

# Getting Inside the 1st SFAB

By Kimball Johnson

NCO Journal

Dec. 8, 2017



Staff Sgt. Justin S. Seeley, right, and Staff Sgt. Joshua Maynard, assigned to 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade, plot grid coordinates during a Master Unmanned Aircraft Systems Operator course, Nov. 3, 2017 at Fort Benning, Ga. Soldiers interested in joining the 1st SFAB should contact their branch manager for more information. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Arjenis Nunez)

*It is no doubt a good thing to conquer on the field of battle, but it needs greater wisdom and greater skill to make use of victory. – Polybius, (as quoted in Field Manual 3-0, Operations)<sup>1</sup>*

Security Force Assistance Brigades are the newest addition to the Army's evolving response for the need to establish stable and secure areas of operation around the world. The SFAB's value lies in its sustained ability to support a commander's mandate, per FM 3-0 ([http://www.apd.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/pdf/ARN5942\\_FM%203-0%20FINAL%20WEB.epub](http://www.apd.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/ARN5942_FM%203-0%20FINAL%20WEB.epub)), paragraph 8-17, to "consolidate gains and transition an AO to a legitimate authority able to maintain security and public order."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, according to Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey, the creation of SFABs is the number one priority for Gen. Mark A. Milley, Army Chief of Staff.<sup>3</sup>

The Army is currently offering incentives to qualified noncommissioned officers who volunteer to be team members in one of six SFABs to be fielded (five for Regular Army and one for the Army National Guard).<sup>4</sup> NCOs holding the rank of promotable specialist and above are needed to accomplish the SFABs' mission .

## The Mission

According to Milley, "The United States will achieve national security objectives by, with, and through allied and partnered indigenous security

forces for the next 25-50 years."<sup>5</sup>

In order to prepare for that eventuality, SFABs are organized differently than Brigade Combat Teams, says Lt. Col. Mary L. Olodun, public affairs officer and chief of Communications Integration, U.S. Forces Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. SFABs provide a sustainable, long-term capability for more complex operations, as opposed to the short-duration advise-and-assist mission capability of BCTs.

"SFABs are designed to enhance the readiness of the Army by reducing the demand for existing BCTs to conduct security-force assistance operations, thereby preserving BCT readiness for full-spectrum contingency operations," she said.

Olodun confirmed that SFABs have all of the same career fields as BCTs, to include infantry, armor, field artillery, engineer, and sustainment, but that they will also include personnel with specialties in civil affairs, psychological operations, foreign area studies, strategy, force management, financial management and cyber protection. (MOSs currently needed to meet these needs include, 25U or 25C, 92Y, 13F, 12B with E-EOCA, 68W, 91 Series, and 35F).

The difference between the BCT and SFAB's mission is also evident in the SFAB's expanded mission objectives: train, advise, assist, accompany, and enable. Olodun pointed out that SFABs go two steps further than BCTs by providing sustained advisor-based assistance to allied and partnered national security forces by also "accompanying" them in the field to provide non-participant advice, and then, "enabling" them to work independently with observations provided only after they return from a mission.

Additionally, Olodun said SFABs have teams tailored to each echelon of a partner security force, to include, company, division and corps. Over 800 commissioned and noncommissioned officers will make up an SFAB and, although SFABs share the same structural framework as BCTs, SFABs are command-centric and have built-in mission command structures to enable independent operations and unity of command.

Olodun concluded by emphasizing that SFABs will not have the major platforms and weapon systems of a BCT and will not train to conduct decisive actions.<sup>6</sup>

### Career Incentives

Perhaps the most enticing incentive offered to promotable specialists, who volunteer for SFAB duty, will be the automatic promotion that accompanies successful completion of the Security Force Assistance Advisor training course. 1st SFAB recently promoted three Soldiers under the new promotion policy. Read more here

([https://www.army.mil/article/196383/1st\\_sfab\\_promotes\\_first\\_soldiers\\_to\\_sergeant\\_under\\_new\\_policy](https://www.army.mil/article/196383/1st_sfab_promotes_first_soldiers_to_sergeant_under_new_policy)).

"For those Soldiers who are specialist-promotable ... regardless of what the cutoff score is, when they graduate from the [Military Advisor Training] Academy at Fort Benning, they will be awarded 799 points – the number they need to get promoted regardless of what their MOS is," said Lt. Gen. Thomas C. Seamands, director of Military Personnel Management and deputy chief of staff, G1, Headquarters, Department of the Army,

Another incentive, designed to attract NCOs, concerns professional military education. According to Seamands, PME will be suspended for NCOs selected for promotion who have not been able to attend their required leadership schools.

"If they're otherwise qualified, they will get promoted, and when they return from a deployment, they'll get their PME," Seamands explained.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, upon successful completion of the SFAA course at the Military Advisory Training Academy, Fort Benning, Georgia, a Special Qualification Identifier of "3" is awarded to all graduates, designating them as a Security Forces Assistance Advisor.<sup>8</sup>

Soldiers also receive a \$5,000 bonus upon completion of the course when volunteering for at least 12 months and their pick of follow-on assignments, according to Seamands.<sup>9</sup> (MATA course length is based on the applicant's previous training and experience.)



Finally, the knowledge of being among the first to help develop a legacy of SFAB service will be enhanced through the distinctive colored beret and SFAB insignia.

"The Army has approved a new shoulder sleeve insignia with a tab for the SFABs," said Maj. Christopher D. Ophardt, public affairs officer to the Secretary of the Army.<sup>10</sup>

It will be in the overall shape of an arrowhead with a broadsword pointing upwards in its center and reads "Combat Advisor." Photo Panel (Left)

### Who Should Volunteer

Remarking on the kind of attitude a Soldier should have before thinking about volunteering for SFAB duty, Seamands said, "If you want to deploy, and ... come in for the sense of adventure, you can do that by volunteering for the SFAB."<sup>11</sup> (Volunteers should be aware that SFABs are intended to sustain a higher deployment tempo than conventional Army units.)

There are other requirements as well. Soldiers must qualify for a secret-level security clearance, achieve a minimum score of 80 in each event of the Army Physical Fitness Test with a total of 240 points, and have completed key and development assignments. Their Physical Profile Serial System score must be 111221 and they must be medically deployable as well. Finally, they must meet with a board for assessment and final

approval.

Perhaps one of the most important requirements for the job has to do with the inherent mission of SFABs to not only provide military training and instruction to our allies' security forces, but to also foster relationships.

In an article titled, "Beyond Frontiers: The Critical Role of Cross-Cultural Competence in the Military," the authors explain the interpersonal skills Soldiers must have in order for the mission of the SFABs to succeed:

The U.S. will likely face missions within the next decade that increasingly involve efforts focused on stabilization, reconstruction, security operations, and humanitarian endeavors. These types of missions often require close interaction between ground personnel and those from other cultural backgrounds, including both allies and adversaries. Given this reality, the demonstrated need for our personnel to communicate, negotiate, and influence members of various cultures — and the agencies involved with these missions — is equally as critical as the military's ability to effectively "aim and fire."<sup>12</sup>

Successfully qualifying to serve in an SFAB won't be easy, but Soldiers who meet the requirements should be aware that the 1st SFAB at Fort Benning, Georgia, is preparing to deploy sometime in 2018, with a focus on the Central Command area of responsibility.

In addition to the high operational tempo, Soldiers should be prepared for a three-year tour of duty in the SFAB. If they have families, they can be accompanied as well.

For updates to these requirements, visit the SFAB website at <https://www.benning.army.mil/mcoe/cdid/TCM-SFAB/Volunteer.html> (<https://www.benning.army.mil/mcoe/cdid/TCM-SFAB/Volunteer.html>) or visit the Army's website (<http://www.armyreenlistment.com/sfab.html>) for a place to start the process.

### **Combat Advisor Staff Sgt. Adams**

Staff Sgt. Randolph S. Adams, gunnery sergeant with the 4th Battalion, 1st SFAB, Fort Benning, Georgia, is one of the first to graduate successfully from the SFAA course at MATA. His Army training helped prepare him for the new assignment. Adams formerly served as a gunnery sergeant in the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry, Fort Benning, Georgia. He deployed to Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom from 2011 through 2012.

Adams also received 16 weeks of language training in Dari and Pashto at the Defense Language Institute and has hands on experience in advising.

"I've personally worked close with security forces in Afghanistan and with the Afghan National Army," Adams said. "I am actually broadening my horizons because [serving in the 1st SFAB is] something different. I'm going to be on a team and I'm going to be working with [all types of] people."<sup>13</sup>

Adams' comments echo those of Brig. Gen. David A. Lesperance, deputy-commanding general of armor at the Maneuver Center of Excellence, Fort Benning, Georgia.

"Those leaders that go out and do [SFAB] missions by and large enjoy seeing and assessing and being a part of [a] team in another country and watching that team grow," Lesperance said.<sup>14</sup>

According to Adams, the training was very in-depth and he enjoyed it. He came across training he never thought that he would receive before going there and wasn't exaggerating when he said the training was all inclusive in the SFAB.

"Not only will they have to retain their combined arms operations [but], on top of that, language training. All the Army mandatory training that occurs in a BCT will still occur [and] . . . they'll continue to hone their advisor skills. When you add the advisor tasks [with] the combined arms tasks that they must be able to maintain," Lesperance said, "that's going to be a full-time job."<sup>15</sup>

Adams said that ongoing training will be essential in the SFAB in order to support changing security challenges around the world.

"I don't know where the [1st] SFAB is going to deploy to, years from now, [but] we'll just start up a new training cycle to get us ready for whatever the new mission will be," Adams said.

### **Conclusion**

"This is an organization that has the full support of the leadership of the Department of the Army. They are going to be trained, equipped and ready to perform [their] mission," said the Sergeant Major of the Army. "Don't listen to some of the perceptions floating around about the advisor mission ... We will absolutely take care of you all. I can promise you that."<sup>16</sup>

### **Notes**

1. FM 3-0, header.
2. FM 3-0, paragraph 8-17, 6 October 2017, p.8-4
3. Staff Sgt. Sierra A. Melendez, "SMA Dailey pays a visit to Army's 1st SFAB," *DVIDS*, October 16, 2017, accessed Nov.1, 2017. <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/3889203/sma-dailey-pays-visit-armys-1st-sfab> (<https://www.dvidshub.net/image/3889203/sma-dailey-pays-visit-armys-1st-sfab>)
4. Meghan Myers, "Army offers automatic promotions to Security Force Assistance Brigade volunteers," *ArmyTimes*, October 11, 2017, accessed Nov 1, 2017. <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/10/11/army-offers-automatic-promotions-to-security-force-assistance-brigade-volunteers/> (<https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/10/11/army-offers-automatic-promotions-to-security-force-assistance-brigade-volunteers/>) Army Public Affairs

- (<https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/10/11/army-offers-automatic-promotions-to-security-force-assistance-brigade-volunteers/>), Army Public Affairs Guidance, par. 5.5.1.
5. SFAB Official Website, Ft. Benning, GA., n.d., <https://www.benning.army.mil/mcoe/cdid/TCM-SFAB/content/PDF/SFAB%20Bugle%20Call.pdf> (<https://www.benning.army.mil/mcoe/cdid/TCM-SFAB/content/PDF/SFAB%20Bugle%20Call.pdf>)
  6. LTC. Mary L. Olodun, Chief of Communications Integration, Public Affairs Officer, US Forces Command, Fort Bragg, N.C., in response to interview questions from the author, October 2017.
  7. Meghan Myers, "Army offers automatic promotions."
  8. LTC Olodun, referencing "Notification of Future Change to DA Pam 611-21, W-1710-03, Establishment of Special Qualification Identifier (SQI) 3 (Security Forces Assistance Advisor)," in email to author.
  9. Meghan Myers, "Interested in joining the Army's newest brigade? Here's what you can expect," *ArmyTimes*, October 28, 2017, accessed Nov 8, 2017. <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/05/28/interested-in-joining-the-army-s-newest-brigade-here-s-what-you-can-expect/> (<https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/05/28/interested-in-joining-the-army-s-newest-brigade-here-s-what-you-can-expect/>).
  10. Matthew Cox, "Army Chief: Advise-and-Assist Unites to Wear Brown, Not Green, Berets," *Military.com*, November 2, 2017, accessed November 7, 2017. <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2017/11/02/army-chief-advise-assist-units-wear-brown-not-green-berets.html> (<http://www.military.com/daily-news/2017/11/02/army-chief-advise-assist-units-wear-brown-not-green-berets.html>)
  11. Meghan Myers, "Army offers automatic promotions."
  12. Elizabeth Culhane, Patrice Reid, Loring J. Crepeau, and Daniel McDonald, "Beyond Frontiers: The Critical Role of Cross-Cultural Competence in the Military," *Science for Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, n.d., <http://www.siop.org/tip/july12/05culhane.aspx> (<http://www.siop.org/tip/july12/05culhane.aspx>).
  13. Staff Sgt. Randolph S. Adams, gunnery sergeant, 4th Battalion, 1st SFAB, Fort Benning, Georgia, in phone discussion with the author, November, 2017.
  14. Meghan Myers, "Interested in joining."
  15. Meghan Myers, "Interested in joining."
  16. Staff Sgt. Sierra A. Melendez, "SMA Dailey pays a visit."