

LIFE IN THE SPECIAL FORCES

# LIFE AS A GREEN BERET

by Cynthia Kennedy Henzel



BrightPoint Press

# CONTENTS

<b>AT A GLANCE</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> <b>READY FOR ANYTHING</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> <b>BECOMING A GREEN BERET</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> <b>TOOLS OF THE TRADE</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b> <b>ROLES IN THE GREEN BERETS</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b> <b>GREEN BERETS ON THE JOB</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Source Notes</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>For Further Research</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Image Credits</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>About the Author</b>	<b>64</b>

# AT A GLANCE

- Green Berets are an elite unit of the US Army.
- The Green Berets' primary mission is unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense. This means fighting alongside guerrillas in other countries and training foreign soldiers to defend their own countries.
- Green Berets must pass the Q course, which includes challenging physical and mental training.
- Green Berets work in teams with six specialties.
- Specialties include team leaders, engineering, operations and intelligence, weapons, communications, and medical.
- Green Berets adapt equipment, weapons, and vehicles for their special missions.
- Many Green Berets work in groups such as dive teams. These groups receive additional training.



- Green Berets have worked in more than eighty countries.
- Green Berets are known for their ability to work with and train soldiers in different languages and cultures.

# 1

## BECOMING A GREEN BERET

**E**ach year, approximately 3,000 soldiers begin Green Beret training. Candidates must be US citizens. They must join the Army or National Guard. Candidates need high scores in reading and math on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). This series of tests covers science, math, reading, and more. They must also qualify for a security clearance. Government

officials check each candidate's past. They also talk to friends, family, and past employers about the candidate's character.

Candidates first enter the Special Operations Preparation Course (SOPC). This lasts two weeks for enlisted soldiers and three weeks for National Guard or

***In addition to traditional academics, the ASVAB measures knowledge in electronics, mechanics, and assembling objects.***





*The ability to work well as part of a team is just as important as individual skills in the Green Berets.*

newly enlisted candidates. The SOPC focuses on physical fitness training and basic skills such as navigation. The course prepares candidates for the Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) course. The SFAS is designed to weed out candidates who don't have the physical or mental strength to become a Green Beret.

The first part of the SFAS tests physical ability. Candidates march, swim, and do push-ups and sit-ups. The second part of the SFAS tests a soldier's ability to work as part of a team. Some exercises test the candidate's ability to think while stressed and exhausted. Many exercises require creative solutions. Candidates must use the energy and resources they have to make a situation work.



Typically, fewer than half of all SFAS class members qualify to move on to Green Beret training. In one 2021 class, 44 percent made it through. Sergeant 1st Class Philip A. Taraska explains that trainers “are looking for humble individuals who care about the mission and have no concern for awards.”<sup>2</sup>

## THE Q COURSE

The Special Forces Qualification Course is commonly called the Q course. The Army adapts the course to the needs of the military. At times, the course takes almost two years to complete. In 2019, the course was shortened to about six months. Major General Kurt Sonntag explains, “Today’s [old] qualification course is for exactly the

type of Green Beret we needed for 2008. It is not what we need for 2028.”<sup>3</sup>

During the Q course, enlisted candidates receive training in their specialty area.

The five specialties are weapons, medical, communications, intelligence, and engineering. Officer candidates receive some training in each specialty plus leadership training.

One Q course is small unit tactics. Candidates learn to work with other

## WOMEN WEAR THE GREEN BERET

Captain Kathleen Wilder completed the Q course in 1980. But she was not allowed to graduate. The US Army did not open combat jobs for women until 2016. In 2020, the first woman joined the Green Berets. Her name was not released for security reasons.

# GLOSSARY

## **amputations**

removing limbs with surgery

## **guerrillas**

members of a small group of fighters who fight in nonconventional ways

## **infrastructure**

the basic structures of an area, including buildings, roads, and bridges

## **marksmanship**

skill in shooting

## **optics**

devices used to precisely aim a weapon

## **recruit**

to enlist people into the armed forces

## **sabotaging**

destroying something for political or military gain

## **turret**

a rotating structure on a vehicle that protects a gun mounted inside it

# SOURCE NOTES

## **INTRODUCTION: READY FOR ANYTHING**

1. Quoted in Chuck Oldham, "SOCOM: Navigating the Gray Zone," *Defense Media Network*, June 23, 2015. [www.defensemedianetwork.com](http://www.defensemedianetwork.com).

## **CHAPTER ONE: BECOMING A GREEN BERET**

2. Quoted in Chad Menegay, "Earning the Green Beret," *Ohio National Guard*, December 22, 2020. [www.ong.ohio.gov](http://www.ong.ohio.gov).

3. Quoted in Lolita C. Baldor, "Big Changes to Grueling Special Forces Course Draw Scrutiny," *Army Times*, October 14, 2019. [www.armytimes.com](http://www.armytimes.com).

## **CHAPTER TWO: TOOLS OF THE TRADE**

4. Quoted in Scott R. Gourley, "Special Operations Special Forces Gear," *Defense Media Network*, August 27, 2009. [www.defensemedianetwork.com](http://www.defensemedianetwork.com).

5. Quoted in Gourley, "Special Operations Special Forces Gear."

## **CHAPTER THREE: ROLES IN THE GREEN BERETS**

6. Quoted in Jason Anschutz, "Sanford Fargo Part of the Special Forces Medical Training Course," *Sanford Health*, March 22, 2023. <https://news.sanfordhealth.org>.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: GREEN BERETS ON THE JOB**

7. Quoted in Elizabeth M. Collins, "First to Go: Green Berets Remember Earliest Mission in Afghanistan," *US Army*, February 8, 2017. [www.army.mil](http://www.army.mil).

8. Quoted in Menegay, "Earning the Green Beret."

# FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

## BOOKS

Sue Bradford Edwards, *Life as an Army Ranger*. San Diego, CA: BrightPoint Press, 2024.

Elizabeth Pagel-Hogan, *US Special Operations Forces Equipment and Vehicles*. Minneapolis, MN: Abdo Publishing, 2022.

Laura Platas Scott, *Life in the US Special Operations Forces*. San Diego, CA: BrightPoint Press, 2020.

## INTERNET SOURCES

Elizabeth M. Collins, "First to Go: Green Berets Remember Earliest Mission in Afghanistan," *US Army*, n.d. [www.army.mil](http://www.army.mil).

"'Hold That Bridge,' the 7th Special Forces Group and Operation JUST CAUSE," *US Army*, December 20, 2018. [www.army.mil](http://www.army.mil).

"JROTC Cadets Have Rare Visit with Green Berets," *Denver Public Schools*, April 26, 2018. [www.dpsk12.org](http://www.dpsk12.org).

# INDEX

- Afghanistan, 46–50
- areas of responsibility, 56
- Chan, Fred, 23–24
- communications specialists, 38
- demolitions, 37
- direct action missions, 10
- diving, 7, 40, 41, 43
- engineering specialists, 36–37
- equipment, 22–28
- foreign internal defense, 6–8
- Gamble, Keith, 49–50
- graduation, 21
- Ground Mobility Vehicle, 30–31
- guerrillas, 10, 20, 44, 51
- hostages, 11
- intelligence specialists, 38–39
- languages, 19, 57
- medical specialists, 39–40
- Mine-Resistant
  - Ambushed-Protected vehicle, 31–33
- motto, 10
- mountain teams, 43
- night vision, 26
- non-lethal weapons, 28
- operations specialists, 38–39
- parachuting, 7, 18, 41–43
- physical fitness, 15, 45
- rifles, 27–28
- search and rescue, 9
- Sonntag, Kurt, 16–17
- success rate, 16, 21
- Taraska, Philip A., 16
- Task Force Dagger, 47–50
- teamwork, 14, 15, 20, 45
- Timmons, Elliot, 57
- training, 12–21
- Ukraine, 50–53
- unconventional warfare, 9–10
- Votel, Joseph L., 10
- weapons specialists, 35–36, 49