

WHAT DOES A CAREER AS A SPECIAL FORCES OFFICER LOOK LIKE?

PART TWO: Command

Troop Command

Challenges and rewards

After passing the cycle of training I returned to a Troop in the New Year, conducted some quick coursing and then immediately deployed. I was one half of a Troop Command team working in support of our Afghan Special Police partners. My first deployments with SOF to Afghanistan remain a crucible of experience, lessons, successes and losses.

Further deployments and command positions have proven that my career has remained as challenging as it was for my first rotation. I spent a good deal of time deployed in various locations and in various roles. I was a Troop Commander (for four years), an Operations Officer, a Liaison Officer, a Team Leader and a Squadron Commander. It has been both varied and rewarding because SOF is much more than just "direct action" or "counter terrorism". Much of what I have been responsible for is necessarily protected, but all of it makes me proud to serve New Zealand.

Importantly I have managed some great time away on my own, with friends and most importantly my wife. Though there have been occasional cancelled holidays, I have travelled extensively, ranging from sailing the Pacific to a month-long honeymoon in Africa.

Most rewarding for me has been the empowerment and mentoring I have received. I have worked for and alongside dedicated women and men, who have taught me a lot. Our regional and global responsibilities have ensured that I remain operationally focused and have

been expected to develop new tactics, capabilities and concepts. Importantly, I have then been empowered to see these through.

Squadron Command

Empowered expectations

In the last three years as an OC I have been involved in the evolution of our organisation as we adapt from the first 17 years' post "9/11". It has been inspiring to be part of a team evolving to meet operational needs so quickly. I have been held to account for the environments our team is responsible for and had a team that is driven to constantly improve. We have all pulled together and developed to a point quite different to the one I was first posted into 10 years ago. It's that kind of thing that makes this job worthwhile – people motivated to be ready for future operations.

It is these people, and their passionate approach to their job, that has been a critical factor in remaining with Special Operations.

I always expected SOF officers to be close, and we are. The best man at my wedding works as the OC in the hangar opposite and though we are now older (he is balding), we still enjoy command in SOF. Most importantly, because we are a smaller community it allows a 'shared consciousness' of ideas to be generated, and then we are empowered to move those ideas forward together.

An important addition is the Senior Enlisted friends I have. SOF Officers are privileged to work with dedicated WOs, SNCOs and JNCOs who are calm in contact, measured on operations, and tenacious in preparing their teams for operations. They aren't afraid to fight to maintain our operational drive at all levels, allowing us (as a command team of Officer Commanding and Squadron Sergeant Major) to focus on setting conditions for operations and capability development that makes a difference for New Zealand.

Overall my career as a Special Operations Officer has been much more than I first expected. Much more than just bombs and bullets – it is the times my team mates and I haven't pulled the trigger that I am most proud of.

It has taught, and allowed, me to deliver discrete integrated and valued operational effects on behalf of the NZDF. It has been a lot of engagement across Joint, Inter-Agency and Multinational partners and has fortunately included a significant amount of time in command, with a smattering of operational staff positions. Overall my SOF career so far has been mentally and physically challenging, operationally rewarding and leaves me with a pride in the focus our team has on delivering for the NZDF.

Conclusion

The only qualification prerequisite for an officer to attend selection is a commission, in any Service. Although there is no minimum rank requirements for officers to attempt selection, a good understanding of combat MAP/estimate process is preferable. Generally you get good exposure to this on Platoon Commander Courses, Intermediate promotion courses or the Grade III Staff and Tactics Course. Experience is useful, but so too is a desire to win, a good attitude and a healthy dose of guile!

What we are looking for in future Special Operations officers is people who are comfortable with uncertainty, agile thinkers, measured professionals and committed to New Zealand. Who Dares Wins.

