

Security-Force Assistance Brigades Looking for a Few Good Soldiers

by MAJ Karl M. Harness

What is a security-force assistance brigade (SFAB), and what is its mission? Many Soldiers interested in volunteering for one ask these questions.

Army Training Publication (ATP) 3-96.1, *Security Force Assistance Brigades*, defines an SFAB as “the Army’s dedicated conventional organization for conducting security-force assistance around the world. While each SFAB has a regional focus, its unique capabilities enable it to perform wherever it is needed with minimal cultural and regional orientation.”

The SFAB organization is a hybrid of conventional brigade combat teams (BCT) and Special Forces teams. Organized as BCTs, the brigade headquarters provides mission command over six battalions: three maneuver battalions (two infantry and one cavalry squadron), an artillery battalion, an engineer battalion and a logistics battalion. Further aligning with BCTs, each battalion has subordinate companies, troops and batteries, all of which have three subordinate adviser teams (ATs).

ATs are the core of the SFAB, and they are led by a post-command captain. The 12-Soldier team consists of four maneuver advisers who have an 11- or 19-series military-occupation specialty (MOS) and eight “enabler advisers,” consisting of intelligence, communications, explosive ordnance disposal/engineer, logistics, fires, medical, operations and maintenance Soldiers in the ranks of sergeant and staff sergeant. These teams primarily advise battalions.

The company adviser teams (CATs) are organized the same way but are led by a key-developmental-complete major (who is also the company commander). A pre-command captain serves as the operations adviser/executive officer, and a master sergeant serves as the team sergeant/first sergeant. The other members of the team are the same MOS as the ATs but are staff sergeants and sergeants first class. CATs advise battalions and brigades.

Battalion adviser teams (BATs) are a little more complicated. The battalion headquarters contains all the same staff sections/warfighting functions as a standard BCT and provides two adviser teams, led by the battalion commander and the executive officer, respectively. In addition to the staff functions required of standard battalions, BATs advise at the brigade and corps level.

The three support battalions (fires, engineer and logistics) are organized similarly to the maneuver battalions, but their adviser teams only have four Soldiers. These teams focus more on partnership within their areas of expertise at echelon rather than with the larger maneuver formations.

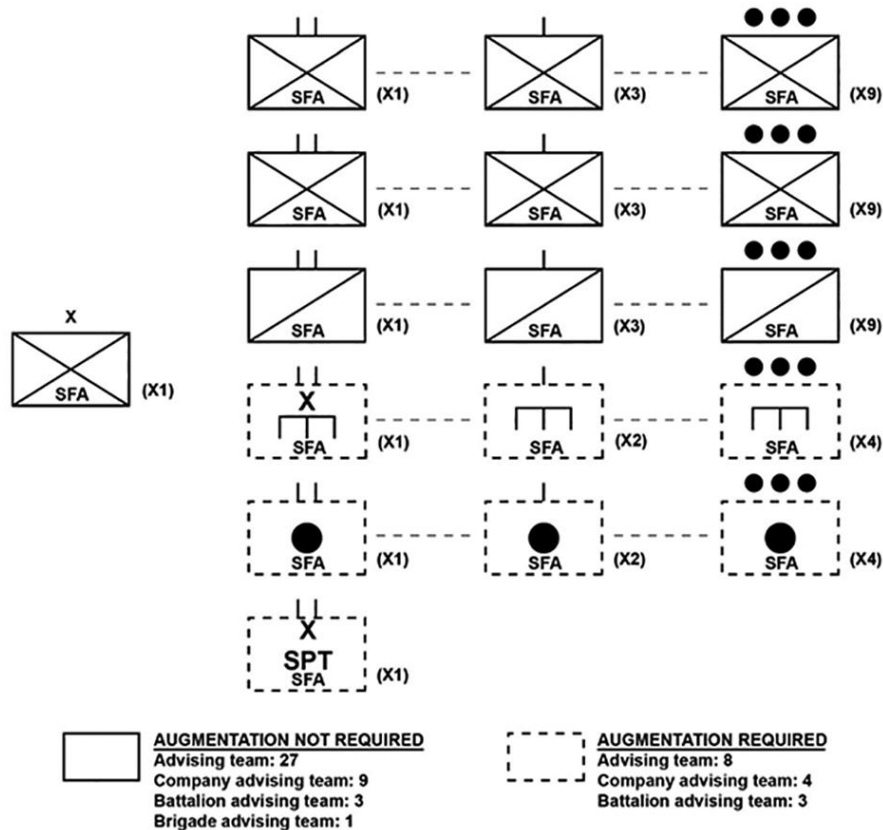


Figure 1. SFAB adviser teams from brigade to team level. (Adapted from Figure 1-5, ATP 3-96.1, May 2018)

The SFAB organization maximizes flexibility for the unit. They are capable of deploying as companies through the entire brigade, or, much like 2 SFAB, as separate task forces especially task-organized to meet mission requirements for the combatant command.

This inherent flexibility allows the SFAB to achieve its core mission as outlined in ATP 3-96.1, “which is to assess, train, advise and assist foreign security forces (FSF) in coordination with joint, interagency and multinational forces to improve partner capability and capacity, and to facilitate achievement of U.S. strategic objectives,” thus making it a unique organization in the Army.

Advisers in the SFABs are **not** Special Forces and are **not** part of Special Operations Command. They are conventional Soldiers selected to advise partner-nation conventional security forces. They are not intended to advise a partner nation’s Special Operations Forces (SOF), even though they may coordinate with them (through allied SOF) on the battlefield.

Adviser attributes

The SFABs desire particular attributes for the advisers. For example, selfless service is paramount to the adviser’s success. An adviser’s success is not based on personal actions but on the actions and success of the partner force. Service in the SFAB requires a certain type of personality and provides an excellent backdrop for the unique purpose and mission of the Assessment and Selection (A&S) Branch. A&S is not just looking for the **most** qualified candidates, they are looking for the **right** qualified candidates.

The Security Force Assistance Command (SFAC) chose 11 adviser attributes outlined in Field Manual (FM) 3-22, **Army Support to Security Cooperation**, which are “disciplined, mature, displays sound judgment, initiative, cool under pressure, tolerance for ambiguity, open-minded, empathetic, situationally aware, patient, morally straight.” These are the attributes the A&S Branch seeks to identify and assess in each potential adviser. A&S conducts this assessment through the execution of the SFAB A&S Course held at Fort Bragg, NC.

The SFAB A&S Course places Soldiers in an environment that challenges individuals and assesses their ability to work within a small team, and it provides an opportunity to observe the adviser attributes. The SFAC A&S Branch continually reviews and updates each event to ensure the course provides an accurate assessment of a candidate for the selection board. While A&S looks at and reviews in detail a candidate's official military-personnel file, the file alone is not a true indicator of a candidate's ability to operate as an adviser.



Figure 2. SFC Lockett observes SFAB candidates conducting the Leader Reaction Course as part of the SFAC A&S Course in July 2019.

The current selection rate for the A&S Course is 73 percent, which indicates that Soldiers who are successful in the conventional force are not necessarily the right fit as an adviser. Advising FSF is a complex task that does not suit all Army leaders. Many candidates attend the course with strong files but are not selected based on their demonstration of the adviser attributes.

Soldiers desiring to serve in the SFAB must consider a very important question: Why should I volunteer for this organization? Many Soldiers volunteer for the duty station or the bonus, or they think assignment to the organization will lead to more success in their careers. These reasons, though valid, are selfish in nature and do not serve the organization, the Army at large or the SFAB mission. As stated, selfless service is the adviser's benchmark. Volunteers should not base service solely on personal desires but on a desire to serve the nation and to enable FSF to defeat the enemies of the United States before the country must intercede with military might. In the SFAB, Soldiers will do more with less (troop-to-task ratio) and be expected to know their jobs to teach it to others while providing expert analysis and advice so their partners can accomplish the mission.

Prep for assessment, selection

Preparing for SFAB A&S requires discipline and self-study on the part of the candidate (the discipline attribute). Candidates must arrive physically prepared for the course. Failure to complete the Army Physical Fitness Test with a minimum score of 240 (with at least 70 points in each event) is an automatic drop from the course. Candidates must also prepare for various other physical activities, which include varying-length foot marches and other physically demanding tasks, all of which are calculated as part of the assessment.

Physical fitness is only one aspect of service in the SFAB. Advisers must know their MOS, so study, study, study. There is no time given the current deployment schedules for the brigades to hire noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and officers who do not know their jobs. Not only should NCOs and officers clearly understand their MOSs inside

and out, Soldiers should study the regulations and FMs so they are confident in their craft and can find answers when they do not know them.

Soldiers must understand the differences between teaching and advising, along with the ability to balance one over the other. Teaching focuses on the “how to do” something, but an adviser explains why doing a certain task is more advantageous than another. Advisers must look at the broader picture and consider the second- and third-order effects of an action, yet accept that their partner may decide to do something differently.

SFAB officers must be technically and tactically proficient with the ability to think critically while seeing the larger, more complex picture. Officers in particular advise partner forces on planning and synchronizing effects. If officers do not clearly understand the military decision-making process or the Army Design Methodology, they need to start studying. Advisers are expected to know how to solve problems – not just by the SFAB leadership, but by their FSF counterparts as well. They look to the U.S. adviser as a subject-matter expert, so advisers must be one!

Soldiers who desire to serve in a SFAB must also prepare mentally. Serving on a small team requires significant mental flexibility. The long hours required, along with the guarantee of deployments, will place significant stress on the adviser and his or her family. Soldiers must prepare themselves and their families for the assignment by effectively communicating with each other and clearly understanding expectations. Prospective SFAB Soldiers should seek out SFAB veterans to gain a holistic view of what the units are, what the mission set is and what to expect in the assignment.

After preparing themselves and their families for potential service in the SFAB, Soldiers should seek out the SFAB recruiting team for more information and details about joining. Soldiers may connect with the SFAB Recruiting and Retention Team via the team’s Website at www.goarmy.com/sfab or by calling the team: officers at (910) 570-5159 and enlisted at (910) 570-9975/5131. Soldiers who are interested in the SFAB may also contact the team via email at usarmy.bragg.forscom.mbx.g1-ag-sfab@mail.mil.

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Acronym Quick-Scan

ATP – Army training publication

A&S – assessment and selection

AT – adviser team

BAT – battalion adviser team

BCT – brigade combat team

CAT – company adviser team

FM – field manual

FSF – foreign security forces

MOS – military occupational specialty

NCO – noncommissioned officer

SFAB – security-force assistance brigade

SFAC – Security Force Assistance Command

SOF – Special Operations Forces