

# The Value of In-Depth Assessment:

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

**Lieutenant Colonel John Chin PhD**, is currently the Command Psychologist at the United States Army Infantry Center, Fort Benning, GA. His distinguished career includes positions as an assessment specialist for Delta Force and the Joint Special Operations Command at Ft. Bragg, NC, and as a White House consultant.



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The success of our Special Operations Forces (SOF) in Afghanistan, Desert Storm, Panama, and on countless classified missions is the result of the quality men we engage in those operations. All special operation combatants go through an extensive multi-dimensional assessment and selection process which includes in-depth record screens, physical fitness evaluations, background checks, field evaluations and simulations, interviews, psychological screening, and finally an interview by a board of senior special operators with combat experience.

Special operators come from diverse backgrounds and experiences. We don't look for a particular entry-level skill set. We look for the man with the right stuff, the Quiet Professional. We assess for trainability and those core psychological characteristics that are known predictors of success in our operational environment.

Those core psychological characteristics are:  
**1. Fluid Intelligence** - This is the ability to evaluate and adapt to situations that previous experiences have not prepared one for. This differs from Crystallized Intelligence, which reflects acquired knowledge, formal education, and cultural experiences. **2. Emotional Stability with High Stress Tolerance**; **3. Situational Awareness**; and **4. High Integrity**. A situation during Desert Storm illustrates how these factors predict successful outcome.

A four man Special Forces element was conducting a Special Reconnaissance mission at a hide site in Iraq. As "Murphy's Law" happens, two young girls and a toddler playing in the desert compromised them. They were on a highly sensitive mission. An immediate decision was required. The choices included killing the children and continuing the mission; killing the children and withdrawal to avoid further compromise; drugging the children without knowing whether it would kill them; or letting the children live, and withdrawal. They rightfully chose the latter, even though it resulted in a heavy sustained firefight several minutes later. All of the core psychological characteristics and training were used in this decision process.

Fluid Intelligence and Situational Awareness allowed the soldiers to accurately assess the situation, adapt to emerging challenges, and make critical decisions. Emotional Stability with High Stress Tolerance kept the soldiers in a task focused steady state under time urgency and distraction, and controlled impulsive action. High Integrity and adherence to law did not allow them to commit murder regardless of mission or personal impact.

In this combat situation, some might argue that it was militarily expedient to kill the children. To do so is immoral and illegal. While defeating the enemy militarily, the illegal action of one individual would have caused the United States to lose legitimacy and moral authority. We would have won the fight, but lost the war.

Law Enforcement personnel throughout the United States are constantly faced with ambiguous high stress situations where time urgent life and death decisions are made. This is particularly the case with SWAT team members. The same factors that predict success for SOF operators are found in successful Law Enforcement personnel.

While several tests are available to measure Emotional Stability, until recently, a user-friendly easy method of assessing fluid intelligence and critical task focus under time urgency with visual and auditory distraction was not. **TechMicro's SAVVY Recruiter**, a computerized self-administered comprehensive measure of fluid/crystallized intelligence, performance under stress, and other critical abilities has demonstrated significant success in the selection of SOF operators. Further, appropriate scores on the test correlate with high supervisor performance ratings. While the **SAVVY Recruiter** was initially used exclusively for the assessment and selection of SOF operators, it is now available for general use.

Great care is essential in assessing and selecting those who hold the public's trust. The sensitivity and importance of our missions requires that as much as possible, only those individuals possessing the proper qualities be selected. To ask for less is a disservice to those we put in harms way, and our Citizens.

**Lieutenant Colonel John Chin PhD**, is currently the Command Psychologist at the United States Army Infantry Center, Fort Benning, GA. There he serves as a psychological consultant to the Commanding General and his staff in the areas of personnel, organizational, and clinical psychology. Dr. Chin created a Leadership Development Program at Ft. Benning that is used widely in leader training. LTC Chin was assigned as Command Psychologist and Chief, Psychological Applications Division, Joint Special Operations Command, Ft. Bragg, NC for six years. There he conducted Executive Selection Psychological Evaluations for all Department of Defense personnel considered for this high priority assignment. He served as Detachment Psychologist in the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment - Delta (Delta Force) for over eight years. There he conducted psychological assessments, assessment research, security vulnerability evaluations, and performance enhancement training. LTC Chin, PhD has participated in many combat operations beginning with Grenada and served as a White House consultant.