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Special Forces Warrant Officer Institute graduates final class before gaining unique appointing authority

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FORT BRAGG, N.C. (USASOC News Service, April 28, 2010) – After 16 weeks of advanced training at Fort Bragg, Special Forces Soldiers who left their battalions wearing the chevrons of noncommissioned officers will return to those same battalions as warrant officers, ready to command or help command Special Forces operational detachments.

Over two dozen newly appointed warrant officers graduated the Special Forces Warrant Officer Tactical and Technical Certification Course April 23 during a ceremony at the John F. Kennedy Auditorium on Fort Bragg. The course is the first step in a warrant officer's official education, teaching and refining their ability to plan and execute tactical Special Forces operations.

"This is one of those life-defining moments for those of us who serve in the military," said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Tony Fox, commandant of the Special Forces Warrant Officer Institute at Fort Bragg, after the ceremony.

"These guys were already successful as noncommissioned officers. Most of them would have probably gone on to be successful master sergeants, first sergeants and sergeants major," he said. "But they made a conscious decision to open new avenues for themselves by becoming warrant officers."

To be selected as a Special Forces warrant officer candidate, applicants must be senior Special Forces noncommissioned officers with at least three years of documented time serving on a Special Forces detachment, Fox said. The day's graduating class, mostly prior sergeants first class, averaged closer to 12 years in the Army and five or six years with Special Forces operational detachments.

Special Forces warrant officers return to the battalion with which they last served as NCOs, but rarely return to the same operational detachment. On a new team, they will act as the assistant detachment commander or as the commander in the absence of a captain.

"We have [warrant officer-ones] right now who are commanding detachments in countries where they are the only U.S. military presence," Fox said.



Warrant Officer (WO1) Perry Zimmerman is congratulated after graduating the 16-week Special Forces Warrant Officer Tactical and Technical Certification Course April 23 in John F. Kennedy Auditorium on Fort Bragg. Zimmerman, who will return to the 2nd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group in Mississippi, a part of the Army National Guard, has 14 years of experience in the U.S. Army and is already a qualified Special Forces Soldier. The Special Forces Warrant Officer Institute is part of the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. (Courtesy photo)

"As an NCO on a detachment, they would normally only be responsible for planning a small portion of their operation, depending on their occupational specialty," Fox said. "As warrant officers, they'll be responsible for planning an entire operation, to include the coordination and resourcing, and synchronization with other elements and higher headquarters."

This class of warrant officers graduating from the certification course will be the last to do so under the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center & School's temporary appointment authority.

After three years of trial periods managing its own warrant officer training program, the Center and School has been authorized the ability to permanently appoint its warrant officers, making it the only organization in the Army to receive this authority aside from the Warrant Officer Candidate School at Fort Rucker, Ala. The class graduating May 18 will be the first to do so under permanent appointment authority.

While the change in appointment authority will make little difference to those teaching and attending the course, it's a big step for the Special Forces Warrant Officer Institute, Fox said.

"This is great for recruiting," he said. "As soon as we got approval to train our own candidate course here, our recruiting went through the roof."

While the rest of the Army's newly appointed warrant officers are required to attend a seven-week course at Fort Rucker, Ala., it was determined that Special Forces warrant officers have already received the bulk of that leadership training during the Special Forces qualification course and noncommissioned officer training required to reach the senior ranks.

With permanent appointment authority, the center and school can rest assured that its control over Special Forces warrant officer training no longer has an expiration date. Noncommissioned officers interested in applying their tactical and technical expertise to a broader, more comprehensive aspect of Special Forces operations can be confident that the training required to reach that next level will be managed by their peers within the Special Forces community.

USAJFKSWCS conducts Special Forces Assessment and Selection, and teaches the Special Forces Qualification Course as well as NCO professional development. By maintaining control of the branch's warrant officer education program as well, the center and school helps ensure consistency and efficiency in the training programs across all Special Forces ranks.

"Our measure of success is the feedback that we get from sitting Special Forces commanders," Fox said. "The minute that we stop changing what we teach is the minute we start losing relevance with the operational force."

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