

Supporting Army and Joint Special Operations Forces

■ By Col. Randal Nelson and Mike Gallagher

Opportunities to serve in support of special operations forces (SOF) have markedly increased since 9/11. Officers, warrant officers, and noncommissioned officers are needed to support the dynamic role of SOF across today's complex global landscape.

Assignments to SOF units challenge logisticians, exposing them to additional authorities, policies, funding streams, and nonstandard ways of sustaining complex, geographically dispersed, unconventional operations.

SOF Logisticians: A Global Network

Headquartered at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) provides SOF career opportunities in more than 25 global locations. SOF joint logistics positions are available at nine locations through the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida.

The SOF community has five truths:

- Humans are more important than hardware.
- Quality is more important than quantity.
- SOF cannot be mass produced.
- Competent SOF cannot be created after emergencies occur.
- Most special operations require non-SOF support.

The fifth SOF truth is where logisticians and broader sustainment professionals are called to contribute. Those assigned to SOF units are the resident logistics experts for SOF

commanders. They balance the dynamic management of major force program (MFP) 11 (SOF) systems with the maximum use of MFP 2 (general purpose forces) systems.

Managing MFP 11 funding for special operations systems requires mature personnel to distinguish and manage multiple funding streams. Leaders at all levels rely on SOF logistics professionals to provide the critical link to external resources across the Army and the joint logistics enterprise.

SOF Logistics Assignments

Assignments in SOF units are very demanding and involve supporting uniquely experienced professionals who require no-fail logistics to ensure mission success. It is rewarding to be a member of a team comprising elite professionals who perform special warfare and surgical strike missions without fanfare.

For some professional logisticians, consecutive tours in SOF are desirable. They enable the individual to gain experience in unique skill sets to better support the SOF enterprise.

However, much like personnel management before 9/11, when it was common to seek experience in both light and heavy Army formations to round out an individual's experience, it is now also desirable to achieve a balance of conventional force (CF) and SOF experience to expand professional growth and leader development.

SOF assignments provide opportunities to expand one's understanding of joint operations and exposure to the joint logistics enterprise. Most SOF missions are joint in nature and are normally part of a joint

special operations task force working directly with multiple services across the geographic combatant commands.

After 14 years of sustained conflict on a noncontiguous battlefield, SOF and CF have developed an unprecedented relationship. SOF-CF interdependence and interoperability are extremely important to senior leaders at the highest levels of the Army and joint headquarters.

This has been reflected in the annual Army-SOCOM warfighter talks and Army-SOCOM memorandum of agreement. Building SOF-CF momentum is among the USASOC commander's top six lines of effort.

USASOC seeks to advance SOF-CF interdependence in both training and operational environments to maximize collective SOF-CF readiness and deployed effects. Logisticians serving in both SOF and CF units should understand that this momentum of interdependence is increasing through training and operations worldwide.

Assignment Process

Certain SOF positions are filled by Human Resources Command (HRC) direct assignment. The screening criteria include a strong performance file, an Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery general technical score of 100 for enlisted Soldiers, airborne qualification (or a signed volunteer statement for airborne training), and the ability to obtain and maintain a secret security clearance. (Some positions require a top secret security clearance.)

Many select assignments come with stringent vetting, selection,

and training requirements. Certain advanced positions require prior SOF experience. Individuals serving in SOF are screened annually for continued service and selection for broadening assignments within SOF organizations.

Managing SOF-CF Progression

USASOC, in coordination with HRC, developed the skill identifier K9 (special operations support) and the special qualifications identifier S (special operations support personnel). These identifiers are for individuals who have successfully served 22 months in a SOF formation or 12 months in a SOF deployment.

The identifiers must be approved by the first SOF colonel in the chain of command. They enable HRC, unit personnel managers, and senior logisticians across the SOF-CF enterprise to identify talent for upcoming assignment consideration.

Logisticians must serve in a range of positions at all echelons and areas within the Army. This ensures the Army is capable of employing all available resources. It is entirely possible to move between conventional and unconventional assignments to satisfy key developmental, professional military education, and broadening requirements.

Individual counseling is essential for logisticians considering consecutive SOF assignments. The individual, the supported command, and HRC should agree that the assignment is beneficial for career development.

Timing is critical to managing the deliberate flow of logistics professionals in and out of SOF assignments. Early communication and staying ahead of HRC assignment cycle deadlines are imperative for success.

Late recommendations for individuals who are already slated for assignment elsewhere will be problematic for the command, the Soldier, and the family. Communicating early and often facilitates

successful career management.

Individuals interested in serving in SOF assignments should discuss future opportunities with their assignment officer, rater, or mentor during counseling sessions. These assignments can be included as goals in five-year career plan. Opportunities to serve in SOF may be available at your current duty station.

Interested individuals may also contact the SOF logistics mentors at the USASOC G-4, the 528th Sustainment Brigade (Special Operations) (Airborne), and the SOCOM J-4. Branch managers will assist individuals by placing them in SOF assignments.

Further information about USASOC may also be found at the USASOC Facebook page and the USASOC website at www.soc.mil. Individuals may also contact the USASOC deputy G-4 at (910) 432-1180 or richard.w.mcardle.civ@mail.mil.

The demand for SOF is increasing, and opportunities for Army logisticians are many. SOF units continue to seek forward-thinking logistics and broader sustainment professionals who are ready to enable SOF operators on tomorrow's complex battlefield.

Col. Randal Nelson is the G-4, Army Special Operations Command, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He holds a bachelor's degree from South Dakota State University, a master's degree in international affairs and communication from Saint Cloud State University, and a master's degree in national resource strategy with a supply chain management concentration from the National Defense University.

Mike Gallagher is a logistics planner in the Army Special Operations Command G-4 office. He is a retired Army officer and holds a bachelor's degree from Pittsburg State University. He is a graduate of the Command and General Staff College and is completing a master's degree from Webster University.

“We seek to advance SOF-CF interdependence, to include interoperability and integration, in both training and operational environments to maximize our collective readiness efforts and deployed effects.”

—Lt. Gen. Kenneth E. Tovo,
Commander,
Army Special Operations
Command

“Logisticians must serve in a range of positions at all echelons both in the conventional and nonconventional Army in order to ensure we are capable of employing all the resources available to our warfighters in this complex environment. Logistics officers must become masters of their craft at the tactical level; this requires our officers to spend time in multiple types of organizations in order to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to sustain our Army.”

—Col. Vic Harmon,
Human Resources Command
Logistics Branch