations-forces/>.

<sup>96</sup> DMDC data from February 2020. Active-Duty service members in pay grades E-3 to E-6 from the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps totaled 552,248—larger than the entire U.S. Army—and still does not account for junior SFC/E-7 soldiers eligible to apply.

for non-Army service members to volunteer for Army Special Forces is challenging to complete and influenced by leaders in other Services. Incompatible human resource systems make it challenging to identify and contact qualified recruits outside the Army. Unit leaders in other Services may be hesitant to support their service members from joining the Army, making the process difficult. The current number of inter-service recruits is small, partly from poor awareness of Green Berets. Surely many intelligent and fit service members outside of the Army possess expertise in foreign languages that would make this single switch worthwhile. Crafting a new Department of Defense Issuance that includes inter-service transfer for all U.S. Special Operations units from each Military Department may build a broader coalition of support.

### Recognizing Recruit Demographics

The overall Army is much younger and more diverse than Soldiers in Army Special Forces. Most future Green Beret recruits are members of Generation Z, a cohort dependent on mobile technology and digital networks, and wary of misleading advertising. The increased diversity of Generation Z means Army Special Forces must account for perceived minority apprehensions about joining Green Berets. By embracing mobile technology, providing balanced career information, and incorporating minority concerns, Green Berets can harness Generation Z recruits.

A mobile phone app designed for Generation Z Soldiers would provide information about Green Berets careers using a preferred platform with global reach and instantaneous updating. Recruitment through mobile technology is the primary means to attract and recruit Green Beret candidates from the mobile natives of Generation Z—already 40% of the enlisted Army and growing—a cohort that prefers

mobile tech, social media, and collaborative learning over physical interactions.<sup>97</sup> The addition of helpful content to the mobile app, like fitness, tactics, or survival, would attract more Soldiers and help build Green Beret brand awareness with adolescents long before they even join the Army. This focus on mobile technology requires a fundamental shift in resources away from face-to-face exchanges with recruiters towards more digital engagement. Mobile technology also needs funding for enhanced digital content, attractive websites, and professionally designed mobile applications. Without dedicated resources to emphasize a digital presence, Green Berets appear antiquated and have less appeal to the growing number of Generation Z recruits.

A realistic job preview product with positive and negative information presents an authentic balanced view of Green Beret careers and seems more credible to Generation Z recruits since they are already distrustful of the intrusive marketing found throughout their online lives. Special Forces recruiters already provide this balanced information with recruits during face-to-face interactions. However, Generation Z recruits rely more on online content to inform and answer their questions. They also respond well to individual testimonies and average person reviews that seem more genuine and trustworthy than positive-only advertisements. Providing both positive and negative information about a career in Army Special Forces, especially the impact on family life, may discourage some recruits from volunteering, but ultimately improve the career satisfaction, retention, and organizational credibility for those who do join the Green

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<sup>97</sup> Alexandra Vitelar, "Like Me: Generation Z and the Use of Social Media for Personal Branding," *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy* 7 (2019): 262-263, [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A593354341/EAIM?u=duke\\_perkins&sid=EAIM&xid=d29e136f](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A593354341/EAIM?u=duke_perkins&sid=EAIM&xid=d29e136f).



Berets.<sup>98</sup> A similar effort made in 1996 from a survey of recruits, experienced Green Berets, and Green Beret spouses produced the handbook titled “Thinking About Special Forces? Answers to Your Most Often-Asked Questions.”<sup>99</sup> The booklet influenced one-third of recruits to apply for Army Special Forces and improved spousal support.<sup>100</sup> In 2020, a modern digital version, easy to update, could reach any Soldier regardless of location.

Establishing a Minority Advisory Group to address concerns that minority recruits may have about joining the Green Berets increases the participation of Generation Z minority recruits. Minority Generation Z recruits could be a valuable opportunity for Green Berets. Research shows that diverse teams outperform homogeneous ones because more considerable group diversity triggers more careful information processing that is lacking in homogenous teams.<sup>101</sup> A Minority Advisory Group, previously established in 1996 to increase minority participation in Army Special Forces, led to initiatives like lowering the minimum GT score to allow more minorities to volunteer and delaying the swimming test to counter poor swimming proficiency.<sup>102</sup> Re-establishing this advisory group may find other novel approaches, like targeting first and second-

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<sup>98</sup> Ann M. Herd and Judith E. Brooks, *Information Needs of Enlisted Soldiers when Making a Special Forces Career Decision*, (Alexandria, VA, U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral Social Sciences, 1993): 11, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a273343.pdf>.

<sup>99</sup> Judith E. Brooks and Wayne E. Evans, *Evaluation of a Realistic Job Preview for U.S. Army Special Forces*, (Alexandria, VA, U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral Social Sciences, 1996): 1, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a317214.pdf>.

<sup>100</sup> Brooks and Evans, *Evaluation of a Realistic Job Preview for U.S. Army Special Forces*, 19.

<sup>101</sup> Katherine W. Phillips, Katie A. Liljenquist, Margaret A. Neale, “Better Decisions Through Diversity: Heterogeneity can boost group performance,” Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University October 1, 2010, [https://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/better\\_decisions\\_through\\_diversity](https://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/better_decisions_through_diversity).

<sup>102</sup> Judith E. Brooks and Michelle M. Zazanis, *Enhancing U.S. Army Special Forces: Research and Applications*, (Alexandria, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral Social Sciences, 1997): 14, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a339086.pdf>. Also see Martha L. Teplitzky, *Minority Representation in the Enlisted Special Forces*, (Alexandria, VA, U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral Social Sciences, 1992), <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a258289.pdf>.

generation Soldiers because of their unique expertise with language and culture vital to Special Warfare or deliberately assigning minority Green Berets as recruiters to offer their experiences to potential recruits.<sup>103</sup> While perceptions about discrimination were relatively low, approximately 9% of Respondents, Recruits, and Graduates still reported that “there might be discrimination in SOF,” a critical barrier to joining the Green Berets.<sup>104</sup>

### Increasing Positive Attitudes

Several factors influence recruit attitudes. Finding opportunities to increase positive attitudes about volunteering for Army Special Forces remains vital. Expanding positive attitudes towards joining the Green Berets requires a multifaceted approach, such as communicating top motivations and more favorable and accurate publicity. This effort also includes improved awareness about Army Special Forces to reduce confusion among recruits and better integration with the SFAB to find experienced advisor recruits willing to join the Green Berets.

Advertising content for Green Berets should prioritize the top-rated motivation of “serving with other volunteers that want to be there and want to perform”. This motivation topped every survey group from a list of fifteen possible motivations for

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<sup>103</sup> Trevor O. Robichaux, "Special Forces Recruiting: the Operational Need for Targeted Recruitment of First and Second-Generation Americans" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2008): 20-21, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/3765>. For extant ways to diversify special operations, see Anna Simons, "Diversity and SOF: Boon or Bane?," *Special Operations Journal* 5, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23296151.2019.1581431>.

<sup>104</sup> Sheila Nataraj Kirby, Margaret C. Harrell, and Jennifer Sloan, "Why Don't Minorities Join Special Operations Forces?," *Armed Forces & Society* 26 (Summer 2000): 542, [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A64397269/AONE?u=duke\\_perkins&sid=AONE&xid=336fdd11](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A64397269/AONE?u=duke_perkins&sid=AONE&xid=336fdd11). This article highlights the importance of minority recruitment in special operations to counteract the shortage of personnel, enhance the intrinsic value of diversity, and improve effectiveness with units that traditionally partner with foreign forces.

joining Special Operations. Of note, it resonated deeply with Graduates of Special Forces Assessment and Selection since all reported it to be “extremely important” or “very important” to their consideration of a potential career in Special Operations.

A robust incentives plan, potentially including bonuses, assignment preference, or matching retirement contributions, would enhance a recruit’s decision, or spousal support, to join Army Special Forces. While all survey groups recorded little interest in financial incentives from special skills pay, bonuses often have a more substantial influence on a spouse. Of the three other specialized units analyzed, only the Marine Raiders currently offer a financial incentive to recruits, but it was significant—\$90,000 for six years of service. Additionally, the HRT offered its members their choice of locations, even if their choice was full once a recruit completed six years of service on the HRT. This powerful incentive is now their top reason agents leave the HRT. Another consideration is matching a Soldier’s retirement investments in the Thrift Savings Plan, a financial incentive infrequently used in the U.S. military.

Increasing the occurrence of publicity campaigns using news media editorials and specials to report on Army Special Forces history, training, and team life improves overall attitudes about volunteering. Publicity events about Army Special Forces do occur, such as National Geographic Channel’s story “Inside the Green Berets” that followed Green Berets in Afghanistan for ten days. <sup>105</sup> However, recent high-profile news reports depicting criminal behaviors by Special Operations members, some involving Green Berets, have overshadowed positive publicity. <sup>106</sup> The growing trend of criminal incidents has eroded trust with all Special Operations units, prompted a lengthy

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<sup>105</sup> The National Geographic Channel video is found at <http://natgeotv.com/asia/inside-the-green-berets>.

<sup>106</sup> Barno and Bensahel, "How to Fix U.S. Special Operations Forces."

military review, and led to Congress voicing public concerns about the “misconduct, ethics, and professionalism” of U.S. Special Operations units. <sup>107</sup> Increasing publicity events to better educate the U.S. media and public would, over time, have positive effects on general attitudes about Green Berets. Local media publicity near major Army bases would reach potential recruits, as would editorials on YouTube, the preferred media platforms of Generation Z.<sup>108</sup>

A designated advisory panel of vetted Green Berets could interact with the Army’s office embedded in the entertainment industry to advise entertainment professionals on how to accurately depict Army Special Forces in film, television, and games. The Army has an organization that works closely with the entertainment industry, the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs-West Region Branch. <sup>109</sup> They assist film, television, and video game professionals to educate American and global audiences about the Army. Army Special Forces should closely partner with this unique Army office to ensure the portrayal of Green Berets in the entertainment industry is accurate. Designating an advisory panel that habitually works closely with this Army office helps increase positive publicity for Green Berets. The video game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare recently introduced a new character wholly designed after a retired Green Beret, highlighting how future opportunities might appear. <sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Army Drawdown and Restructuring*, 8.

<sup>108</sup> "As Gen Z shuns traditional media, content creators adapt and bring television and movies where they live — YouTube," CNBC, March 2, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/03/02/as-gen-z-balks-at-traditional-tv-content-creators-shift-to-youtube.html>.

<sup>109</sup> "From East to West: The Army Public Affairs regional offices — your resources across the country," 2017, <https://medium.com/@armypublicaffairscenter/from-east-to-west-the-army-public-affairs-regional-offices-your-resources-across-the-country-a376fe377f2d>.

<sup>110</sup> "Meet the Real Green Beret Who’s a Playable Character in 'Call of Duty'," April 23, 2020, <https://www.military.com/off-duty/2020/04/23/meet-real-green-beret-whos-playable-character-call-duty.html>.

Rebuilding brand exclusivity from other Special Operations units by using simple marketing techniques reverses the effects of genericide in the U.S. news media and improve awareness of Green Berets. Previous research of U.S. newspapers shows that the name Special Forces has lost its distinctive identity from overuse and often serves as a generic term for any Special Operations unit. Several simple marketing solutions can help reverse this genericide, such as educating the news media to use the name correctly and always including "Army" as a precursor (Army Special Forces versus Special Forces). Watching for and immediately correcting misuse and incorporating unique names (Green Berets, Jedburgh) helps reverse confusion.<sup>111</sup>

Army Special Forces should embrace the SFAB, placing as many Green Berets into the organization as possible to make SFAB a future pipeline into Army Special Forces. While the SFAB does compete for Green Beret recruits, SFAB Soldiers are usually on assignment for just three years, which presents Army Special Forces an opportunity to find the best performing Soldiers already in an advisory unit and expedite their recruitment. The SFAB could become a conduit for Army Special Forces recruits. SFAB leadership positions are considered second-time jobs available to Green Berets. Emphasizing these leadership positions for Green Berets gains influence inside the SFAB. No other Army branch has spent 68 years focused on advising, and Army Special Forces should not relinquish SFAB opportunities or view serving in them as disloyalty. Discounting the Army's substantial resource investment into building and sustaining the SFAB is risky.

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<sup>111</sup> Matthew Dick, "Why you must never Sellotape® a Xerox® into your Filofax," *Journal of Brand Management* 11, no. 6 (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2540195>.

### Using the Power of Subjective Norms

Two subjective norms identified from the survey have enormous sway with potential Green Beret recruits: a spouse or significant other and a current or former SOF mentor. Candid information about the effects of a spouse joining Army Special Forces helps offset the most significant barrier to volunteering, the impact on a family. Conversely, increasing the opportunities for enlisted Green Berets to interact, mentor, and inspire Soldiers to volunteer for Army Special Forces greatly assists recruitment. A system to encourage all Green Berets to refer Soldiers also increases the number of enlisted volunteers.

Informing spouses/significant others and children about the impacts on their lives if their Soldier becomes a Green Beret is vital to building support with Army Special Forces families. By far, the most significant barrier to joining Army Special Forces is the perceived hardship on a recruit's family, a belief supported by survey data as far back as 1993.<sup>112</sup> While this finding might not surprise many Green Berets, the lack of a coordinated and thorough campaign to counter this narrative for almost thirty years is alarming. Concerns over family hardship and the potential loss of normal family life were nearly three times stronger than any other worry, including for Graduates well on their way to becoming Green Berets. An example from another Special Operations unit is a family video that only features spouses.

An Army Special Forces mentorship program could connect retired Green Berets with interested recruits to enhance recruitment. The importance of mentorship and its impact on Special Forces recruits cannot be understated. Having a current or former

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<sup>112</sup> Brooks and Evans, *Evaluation of a Realistic Job Preview for U.S. Army Special Forces*, 1.

SOF mentor was considered vital and for many recruits rated near or above their spouse. Nearly half of all Graduates reported that a SOF mentor was “very important” in making decisions about their future. Additionally, 57% of Recruits and 68% of Graduates reported knowing someone currently serving in Army Special Forces. With less general awareness of Green Berets in the Army, Soldiers may respond exceptionally well to mentors charged with helping recruits become Green Berets. The U.S. Navy SEALs have a similar effort that complements their recruiters that could serve as an example.<sup>113</sup> Generation Z recruits would undoubtedly support being virtually mentored online by former Green Berets, an opportunity with exceptional reach.

A fellowship program that allows highly qualified potential recruits to work and train with Green Berets would help to recruit and enhance positive word-of-mouth about Army Special Forces. Many organizations offer selective fellowships and use current members as recruiters.<sup>114</sup> There is no better Green Beret recruiting tool than allowing a potential recruit to spend time with an Army Special Forces team. A fellowship could easily prioritize key recruits; even if the Soldier never volunteers, the fellowship improves word-of-mouth about Green Berets.

Placing more enlisted Green Berets in key assignments (instructors, liaison officers) to interact purposefully with conventional Soldiers would engender more Soldiers to volunteer for Army Special Forces and increase overall positive word-of-mouth effects. Word-of-mouth matters and leaders should consider its incremental impact before dismissing its use. It is possible to conduct activities that increase the

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<sup>113</sup> “Warriors Recruiting Warriors,” U.S. Navy, 2015, [https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story\\_id=86286](https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=86286).

<sup>114</sup> Collins and Stevens, 1123.

likelihood of positive word-of-mouth endorsements. Mentorship programs and fellowships discussed above can help increase positive word-of-mouth, but so can more interactions between Green Berets and regular Army troops.<sup>115</sup> Most enlisted Green Berets have little contact with the regular Army. Exposing Green Berets, especially enlisted members, to regular Army Soldiers connects them to their future replacements while also providing a “wider range of experience and better-developed leadership skills.”<sup>116</sup> Since recruits often make decisions based on incomplete information, Green Berets have opportunities to influence recruit decisions, especially since positive word-of-mouth can counteract the effects of negative publicity.<sup>117</sup>

Constructing an official referral system that allows current Green Berets to easily refer and sponsor a recruit using a mobile or online system would expand the network of Army Special Forces recruiters by a factor of two hundred. Although recruits recommended by current employees are often highly successful, many organizations lack a purposeful approach to using existing employee networks.<sup>118</sup> Informal recruiting through referrals yields more high-performing individuals and more stable employees than more formal recruiting sources.<sup>119</sup> In today’s competitive environment, every Green

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<sup>115</sup> Michael B. Weathers, "Special Forces Officer recruiting in a high OPTEMPO environment" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2008): 30, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/4023>. This thesis notes the powerful influence a small group Special Forces soldiers can have on prospective Green Beret recruits while assigned as cadre at West Point and ROTC detachments. Recruits credited these informal recruiters with instilling in them the desire to volunteer for Army Special Forces.

<sup>116</sup> Barno and Bensahel, "How to Fix U.S. Special Operations Forces."

<sup>117</sup> Yasmina Jaidi, Edwin A J. Van Hooft, and LidiaR Arends, "Recruiting Highly Educated Graduates: A Study on the Relationship Between Recruitment Information Sources, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and Actual Job Pursuit," *Human Performance* 24, no. 2 (2011): 139, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=s3h&AN=60106986&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>118</sup> Ed Michaels, Helen Handfield-Jones, and Beth Axelrod, *The War for Talent* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2001).

<sup>119</sup> Robert N. McMurry, "Man-Hunt for Top Executives," *Harvard Business Review* 32, no. 1 (1954): 3, 5. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1296491045?accountid=10598>.



Beret should recruit a replacement.<sup>120</sup> Only twenty-five out of nearly five thousand enlisted Green Berets are recruiters. A simple web portal or mobile app can quickly become a reliable referral system that utilizes the expansive social networks of all Green Berets. It is also easy to track an official referral system for compliance and incentives. A Green Beret that recommends a Soldier join Army Special Forces increases the subjective norm for the recruit to volunteer to become a Green Beret. Incorporating individual and team incentives would greatly aid a new referral system, such as Green Berets remaining longer on their teams or attending specialty training.

### Improving Perceived Control

A recruit's perceived ease or difficulty of volunteering for Army Special Forces has a considerable effect on intentions. Confidence in their ability to volunteer, or a lack thereof, significantly influences a recruit's physical fitness preparation. Smokejumpers and Marine Raiders emphasize better recruit fitness to overcome fewer recruits. Since fitness training is such a crucial component to passing Special Forces Assessment and Selection, the development of a fitness app may help increase a recruit's perceived control of volunteering. It is also essential to identify why some units are supportive of their Soldiers volunteering for Army Special Forces, and others are not. Further study of this topic may impact other in-service recruiting opportunities.

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<sup>120</sup> Richard S. Wheeler, "Special Forces Recruiting Methodologies for the Twenty-First Century" (master's thesis, U.S Army Command and General Staff College, 2000): 102, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a388312.pdf>. This thesis briefly discusses having all current Green Berets recruit one soldier to join Army Special Forces and the enormous impact it could have on the future of the force.

A mobile fitness tracking app that incorporates existing physical training plans improves a recruit's perceived control over preparation and likely improve graduation rates at Special Forces Assessment and Selection. The Marine Raiders have utilized a fitness app for several years and report success with recruits that follow the training plan. Research indicates that using a fitness app increases the perceived behavioral control to exercise—fitness app users are more likely to exercise than non-users.<sup>121</sup> This tendency could result from mobile technology helping users control their fitness behavior by tracking progress, triumphs, or failures and “enhancing the perceptions of their ability to perform better every day.”<sup>122</sup> One in five U.S. adults already uses a fitness tracker, and even more have tried one, so implementing this approach should complement existing behavior.<sup>123</sup>

A survey of company and battalion leadership across the Army would provide valuable data on how best to encourage Army units to support their Soldiers volunteering for Army Special Forces. There is less interference by Army unit leaders dissuading their enlisted Soldiers from joining the Green Berets than initially expected. Only 11% of Recruits reported they were extremely concerned with their current leadership not supporting their decision to join the Green Berets or that their command would perceive it as being disloyal to their unit or Army branch. Over 60% considered it not important at all, and 43% of Recruits stated they consider their unit leaders someone they look to for guidance in making critical decisions. Negative command

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<sup>121</sup> Alessandro Gabbiadini and Tobias Greitemeyer, "Fitness Mobile Apps Positively Affect Attitudes, Perceived Behavioral Control and Physical Activities," *The Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness* 59, no. 3 (2019): 9.

<sup>122</sup> Gabbiadini and Greitemeyer, "Fitness Mobile Apps Positively Affect Attitudes, Perceived Behavioral Control and Physical Activities," 10.

<sup>123</sup> "One in Five U.S. Adults Use Health Apps, Wearable Trackers," Gallup, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/269096/one-five-adults-health-apps-wearable-trackers.aspx>.

influence may also serve as motivation for some Soldiers to leave. Still, adverse command influence exists and may even be more pronounced in the officer population. The minimal concern reported is in direct contrast with considerable anecdotal evidence of many Green Berets. Perhaps it occurs much less today than in previous times but certainly requires further study to validate its occurrence.

### Counterarguments

Many of the above recommendations have rebuttals with merit. A delicate balance exists between the necessity to increase the number of enlisted recruits and supporting the operational needs of current Green Berets. If leaders doubt the severity of the current shortage or dismiss new initiatives, understaffed Green Berets teams are their future, and overreliance on the “civilian-to-Green Beret” recruitment method continues—recruiting young, high-performing civilians—adding little Army experience to the force.

Funding is the basis for opposition to several recommendations, such as incentives, mobile apps, screening tools, and mentorship programs. Although these initiatives require reprioritizing funds or requesting additional funds, the Army’s new People Strategy and continued Congressional budget support for Special Operations units may now offer a well-timed request. Another consideration for additional funding highlighted below is to solicit USSOCOM financial assistance.

Any perceived change to Green Beret training is vulnerable to allegations of lowered standards. Removing preconditions, like GT cutoff scores, does not exclude a single training standard. The removal of prerequisites during periods of low recruitment only increases the number of potential recruits. If removing preconditions to attend

training becomes a panacea for more enlisted recruits, prioritizing the highest qualified first—with others if space allows—minimizes any perception of lowering recruit quality.

Rebuttals may also contend that the recommendations are already ongoing, or they would have minimal enlisted Green Beret support. While some proposals already exist—publicity campaigns, realistic job previews, and advertisements—increasing their occurrence, presenting them in a digital product versus face-to-face, or prioritizing a powerful message offer simple solutions to improve attitudes towards volunteering. Other recommendations will probably meet significant internal resistance. Enlisted assignments outside of Army Special Forces, establishing a referral system, and an entertainment advisory board all need leaders' emphasis and must incorporate strong incentives to gain support.

A few recommendations require minimal resources to implement. They could quickly help expand the recruiting pool and increase intentions of recruits to volunteer: establishing a minority advisory group, building a fellowship program, surveying Army unit leaders, embracing the SFAB, and rebuilding the Green Beret's exclusivity. Also, recruiting former military members could easily fall under the existing "civilian-to-Green Beret" program; that also requires a simple process to access military records of recent veterans.

#### Future Research:

Future research of Green Beret recruitment should consider Army Special Forces size, supplementary USSOCOM funding, and the overreliance on artificial intelligence. The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review mandated the addition of five new Army Special

Forces battalions in six years.<sup>124</sup> Army Special Forces may no longer require this expanded size, especially if the Army, the primary Green Beret recruiting pool, remains smaller. Another valuable research area is securing additional USSOCOM funding by considering Army Special Forces volunteers as trainees and not recruits since recruiting is limited to Army funding by law.<sup>125</sup> The Army still recruits a small number of civilians directly to become Green Berets so it could continue to fund recruitment lawfully. A final topic worthy of further study is the growing overreliance of artificial intelligence in recruitment prescreening that leads to the homogenization of Army Special Forces. Artificial intelligence, looking backward at prior outcomes to predict future results, misses many recruits with backgrounds different from historical norms, squandering minority perspectives vital for Special Warfare.<sup>126</sup>

#### CONCLUSION:

The declining interest of Soldiers willing to volunteer for Army Special Forces has severe implications for national defense. Green Berets comprise the most operators in USSOCOM, and any sustained personnel shortage impacts future operations. The analysis of this unique problem identified several opportunities to expand the number of enlisted recruits and increase their intentions to volunteer for Army Special Forces. The resulting recommendations to expand the labor market, recognize changing recruit

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<sup>124</sup> Linda Robinson et al., *Improving the Understanding of Special Operations: A Case History Analysis*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), 81-98, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2026.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2026.html).

<sup>125</sup> Department of Defense Directive 5100.01 - *Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components*, (2010): 25. U.S. law considers USSOCOM a Combatant Command and grants it authority and responsibility to fund training for special operations units. Only Military Departments have the authority and responsibility to fund recruiting.

<sup>126</sup> Peter Cappelli, "Data Science Can't Fix Hiring (Yet)," *Harvard Business Review*, 97, no. 3 (May/June 2019): 57, <https://hbr.org/2019/05/recruiting#data-science-cant-fix-hiring-yet>.

demographics, increase positive attitudes about volunteering, use the strength of subjective norms, and improve recruits' perceived control of joining the Green Berets reverses this dangerous volunteer decline, a growing concern for many other specialized organizations.

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