

Combat Sustainment Support Soldiers in Special Forces

BY CAPTAIN ZACHERY BRISCOE

Logistics Soldiers working in an Army Special Forces unit need to be able to handle several logistics jobs, and they must have Special Forces training so they can function with and support their units.

Combat units in today's military require logistics support personnel with specialized knowledge and training to support the efforts of the "trigger pullers." Without organizational support, either the combat specialty Soldiers will be unable to conduct combat operations because they are too busy doing the tasks necessary to keep a unit operational or the support tasks will go undone and the unit will be rendered unable to conduct combat operations. Nowhere is this truer than in special operations units.

Although a vehicle mechanic is absolutely necessary to keep an Army Special Forces operational detachment alpha (ODA) in the fight, not just any vehicle mechanic will be able to provide the level of support needed. This article will provide an overview of training sustainment personnel for Special Forces units from the perspective of a logistics officer assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne).

Special Training Needed

Because of the differences between Special Forces units and other Army units, Soldiers assigned to a Special Forces group require additional training. Keeping Soldiers from these training opportunities because "we're too busy" or "you don't need that school" only serves to restrict their abilities to support the mission. Skills training, such as air assault, pathfinder, jumpmaster, and sling load inspector, provides qualifications that enable sustainment Soldiers to better support the mission.

The 528th Special Operations Support Battalion, before its conversion to the 528th Sustainment Brigade, developed a multiskilled Soldier concept. The point of this program was to formalize military occupational specialty (MOS) cross-training across the battalion in order to create multifunctional Soldiers capable of performing multiple tasks as they were attached to operational units. Since Special Forces units are frequently understrength, this cross-training can help overcome personnel shortfalls by providing one Soldier with two specialties.

In a Special Forces battalion, the Soldiers most

frequently attached to ODAs are MOS 92G (cook) and MOS 91B (wheeled vehicle mechanic). Formalized cross-training under the multiskilled Soldier concept would give an ODA not just a cook or a mechanic but a cook who is able to manage supply and ammunition requisitions or a mechanic who is certified to work on a much broader range of military equipment than just trucks. Every ability that these Soldiers possess beyond their primary MOS enables the ODA to focus more on operations and less on sustainment.

Much of the necessary training is available from Army sources. Hands-on courses in topics ranging from supply systems to vehicle recovery to sling load inspector are available at Fort Lee, Virginia.

Training should focus on developing a Soldier's skills across related MOSs. All quartermaster MOS Soldiers need to know as many areas of supply as possible. All vehicle maintenance Soldiers need to be able to repair as broad a range of military equipment as possible.

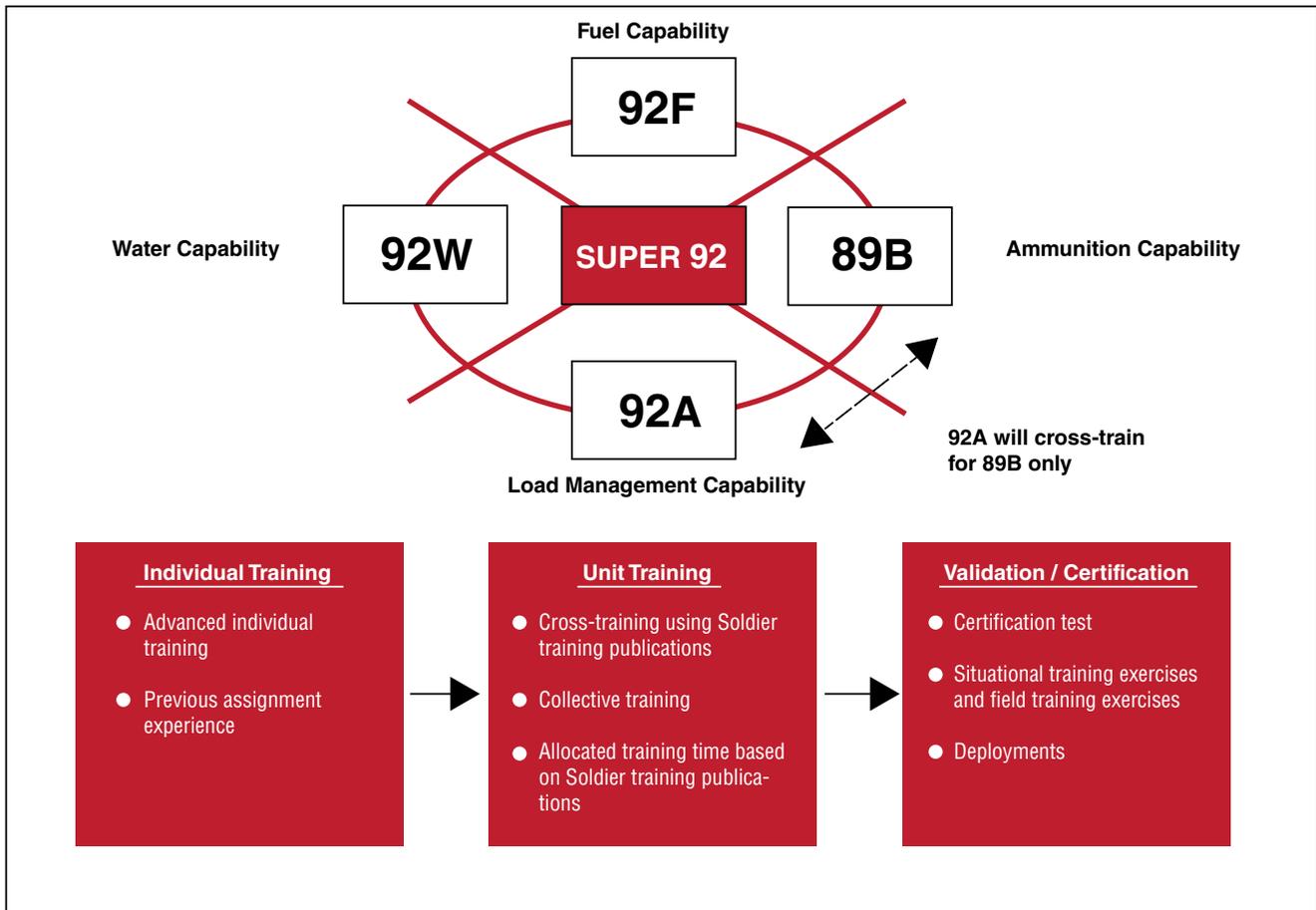
Nonstandard Training

Nonstandard training is also required because of the range of Special Forces operations. Mechanics must be trained to repair and modify civilian vehicles, armorers need to receive training on foreign weapons, and supply sergeants must develop cultural awareness and language skills to allow them to purchase supplies from local merchants.

Many of these skills have not been frequently used during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan because of the availability of conventional means of supply and contracted mechanics. However, these assets may not be present at the beginning of the next war. A formalized training plan to develop broad skill sets will increase the flexibility of organic logistics, not only in the contemporary operational environment but also in future missions.

Beyond low-level Soldier skills training, Special Forces logistics personnel must develop the ability to manage sustainment operations at a lower level than conventional forces. Because of the decentralized oper-

Multiskilled Soldier Concept



This chart shows the training progression for the multiskilled Soldier concept, which was developed by the 528th Special Operations Support Battalion.

ations conducted by Special Forces, a company supply sergeant may have to manage sustainment for multiple ODAs dispersed across hundreds of miles with little support from his parent battalion.

Training on topics such as support operations, contracting, and joint and multinational logistics can develop the knowledge needed to manage this mission by tying in with Army or joint and multinational partners. Developing knowledge typically found on higher level staffs at the battalion and company levels will increase the ability to operate independently. This is embraced operationally by Special Forces and must be embraced by supporting personnel.

Required Special Forces Skill Qualifications

Beyond developing logistics expertise, Soldiers supporting Special Forces must have various special skill qualifications. Some of this training develops a knowledge base that will help Soldiers fit in with a Special Forces unit. Other training provides qualifications and knowledge that a Soldier can use to assist an ODA. Sustainment Soldiers being certified to rig a sling load

or having the knowledge to assist in setting up a drop zone or landing zone increases the capabilities of a combat unit. Many of these skills are not commonly used in the contemporary operational environment, but a more dynamic or kinetically oriented mission would benefit from many personnel having these qualifications.

Sustainment Soldiers are integral to the success of a Special Forces unit. The level of training given to these Soldiers must be commensurate with the demanding nature of the mission they are supporting. Formalized cross-training, knowledge development, and special skills qualifications will increase the value of sustainment Soldiers to all areas of Special Forces operations.

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