



**The Inspector  
General  
of the Department of  
the Air Force**

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**Report of Investigation (S9238P)  
Special Warfare Training Investigation**

**April 2022**

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# REPORT OF INVESTIGATION (Case S9238P)

CONCERNING

## SPECIAL WARFARE TRAINING

April 2022

### I. INTRODUCTION

On 2 Jan 22, an anonymous Complainant published an online letter entitled, “Blowing the Whistle on Women in SOF.” (Ex 1) The anonymous Complainant alleged “enhanced consideration of women in combat roles is problematic because (at times) standards are being lowered to accommodate them, and women are given preferential treatment over men.” (Ex 1:1) Furthermore, the Complainant claimed multiple incidents of preferential treatment based on gender were afforded to the first female trainee to go through the Special Tactics (ST) training pipeline.<sup>1</sup> To protect the privacy and safety of the female Special Tactics Officer (STO) candidate, she is referred to as “Candidate X.”

On 7 Jan 22, the Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command (COMAFSOC), publically released a letter refuting the claims made by the anonymous Complainant, stating, “Our standards have not changed to accommodate women. Period.” (Ex 3:1) COMAFSOC requested an independent investigation to ensure the integrity of the process, and on 7 Jan 22, the Secretary of the Air Force (SecAF) directed the Department of the Air Force Inspector General (DAF/IG) to investigate the anonymous Complainant’s concerns:

- Whether Special Warfare standards were lowered to accommodate women
- Whether preferential treatment was given to a STO Candidate during training
- Whether preferential treatment was given to a STO Candidate after her self-initiated elimination (SIE) from Special Tactics training

Specifically, the following assertions were made publically:

Complaint 1: “[The] very notion of national-level attention has forced military leaders in all branches to take a special look at all females within SOF training pipelines. This enhanced consideration of women in combat roles is problematic because (at times) standards are being lowered to accommodate them, and women are given preferential treatment over men.” (Investigated as Issue 1) (Ex 1:1)

Complaint 2: Candidate X “was closely looked at, and her status monitored by Congress and AFSOC leadership (O-6 and above) on a weekly basis... [Candidate X’s] progress throughout the pipeline was briefed to Congress on a weekly basis, and numerous Wing-level leaders (O-4, O-5, and O-6s) would continually check-in on her. This type of

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, student, trainee, and candidate are used interchangeably. All terms refer to officer and enlisted Airmen in the Special Warfare training pipeline.

treatment and individual monitoring is not common when compared to the treatment of male trainees.” (Investigated as Issue 2) (Ex 1:2)

Complaint 3: “[Candidate X] made it to her first Special Tactics Officer (STO) Phase II...She quit during a rigorous pool session, but remained at Phase II and was given the chance to finish.” (Investigated as Issue 3) (Ex 1:2)

Complaint 4: “...[Candidate X] was a non-selectee during the 2018 STO Phase II. However, [she] was invited to return – a second major violation of a societal norm for ST, as people that quit are not normally invited back.” (Investigated as Issue 4) (Ex 1:2)

Complaint 5: “In 2019, [Candidate X] returned to her second STO Phase II and received a unanimous ‘non-select’ from cadre based on her performance. However, higher leaders dictated that she be selected as a STO trainee candidate because of her gender.” (Investigated as Issue 5) (Ex 1:2)

Complaint 6: “[D]uring the Special Warfare Pre-Dive Course at Lackland Air Force Base, TX, [Candidate X] quit in a pool session while next to multiple students... instructors that were present and monitoring the course pulled [Candidate X] from the pool, and sent her back to the [Special Tactics Training Squadron] at Hurlburt. There she was allowed to attend a special offering of a more relaxed version of the Pre-Dive Course, despite the course officially being run in Texas by the 350th.” (Investigated as Issue 6) (Ex 1:2)

Complaint 7: Following the public release of the Complainant’s letter, the Air Force Times published an article after receiving “multiple documents...including performance forms, score charts and a report the woman authored...” that alleged “physical training metrics were lowered just as she arrived at a challenging schoolhouse.”<sup>2</sup> (Ex 2) Several witnesses mentioned the changes in physical training standards during their interviews; as such, it was added to the investigation as Issue 7. (Ex 17:11-12; Ex 18:15; Ex 29:69; Ex 29:7; Ex 30:119; Ex 32:6; Ex 34:12-13; Ex 35:14-15; Ex 49:5; Ex 50:2-3)

Complaint 8: “In Spring 2021...[Candidate X] self-eliminated during a solo land navigation event. When a self-elimination occurs, the student is typically returned to their previous duty assignment and either reclassified by the Air Force, or given the option to separate from the military...<sup>24</sup> [Special Operations Wing leadership], talked to [Candidate X] about staying in the training pipeline despite her effort to self-eliminate/quit.” (Investigated as Issue 8) (Ex 1:2-3)

Complaint 9: “[<sup>24</sup> SOW leadership] were even known to offer [Candidate X] a highly selective spot at a Special Mission Unit (SMU). Typically, a SOF member must go through an entirely separate selection progress to be considered for an SMU, but in this case, the offer was open to [Candidate X] without the need to try out.” (Investigated as Issue 9) (Ex 1:3)

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2022/01/13/woman-who-quit-air-force-commando-course-questioned-highly-suspicious-lower-standards/>, accessed 13 Jan 22.



Complaint 10: “After [Candidate X’s] self-elimination from CCS...She was given the opportunity to train with a personal trainer of her choosing, was able to take weeks off of work without leave or repercussions, and had the ability to meet with various senior leaders. (Investigated as Issue 10) (Ex 1:3)

Complaint 11: “In Spring 2021... [Candidate X] was given the opportunity to write and present an After Action Report (AAR) to the AFSOC Commander...” (Investigated as Issue 11) (Ex 1:3)

Complaint 12: “In Spring/Summer 2021, [Candidate X] was then selected to work directly under the AFSOC Commander...She worked to audit courses and designed new Combat Control standards despite her never working within AFSOC, nor gaining her ST beret, and quitting the training pipeline” (Investigated as Issue 12) (Ex 1:3)

Complaint 13: “In December 2021...the ST community was just told that [Candidate X’s] training status will be actively re-instated on 3 January 2022, despite her choice to quit and her negative viewpoint of ST. She will be rejoining the Special Tactics Training Squadron (STTS) as an ST trainee, and pick up where she left off. This decision was pushed down to the STTS Commander...regardless of the demoralizing effects it has on the remainder of the ST community. This decision was driven by the AFSOC Commander...and supported by...the current 24 SOW Commander.” (Investigated as Issue 13) (Ex 1:3-4)

On 10 Jan 22, the Commander, 24th Special Operations Wing, released a Memorandum for Squadron, Flight, and Team Leadership entitled, “Correcting Open Source Inaccuracies on STO Candidate’s Pipeline Training.” In his memo, the commander stated, “The anonymous email includes inaccuracies throughout and sows a slanted narrative that has degraded trust in the training architecture as well as damaged the candidate’s reputation.” (Ex 4:1) This independent DAF/IG investigation of the claims in the anonymous Complainant’s letter found the 24 SOW Commander’s refuted account of the claims were accurate.

During this investigation, 22 individuals provided sworn testimony, and 13 individuals provided statements and/or information regarding issues covered in this report.

## II. BACKGROUND<sup>3</sup>

On 24 Jan 13, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) and Secretary of Defense (SecDef) released a memorandum entitled, *Elimination of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule (DGCDAR)*, which rescinded the policy that excluded women from filling direct combat roles. (Ex 15) Per the memo:

Currently closed units and positions will be opened by each relevant Service...after the development and implementation of validated, gender-neutral occupational standards and the required notifications to Congress. Military Departments shall submit by May 15, 2013...their detailed plans for the implementation of this directive<sup>4</sup> (Ex 15:1)

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<sup>3</sup> Unit descriptions are in Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/WISRJointMemo.pdf>, accessed 14 Mar 22.

The memorandum directed the integration of women into more than 111,000 newly opened positions as expeditiously as possible, “considering good order and judicious use of fiscal resources” by 1 Jan 16.<sup>5</sup> (Ex 15:1)

On 3 Dec 15, following the Women in Service Review (WISR),<sup>6</sup> the SecDef released a memorandum stating that starting 1 Jan 16, all military occupations and positions would be open to women without exception.<sup>7</sup> DoD-wide, approximately 213,000 previously closed positions opened to women, including six Air Force combat career fields, which included combat rescue officer (CRO), special tactics officer (STO), pararescue (PJ), combat control (CCT), tactical air control party (TACP), and special operations weather (SOWT).<sup>8,9</sup>

On 18 Mar 16, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness issued a memorandum outlining requirements for the Military Departments and the Commander, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), to provide annual assessments regarding the full integration of women in the Armed Forces to the SecDef. Currently, the SecAF continues to provide annual reports on the integration of women to the SecDef as required.

### **Air Force Special Warfare (AFSPECWAR)<sup>10</sup>**

AFSPECWAR is the Air Force’s offensive ground force specializing in air-ground-space-cyber integration in hostile, denied, and politically sensitive environments to achieve air, space, and cyber dominance.<sup>11</sup> AFSPECWAR is organized into three weapons systems – Guardian Angel, Tactical Air Control Party (TACP), and Special Tactics (ST) – for three mission sets: gain global access, provide precision strike, and conduct personnel recovery. (Ex 8:2)

Air Force ground combat forces primarily organize, train, and equip under Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) and Air Combat Command (ACC) but are also assigned to other Major Commands (MAJCOMs) and the broader USSOCOM enterprise, as shown in the figure below. Outside of the training enterprise and Headquarters Air Force (HAF), these forces are more commonly categorized by weapon system of assignment or individual specialty.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid and <https://dacowits.defense.gov/Portals/48/Documents/General%20Documents/RFI%20Docs/RFI%201%20Written%20Response.pdf?ver=2016-06-28-141932-523>, accessed 17 Mar 22.

<sup>6</sup> [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Fact\\_Sheet\\_WISR\\_FINAL.pdf](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Fact_Sheet_WISR_FINAL.pdf), accessed 7 Feb 22.

<sup>7</sup> <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/OSD014303-15.pdf>, accessed 14 Mar 22; <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/632536/carter-opens-all-military-occupations-positions-to-women/>, accessed 7 Mar 22.


<sup>8</sup> <https://dacowits.defense.gov/Portals/48/Documents/General%20Documents/RFI%20Docs/RFI%201%20Written%20Response.pdf?ver=2016-06-28-141932-523>, accessed 17 Mar 22, and [https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/cct/2015/CCT\\_10\\_DEC\\_2015.pdf#:~:text=The%20six%20Air%20Force%20career%20fields%20%28about%204%2C100,tactical%20air%20control%20party%2C%20and%20special%20operations%20weather](https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/cct/2015/CCT_10_DEC_2015.pdf#:~:text=The%20six%20Air%20Force%20career%20fields%20%28about%204%2C100,tactical%20air%20control%20party%2C%20and%20special%20operations%20weather) accessed, 14 Mar 22.

<sup>9</sup> On 30 April 19, SOWT was renamed Special Reconnaissance (SR), and the career field shifted from a focus on specialized weather analysis to multi-domain reconnaissance and surveillance. Reference: <https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/2290065/special-reconnaissance/>, accessed 7 Mar 22.

<sup>10</sup> “Special Warfare” became the moniker for Air Force combat ground forces in or around 2019. (Ex 62) Before that, combat ground forces were called “Battlefield Airmen.”

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/2483538/air-force-special-warfare/>, accessed 14 Mar 22.

Figure 1. Overview of AFSPECWAR (Ex 62)



## Air Force Special Warfare (AFSPECWAR) Overview

<b>Key Events /Timeline:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jul 2017 – Battlefield Airman Force Improvement Program initiated</li> <li>Jul 2018 – Battlefield Airman Vision 2030 signed</li> <li>Jan 2019 – Name change to Air Force Special Warfare (AFSPECWAR)</li> <li>Apr 2019 – AF/A3S established (Special Warfare Directorate)</li> </ul>		
<b>Department of the Air Force Policy Directive 10-35, Air Force Special Warfare</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AFSPECWAR is the Air Force's <b>offensive ground force</b> that specializes in air-ground-space-cyber integration in hostile, denied, and politically sensitive environments to achieve air, space, and cyber dominance. These Airmen are employed to <b>gain global access; provide precision strike; and conduct personnel recovery</b> across the spectrum of conflict.</li> </ul>		
<b>AFSPECWAR Weapon Systems:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guardian Angel: Lead Command = ACC (also in PACAF, USAF, AFRC, NGB)</li> <li>Tactical Air Control Party: Lead Command = ACC (also in PACAF, USAF, NGB)</li> <li>Special Tactics: Lead Command = AFSOC (also in SOCPAC and SOCEUR)</li> </ul>		
<b>AFSPECWAR Specialties:</b>		
<b>Enlisted Operator (1Z)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1Z1: Pararescue (PJ)</li> <li>1Z2: Combat Control (CCT)</li> <li>1Z3: Tactical Air Control Party (TACP)</li> <li>1Z4: Special Reconnaissance (SR)</li> </ul>	<b>Officer Operator (19Z)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>19ZXA: Special Tactics Officer (STO)</li> <li>19ZXB: TACP Officer (TACPO)</li> <li>19ZXC: Combat Rescue Officer (CRO)</li> </ul>	<b>Enlisted Enabler/Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1T0: Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape (SERE)</li> <li>9ZX00: Special Warfare Mission Support (SWMS)</li> </ul> <i>*Note: Additional specialties are assigned to support positions within AFSPECWAR units but do not fall under AFSPECWAR for functional management.</i>
<b>What AFSPECWAR is:</b>		<b>What AFSPECWAR is NOT:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unity of effort (where it makes sense – HAF, AETC, etc.)</li> <li>Single institutional voice for Air Force ground combat forces</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unity of command</li> <li>Single career field, weapon system, or warfighting capability</li> </ul>

Presently, there are seven Department of the Air Force (DAF) AFSPECWAR operator career fields. Enlisted Special Warfare specialties are Combat Control (CCT), Pararescue (PJ), Special Reconnaissance (SR), and Tactical Air Control Party (TACP), and officer Special Warfare specialties include Combat Rescue Officer (CRO), Special Tactics Officer (STO), and TACP Officer (TACPO). The Air Force employs a range of screening and preparation processes and programs to ensure candidates for AFSPECWAR career fields meet entry standards and increase the probability that candidates will complete the rigorous one- to two-year training pipeline (Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) dependent).

Specific to Candidate X, a STO in the Special Warfare training pipeline, STOs lead and execute ground combat operations specializing in the application of airpower, including global access, precision strike, personal recovery, and other missions and associated training. They also organize, train, equip, and employ Special Tactics forces, including command, supervisory, and staff functions. (Ex 65:86)

### Air Force Special Warfare Fitness Standards

Under the guidance of the 24 Jan 13 DGCDAR memo, the Air Force directed a review and validation of career field standards to ensure they were “occupationally and operationally relevant.” (Ex 57) The Air Force determined the legacy AFSOC Operator PT Test, which consisted of pull-ups, push-ups, sit-ups, a 3-mile run, and a 1500 meter fin swim, was not linked to operational tasks and did not represent all components of fitness. (Ex 58:2; Ex 61:32; Ex 62:8)

In mid-2015, the Air Force initiated the Physical Tests and Standards Study to ensure gender-neutral standards across all Air Force specialties were operationally tied and scientifically



based.<sup>12</sup> In 2016, the first version of the Operator Fitness Test (OFT), a Tier 2 fitness test, was devised through data-driven research and testing.<sup>13</sup> However, the Special Tactics community rejected the new test because it did not cover Human Performance (HP) staff requirements such as “ease of administration, operational relevancy, and safety.”<sup>14</sup> (Ex 57) The Special Warfare community continued to use the legacy AFSOC PT test. (Ex 61:32; Ex 62:7)

In 2018, to make the Special Warfare fitness test more operationally relevant, a new blended Operator Fitness Test (OFT) test was created by Special Warfare operator subject matter experts (SMEs), working in coordination with unit and MAJCOM HP experts. (Ex 58:5) The blended test, which included a tactical ruck, standing long jump, pro agility drills, trap bar deadlift, pull-ups, farmer's carry, shuttle run, and a 1500m combat fin swim was beta-tested and validated normative standards were created from operator performance. The new test was released on 1 Jan 19 with the intent to review the data after one year and make adjustments to the standards based on operator performance. (Ex 50:3; Ex 57; Ex 58)

**Figure 2. AFSPECWAR Operator Fitness Test (OFT v1.2) – 1 Jan 19 (Ex 11:12)**

AFSPECWAR Operator Fitness Test v1.2

AFSPECWAR Operator	Infil:		Standing Long Jump	Pro Agility Drill (Right)	Pro Agility Drill (Left)	Trap Bar Deadlift	Pull-Ups	Farmer's Carry 2x53lbs KB	Shuttle Run Repeat	Exfil: Combat Fin 1500M
	Tac Ruck 3mi/60lbs	3mi/60lbs								
score	mins:secs	inches	secs	secs	lbs	reps	secs	secs	hrs:mins:secs	
20	<49:00									36:04
19										38:04
18										40:34
17										42:30
16										44:42
15										47:04
14										49:39
13										52:26
12										55:27
11										58:03
10		94				375	17	22	69.7	1:01:33
9		85				338	15	24	76.7	1:04:38
8		78				300	14	26	80.5	1:07:18
7		66				263	12	30	82	1:10:53
6		56				225	10	32	86	1:14:06
5		47	4.59	4.66	188	8	35	90	90	1:18:16
4		38	5.07	5.18	150	7	39	95	95	1:22:05
3		28	5.63	5.75	113	5	43	100	100	1:26:13
2		19	6.19	6.5	75	3	47	105	105	1:30:02
1		9	6.81	7	38	2	52	110	110	1:34:52
minimum component score highlighted in blue						minimum composite score is 77pts				

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.aetc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/586328/volunteers-needed-to-test-gender-neutral-physical-standards/>, accessed 7 Mar 22.

<sup>13</sup> Per AFMAN 36-2905, *Air Force Physical Fitness Program*, 11 Dec 20, the Tier 2 Physical Fitness Assessments are performance-based fitness tests that are occupationally specific, operationally relevant, and independent of age and gender. (Ex 6:53)

<sup>14</sup> HP is called “Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF)” within AFSOC and broader USSOCOM.

On 11 Feb 21, the Director of Air Force Special Warfare released a memorandum, which initiated a 12-month adaptation period for a new OFT (OFT v2.0). Based on further HP, Exercise Science, and operator input and analysis, OFT v2.0 decreased the minimum standard for the standing long jump and 1500m combat fin swim, and increased the standard for pro-agility drills, trap bar deadlift, pull-ups, and farmer's carry. OFT v2.0 also added the option for a 1.5-mile combat run in place of the 1500m combat fin swim for specialties without a combat dive requirement or when extenuating circumstances prevent execution of the swim, including lack of facilities. (Ex 12:1, 15, 18) OFT v2.0 was coordinated with and concurred on by all applicable MAJCOMs and HAF directorates. The 12-month adaptation period for the OFT v2.0 is currently under extension until the test is officially implemented. The publication of the associated Air Force Manual is expected in the summer of 2022, which will incorporate updates to fitness standards based analysis of test results collected during the adaptation period. (Ex 50:3)

**Figure 3. AFSPECWAR Operator Fitness Test (OFT v2.0) –11 Feb 21 (Ex 12:15)**

AFSPECWAR OFT SCORES											
AFSPECWAR OPERATOR	Infil: Tactical Ruck 3mi/60lbs	Standing Long Jump	Pro Agility Drill (Right)	Pro Agility Drill (Left)	Trap Bar Deadlift	Pull Ups	Farmer's Carry 2x 53lb kb	Shuttle Run repeat	Combat Fin 1500M	Or	Combat Run 1.5mi
Score	mins secs	inches	Secs	secs	lbs	reps	secs	secs	mins secs		mins secs
20	≤49:00								34:37		10:10
19									36:21		10:33
18									38:10		10:59
17									40:04		11:31
16									42:50		12:17
15									44:11		12:42
14									46:23		12:59
13									48:43		
12									51:09		
11									53:42		
10		94			360	16	21	67.7	56:23		
9		85			325	15	24	71.1	59:12		
8		76			305	14	27	80.5	1:02:10		
7		69			270	12	29	84.5	1:05:16		
6		62			240	10	33	86.1	1:08:32		
5		50	4.99	4.99	205	9	36	90.3	1:11:58		
4		42	5.24	5.24	170	8	39	94.5	1:15:34		
3		34	5.50	5.50	135	7	43	99.8	1:19:21		
2		25	5.78	5.78	105	5	48	105.0	1:23:19		
1		17	6.07	6.07	70	3	52	110.3	1:27:28		
Minimum Component Score Highlighted in Blue						Minimum Composite Score is 78pts					

### Air Force Special Warfare Training

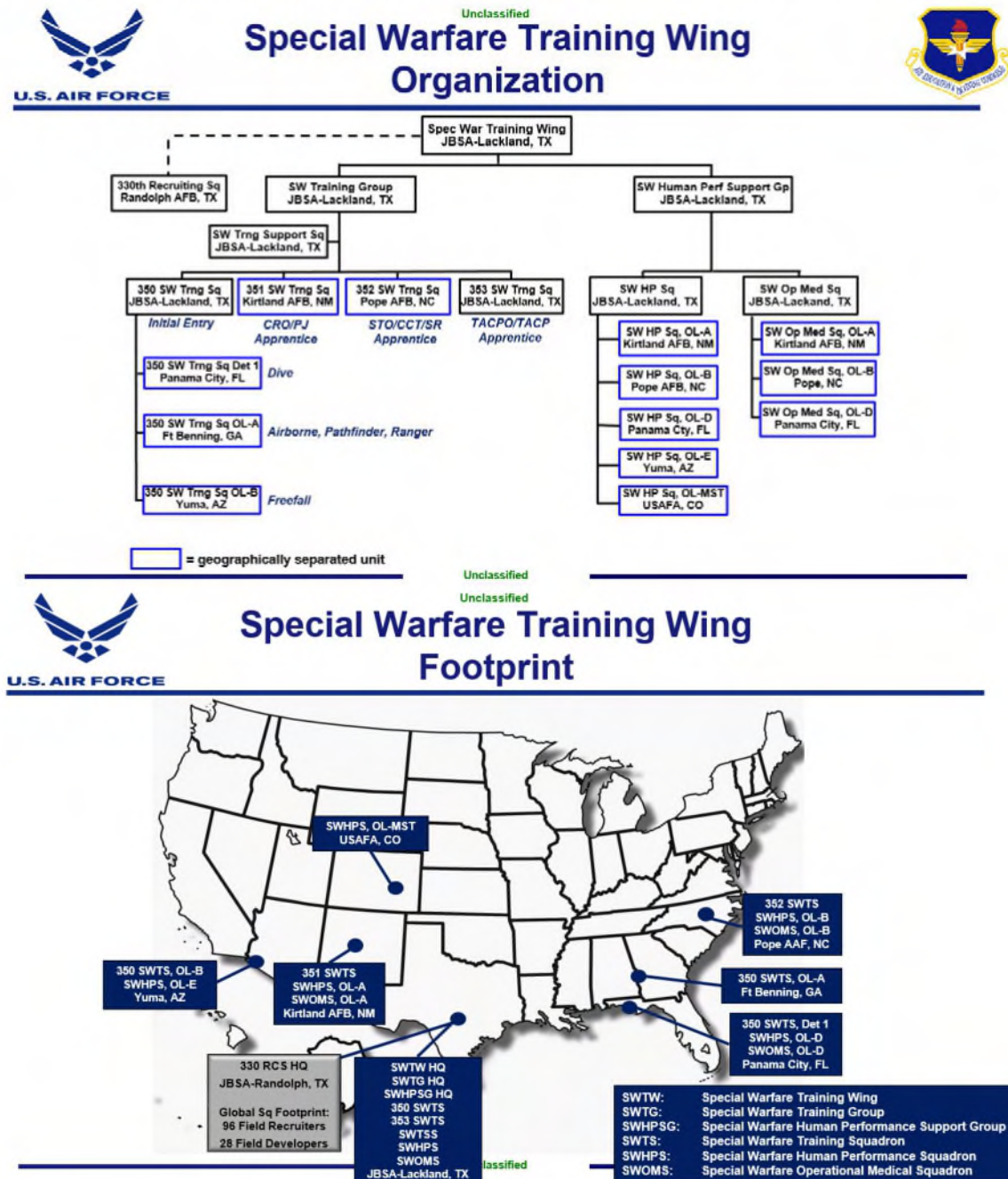
Regardless of the MAJCOM of assignment, all Airmen assigned to Special Warfare career fields go through apprentice or “3-level” training in the Special Warfare Training Wing (SWTW) within Air Education and Training Command (AETC).<sup>15</sup> The SWTW was activated on 10 Oct 18 and is headquartered at Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA)-Lackland. Previously, Special Warfare training was conducted through the Battlefield Airmen Training Group, 37th Training

<sup>15</sup> AETC oversees the AF Recruiting Service (AFRS), Air University (AU), and two Numbered Air Forces (NAFs); 2d Air Force (2 AF) and 19th Air Force (19 AF). The SWTW is subordinate to 2 AF.



Wing, JBSA-Lackland, activated in June 2016.<sup>16</sup> (Ex 64) The Battlefield Airmen Training Group was renamed the Special Warfare Training Group (SWTG) with the standup of the SWTW. The SWTW has units across eight states and is composed of the SWTG and the SW Human Performance Support Group. The mission of the SWTW is to recruit, train, and develop ground combat forces that specialize in airpower application.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 4. Special Warfare Training Wing Organizational Chart and Locations



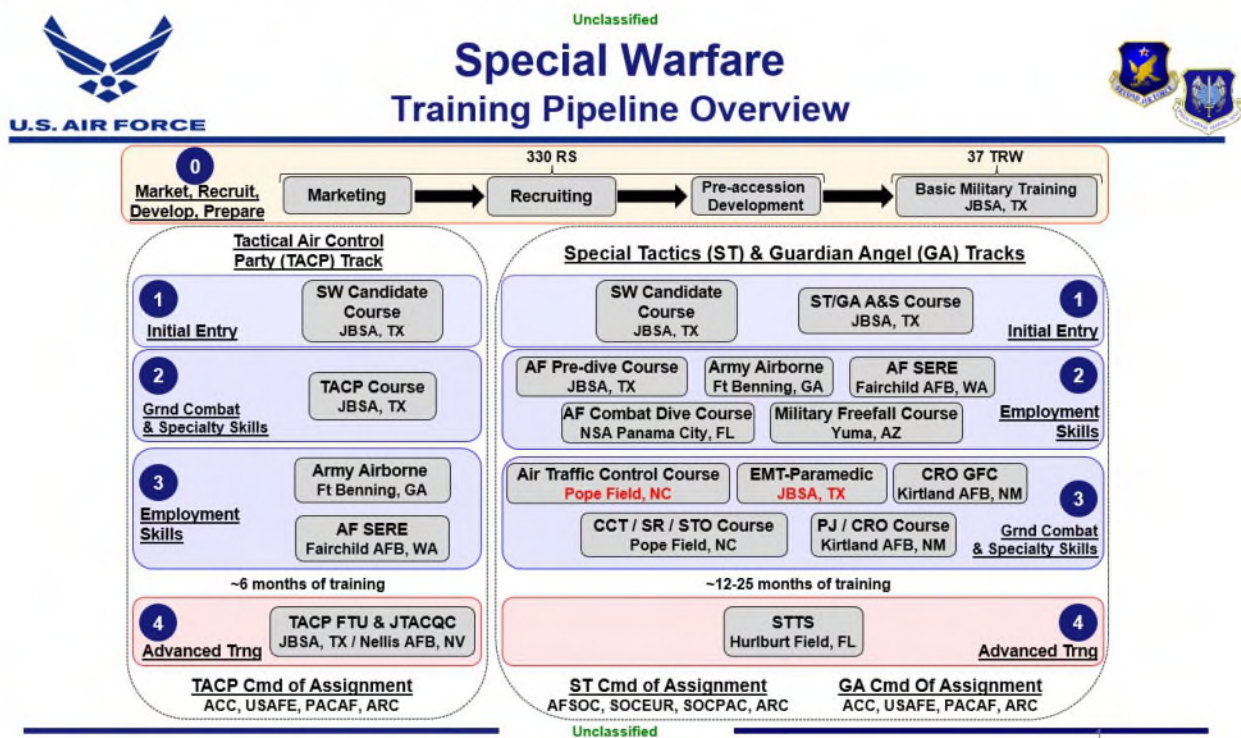
<sup>16</sup> Prior to 2016, Special Tactics 3-level training flowed from the 342d Training Squadron at JBSA-Lackland.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.specialwarfaretw.af.mil/>, accessed 16 Mar 22.



The Special Warfare training pipeline has gone through significant changes beyond organizational structure. Before 11 Sep 01 (9/11), PJs, CCTs, CROs, and STOs attended the Indoctrination course (or “Indoc”). Indoc was an approximately 9-10 week screening and selection course that identified candidates who could meet the intense physical and mental training of their career field’s training pipeline. Due to lagging production of Special Tactics operators post-9/11, CCT and STO candidates started attending the Combat Control Orientation Course (CCOC) instead of Indoc. In or around January 2019, after the activation of the SWTW, the training pipeline was revamped, and both Indoc and CCOC were disestablished. The STO/CCT and CRO/PJ pipelines consolidated their Assessment and Selection (A&S) and Pre-Dive courses. (Ex 61:11) An overview of the current Special Warfare training pipeline is illustrated in the figure below.

**Figure 5. Special Warfare Pipeline Overview**



This investigation primarily focuses on the Special Tactics training pipeline since the published claims involved a STO candidate. "STOs are elite special operators uniquely skilled in commanding and controlling operations integrating air and ground capabilities, often necessary in special operations, to achieve battlefield objectives."<sup>18</sup>

Officer and enlisted Special Tactics candidates (those pursuing STO, CCT, and SR AFSCs) go through a similar training pipeline, and for most courses, STO and CCT candidates train side-by-side. While some of the Special Tactics training is conducted within the SWTW (A&S, Pre-Dive, and Combat Dive courses), several courses are conducted outside of the SWTW, such as SERE, Army Military Free Fall (MFF), and Army Airborne. When Candidate X went through training, enlisted CCT and SR candidates were assigned to the SWTW (AETC),

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.airforcespecialtactics.af.mil/About/Careers/STO/>, accessed 17 Mar 22.

whereas STO candidates were assigned to the 24 SOW (AFSOC) and attend all training courses in a TDY status. However as of 2021, STO candidates are assigned to AETC and report to the SWTW while in 3-level apprentice training.

During the timeframe covered in this investigation, the 24 Special Operations Wing (24 SOW), Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), assessed and selected cadets, officer cross-trainees, and enlisted cross-trainees for entry into STO and CCT training through Phase I and Phase II. During Phase II, Special Tactics Assessment and Selection (A&S), held at Hurlburt Field, Florida, applicants attended a rigorous, week-long evaluation of their suitability for Special Tactics career fields based on defined attributes. At the end of Phase II, applicants were selected or non-selected by the 24 SOW for entry into STO or CCT training. (Ex 10:8) After the 24 SOW selected candidates, they attended the A&S course at the SWTW as their course of initial entry into the AETC portion of the pipeline.

Starting in or around May 2021, the 24 SOW stopped its Phase II A&S process, and currently, all CCT and STO candidates apply through AETC and solely go through the A&S course at the SWTW. Following the A&S course, candidates attend the Pre-Dive course to prepare them for success at a USSOCOM-certified dive course. (Ex 28:45; Ex 34:86; Ex 36:84)

### **General Overview of Candidate X's Special Warfare Training**

Candidate X is an officer who applied and was selected to be assessed for the Special Tactics Officer (19Z) career field in 2018. In or around October 2018, she attended the Special Tactics Phase II A&S course at Hurlburt Field, FL. She was not selected for the STO career field but was recommended to reassess in a year. In or around October 2019, she attended Phase II again, and became the first female to be selected for the Special Tactics training pipeline after completing Phase II.<sup>19</sup> (Ex 60:8)

Candidate X started the training pipeline on or around January 2020 and self-initiated elimination (SIE) from the training pipeline on 7 Apr 2021 while at the STO Apprentice Course (formerly called Combat Control School, or CCS). At the time of her SIE, training records show the Commander, 352 Special Warfare Training Squadron (SWTS), documented her performance and conduct as "well above the standard" and concurred with a Military Training Leader (MTL) recommendation that she should be considered for reinstatement into the course.

After her self-elimination, Candidate X completed an After Action Report (AAR) at the request of the 24 SOW leadership, who wanted to learn from her experiences as the first female Airman in the training pipeline. Specifically, they wanted an assessment of whether there were institutional, infrastructure, or policy challenges that presented unnecessary barriers to women's success. (Ex 19:21; Ex 20:12, 15)

In her AAR, Candidate X outlined her experiences and challenges in the Special Tactics training pipeline. The 24 SOW forwarded the AAR to COMAFSOC based on the issues Candidate X raised therein. On 21 Jun 21, the Commander, AETC, initiated a Commander's

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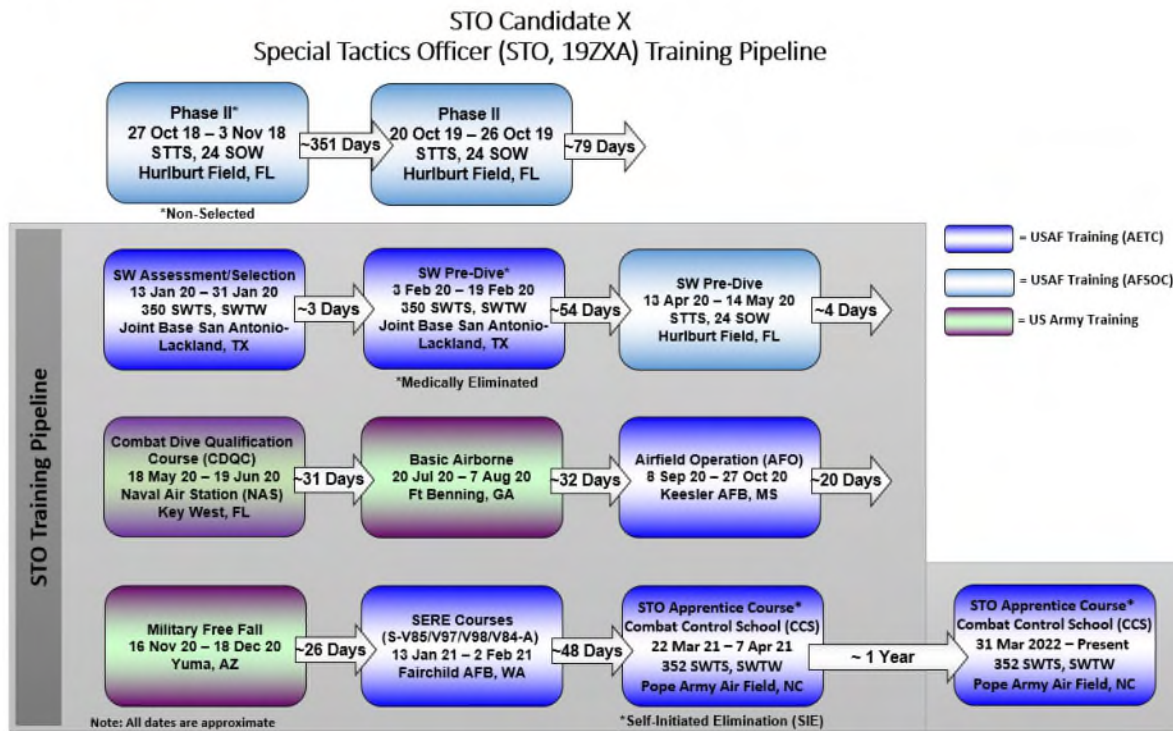
<sup>19</sup> Currently, there are five females in the Special Warfare training pipeline, including Candidate X: 1 enlisted SR candidate, 3 officer STO candidates, and 1 enlisted TACP candidate. (Ex 53:1)



Directed Review (CDR) of the standards and professionalism in the Special Warfare enterprise, which was completed on 30 Sep 21. (Ex 61:2) The CDR will be addressed in Issue 7.

After her self-elimination, Candidate X was assigned to the Special Tactics Training Squadron (STTS), “With Duties At” the AFSOC staff until December 2021. In January 2022, Candidate X elected to return to the Special Warfare training pipeline with the support of her AFSOC squadron, wing, and MAJCOM commanders. She returned to training on 31 Mar 22.

**Figure 6. Candidate X Training Pipeline.**



### III. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Based on an independent review of formal records and interviews with first-hand witnesses and SMEs, this investigation found the Complainant’s anonymous letter contained factual errors and misperceptions. This investigation determined that facts did not support the letter’s claims of gender-based preferential treatment. The evidence showed the letter’s assertions are based mainly on the application of “cultural norms,” knowledge of half of the story, and widely-spread speculation fueled by Special Warfare students, instructor cadre, and operators. The investigation determined Air Force members named in the anonymous letter acted appropriately and complied with applicable standards regarding the issues the Complainant raised. Witness testimony and documentary evidence did not support gender-based preferential treatment occurred, as Complainant alleged.<sup>20,21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The title of the Complainant’s anonymous letter, “Blowing the Whistle on Women in SOF,” identifies women as the Subject of the claims. Neither women nor Candidate X can confer preferential treatment upon themselves and were not investigated as Subjects in this case.

<sup>21</sup> AFI 90-301, *Inspector General Complaints Resolution*, 30 Sep 20 details the procedure for complaint analysis. (Ex 7:52-53)

## **DEFINITIONS AND STANDARDS**

### **Standards**

DAFI 90-301, *Inspector General Complaints Resolution*, 28 Dec 18, *Change 1*, 30 Sep 20 defines standards as a “law, regulation, policy, procedure, operating instruction, or custom of service that establishes a criterion for measuring acceptability.” (Ex 7:161) When asked to define the word “standards,” witnesses had a general consensus that they are written rules, thresholds, or measurements for tasks, performance, or conduct.

### **Norms**

There is no DoD or DAF-wide definition of norms. The Merriam Webster online dictionary defines norms as “a pattern or trait taken to be typical in the behavior of a social group” or “a widespread or usual practice, procedure, or custom.”<sup>22</sup> The anonymous Complainant asserts, “It is against societal norms for the ST community to keep a quitter....” (Emphasis added) (Ex 1:2) In his 7 Jan 22 letter, COMAFSOC described norms as “those things which reflect something usual or expected.” (Ex 3:1) Witnesses were asked how they defined norms, for which there was no clear consensus. Some witnesses describe norms as expected, culturally understood, and repeated behaviors, and others said they were generally acceptable performance but not written or required for mission accomplishment. Other witnesses defined norms as the normalized center of performance. Several witnesses described perceptions similar to those outlined in the anonymous complaint as outside the norm while acknowledging they were either unaware of an applicable standard or recognized the appropriate standard was followed for the circumstances.

### **Preferential Treatment**

There is no DoD or DAF-wide definition of preferential treatment. The Merriam Webster online dictionary defines “preferential” as “giving preference,” and “preference” is defined as “the act, fact, or principle of giving advantages to some over others.”<sup>23</sup> In plain language, preferential treatment means giving better or different treatment that confers unearned gain or unfair advantage. Witnesses defined preferential treatment as being afforded opportunity or treatment that others would not have or unfairly applied standards or norms.

### **Sex-Based Discrimination**

The Complainant alleged Candidate X received an advantage due to her gender. In terms of employment opportunities, the DAF has zero-tolerance for discrimination based on protected classes, such as gender, race, and religion, as enumerated in DAFI 36-2710, *Equal Opportunity Program*, 18 Jun 20:

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/norm>, accessed 14 Mar 22.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/preferential> and <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/preference>, 24 Jan 22.

**2.2. Unlawful Discrimination Against Military Members.** Unlawful discrimination against military members is any unlawful action that denies equal opportunity to persons or groups based on their race, color, sex (including sexual harassment), national origin, religion, or sexual orientation. These bases are collectively referred to as a “protected class.”... (Ex 5:31)

This investigation found no evidence of preferential treatment based on gender (or on any other basis), nor did it find any evidence of unlawful action that denied persons or groups equal opportunity.

**ISSUE 1:** Whether Air Force Special Warfare standards were lowered to accommodate women.

**Analysis:** The Complainant wrote, “national-level attention has forced military leaders in all branches to take a special look at all females within SOF. This enhanced consideration of women in combat roles is problematic because (at times) standards are being lowered to accommodate them, and women are given preferential treatment over men.” (Ex 1:1)

Determining whether each military component’s SOF standards were lowered to accommodate females was outside the authority of this DAF/IG investigation. Within the DAF, there is not a singular overarching set of “SOF” standards that applies to all combat ground force career fields. AFSPECWAR is composed of both special operations forces (SOF) and non-SOF. Approximately 35% of AFSPECWAR is SOF and consists of Special Tactics forces within AFSOC. The majority of AFSPECWAR, approximately 65%, is non-SOF and consists of Guardian Angel and Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) forces within the Combat Air Force (CAF). Air Education and Training Command (AETC) provides initial qualification training for all AFSPECWAR. As a result of similarities in training and mission, the SOF and CAF components of AFSPECWAR have adopted common entry, physical fitness, and medical standards in many cases.<sup>24</sup> Through the course of the investigation, when witnesses from the Special Tactics community discussed the topic of meeting standards, they were most commonly referring to physical standards.

Of the 22 witnesses and subject matter experts (SMEs) interviewed for this investigation regarding standards for women, including commanders, staff, instructor cadre, operators, and other pipeline students, all but one testified that Air Force Special Warfare standards were *not* lowered to accommodate women. Many of them stated “the standards are the standards,” or words to that effect, and emphasized the importance of a singular standard in Special Warfare.<sup>25</sup> (Ex 17:10-12; Ex 18:4; Ex 19:53; Ex 20:36; Ex 21:11; Ex 22:8; Ex 25:18; Ex 26:4, 16; Ex 27:9; Ex 28:11; Ex 29:4; Ex 30:7; Ex 32:5; Ex 33:10; Ex 34:10; Ex 36:6; Ex 37:1; Ex 40:1; Ex 41:1; Ex 49:1; Ex 51:3) The one remaining witness did not know. (Ex 35:30)

This investigation found Air Force Special Warfare fitness standards are constantly changing for many reasons: the requirement to create a gender-neutral operationally based fitness

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<sup>24</sup> Data provided by AF/A3S. Per AF/A3S, the USAF is the only military service to use the term “Special Warfare” to refer to non-SOF forces.

<sup>25</sup> While witness testimony did not support the notion that Air Force Special Warfare standards were lowered for women, several witnesses testified to an incident where they believed a fitness standard in a specific training course might have been lowered to accommodate Candidate X. That specific claim was not found to be accurate and will be addressed in Issue 7.



standard, recent changes to the structure of the training pipeline, organizational changes, and new equipment and tactics. Witnesses testified changes to standards apply to both genders equally. (Ex 20:37; Ex 25:19; Ex 28:11; Ex 29:5; Ex 30:7; Ex 34:11-12) For instance, the legacy CCT/STO PT test included sit-ups and push-ups, which are no longer required by Special Warfare Tier 2 physical fitness standards released on 1 Jan 19. (Ex 63:8) The new gender-neutral test adds operationally relevant components, such as trap bar deadlift, farmer's carry, and pro agility drills. These components evaluate operators' anaerobic capacity, power, agility, and muscular strength. (Ex 11; Ex 57)

One experienced witness summed up this sentiment by stating:

I think that standards are changing all the time; they have been changing all the time... as far back in my career as I remember, standards have changed. I don't think there was as much, perhaps, scrutiny or debate about them because at the time, it was...the all-male career field, and there was certainly some emotion around it in terms of, you know, how many pull-ups you're supposed to do, how many laps you can swim in the pool, but it's not just physical standards, we've changed the standards by which we train for everything. Standards of all the job skills we've trained, the weapons we shoot, the radios ...All the expectations have just been in constant evolution. (Ex 22:7)

**Findings:** The preponderance of the evidence does not support Air Force Special Warfare standards were lowered for women. Witnesses from all echelons of the Special Warfare community were interviewed, including pipeline students, instructor cadre, operators, and commanders. Members of the Special Warfare community testified that standards have changed over time for many reasons, including creating operationally relevant and scientifically-based physical standards, organizational structure changes, and adapting for the future fight. However, witnesses did not corroborate the assertion that Special Warfare standards were explicitly lowered for women.

**ISSUE 2:** Whether preferential treatment was given to Candidate X as compared to her male peers because her status was continually monitored by Congress and AFSOC leadership weekly.

**Analysis:** The Complainant wrote that Candidate X "was closely looked at, and her status monitored by Congress and AFSOC leadership (O-6 and above) on a weekly basis... [Candidate X's] progress throughout the pipeline was briefed to Congress on a weekly basis, and numerous Wing-level leaders (O-4, O-5, and O-6s) would continually check-in on her. This type of treatment and individual monitoring is not common when compared to the treatment of male trainees." (Ex 1:2)

The SecAF provides annual updates to SecDef on the integration of women into all career field specialties, in compliance with the 18 Mar 16 memorandum from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. (Ex 60) The DAF's 2020 update contained this excerpt:

... five female candidates (one officer, four enlisted) successfully completed the initial Physical Ability and Stamina Test to enter AFSPECWAR initial skills training (by comparison, in 2019, four enlisted women met the standard). The officer candidate became the first female to successfully complete the Special



Tactics Assessment and Selection course. She also became the first DAF female to graduate the US Army's Combat Dive Qualification Course. Notably, this female Special Tactics Officer candidate is waiting to start her final phase of training at Pope Air Base, North Carolina. If successful, she will be the first-ever AFSOC female Special Tactics Operator. (Ex 60:8)

As the Air Force integrates women into previously-closed Special Warfare career fields, there is increased interest and monitoring of their progress by senior leaders. Leaders testified to the importance of learning and adapting from the experiences of the first females in the Special Warfare training pipeline. (Ex 19:24; Ex 27:2) One general officer testified:

I don't think that we are really clear-eyed on all of the potential barriers that might exist for [women] as they go through the pipeline. And that doesn't mean preferential treatment at all. That means making sure that [they] have the right equipment...the right facilities for them to be able to succeed. And, until one goes all the way through, or multiple ones go all the way through, we're probably going to continue to learn lessons along the way. As hard as we have worked to make sure we've eliminated those false barriers...we're going to continue to learn. (Ex 18:9)

Increased attention did not equate to or result in preferential treatment; rather, it was a mechanism in the Air Force integration efforts. (Ex 17:26; Ex 37:1)

Candidate X was assigned to the STTS under AFSOC but attended several training courses within AETC. As such, both AFSOC and AETC leaders tracked her progress and other females' progress in the Special Warfare training pipeline. Witnesses in AFSOC leadership positions testified Candidate X's progress was reported to COMAFSOC at transition points in her training, such as course graduation.<sup>26</sup> (Ex 22:9; Ex 17:22) COMAFSOC recalled being notified of Candidate X's selection for the STO training pipeline but did not receive regular updates after that. He explained there was a concerted effort by 24 SOW leadership to "just leave her alone...protect her from...scrutiny...and just let her get through training, the way everybody else gets through training." (Ex 17:22) An AFSOC staff member estimated the AFSOC Commander gave approximately quarterly updates on the status of Candidate X to the Air Force Chief of Staff (CSAF) and the Commander, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) because the integration of women into combat ground forces was a SecDef mandate. (Ex 22:9-10)

AETC/A3S reports the status of females in training in previously excluded career fields to AF/A3S, which compiles the information for the annual report to SecDef. AETC provides monthly reports in part for the Air Force to be ready to respond to information requests.<sup>27</sup> (Ex 18:17; Ex 21:13-14; Ex 40:2-3) Additionally, 2d Air Force (2 AF) required reporting when the status of female trainees changed, which was passed to the Commander, AETC (i.e., injury, course failure, or SIE). (Ex 18:9; Ex 34:6; Ex 37:2) Beyond updates on status changes, two

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<sup>26</sup> Witness testimony does not indicate COMAFSOC requested these updates, but rather they were provided to him for situational awareness. (Ex 22:9; Ex 17:22)

<sup>27</sup> Two witnesses in AETC leadership positions testified they believe the monthly reports to AETC were a Congressional requirement as a result of the WISR, which indicates a misunderstanding of reporting requirements. (Ex 21:13; Ex 24:25) In fact, AETC's monthly reports to A3S are optional and are not automatically forwarded to the SecAF, SecDef, or Congress but rather used to respond to information requests. (Ex 40:2)

squadron commanders from the SWTW testified their leadership did not direct them to give recurring updates on Candidate X's progress. (Ex 25:12; Ex 27:39) Finally, the former 2 AF/CC stated there are Congressional reporting requirements on AETC overall training production, not specifically on the training status of females in the Special Warfare training pipeline. (Ex 37:3)

However, witnesses testified requests for information or updates regarding female trainees from official and unofficial channels came directly into the squadrons, which may have fed the perception that updates were requested by the chain of command more frequently. (Ex 21:15; Ex 25:12; Ex 34:7) One leader testified:

[T] here were all kinds of people either bro calling or just going straight down to the cadre level asking all kinds of questions and making injects...it wasn't just about females; it was about all kinds of other stuff. ...Everyone and their brother felt like they had something to say, something to offer, a critique or a question or -- I mean, it was -- it was downright intolerable, the amount of people that were all up in our [business]. (Ex 25:12)

Two witnesses explained leaders made a concerted effort to direct queries to the SWTW to reduce the burden on the squadrons and instructor cadre. (Ex 18:13; Ex 21:15) While there was general concurrence that there was increased attention on the progress of Candidate X and female candidates, witnesses testified the extra attention and increased reporting requirements did not amount to preferential treatment. (Ex 18:7; Ex 21:14; Ex 40:2; Ex 51:2) Instead, the increased attention women received was disadvantageous, resulting in an increased level of pressure male candidates did not face, and the female trainees "don't appreciate being singled out for additional reporting...they would prefer to be allowed to continue in training the way that all their peers are," one witness said. (Ex 21:15) Another witness stated extra attention paid to female candidates incurred greater stress than experienced by their male counterparts. (Ex 51:2)

There was no requirement for SecAF to report weekly or monthly on female Special Warfare candidates' progress to Congress, nor did witness testimony from leaders in AFSOC or AETC corroborate that updates were made to Congress. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest Candidate X's progress was tracked weekly; AETC received monthly updates, and AFSOC provided quarterly updates to SOCOM and the CSAF.

**Findings:** The preponderance of the evidence does not support preferential treatment was given to Candidate X because her progress was tracked during training, as it did not provide her an unfair advantage over other trainees. The investigation found Candidate X's progress was conveyed to higher headquarters on a monthly or status change basis to satisfy reporting requirements and other information requests.

**ISSUE 3:** Whether preferential treatment was given to Candidate X in or around October 2018 by allowing her to finish Phase II after she quit during a pool session.

**Analysis:** The Complainant wrote, "[Candidate X] quit during a rigorous pool session, but remained at Phase II and was given the chance to finish. This was my first known instance of preferential treatment towards a woman within the ST community. It is against societal norms for the ST community to keep a quitter through the entirety of Phase II; however, since [she] was one of the first females to go through Phase II, the hype of having a female present radiated

through the community. After much deliberation amongst Phase II cadre, [she] was a non-selectee during the 2018 STO Phase II.” (Ex 1:2)

Candidate X attended her first Phase II Assessment and Selection (A&S) in or around 2018 (Class 19-01). A witness testified Candidate X exited the pool during a training session and said something to the effect of being done. (Ex 50:1) Candidate X testified she did not speak when she exited from the pool, and another witness testified, “people started saying that they heard...she said she was done...I don’t hold much value in that...I think it was just people chirping.” (Ex 31:34; Ex 36:29) By all accounts of first-hand witnesses interviewed, she then had a brief conversation with cadre poolside. (Ex 28:25-26; Ex 30:9-10; Ex 36:29-30; Ex 46:3) The cadre leader who directly interacted with Candidate X stated, “She never said the words ‘I quit’ or ‘I self-eliminate,’ but rather expressed concern about letting her team down because she was struggling with a specific pool drill. (Ex 26:24) The cadre member testified he asked Candidate X, “Do you quit?” She responded, “No.” He told her, “then you need to get back in the pool, or I’ll remove you for failure to train,” at which time, she re-entered the pool. (Ex 26:16)

Candidate X similarly testified, “When asked what my intention was, my intention was to help my team because the event that we were currently in was very difficult, and they said you could help your team by getting back in the pool, and that’s what I did. I never at any point voiced or . . . said that I wanted to quit...I just was at a loss for what we were -- needed to do in order to progress that solution.” (Ex 31:4)

Testimony indicates cultural norms have shifted over time. Witnesses testified 10+ years ago, when a candidate got out of the pool, the candidate may have been immediately removed from the A&S. (Ex 26:26; Ex 36:58) As published in an Operating Instruction (OI) at the time of Candidate X’s Phase II, cadre members provided candidates with a brief cool-down period, followed by direct questions about the candidate’s intentions. A 24 SOW director recounted how a candidate quits, stating:

[W]e try to let them cool down for a minute or so and then the cadre lead and chief or the senior member...have a discussion with them...“hey, you know, what's going on?”...and then “hey, are you -- are you quitting?” In order to quit with us, you get your ruck, you put it on your back, and you give your rifle up.... (Ex 36:28)

This witness, who was present during Candidate X’s 2018 Phase II pool event, stated, “That never happened with her. And we have -- like I said, we have others that . . . get pulled out and go back in. She’s not the first.” (Ex 36:28) Of the claim Candidate X received preferential treatment by being allowed to continue in Phase II after this incident, this witness said, “Garbage. She wasn’t treated any differently than anybody else was at that point.” (Ex 36:27) As described above, when Candidate X exited the pool, the cadre acted in accordance with the STTS OI 36-101, *SOW Personnel Assessment and Selection*, by allowing her a cool-down period and directly asking her intentions, with her verbally affirming she was not quitting and getting back in the pool.

STTS OI 36-101 provides guidance on self-initiated elimination:

Self-Initiated Elimination (SIE) occurs when a candidate no longer desires to continue the assessment. The physical act will be for the candidate to relinquish their rifle. The candidate may also verbalize any of the following or similar statements: "I quit," "I no longer want to be here," "I can't/won't do this anymore," or any statement indicating that a candidate is unwilling to continue."<sup>28</sup> (Ex 10:11)

Per SME testimony and the STTS OI, Candidate X's action could be defined as *Quit by Action (QBA)*; she did not follow actionable instructions because she got out of the pool instead of continuing with the ongoing drill. (Ex 19:57; Ex 26:23; Ex 28:29; Ex 36:32-33) However, one instance of a QBA does not constitute the end of a candidate's Phase II evaluation. According to the STTS OI 36-101, when a candidate "accumulates three QBAs during separate events...that candidate will be removed from Phase II, no exceptions." (Ex 10:10) There were no other instances of Candidate X engaging in conduct construed as QBA. Therefore, she was not removed from Phase II, nor did her remaining to complete the 2018 Phase II training constitute preferential treatment solely for her.

Another witness who had been involved in several Phase II training events stated, "It is not uncommon [for] people [to] stop training. As you can imagine, going through days and nights without sleep and food and being put through stressful things like that, that is commonplace." (Ex 26:20) A third leader in the Special Tactics community said:

[I]t happens often with male candidates as well, especially going through those pool sessions...it is not an abnormal occurrence... And we allow the person to get through the rest of the training because the whole week is an assessment, and you're just getting data points on that person...She didn't quit, but she wasn't hired during that Phase II selection. (Ex 19:56-57)

**Findings:** The preponderance of the evidence does not support preferential treatment was given to Candidate X by being allowed to complete Phase II after she exited the pool during a training session. Candidate X's action and words did not constitute the act of self-initiated elimination from the pipeline. Her action was not uncommon, and the decision to allow her to complete the 2018 Phase II session followed written OI standards that apply to both male and female candidates.

**ISSUE 4:** Whether preferential treatment was given to Candidate X by inviting her to return to Phase II in or around October 2019 for a second attempt at selection into the Special Warfare training pipeline after she was non-selected during her first Phase II in 2018.

**Analysis:** The Complainant claimed the female officer trainee received preferential treatment in 2018 when the Phase II cadre voted to non-select her, but she was invited to return – a move the Complainant claims was a major violation of a Special Tactics societal norm, as quitters are not normally invited back. (Ex 1:2) As discussed in Issue 3, Candidate X's exit from the pool during Phase II did not constitute self-initiated elimination.

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<sup>28</sup> This procedure was in effect in 2018. There were no pertinent substantive changes when the STTS OI was updated in 2019. (Ex 36:15-16)



A review of official records from the 2018 Phase II showed all but one cadre voted to non-select Candidate X.<sup>29</sup> However, the context is missing from the complaint. Of the cadre who non-selected Candidate X, more than 70% voted in favor of reassessing her in one year or less. The hiring authority supported the cadre's vote both to non-select her in 2018 and also to allow a reassessment in 2019. Furthermore, Special Tactics leaders directly involved in the oversight and administration of Phase II testified it is not uncommon for candidates who show aptitude to be invited back for another assessment. (Ex 19:32; Ex 26:32; Ex 28:29; Ex 36:35)

**Findings:** The preponderance of the evidence does not support preferential treatment was given to Candidate X when she re-competed in Phase II after her non-selection in 2018. Witnesses stated it was normal practice to recommend reassessment for candidates who showed promise for future success in Special Tactics career fields.

**ISSUE 5:** Whether preferential treatment was given to Candidate X because she was selected for STO training after she received a unanimous non-select from cadre during her second Phase II in 2019.

**Analysis:** The Complainant claimed Candidate X "returned to her second STO Phase II and received a unanimous "non-select" from cadre based on her performance. However, higher leaders dictated that she be selected as a STO trainee candidate because of her gender." (Ex 1:2) The investigation found no part of this claim to be accurate.

Candidate X attended her second Phase II in October 2019 (Class 20-01), one year after her first attempt. Documentary evidence and witness testimony showed the majority of cadre members voted to select her, and she received favorable reviews from her peers and the attending psychologist. While the cadre makes recommendations, the hiring authority decides whom to select. A review of documentary evidence revealed cases where the hiring authority selected candidates who did not receive a majority vote from the cadre. While this was not the case for Candidate X, it highlights the precedent that the hiring authority could use their professional judgment and experience to determine which officers displayed the attributes and potential to succeed in Special Tactics. The selection of a candidate that did not get a majority vote from the cadre does not violate a standard and would not, in and of itself, constitute preferential treatment.

In the case of Candidate X, the hiring authority followed the cadre's recommendation and selected her. (Ex 19:59-60; Ex 36:73) Additionally, the hiring authority stated he was not pressured to select Candidate X because she was a female, remarking "she did very well." (Ex 19:33)

**Findings:** The preponderance of the evidence does not support preferential treatment was given to Candidate X based on her gender when she was selected for the STO career field in 2019. The letter writer's claim that the cadre unanimously did not recommend her selection was false. Contrary to the claim, Candidate X received a majority vote for selection by Phase II cadre.

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<sup>29</sup> Phase II cadre was made up of approximately 14-16 officers and enlisted members (in total) from Special Tactics career fields.

**ISSUE 6:** Whether preferential treatment was given to Candidate X by allowing her to attend a special offering of the Pre-Dive course at Hurlburt Field, FL, after not completing the Pre-Dive course at JBSA-Lackland, TX.

**Analysis:** The Complainant stated the female officer quit in the pool session while next to multiple students, and instructors pulled her from the pool, sending her back to Hurlburt Field, FL. (Ex 1:2) The Complainant claimed she then was allowed to attend a special offering of a “more relaxed version of the Pre-Dive Course, despite the course officially being run in Texas by the 350<sup>th</sup>.”

On or around 3 Feb 20, after completing SWTW Assessment and Selection (A&S),<sup>30</sup> Candidate X started her Pre-Dive course at the 350 SWTS at JBSA-Lackland, TX. Approximately nine days into training, Candidate X requested medical attention during training due to an injury. Documentary evidence and first-hand witness testimony show Candidate X was, in fact, injured, and she struggled with training events at Pre-Dive directly related to her injury. (Ex 29:41; Ex 30:80; Ex 31:71; Ex 34:85) Her training record shows that on 13 Feb 20, nine days into the course, medical authorities determined Candidate X was not cleared to continue in Pre-Dive due to an injury, and an instructor recommended she “return to home station with the opportunity to return back to Pre-Dive training upon authorization and availability.” Testimony of squadron leadership, instructor cadre, and peers corroborate that Candidate X was removed from Pre-Dive due to an injury. (Ex 25:77; Ex 29:36; Ex 34:127; Ex 45:1) Following her medical removal from Pre-Dive at JBSA-Lackland, Candidate X returned to the STTS at Hurlburt Field to recover. There is no truth to the claim Candidate X quit the Pre-Dive course or was pulled from the pool by instructor cadre.

To address the claim Candidate X was allowed to attend a special offering of a more relaxed Pre-Dive course at Hurlburt Field, it is important to overlay the Complainant’s assertion with the COVID-19 pandemic, which was initially taking hold in the U.S. in early 2020. On 26 Feb 20, the first U.S. service member confirmed positive for COVID-19, around the time Candidate X returned to home station to recover from her injury. On 13 Mar 20, the COVID-19 outbreak was declared a national emergency, and DoD restricted military and civilian personnel from travel, including Permanent Change of Station, Temporary Duty, and government-funded leave to and from locations designated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).<sup>31</sup> As a result, the SWTW canceled its March 2020 Pre-Dive course at JBSA-Lackland due to COVID-19. (Ex 34:117) On 19 Mar 20, there was a student fatality at the Air Force Combat Dive Course.<sup>32</sup> When the next course was re-opened in May 2020, it had a reduced class size. (Ex 29:55) The combination of these events resulted in a backlog of students at the STTS and SWTW awaiting their Pre-Dive course.

Candidate X was not the only pipeline student at the STTS awaiting a Pre-Dive course following her injury. The 24 SOW and STTS leadership adapted to keep student production

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<sup>30</sup> SWTW A&S is an attributes-based evaluation process that assesses a candidate’s physical readiness, mental toughness, critical thinking, ability to work as part of a team, and capacity to perform under physical and mental stress.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.defense.gov/Spotlights/Coronavirus-DOD-Response/Timeline/>, accessed 23 Mar 22.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.afjag.af.mil/Portals/77/AIB-Reports/2020/200319-AETC-Air%20Force%20Combat%20Dive%20School-GAIB-Narrative%20Report.pdf>, accessed 18 Jan 22.



moving. A Pre-Dive course at STTS at Hurlburt Field had already been scheduled for April 2020, run by experienced and qualified instructor cadre. (Ex 19:35-36; Ex 36:77; Ex 39:1) Between on or around 13 April 20 to 14 May 20, the STTS held a Pre-Dive course for ten students, including Candidate X, and put another 15 students through a Pre-Dive refresher course. (Ex 28:42) There is no evidence to support the claim Candidate X received preferential treatment by attending a “special offering” of the Pre-Dive course to accommodate her.

The Complainant also asserts the course held by the STTS at Hurlburt Field was a “more relaxed version of the Pre-Dive Course.” However, both courses followed the same curriculum, with Special Tactics members and former U.S. Army Green Berets serving as instructors at Hurlburt Field. There is no evidence the standard of training or quality of instruction was lowered for students regardless of where they attended the Pre-Dive course. (Ex 28:45; Ex 21:35; Ex 36:83) A 24 SOW leader explained:

[T]he Special Warfare Training Wing pre-dive course used literally the exact same syllabus from Special Tactics Training Squadron. There was no change. The task condition standard and the course of instruction were mirror images of each other. That's how the Training Wing established its own pre-dive course... Additionally, the question of validity or the standards of that course would mean that you would question probably 600 combat controllers that are currently in the community that went through that same pre-dive course. (Ex 21:35-36)

Witnesses familiar with both training experiences were asked to explain whether there were differences between the courses. One candidate offered the following, a summary of what multiple witnesses told investigators: (Ex 29:53; Ex 31:88-89; Ex 32:50-53; Ex 36:82; Ex 49:3)

So it's a more relaxed environment in terms of here at the STTS. You go to your home every single night; you can go out to get dinner, at your favorite restaurant, you can hang out with your friends...you are at home station.

When you're at Lackland, you live in the dorms, you have to use the DFAC [dining facility], you have to be in uniform everywhere you go, you get much less time off at Lackland. The schedule, you know, by the time you get back at the dorms, you have enough time to go grab some dinner, practice tying your knots for about a half hour, 45 minutes, maybe fix up your gear... then I was asleep and up at 4 a.m. to get breakfast and start the next day.

Here at the STTS ...You know, it used to be for just beret wearers, so . . . you're not in uniform all day, you're not marching around, you're not doing anything like that. The instructor cadre at Lackland, it's still an initial tech school, so they are all, they are all over you all day long...It's a very intense and draining atmosphere. (Ex 30:98)

Furthermore, the purpose of the Pre-Dive course is to prepare students for success in a USSOCOM-certified dive course. (Ex 28:45; Ex 34:86; Ex 36:84) The 24 SOW decision to include more students in an existing Pre-Dive course at Hurlburt Field to prepare them for upcoming Air Force and Army combat dive courses was reasonably necessary, given COVID-19 travel restrictions. The decision was logical in Candidate X's case since she was already assigned at Hurlburt Field.

While Candidate X was going through the Pre-Dive course at Hurlburt Field, the Army offered the Air Force 20 slots for the U.S. Army Combat Dive Quality Course (CDQC) at Key West, FL, for the course starting 18 May 2020. After recovering from her injury and performing well in the Pre-Dive course, Candidate X and approximately 15 other students were selected to attend the CDQC. (Ex 28:49; Ex 36:85) Upon graduation, in mid-June 2020, Candidate X became the first woman ever to complete the CDQC.

**Findings:** The preponderance of the evidence does not support preferential treatment was given to Candidate X by allowing her to attend the Hurlburt Field Pre-Dive course. Once she was medically qualified to continue, she and more than a dozen other trainees attended a Pre-Dive course at Hurlburt Field to not pre-empt their training due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**ISSUE 7:** Whether preferential treatment was given to Candidate X because fitness test standards were lowered at the STO Apprentice Course prior to her arrival. (Ex 2)

**Analysis:** On or about 22 Mar 21, Candidate X started the STO/CCT Apprentice Course at the 352 SWTS, a 13-week course that provides final qualifications to enlisted and officer Special Tactics candidates. As alluded to by the Complainant and mentioned by several witnesses, this is the same timeframe as the fitness standards were changed. Unclear rationale and implementation of changing fitness standards in the training pipeline was a shared point of consternation among witnesses. (Ex 18:15; Ex 29:69; Ex 30:119; Ex 32:6; Ex 34:12-13; Ex 35:15; Ex 49:4; Ex 50:2-3; Ex 55:9)

This investigation found changes to fitness standards were not related to Candidate X's arrival. (Ex 17:12; Ex 21:22; Ex 24:26-27) By way of background is a timeline of the fitness standard changes:

- **13 Feb 18** – Combat Control (CCT) Career Field Education and Training Plan (CFETP) is released as the official fitness standard for CCT candidates in training (see Figure 7).<sup>33</sup> STO (officers) candidates do not have an applicable CFETP and are held to the same fitness standards as CCT (enlisted) candidates. Relevant to Issue 7 is the bottom block of the figure below, which are the physical training standards for Combat Control School (CCS), later called the STO/CCT Apprentice Courses.

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<sup>33</sup> [https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af\\_a3/publication/cfetp1c2x1/cfetp1c2x1.pdf](https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af_a3/publication/cfetp1c2x1/cfetp1c2x1.pdf), accessed 15 Feb 22

**Figure 7. 2018 CFETP Apprentice Physical Training Standards (Ex 13:14)<sup>34</sup>**

Event	Push-Ups	Sit-Ups	Pull-Ups	Run	Swim (5A)	Rucksack	Obstacle Course
<b>Combat Control Selection Course, Lackland AFB, TX (2 weeks)</b>							
PAST (1a)	48	48	8	10:10/1.5mi	11:42/500m	N/A	N/A
Exit (1b)	49	50	8	10:10/1.5mi	10:40/500m	80min/4mi (6a)	90% (7)
<b>Pipeline Progression for Students Awaiting Training (SAT)</b>							
Pipeline SAT (2a)	2a	2a	2a	2a	2a	2a	2a
<b>Combat Control Operator Course, Keesler AFB, MS (15 weeks)</b>							
Entry (3a)	49	50	8	13:53/2.0 mi	10:40/500m	80min/4mi (6a)	N/A
30 Day (3b)	51	54	8	17:37/2.5 mi	19:16/900m	100 min/5mi (6b)	N/A
60 Day (3b)	54	60	9	21:21/3mi	25:36/1200m	140 min/7 mi (6c)	N/A
Exit (3c)	58	65	10	28:54 /4mi	34:00/1500m	200 min/10 mi (6d)	90% (7)
<b>Combat Control School, Pope AAF, NC (13 weeks)</b>							
Entrance (4a)	57	64	9	28:54/4mi	35:00/1500m	200min/10 mi (6d)	N/A
Mid (4b)	61	71	11	32:42/4.5mi	33:00/1500m	N/A	N/A
Exit (4c)	64	75	12	36:32/5mi	32:00/1500m	300 min/15 mi (6e)	90% (7)

- 1 Jan 19** – The Operator Fitness Test version 1.2 (OFT v1.2) is released as the official Air Force Tier 2 fitness test for the Special Warfare community (See Figure 2). (Ex 57; Ex 11) The OFT v1.2 includes a 3-mile tactical ruck, standing long jump, pro agility drills, trap bar deadlift, pull-ups, farmer’s carry, shuttle run, and a 1500-meter combat fin swim. The events overlapping between the CFETP fitness standards used at CCS and the OFT v1.2 are the pull-ups, run, swim, and rucksack.<sup>35</sup>
- 20 May 20** – Having received a draft of a new CCT CFETP, the 352 SWTS changed the pipeline physical fitness standards in anticipation of what the squadron believed would soon be released (see Figure 8). (Ex 14:13; Ex 16) The draft CFETP changed the Combat Control Operator Course (CCOC) minimum exit physical standard to the OFTv1.2 standard and the CCS (or STO/CCT Apprentice Course) minimum exit standard to exceed the OFTv1.2 standard in every event except pro agility drills. Specific to Issue 7, the CCS exit standard in the 2020 CFETP draft required trainees to perform 12 pull-ups instead of the annual OFT v1.2’s 8.<sup>36</sup> It also required trainees to execute a trap bar deadlift of 300 lbs, whereas the annual OFT v1.2 fitness test required 225 lbs. To note, the 2018 CFETP also had a 12 pull-up minimum CCS exit standard but did not have a trap bar deadlift standard. As of April 2022, a new CFETP has not been adopted, and the 2018 CFETP is still in effect.

<sup>34</sup> The notes in the table describe the assessment and evaluation of each event. (Ex 13:14-15) Per the 2018 CFETP, the Physical Aptitude and Stamina Test (PAST) must be successfully completed by all candidates entering the CCT specialty. The Student Awaiting Training (SAT) standards are “progression accountability...relevant to the stage of training in the pipeline for the individual.” (Ex 13:14-15)

<sup>35</sup> The run and rucksack distances are shorter for the OFT v1.2 than the 2018 CFETP standards. The CFETP minimum CCS exit pull-up standard is 12, while the OFT V1.2 is 8.

<sup>36</sup> One witness testified the new 352 SWTW standard for pull-ups was 10 pull-ups versus 12, also above the OFTv1.2 standards. (Ex 52:1)



**Figure 8. 2020 Draft CFETP for Pipeline Physical Training Standards (Ex 14)**

**Table 5.1.1. Pipeline Physical Training Standards**

Event	Push-Ups	Sit-Ups	Pull-Ups	Run	Swim (5A)	Rucksack	Obstacle Course	
<b>Physical Abilities and Stamina Test (Entry to SW Prep Course)</b>								
PAST (1a)	40	50	8	10:20/1.5mi	15:00/500m	N/A	N/A	
Exit (1b)	40	50	8	10:20/1.5mi	12:30/500m	N/A	N/A	
<b>Pipeline Progression for Students Awaiting Training (SAT)</b>								
Pipeline SAT (2a)	2a	2a	2a	2a	2a	2a	2a	
<b>Combat Control Operator Course, Pope AAF, NC (45 days)</b>								
	Ruck	L Jump	Pro Agile	Trap Bar DL	Pull-ups	Farmers Carry	Shuttle	Fin
Exit (3c)	49:00 Min	78in	5.75 secs	225 Lbs.	8	30 secs	80 secs	42:30
<b>Combat Control School, Pope AAF, NC (13 weeks)</b>								
	Ruck	L Jump	Pro Agile	Trap Bar DL	Pull-ups	Farmers Carry	Shuttle	Fin
Exit (4c)	45:00 Min	80in	5.7 secs	300 Lbs.	12	26 secs	75 secs	40:30

- **May – August 2020** – SWTW, SWTG, and 352 SWTS had changes of command, and the 352 SWTS Senior Enlisted Leader changed out.
- **January 2021** – A male candidate who “was performing well in the apprentice course” accomplished 11 pull-ups yet failed the STO/CCT Apprentice Course physical training test by one pull-up based on the aforementioned draft 2020 CFETP standards and washed back a class.<sup>37</sup> (Ex 27:26; Ex 35:12) As a result, new SWTW squadron, group, and wing leadership question why candidates are being tested based on physical fitness criteria different and higher than the annual OFT v1.2 fitness standards. (Ex 21:22; Ex 24:26-27; Ex 27:26; Ex 52:1)
- **11 Feb 21** – Following a development period that included HP, Exercise Science, and operator input and analysis, along with coordination with all relevant MAJCOMs, the Air Force issues new annual Special Warfare fitness test standards (OFT v2.0) (see Figure 3). Several changes were made to component minimum standards from OFT v1.2, including increasing the trap bar deadlift (225 lbs to 270 lbs) and pull-ups (8 to 10) minimum standards. However, an adaptation period gives the Special Warfare community time to train to the new standard. Special Warfare Airmen who do not pass the new requirements will not receive adverse administrative action during the adaptation period. (Ex 12:1, 15)
- **3-21 Mar 21** – A review of internal emails shows that 24 SOW and SWTW leadership expressed concern about the changing fitness standards in the training pipeline and unclear implementation strategy. Leadership testified they were concerned with holding students to a higher pull-up and trap bar deadlift standard than the OFT v1.2 after the aforementioned male candidate failed the training squadron’s test in January but would have passed the OFTv1.2. (Ex 21:21-22; Ex 24:26-27; Ex 27:26) The SWTW directed the training pipeline to use the OFT v1.2 fitness standards since OFT v1.2 fitness standards since OFT v2.0 was in its 12-month adaptation phase. (Ex 24:27; Ex 35:14)

<sup>37</sup> At least two students did not initially pass the STO/CCT Apprentice Course (formerly called CCS) physical fitness test based on the new standards. Only one student also failed the retest and thus failed the course. (Ex 27:26; Ex 35:12)

- **22 Mar 21** – Candidate X and the aforementioned male candidate who previously failed the fitness standard start the STO/CCT Apprentice Course, with OFT v1.2 as the physical training standard.

In March 2021, as Candidate X was starting the STO Apprentice Course, the SWTW/CC directed the OFT v1.2 be the common physical training standard across the Special Warfare training pipeline.<sup>38</sup> The minimum requirements for the pull-ups and trap bar deadlift at the 352 SWTS STO Apprentice Course were lowered from 12 to 8 repetitions and 300 to 220 lbs, respectively. One SWTW leader testified, “The problem was that 300 pounds [for the deadlift] wasn’t found to be a relevant weight in the operational standards in the early assessment, so [we] were holding [students] to a standard that wasn’t based in [the] career field...[somebody] just hadn’t caught that the Combat Control community had written a higher PT standard than was necessary.” (Ex 24:28) The physical training standard implemented by the 352 SWTS, which was based on a draft CFETP, was replaced by the HAF-approved operationally-relevant fitness standard (OFT v1.2).

The seemingly abrupt fitness standard change was not lost on Candidate X, who wrote in her AAR for the 352 SWTS:<sup>39</sup>

I believe the change in standards invalidated me with a majority of my team. They knew the standards were at one point 300lbs for the deadlift. During the test, we were not told any standards, and I lifted 250lbs. Since I passed, they believed the standards had been bent for me. One cadre member had a conversation with a student and said that the cadre “rioted” when they found out the PT test was changing back to lesser standards. Perhaps all of this timing was coincidental, but looks highly suspicious with my arrival on campus.

However, based on the aforementioned chronology, this investigation found the standards were changed not to accommodate Candidate X but because a male candidate had failed a fitness portion, raising the issue of which was the proper fitness standard to evaluate candidates in the training pipeline. One Special Tactics leader observed, “[Y]ou could equally make the argument that we had updated the PT standards so then that male student who had failed could make it through the pipeline . . . but nobody, nobody focused on that fact.” (Ex 24:27)

**Findings:** This investigation found the timing of the changes of the fitness test administered in STO/CCT Apprentice Course was based on concern about inconsistencies between CFETP fitness standards and OFTv1.2 standards that arose from a student’s fitness failure in January 2021. The changes were not to confer preferential treatment to Candidate X. Fitness standards were adjusted to the HAF-approved Tier 2 Special Warfare physical fitness test requirements (OFT v1.2). Furthermore, Candidate X and her peers were given the same fitness test; thus, she was not given preferential treatment. The preponderance of the evidence does not support fitness standards were lowered to accommodate Candidate X.

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<sup>38</sup> The SWTW/CC did not make the OFT v2.0 released on 11 Feb 21 the physical standard because the new test was still in the adaptation phase.

<sup>39</sup> Students in the training pipeline were given the opportunity to provide input to the training squadron via After Action Reports (AAR). As an officer, it was not unusual for Candidate X to provide an AAR as other officers provided them as well.

**ISSUE 8:** Whether preferential treatment was given to Candidate X because she was allowed to remain in the training pipeline after her self-initiated elimination (SIE) from the STO Apprentice Course.

**Analysis:** The Complainant stated that in Spring 2021, Candidate X self-initiated elimination during a solo land navigation event at the STO Apprentice Course, Pope Army Airfield, NC.<sup>40</sup> The Complainant continued, “When a self-elimination occurs, the student is typically returned to their previous duty assignment and either reclassified by the Air Force, or given the option to separate from the military.” (Ex 1:3) The Complainant contends Candidate X met with numerous senior leaders from the 24 SOW, who talked to her about staying in the training pipeline even though she quit. (Ex 1:3)

It is factually correct that Candidate X decided to SIE during the STO Apprentice Course at Pope Army Air Field. However, the assertion her follow-on assignment was handled differently from other similarly situated officers is inaccurate. According to first-hand witness testimony, including Air Force senior leaders and 352 SWTS instructor cadre members, the process for handling Candidate X’s self-elimination from training was followed in accordance with established procedures for all candidates. Once Candidate X identified herself for SIE, she was removed from training. After discussions with the appropriate staff members, she returned to the Special Tactics Training Squadron (STTS) Hurlburt Field, FL, which was her unit of assignment. (Ex 27:33-36; Ex 35:52-54)

During the timeframe at issue, officer candidates were given the STO AFSC and assigned to the STTS at Hurlburt Field for the duration of the training pipeline, placed in a temporary duty status while attending training courses. In between training courses, officer candidates return to the STTS to prepare for their next training class. Given Candidate X’s permanent assignment to the STTS, it was appropriate for her to return to Hurlburt Field and await outplacement.

Following Candidate X’s return to the STTS, she received an AETC Form 125A, Record of Administrative Training Action, signed by the 352 Special Warfare Training Squadron Enlisted Military Training Leader. On the form, the leader recommended that Candidate X be considered for reinstatement into the CCS course and Special Warfare AFSCs. Subsequently, the 352 SWTS/CC endorsed the AETC Form 125A as follows: “[Candidate X] was performing at or above the standard in all respects prior to SIE,” and “the 352 SWTS would welcome [Candidate X] back into training in future classes...proceed IAW SWTW & 24 SOW determination.”

Three witnesses who had first-hand experience with Candidate X in the STO Apprentice Course testified they were surprised she quit because she excelled in the course and was on course to graduate. (Ex 27:34; Ex 54:23; Ex 55:18) The squadron commander considered Candidate X’s performance and the circumstances of her self-elimination in supporting the recommendation to allow her to return to training. He explained that some “dysfunctional dynamics,” such as an environment where students would openly make gender disparaging statements, led him to believe she had a disadvantageous training experience compared to her

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<sup>40</sup> The STO and CCT Apprentice Courses are commonly referred to by their former name, Combat Control School (CCS).



peers. (Ex 27:35, 42) Multiple witnesses corroborated incidents of unprofessional conduct by a few instructor cadre and students occurred, and this investigation determined those incidents put Candidate X at a disadvantage compared to her peers. (Ex 19:57, 66; Ex 20:15; Ex 22:18; Ex 29:38; Ex 31:18, 26-29, 116; Ex 32:86-93; Ex 47:2)

The squadron commander also testified, “[S]he was performing at a level where I need her to be. I don’t know why she wouldn’t be given another chance.” (Ex 27:35) The SWTW/CC at the time testified he was not involved in the decision to invite Candidate X back to training but felt the decision was appropriate given the situation and was not unprecedented based on his time in the community. (Ex 40:2) As discussed in Issue 13 below, 11 witnesses testified to knowledge of candidates who previously self-eliminated from the training pipeline and were allowed to return. (Ex 19:15; Ex 20:23; Ex 21:26; Ex 27:38; Ex 36:32; Ex 39:1; Ex 41:2; Ex 43:4; Ex 44:1; Ex 51:2; Ex 56:19)

Testimony from 24 SOW senior leaders with direct knowledge and interviews of STO candidates who did not complete the pipeline reveals it is common practice for follow on assignments to be handled individually with 24 SOW leadership. (Ex 19:14, 42, 46, 49; Ex 47:3) In one case, a male officer who failed a course in the pipeline repeatedly was allowed to remain in the training pipeline at his request while he competed for another career field. After being selected for another career field, this officer requested and was approved to attempt the STO pipeline a fourth time, spending, in total, more than four years in the training pipeline while he worked with STTS leaders for either outplacement or re-entry into the pipeline. (Ex 46:1-3; Ex 31:156) In another case, 24 SOW leadership worked with an officer candidate’s career field to find him advantageous outplacement following his removal from the training pipeline. (Ex 19:14, 42, 49; Ex 47:3)

Thus, it cannot be deemed Candidate X received preferential treatment when she was afforded similar opportunities as her male counterparts following her SIE from the training pipeline. In her case, her 24 SOW senior leaders testified they spoke to her about outplacement opportunities, which included separation from the Air Force, returning to her previous Cyberspace Operations (17D) career field, competing for placement on a Special Mission Unit employing her expertise in cyber, and the opportunity to return to the Special Tactics training pipeline. (Ex 19:47-49; Ex 20:47-51)

Several experienced witnesses testified they knew officers who, in the past, self-eliminated from the STO pipeline, were allowed to return, and became successful leaders in the career field. (Ex 19:15; Ex 20:23; Ex 27:38; Ex 36:32; Ex 39:1) One witness stated, “Word out on the street is you know, if you quit, you never come back, which, you know, we’ve learned over the years, that’s not true.” (Ex 36:32) Another said, “I think there's plenty of examples of...combat controllers who were able to get additional shots and a few other STOs who had additional opportunities.” (Ex 27:38) At the time of Candidate X’s SIE from the pipeline, the SWTW did not have a policy regarding returning to the training pipeline following SIE. However, there was precedence that it was allowed in the past.

**Findings:** The preponderance of the evidence does not support preferential treatment was given to Candidate X by allowing her to remain assigned to the STTS following her self-initiated elimination. Candidate X’s outplacement from the training pipeline was handled like others

before; each officer's situation is considered individually, and commanders have the authority to decide what is in the best interest of the member and the Air Force. Further, officers who have self-eliminated in the past have been allowed to return to the training pipeline.

**ISSUE 9:** Whether preferential treatment was given to Candidate X by offering her a spot at a Special Mission Unit, forgoing the normal selection process.

**Analysis:** The Complainant alleged 24 SOW leadership offered Candidate X “a highly selective spot” at a Special Mission Unit (SMU) “without the need to try out.” (Ex 1:3) During the outplacement process following Candidate X's SIE, senior leaders within her chain of command said they spoke to her about multiple options, including separation from the Air Force, returning to her previous Cyberspace Operations Officer (17D) AFSC, returning to the training pipeline, or competing for a position in an SMU in her previous AFSC utilizing the normative selection process. According to witnesses with direct knowledge and engagement with Candidate X, no offers were made; instead, ideas for outplacement were deliberated.

Regarding an SMU placement, discussions involved her competing in an interview process and assessing as a Cyberspace Operations Officer, not as a Special Tactics Officer (19Z), according to witnesses involved in those discussions. (Ex 19:47; Ex 20:49; Ex 31:134; Ex 38:1) Witnesses stated that AFSOC needed cyber officers, given the prominence cyber plays in the future of warfare. (Ex 17:33; Ex 20:49) At no time did any member of STO Candidate X's chain of command present her an option to join an SMU as a STO, nor did they offer her an opportunity to circumvent normative procedures for SMU selection within STO Candidate X's previous Cyberspace Operations career field, according to witnesses involved in those discussions. (Ex 19:47, 48; Ex 20:48-50)

**Findings:** This investigation found the letter's claim Candidate X was offered an SMU position without going through the normal selection process as false. Therefore, the preponderance of the evidence does not support Candidate X received preferential treatment in this alleged manner.

**ISSUE 10:** Whether preferential treatment was given to Candidate X because she was given the opportunity to train with a personal trainer of her choosing, took weeks off work without leave, and met with various senior leaders.

**Analysis:** Upon her return from the STO Apprentice Course, and because she was the first female STO to go through most of the Special Tactics training pipeline, the 24 SOW leadership tasked Candidate X with writing an After Action Report (AAR) detailing her experiences during the training pipeline. (Ex 19:28; Ex 20:12-13; Ex 28:50, 54)

**Leave:** The Complainant claims Candidate X took weeks off without leave. However, Candidate X denied this assertion, as did her commander, to whom she directly reported. (Ex 28:62; Ex 31:140) Additionally, the investigation found this claim may be based on misperception. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Candidate X's commander authorized individuals not actively involved in training or not Mission Essential to telework based on COVID concerns. Accordingly, like many other staff members, Candidate X teleworked while she completed her AAR. (Ex 28:62)

Personal trainer: The Complainant wrote, “the wave of preferential treatment continued...[Candidate X] was given the opportunity to train with a personal trainer of her choosing...” This claim had no basis. Candidate X was not required to report to physical training every morning with Special Warfare pipeline students since she had self-eliminated, instead worked out on her own. (Ex 28:61) To maintain her physical fitness level, Candidate X still worked out daily and acquired a personal trainer at her own expense, an individual choice that any military member can make regarding how they spend their pay. The trainer in question is a close associate of Candidate X, who routinely works with Olympic and professional athletes. (Ex 31:158; Ex 47:2) All members of the STTS have access to permanently assigned Human Performance (HP) coaches who provide specialized training to help maintain a high physical fitness standard and prepare for the fitness standards associated with their next training class. (Ex 28:61; Ex 19:69; Ex 20:53-54)

Meetings with senior leaders: Pipeline students have the option to author AARs at the end of a course of instruction, and documentary evidence shows other candidates wrote AARs. The AAR Candidate X produced, as the first female to go through the Special Warfare training pipeline, received a high level of attention due to the issues raised within the document (see Issue 11). Aside from the meeting involving her AAR, Candidate X had additional meetings with wing senior leaders regarding her outplacement, as would other similarly situated STO candidates. (Ex 19:14, 46, 49; Ex 47:3)

Candidate X is not the only officer from the training pipeline to meet with 24 SOW leadership. A male STO candidate testified he and another STO candidate met with the 24 SOW/CC to discuss their experiences in the training pipeline. (Ex 32:84) Furthermore, 24 SOW leadership worked with another male officer candidate’s career field to find him advantageous outplacement following his departure from the training pipeline. (Ex 19:46, 49; Ex 47:3) Regardless, communication between an officer and their chain of command does not constitute preferential treatment.

**Findings:** The preponderance of the evidence does not support Candidate X received preferential treatment after she left the training pipeline. Candidate X did not take weeks off without leave, as claimed, and she paid out of pocket to hire a personal trainer to maintain her physical fitness when she no longer had the requirement to work out with pipeline students. Her meetings with senior leaders were to discuss outplacement, as afforded to other students who left the pipeline.

**ISSUE 11:** Whether preferential treatment was given to Candidate X by allowing her the opportunity to write and present an After Action Report (AAR) to the Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command (COMAFSOC).

**Analysis:** As previously noted, 24 SOW and STTS leadership met with Candidate X after her SIE and asked her to author an AAR detailing her experiences as the first female STO Candidate to attend virtually all of the Special Tactics training pipeline. Per senior leaders who asked Candidate X, the reasoning for the AAR was to capture her unique experiences related to policies, standards, and norms and to highlight areas of concern, allowing leadership to identify areas for improvement. (Ex 19:21, 28; Ex 28:54) There was no evidence of COMAFSOC’s involvement in tasking Candidate X to write the AAR. (Ex 17:25-26; Ex 19:21; Ex 20:17-18; Ex 28:54)



Candidate X was neither the first nor the only person asked to provide feedback on their training experience. Contrary to Complainant's claim, all students are afforded this opportunity, though more commonly in the form of course critiques. (Ex 20:18-19; Ex 27:47; Ex 32:86) While course critiques do not share an identical format as an AAR, they similarly provide a mechanism for students to offer insight, criticism, praise, and suggestions for improvement, such as was the case for Candidate X.

In addition to the AAR requested by 24 SOW/CC and STTS/CC, a 352 SWTS instructor cadre member also asked Candidate X to write an AAR on her experiences in the STO Apprentice Course. (Ex 35:56) 352 SWTS instructor cadre testified "students write AARs after every block of instruction." (Ex 35:56) A review of internal squadron documents revealed another student submitted a post-course AAR in March 2021. In her AAR for the 352 SWTS, Candidate X made recommendations for better integration of females into training and recognized efforts that allowed her to fully integrate with her team. (Ex 35:56-58; Ex 54:24)

Neither requests for Candidate X to write an AAR amounted to preferential treatment but rather a reasonably justified effort to improve gender integration. The 24 SOW/CC who tasked Candidate X with writing an AAR stated, "I wanted to make sure that my organization and the people within my organization... [are] holding the standard. I think that's exactly the due diligence that you need to exercise as the commander." (Ex 19:21) By doing so, the 24 SOW Commander met his *Commander's Responsibilities* as defined in AF1-2, which directs commanders to "maintain effective communication processes and ensure unit members are well disciplined, trained and developed...[and] be aware of critical processes, and constantly seek to improve and standardize those processes to produce more reliable results."<sup>41</sup> (Ex 9:2, 4)

Candidate X's AAR for the 24 SOW/CC spotlighted troubling incidents that occurred during training, which is why he forwarded the AAR to COMAFSOC. Given these facts, it is not accurate to maintain that Candidate X received preferential treatment by writing and presenting her AAR to COMAFSOC.

**Findings:** The preponderance of the evidence does not support preferential treatment was given to Candidate X by asking her to write an AAR and discuss her report with COMAFSOC.

**ISSUE 12:** Whether preferential treatment was given to Candidate X when she was selected and assigned to work under the Commander, AFSOC (COMAFSOC).

**Analysis:** In or around June 2021, following a meeting with Candidate X, COMAFSOC, and 24 SOW leadership, COMAFSOC asked 24 SOW leadership if there were any assignment plans for Candidate X within the wing. At the time, wing leadership did not have a specific plan while her next assignment was being worked out. (Ex 17:31-32) From his meeting with Candidate X regarding her AAR, COMAFSOC said he found her to be "a remarkable officer...very articulate...a first-rate thinker," a perception similarly shared by multiple other AFSOC senior leaders. (Ex 17:31-32; Ex 19:51; Ex 20:23; Ex 43:2)

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<sup>41</sup> [https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/csaf/afi1\\_2.pdf](https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/csaf/afi1_2.pdf), accessed 23 Mar 22.



Due to Candidate X not yet having an assignment after her SIE, her experiences in the STO pipeline, her expertise as a Cyberspace Operations Officer, and her stellar record, the COMAFSOC selected her to serve on the AFSOC staff as a member of the Cochran Group. (Ex 17:33)

The Cochran Group, named for WWII Air Commando Philip Gerald Cochran, is AFSOC's dedicated future studies initiative and acts as a catalyst for strategic initiatives. The group directly supports COMAFSOC with an independent, critical assessment of proposed strategic actions. Advisory in nature, the Cochran Group does not make policy, management, or acquisition decisions but rather is a "think tank" for the commander. (Ex 43:3) COMAFSOC described the group as an "intellectual sounding board" designed to assist him in thinking about and presenting future concepts. (Ex 17:29-31)

While working at the Cochran Group, Candidate X was assigned to the STTS but had "Duties At" AFSOC staff. She worked for the Director of the Cochran Group, not directly for COMAFSOC as the Complainant asserted. One of several projects Candidate X assisted with while assigned to the Cochran Group involved conceptual thinking and design of the future ground force. (Ex 17:32; Ex 43:3) COMAFSOC testified, "[s]he was not the leader. She was not the subject matter expert, but she had an interesting perspective, given her experience in the training pipeline..." (Ex 1:3; Ex 17:32) The Director of the Cochran Group corroborated COMAFSOC's testimony regarding Candidate X's role in design thinking. (Ex 43:3) Furthermore, COMAFSOC stated since there is a cyber component to the Special Operations ground force of the future, "her cyber background obviously was attractive...[she's] bright, and a good thinker and communicates well. She was well qualified; she is of the caliber of the person that I would hire into the Cochran Group." (Ex 17:33) COMAFSOC testified like in Candidate X's case, he hand-picked a male officer and a female civilian for the Cochran Group. (Ex 17:33)

The Director of the Cochran Group explained while there is typically a call across wings for candidates interested in serving in the Cochran Group, "everyone in the Cochran Group is hand-selected, and [STO Candidate] was an appropriate pick." (Ex 43:2, 5) The Director observed, "Just because you self-eliminated from training doesn't mean you don't have potential to excel somewhere else... If you see a talented officer, you need to use them." (Ex 43:5)

This investigation determined commanders have the authority and responsibility to select personnel whom they feel best suited to meet their organization's mission needs. A "by name" practice of selecting personnel is typical across the Air Force and does not violate a standard. One AFSOC senior leader noted COMAFSOC "has to be able to balance the talent...he has in the formation" to have "the best officers around him to help make decisions...she is a really impressive officer and has great insight and great analytical ability and really persuasive writing abilities," so "I had a hard time looking at that...from my perspective as preferential treatment." (Ex 19:51) Given that commanders have the authority to select officers to serve on their staff, COMAFSOC's selection for Candidate X based on her capability, record, and expertise was not preferential.

One witness felt it was inappropriate for someone who self-eliminated on the pipeline to work within the Cochran Group. (Ex 33:28) Another AFSOC staff member did not feel Candidate X was uniquely qualified above others for a Cochran Group position and



characterized her assignment as preferential treatment while acknowledging commanders have the authority to select their staff members. (Ex 22:33, 51) Even so, this same witness stated, “she brought a lot of really strong experience from the cyber world on how we could adapt the force to be more technical savvy and take advantage of cyber and space capabilities...that was very helpful.” (Ex 22:32)

The Director of the Cochran Group stated Candidate X was talented and called her “absolutely qualified and capable” for the position.

**Findings:** The preponderance of the evidence shows COMAFSOC hand-selects members for the Cochran Group, and he selected Candidate X based on her capability, record, and expertise, which does not constitute preferential treatment.

**ISSUE 13:** Whether preferential treatment was given to Candidate X by allowing her to return to the Special Warfare training pipeline after her self-initiated elimination in April 2021.

**Analysis:** In his letter, the Complainant asserts, Candidate X “will be rejoining the Special Tactics Training Squadron (STTS) as an ST trainee, and pick up where she left off. This decision was pushed down to the STTS Commander...regardless of the demoralizing effects it has on the remainder of the ST community. This decision was driven by the AFSOC Commander...and supported by...the current 24 SOW Commander.”<sup>42</sup> (Ex 1:3)

In April 2021, Candidate X self-initiated elimination (SIE) from the training pipeline. The 352 SWTS/CC and the 352 SWTS Enlisted Military Training Leader completed an AETC Form 125A, *Record of Administrative Training Action*, for the candidate, recommending she be considered for reinstatement into the STO Apprentice Course (commonly called by its former name, CCS). The form stated it was up to the determination of the 24 SOW and SWTW commanders to determine if Candidate X should return to training.

A review of Special Warfare training records in the last ten years indicates only five candidates self-initiated elimination from training after completing A&S and/or Stress Inoculation Training (SIT). Of these five candidates, Candidate X was the only person to request a return to the training pipeline. Although there is precedence for a candidate who self-eliminates to return to training, the point at which Candidate X self-eliminated – after completing most of the apprentice pipeline – was unprecedented, prompting SWTW and 24 SOW leaders to consider the circumstances that led a well-performing officer to SIE late in training. Leaders testified to training environment dynamics that were disadvantageous to Candidate X compared to her peers. (Ex 19:57; Ex 24:23-24; Ex 27:35; Ex 28:23; Ex 39:1; Ex 40:2-3) The SWTW/CC at the time of her SIE testified, “She’s overcoming more to serve in this community than any male...She was not held to different standards. She was subjected to things no man was subjected to, and no man has had to deal with.” (Ex 40:3)

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<sup>42</sup> The Complainant also claimed the 352 SWTS/CC informed his staff Candidate X “**WILL** graduate regardless of if she meets standards or not.” (Ex 1:4) Witness testimony does not support this claim. (Ex 4:3; Ex 27:39) Further, the commander in question relinquished command in the summer of 2021 and is not in a position to affect Candidate X’s training, as alleged.



During their changeover in the summer of 2021, both the current 24 SOW/CC and the former 24 SOW/CC testified they agreed they would allow Candidate X to return to training if she elected, as was within their authority. (Ex 19:44; Ex 39:2) The former 24 SOW/CC testified he discussed with Candidate X whether she wanted to return to the training pipeline, and she asked for time to think about it. (Ex 19:40) He also testified there was no policy prohibiting her return, stating, "I think the norm...[was] a one-year process, but I wasn't overly concerned about that norm because again I had seen...two years prior...a young STO that had got plugged right back into training." (Ex 19:41) The SWTW and SWTG commanders corroborated there is no written policy regarding the approval authority and process for returning a candidate to training, but one is currently being drafted. (Ex 24:8-9, 15; Ex 21:28) Per Candidate X's AETC Form 125A, Candidate X's return to training was at the discretion of the 24 SOW and SWTW; both former and current 24 SOW and SWTW commanders supported her return to training. (Ex 19:40-41; Ex 21:25; Ex 39:1-2; Ex 40:2) Furthermore, the former 24 SOW/CC testified he asked the STTS/CC if he knew of any issues from conversations with the 352 SWTS/CC that would preclude Candidate X from returning to training, to which he was told, "No, they didn't. In fact, she was doing well and it was kind of a surprise to them." (Ex 19:40)

As previously discussed, Candidate X was selected to serve on the AFSOC staff in the summer of 2021. In or around December 2021, COMAFSOC told the 24 SOW/CC that Candidate X had informed him that she wanted to return to training. The 24 SOW/CC, in turn, notified the STTS commander. (Ex 28:66) In his 10 Jan 22 letter to the force, the 24 SOW/CC explained his rationale for allowing STO Candidate to return to training in his letter to the force:

"...[Candidate X] faced different challenges than most, if not all, other students going through the pipeline. [Her] AAR ultimately spurred AETC and AFSOC to request a review of the training pipeline standards and professionalism which concluded: 1) some behavior of individuals in the Special Warfare (SW) training enterprise does not align with professional standards, 2) while a good faith effort was made to integrate female trainees, much more work remains before credibility can be restored, and 3) the SW enterprise should be devoid of institutional, occupational, or individual barriers that cause anyone to feel like they do not belong.

Due to the findings in the review and the student's performance in the pipeline, Wing leadership offered the candidate another opportunity to meet graduation standards and complete the pipeline. The candidate is now preparing to re-enter the pipeline after a year. With respect to timeline prior to re-entering training, for years the 24 SOW standard operating procedure for STO selection and re-entry into the pipeline has been to wait for one year or longer before returning for another attempt. Additionally, the SWTW is currently finalizing a written policy to codify the waiting period for re-entry into the pipeline.<sup>43</sup> (Ex 4:2)

This DAF IG investigation reviewed the CDR and determined the findings were supported by witness testimony and documentary evidence. (Ex 61:15-20) Corroborating the 24 SOW/CC and former SWTW/CC statements above, this investigation found Candidate X faced challenges directly affecting her as the first female trainee through the training pipeline. These challenges included incidents of unprofessional conduct and the dissemination of

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<sup>43</sup> Based on issues Candidate X raised in an AAR she wrote at the request of the 24 SOW/CC, the AETC/CC initiated a CDR on 21 Jun 21, which concluded on 30 Sep 21.

misperceptions and untrue information regarding her performance by students and instructor cadre; also, she alone was assigned subpar facilities.<sup>44</sup> (Ex 18:5-6; Ex 19:26, 57, 66; Ex 20:15; Ex 22:18, 21; Ex 28:23; Ex 29:39-40, 57; Ex 30:54-55, 81, 108; Ex 31:18, 73-74, 98, 116; Ex 32:86-93; Ex 33:13-14; Ex 46:5, 6; Ex 47:2; Ex 54:24; Ex 55:9) Cumulatively, these events placed her at a disadvantage compared to peers who did not face similar experiences. However, it is notable that these events took place one to two years ago, and AFSOC and AETC leaders have implemented measures to improve professional standards and gender integration efforts.

Regardless of Candidate X's specific circumstances, multiple senior enlisted and officer leaders within the career field stated there is precedence for members who SIE to return to training. (Ex 19:15; Ex 20:23; Ex 21:26; Ex 27:38; Ex 36:32; Ex 39:1; Ex 41:2; Ex 43:4; Ex 44:1; Ex 51:2) A senior enlisted leader stated, "People have quit before. She's not the first person that's quit. There's been many successful people that have quit and then come back, and redone it." (Ex 56:19) In addition, two senior officers recounted first-hand knowledge of officer candidates who returned to the pipeline following SIE, later progressing to become commanders in the same field. (Ex 19:15; Ex 20:24)

In addition to the historical precedence of candidates returning to the pipeline, no Air Force, AETC, or AFSOC policy prohibits candidates from applying for re-entry following SIE. One senior leader with first-hand knowledge testified, "Nowhere was it written [in] CFETPs or otherwise that if students self-eliminate...[they] forfeit any other opportunities to go through the course again." (Ex 27:38) There is no Air Force policy on the length of time for candidates to reapply for training, although it is a cultural norm for candidates to wait one year following SIE before re-entering the pipeline. (Ex 4:2) Candidate X self-initiated elimination on 7 Apr 22 and returned to training on 31 Mar 22, dispelling the notion that her return is preferential and outside cultural norms.

**Finding:** The preponderance of the evidence does not support preferential treatment was given to Candidate X by allowing her to return to the pipeline after she self-initiated elimination. There is no Air Force policy prohibiting her return, and there is historical precedence within the Special Tactics for students to return to training after self-elimination.

#### IV. SUMMARY

Witness testimony revealed Candidate X experienced a level of scrutiny not shared by her male peers; her actions were watched closely and magnified by other students, instructor cadre, and leaders. The evidence showed the letter's assertions were based on factual errors and misperceptions, which were obtained through widely-shared speculation. The investigation determined Air Force members named in the anonymous letter acted appropriately and complied with applicable standards regarding the issues the Complainant raised. Witness testimony and documentary evidence did not support gender-based preferential treatment occurred, as Complainant alleged.

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<sup>44</sup> For example, a one-stall bathroom with no seating other than the toilet was designated for Candidate X to use between sessions and for changing during her Pre-Dive training in February 2021, while other trainees were provided a shower and locker area with benches and, notably, a heater to use to warm up before their next session. (Ex 18:5; Ex 19:26; Ex 29:39-40; Ex 30:54; Ex 31:73-74) Females in Special Warfare training are now provided a facility similar to that used by their male peers. (Ex 61:15-16)

**Issue 1:** Whether Special Warfare training standards were lowered to accommodate women.

The preponderance of the evidence does not support Air Force Special Warfare standards were lowered for women. Witness testimony and documentary evidence show standards have changed over time for many reasons, including integrating women, creating operationally relevant and scientifically-based physical standards, responding to organizational structure changes, and adapting for the future fight.

**Issues 2 - 8:** Whether preferential treatment was given to a STO Candidate during Special Warfare training.

The preponderance of the evidence does not support preferential treatment was given to Candidate X during her Special Tactics Assessment and Selection (Phase II) or while in the training pipeline. Candidate X's actions during her first Phase II in 2018 did not constitute self-initiated elimination (SIE), and the decision to allow her to complete the session followed written OI standards. Candidate X's recommendation for reassessment was normal practice for candidates who showed strong potential to succeed in the Special Tactics career field. The letter writer's claim that the cadre unanimously did not recommend Candidate X during her second Phase II in 2019 was false; she received a majority vote for selection by Phase II cadre. After Candidate X entered the STO training pipeline, she was injured during training and was medically eliminated from her Pre-Dive course at Lackland AFB, contrary to the claim that she quit and was pulled from the pool. Once Candidate X healed and was able to continue training, she and more than a dozen other trainees attended a Pre-Dive course at Hurlburt Field to not preempt their training due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Later, Candidate X continued to STO Apprentice Course, the last course in the training pipeline before a STO earns their beret. While witnesses claimed fitness standards at the course were lowered to accommodate Candidate X, this investigation found the timing of the changes of the fitness test administered in the STO/CCT Apprentice Course was not to confer preferential treatment to Candidate X but was spurred by a male student's failure in a fitness test portion. Finally, while Candidate X self-initiated elimination from training at the STO Apprentice Course, her outplacement from the training pipeline was handled like others before. Officers who have self-eliminated in the past have been allowed to return to the training pipeline.

**Issues 9 - 13:** Whether preferential treatment was given to a STO Candidate after self-elimination from Special Warfare training.

The preponderance of the evidence does not support preferential treatment was given to Candidate X following her self-initiated elimination from training. Candidate X was asked to write an AAR detailing her training experiences. Due to the concerning information contained in the AAR, it was provided to COMAFSOC, who requested a meeting with Candidate X and her leadership to discuss her report. Passing pertinent information to senior leaders does not constitute preferential treatment. Regarding Candidate X's assignment to the Cochran Group, the preponderance of the evidence shows COMAFSOC selected Candidate X based on her capability, record, and expertise, as he has with other members of the Cochran Group.



This investigation found the claim Candidate X was offered an SMU position without going through the normal selection process was not accurate. Candidate X's leadership spoke to her about multiple options following her self-initiated elimination, including separation from the Air Force, returning to her previous Cyberspace Operations Officer (17D) AFSC, returning to the training pipeline, or competing for a position in an SMU in her previous AFSC utilizing the normative selection process. Additionally, Candidate X did not take weeks off without leave, as claimed, and she paid out of pocket to hire a personal trainer to maintain her physical fitness when she no longer had the requirement to work out with pipeline students.

Finally, preferential treatment was not given to Candidate X by allowing her to return to the pipeline after her self-initiated elimination. There is no Air Force policy prohibiting her return, and there is historical precedence for students to return to training after self-elimination. Approval for Candidate X to return to training was at the discretion of her chain of command. Based on her performance and recognizing the obstacles she faced in training, which her male peers did not face, Candidate X's leadership fully supported her decision.



I have reviewed this Report of Investigation and the accompanying legal review and I concur with their findings.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S=L D" with a horizontal line extending to the right.

STEPHEN L. DAVIS  
Lieutenant General, USAF  
The Inspector General

## APPENDIX A: UNIT DESCRIPTIONS

### Air Education and Training Command (AETC)<sup>45</sup>

The mission of AETC is to recruit, train, and educate exceptional Airmen. AETC headquarters is located at Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA)-Randolph, TX. The command is composed of more than 29,000 active-duty members, 6,000 Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve personnel, 15,000 civilian personnel, and 11,000 contractors. AETC oversees the AF Recruiting Service (AFRS), Air University (AU), and two Numbered Air Forces (NAFs) -- 2d Air Force (2 AF) and 19th Air Force (19 AF).

#### Second Air Force (2 AF)<sup>46</sup>

The mission of 2 AF is to train, develop, and inspire Airmen to deliver airpower for America. Headquartered at Keesler Air Force Base, MS, 2 AF is responsible for conducting basic military training (BMT) and technical training for Air Force, Joint, and Coalition partners. 2 AF also trains and provides oversight of Airmen completing Army training prior to Joint Expeditionary Tasking missions.

#### Special Warfare Training Wing (SWTW)<sup>47</sup>

The SWTW is headquartered at JBSA-Lackland, TX, and recruits, assesses, selects, and trains the Air Force's conventional and special operations group combat forces to meet the demand of the future battlefield. The wing's mission is to recruit, develop, and train ground combat forces that specialize in the airpower application. The SWTW is comprised of the Special Warfare Training Group (SWTG) and the Human Performance Support Group.

#### 350th Special Warfare Training Squadron (350 SWTS)

The 350 SWTS is headquartered at JBSA-Lackland and executes 25 courses and trains over 1,500 students per year in support of the Air Force Special Warfare training pipeline. The 350 SWTS executes all courses from Special Warfare's Course of Initial Entry through all skills and employment courses in order to provide the 351 SWTS, 352 SWTS, and 353 SWTS with fully-developed and prepared students as efficiently as possible. The 350 SWTS is responsible for 3 Geographically Separated Units (GSUs), including Det 1 (Air Force Combat Dive School, Naval Support Activity-Pensacola, FL), Operation Location (OL)-A (Air Force Liaison to Airborne Ranger Training Brigade, Ft Benning, GA), and OL-B (Air Force support to 2d SWTG(A), Yuma Proving Grounds, AZ).

Assessment and Selection Course (A&S): Conducts an attributes-based evaluation process, assessing physical readiness, mental toughness, critical thinking, ability to work as part of a team, and capacity to perform under physical and mental stress. Those selected are assigned

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<sup>45</sup> <https://www.aetc.af.mil/>, accessed 20 Mar 22.

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.2af.aetc.af.mil/>, access 20 Mar 22.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.specialwarfaretw.af.mil/>, accesses 20 Mar 22.

CCT, PJ, and SR AFSCs and entered into their respective Apprentice courses following Combat Dive Course completion.

Pre-Dive Course: Prepare candidates for USAF Combat Dive School, and fulfills SOCOM-required prerequisite standards for a USSOCOM-certified Combat Dive Course.

#### 352d Special Warfare Training Squadron (352 SWTS)

The 352 SWTS is located at Pope Army Airfield, NC. The squadron's mission is to train and develop ground forces who specialize in the precision application of airpower. The 352 SWTS executes four Special Warfare Air Traffic Control Courses, four Combat Control and Special Tactics Officer Apprentices Courses, three Special Reconnaissance Apprentice Courses, and between four and six Static-Line Jumpmaster Courses annually. The squadron trains, mentors, and develops Special Tactics Officer (STOs), Combat Control (CCT), Special Reconnaissance (SR), and Static-Line Jumpmaster students in foundational skills to prepare them for global employment across the range of Special Warfare mission sets.

The 352 STWS runs the CCT/STO Apprentice Course, formerly called the Combat Control Course (CCS). The CCT/STO Apprentice Course is 13 weeks and provides 3-level skill qualifications to STO and CCT candidates. Officers attend the STO Apprentice Course side-by-side with enlisted CCT candidates. Training includes human performance and resiliency training, small unit tactics, land navigation, communications, assault zones, fire support, and field operations, including parachuting. At the completion of the apprentice course, each graduate is awarded the three-skill level (apprentice), the scarlet beret, and CCT or STO flash.

#### Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC)<sup>48</sup>

Headquarters AFSOC is located at Hurlburt Field, FL, and is the Air Force component of U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). The command's mission is to provide our Nation's specialized airpower, capable across the spectrum of conflict ... Any Place, Any Time, Anywhere. AFSOC provides Air Force special operations forces (SOF) for worldwide deployment and assignment to unified combatant commanders. The command has approximately 20,800 active-duty, Reserve, Air National Guard, and civilian professionals.

#### 24 Special Operations Wing (24 SOW)<sup>49</sup>

The 24 SOW is an active duty wing located at Hurlburt Field and assigned to AFSOC. It is the only Special Tactics wing in the USAF. The mission of the 24 SOW is to solve special operations ground problems with air power. The 24 SOW provides Special Tactics forces for rapid global employment to enable air power success. The wing oversees the 720th Special Tactics Group (STG), 724th STG, and the Special Tactics Training Squadron (STTS).

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.afsoc.af.mil/>, accessed 20 Mar 22.

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.airforcespecialtactics.af.mil/>, accessed 20 Mar 22.



*Special Tactics Training Squadron (STTS)*

The STTS is located at Hurlburt Field, Florida. The squadron's mission is to conduct Advanced Skills Training for the Air Force Special Tactics enterprise. The STTS trains and develops five-level Special Tactics operators to conduct and support precision strike, global access, and personnel/sensitive item recovery. Additionally, the squadron hosts USSOCOM's Special Operations Terminal Attack Control Course (SOTACC) and provides initial joint terminal attack control (JTAC) training to select Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force Special Operation Forces. The STTS also assists with Recruiting, Assessment, and Selection (RAS) for Special Operations Surgical Teams (SOST), Terminal Attack Control Party (TACP), and Combat Camera (COMCAM) personnel assigned to the 24 SOW.

## APPENDIX B: LIST OF ACRONYMS

A&S – Assessment and Selection  
AAR – After Action Report  
ACC – Air Combat Command  
AETC – Air Education and Training Command  
AFSPECWAR – Air Force Special Warfare  
AFSOC – Air Force Special Operations Command  
ARC – Air Reserve Component  
CAF – Combat Air Forces  
CCOC – Combat Control Orientation Course  
CCS – Combat Control School  
CCT – Combat Controller  
CDI – Commander Directed Investigation  
CDQC – Combat Dive Qualification Course  
CDR – Commander Directed Review  
CFETP – Career Field Education and Training Plan  
CJCS – Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
COMAFSOC – Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command  
COMCAM – Combat Camera  
CRO – Combat Rescue Officer  
CSAF – Chief of Staff of the Air Force  
DAF – Department of the Air Force  
DAFI – Department of the Air Force Instruction  
DAF IG – Department of the Air Force Inspector General  
DAFPD – Department of the Air Force Policy Directive  
DGCDAR – Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule  
GA – Guardian Angel  
GSU – Geographically Separated Unit  
HAF – Headquarters Air Force  
HP – Human Performance  
IAW – In Accordance With  
JBASA – Joint Base San Antonio  
MAJCOM – Major Command  
MTL – Military Training Leader  
NAF – Numbered Air Force  
OFT – Operator Fitness Test  
OI – Operations Instruction  
OL – Operating Location  
PACAF – Pacific Air Forces  
PAST – Physical Aptitude and Stamina Test  
PJ – Pararescue  
POTFF – Preservation of the Force and Family  
PT – Physical Test  
QBA – Quitting By Action  
RAS – Recruiting, Assessment, and Selection

SecAF – Secretary of the Air Force  
SecDef – Secretary of Defense  
SERE – Survival Evasion Resistance and Escape  
SIE – Self-Initiated Elimination  
SMU – Special Mission Unit  
SOCEUR – Special Operations Command Europe  
SOCPAC – Special Operations Command Pacific  
SOF – Special Operations Forces  
SAT – Students Awaiting Training  
SAST – Special Operations Surgical Teams  
SOTACC – Special Operations Terminal Attack Control Course  
SOW – Special Operations Wing  
SOWT – Special Operations Weather Technician  
SR – Special Reconnaissance  
ST – Special Tactics  
STG – Special Tactics Group  
STO – Special Tactics Officer  
STTS – Special Tactics Training Squadron  
SW – Special Warfare  
SWMS – Special Warfare Mission Support  
SWTG – Special Warfare Training Group  
SWTS – Special Warfare Training Squadron  
SWTW – Special Warfare Training Wing  
TACP – Tactical Air Control Party  
TACPO – Tactical Air Control Party Officer  
USAFE-AFAFRICA – United States Air Forces in Europe and Air Forces Africa  
USSOCOM – United States Special Operations Command  
WISR – Women In Service Review



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