**General Advice - SFAS**

Gents,

My goal in getting ready for SFAS was admittedly to learn everything I possibly could.  That approach doesn’t work for everyone, but it worked for me.  The more I knew and the more I thought things out, the more relaxed and better prepared I was.

Making life at SFAS as easy as possible under the circumstances was also a focus of my preparation.  You have limited time and energy (emotional and physical), and I found taking care of a lot of the little things below was key.

Though this doesn’t reveal any secrets, it is nonetheless a comprehensive list of what I did, or what I wish I had done in some cases, that helped me be successful.  I encourage you to read it soon, in case you need to order something in time for your start date.

GOOD LUCK!

***EQUIPMENT TO BRING*** *– There seemed to be no limit of how much authorized stuff you can take*

**A Really Good Book** – *There is a surprising amount of time hanging out in the barracks trying to stay awake, so bringing a book that will inspire or take your mind off things is critical.  I brought Into Thin Air about the tragic climb up Mount Everest and it was the perfect book…highly recommended.*
  -  <http://www.amazon.com/Into-Thin-Air-Personal-Disaster/dp/0385492081?ie=UTF8&psc=1&redirect=true&ref_=oh_aui_detailpage_o05_s00>

**An Inspirational Photo and Quote** – *I brought a photo of the trails where would ruck three times a week to remind me of how hard I had worked to get there. I also brought a laminated quotation by Tony Robbins about hard work. I looked at these several times a day and always before a big event. They did a lot to focus and reassure me of what I had to do. I kept them in my book so to keep them out of sight.*

**3 or 4 Combination Padlocks** – *one for each bag and one for the wall locker/s.*

**Sleep System** – *I brought mine, but CIF can issue you a complete one as well when you get there.  However, if you have one, I would take it.*

**A Woobie Converted into a Sleeping Bag** – *I always loved doing this with my woobie. By folding your woobie in half and sewing a sleeping-bag replacement zipper along two sides of it, you can convert your woobie into a lightweight sleeping bag. Brigade Quartermaster used to sell a kit, but I think they stopped. I made mine by order a sleeping-bag zipper online and then sewing it on myself. Here’s a site to get a general idea of what a converted woobie would look like:* [*http://www.survivaloutdoorskills.com/poncho\_liners.htm*](http://www.survivaloutdoorskills.com/poncho_liners.htm)*.*

**Sheets and Pillows** – *You can bring your own sheets and a pillow and those who did slept like kings.  I would recommend bringing at least a fitted sheet for a twin/full bed and your favorite pillow.*

**Canteen Cleaner** – *It’s up to you, but the canteens you are issued were used by 100 other Soldiers before you, so something like hydrogen peroxide or other sterilizing solution can help make it a little cleaner*.

**Gloves** – *A light pair of gloves for general stuff (walking during LandNav) and the heavy leather work gloves for team week are great.  They also issued us the white repelling gloves at CIF, which will work as well*.

**Two+ Sets of Eye Pro** – *Set yourself up for success with a fresh pair of eye pro when you start the Star. Also, wrap all glasses in scratch-resistant cloth or bags. I failed to do this latter bit and ended up with my new glasses being badly scratched, even though they were in a case.*

**Glasses Defogger** – *If there’s a product that will keep eye pro from fogging up, I would get it.  Once I started sweating, by eye pro fogged up and I couldn’t see anything.*

**Two+ Headlamps** – *Losing your one-and-only headlamp can be really bad, so bring two.  If you can find one that has both Red and Blue lights, that would be the best as different colors can help show off different features of the map and especially anything marked with a highlighter.*

**Highlighters for the Map** – *You can bring map markers, but I would definitely bring a five-color pack of highlighters for marking boundaries, draws, and points of interest on your map; you can mark the map anyway you want.*

**Pen Light** – *I always felt best with more, so I took two AAA pen lights (one Blue, one Red) as backups for my two headlamps.*

**Liquid Biodegradable Detergent** – *You will be doing any washing in a big sink, and I found liquid detergent worked best. Do the right thing by the environment and buy only biodegradable detergent – Seventh Generation makes a good one.  Also a scrub brush comes in handy.*

**One Nice Taped Uniform** – *After you are selected, you will be in a lot of briefings, so it’s good to either keep one of your four taped uniforms relatively clean or have a fifth one ready to go.  I had nothing but trashed uniforms and it was kinda embarrassing.*

**Extra Stuff for Others** – *Being generous and supportive of those around you is a great way to bond (and get future high peers).  I brought a 1,000’ role of 550 cord, hung it on the end of my bunk, and encouraged everyone to help themselves.  I also hung a bottle of sunscreen and a muscle roller there for people to use.  It worked very well.*

**Clear 2” Packing Tape** – *A roll of this, the same width as 100 mph tape, is great for making quick laminations.  After writing your roster number on the 100 mph tape, cover it with the clear tape and it will never fade.*

**MOLLE Web Dominators with Elastic String for Holding your Canteen Straw** – *Another little bit of equipment that made life so much easier for me was putting two of these on the sternum straps of my ruck and using them to retain the two hoses of my 2-quart straws.*
  -  <http://www.amazon.com/BCP-MOLLE-Dominators-Elastic-String/dp/B0116STCBW?ie=UTF8&psc=1&redirect=true&ref_=oh_aui_detailpage_o01_s01>

**Two 2-Quart Straws, One for Each 2-Quart Canteen** – *Can’t imagine life without them…a must-have.*
  -  <http://www.amazon.com/Rothco-602-Canteen-Straw-Kit/dp/B001DKY1KG?ie=UTF8&psc=1&redirect=true&ref_=oh_aui_search_detailpage>

**Camelbak Hydrolink Hydration Conversion Kit Bite Valve for 2-Quart Straws** – *The ones that come with the straws are very bad.*
  -  <http://www.amazon.com/CamelBak-90512-HydroLink-Conversion-Black/dp/B001LQWIB6?ie=UTF8&keywords=camelbak%20bite%20valve&qid=1459108068&ref_=sr_1_17_a_it&sr=8-17>

**Band-Aids and Hand Sanitizer** – *Just good to have for cleaning and protecting any cuts.  Things don’t heal well out there.*

**Moisturizer** – *Your skin will take a beating at Selection with numerous cuts and abrasions. In addition to Band-Aids, I would take hand crème and body lotion. Taking the time to properly help yourself heal every evening and whenever opportunities arise pays big dividends. I even slept with moistening gloves on that I put on after applying hand crème – a little tip from a Ranger student.*

**FoxRiver Socks** – *I’m not a sock guy, but I tried them and I will probably never go back to the regular Army ones.  They are nicely padded, offer foot support, function well when wet, and dry fast.  This is just what I used…there are some other good ones out there too.*
  -  <https://www.foxsox.com/catalog/product.aspx?type=subcategory&sortorder=stylenumber&code=MILBT&selectedstyle=6036>

**Nice Kit Bag** – *To make life as easy as possible and thus maximize my emotional and physical energy at SFAS, I treated myself to the best kit bag I could find:  a jumbo zippered kit bag with multiple compartments and wheels called the Sandpiper of California Rolling Loadout Luggage X-Large Bag.  You will move several times at SFAS and you will be constantly diving in and out of your bag for stuff with often little time to find it.  This kit bag made life easy and was the envy of many Soldiers there.  For overflow equipment that I never used, I stored them in an Army-issue top-loading duffel and kept it under my bunk.  If you don’t want to shell out the bucks for the fancy kit bag, the giant zippered duffel below is an adequate alternative.  I actually took that as well, in case they said “no” to the wheeled kit bag…but they didn’t. – NOTE: I would only travel with military bags when absolutely necessary…it’s not safe these days to spotlight yourself as a Serviceman.*
  -  Sandpiper Kit Bag:  <http://www.amazon.com/Sandpiper-California-Rolling-Loadout-15-5x37x17-Inch/dp/B004HPE91K?ie=UTF8&psc=1&redirect=true&ref_=oh_aui_detailpage_o07_s00>

  -  Giant Duffle:  <http://www.amazon.com/Rothco-Canvas-Zipper-Duffle-Olive/dp/B000FBWYOO?ie=UTF8&psc=1&redirect=true&ref_=oh_aui_detailpage_o06_s00>

**Trash Bags** – *Take a couple…can make a good waterproof bag if needed.*

**Storage bags** – *I used several of the large oversized bags with the one-way valves for storing uniforms in my kit bag.  Made things easier to find.*

**Two gallon bags** – *I would take at least 5 of them.*

**100 MPH Tape** – *Take some…you will need it.  I also took a piece of cardboard and wrapped about 5 feet of tape around it and kept in in my pocket.  It was great as I often needed a piece in the field.*

**Two Sets of Flip Flops** – *A tiny pair you leave in your ruck, and another you leave out for heading to the latrine.*

**Extra Fleece Caps and Neck Gators** – *I took three of each…nothing’s sadder than losing your fleece cap (or gator), especially in the chilly evenings.*

**Lots of Socks** – *I took twenty pairs and could have taken more.  Once they get dirty/salty, they won’t treat your feet as well and washing them can be a pain.*

**Bring a Little Extra Engineer Tape** – *You can’t have a lot of it, but there will be someone who needs it for their uniform and will be glad you have it.  Plus, you will need about a foot of it for putting your number on the road guard vest.*

***MENTALLY PREPARE BEFORE YOU GO***

*The bad news is that you’ll be under some kind of stress all time at SFAS. The good news is that it’s all in your head and therefore you have some control over it. Stress is a person’s reaction to a situation. The cadre put you in situations that they know will stress a typical person. So strengthening your mental endurance and ability to handle stress will dictate your experience at SFAS. There are lots of techniques that work extremely well at SFAS and elsewhere in life. These are what worked for me and for thousands of others throughout time.*

**Learn Meditation and Relaxation / Breathing Techniques** - *What’s amazing about learning these techniques is that you can do them anywhere, anytime and they really work! Meditation and breathing can turn off the sympathetic nervous system…the fight-or-flight response. Deep breathing helps activate the parasympathetic nervous system which calms us. Forcing yourself to smile a hug smile and holding it for seventeen seconds releases endorphins. I am not a spiritual or religious person and that was not my approach to this. This is just science and these techniques have been used to thousands of years. If you want to add your own religious or spiritual elements to is as well, that would probably work too.*

*Here are some resources that helped me, though there are many out there and I encourage you to explore on your own:*

 *1. How to Meditate -* [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wirV265ZYSw*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wirV265ZYSw)

 *2. 4-7-8 Breathing Technique for Relaxation -* [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRPh\_GaiL8s*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRPh_GaiL8s)

 *3. Breath Walking -* [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGkHVEnpVoY&nohtml5=False*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGkHVEnpVoY&nohtml5=False)

 *4. Calming your Sympathetic Nervous System -* [*http://www.newsmax.com/Health/Headline/anxiety-vegus-nerve-stimulation-brainstem/2014/09/15/id/594746/*](http://www.newsmax.com/Health/Headline/anxiety-vegus-nerve-stimulation-brainstem/2014/09/15/id/594746/)

 *5. Guided Meditation App for Android/iPhone – Insight Timer:*

 *-* [*https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.spotlightsix.zentimerlite2&hl=en*](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.spotlightsix.zentimerlite2&hl=en)

 *-* [*https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/insight-timer-meditation-timer/id337472899?mt=8*](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/insight-timer-meditation-timer/id337472899?mt=8)

**Listen to Experts on Emotional Wellbeing** – *Your emotions are one of the biggest factors at SFAS. Learn their techniques. These are what helped me:*

 *1. Tony Robbins’ Hour of Power -* [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3bvYhm7qcg&nohtml5=False*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3bvYhm7qcg&nohtml5=False)

 *2. Believe yourself to be already selected -* [*http://unleashyourinnerstrength.com/the-%E2%80%9Ci-already-have-it-i-already-am-it%E2%80%9D-technique/*](http://unleashyourinnerstrength.com/the-%E2%80%9Ci-already-have-it-i-already-am-it%E2%80%9D-technique/)

 *3. Staying in your “Flow State” -* [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jE1j5Om7g0U*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jE1j5Om7g0U) *and* [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1MHyyWsMeE*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1MHyyWsMeE)

 *4. Learning to learn from your mistakes -* [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN34FNbOKXc*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN34FNbOKXc)

 *5. Motivational Videos.  Anything that talks about the benefits of pure hard work or “Rise and Grind” was good for me.*

**Listen to Motivational Speeches on Hard Work** - *These are what helped me but there are many more great ones out there:*

 *1. The Best Motivational Video Speeches Compilation 2015 - 1 Hour Long -* [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9V6BDnu35qs&nohtml5=False*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9V6BDnu35qs&nohtml5=False)

 *2. Be Fearless -* [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjjYVROiJIA&nohtml5=False*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjjYVROiJIA&nohtml5=False)

 *3. Prove them Wrong -* [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPQ1budJRIQ&index=13&list=PL9XDPqN8lxBphPe-jqlu6cRejGpd54oqA&nohtml5=False*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPQ1budJRIQ&index=13&list=PL9XDPqN8lxBphPe-jqlu6cRejGpd54oqA&nohtml5=False)

**Get on a SFAS Forum** – *There are many online places to get great advice on SFAS. I combed the internet frequently looking for every little tidbit I could find. There are many out there, but here’s the one I used the most -* [*http://www.professionalsoldiers.com/forums/showthread.php?t=30549*](http://www.professionalsoldiers.com/forums/showthread.php?t=30549)

***PHYSICALLY PREPARE BEFORE YOU GO***

**Get Your Pace-Count** *– I bought a “Contractor’s Wheel” at my local hardware store and measured out several 100m courses over various terrains to get my pace-count. I also used it to see how long it would take me to cover 100m, which helped me later in my route planning. Having this knowledge locked in before getting to SFAS helped me focus and be confident about approaching the LandNav portion of the course.*

**My 3-Month Pt Training Plan** – *I am not a physical fitness expert, but here’s what I did that worked for me:*

***Note: I rucked with a heavy ruck. This is not for everyone and, though this worked very well for me, I was experiencing some minor overuse injuries by the end of the three months, so train with caution!***

Day 1:

    -    5+ mile cardio (slow) run

    -    3 sets of max pushups, going from regular, to narrow, to wide arm and then repeating

    -    2 sets of max sit-ups in a minute

    -    2 sets planks for 1:30 minutes

    -    Ruck off road on flat and up and down hills with 75lbs for 7+ miles

    -    3 sets of squats w 75lb ruck

Day 2:

    -    3 sets of max pull-ups, chin-ups, narrow pull-ups, and wide pull-ups

    -    2 sets of max sit-ups in a minute

    -    2 sets planks for 1:30 minutes

    -    Fartlek for 2+ miles

Day 3:

    -    5+ mile cardio (slow) run

    -    Go to the gym

         -    Narrow Bench

         -    Regular Bench

         -    Bench Triceps

         -    Bench Butterflies

         -    Machine Butterflies

         -    Dips

         -    Fire Hydrants

         -    Shrugs

         -    Neck Bridges

         -    Planks

         -    Sit-ups

   -    2 sets of max sit-ups in a minute

   -    2 sets planks for 1:30 minutes

   -    Ruck off road on flat and up and down hills with 75lbs for 7+ miles

   -    3 sets of squats w 75lb ruck

Day 4:

    -    3 sets of max pull-ups, chin-ups, narrow pull-ups, and wide pull-ups

    -    2 sets of max sit-ups in a minute

    -    2 sets planks for 1:30 minutes

    -    Fartlek for 2+ miles

Day 5:

    -   Rest

***WHAT TO DO WHEN THERE***

**Commit Not to Quit** – *I was 100% committed to completing SFAS and getting selected before I got there. However, as soon as I arrived, I started feeling overwhelmed with questions: is this for me, will I just embarrass myself, do I even want to go to the Q Course. Those voices were suddenly louder than the ones telling me that this is what I wanted. However, I was experienced enough to know that these were just nerves talking. If you get there and you feel the same way, then that just means you’re a normal human being at SFAS! Further, if you actually decide you don’t want to be in SF anymore, make that decision AFTER SELECTION when you can think clearly. There is no way anyone is capable of making a fully-rational life-decision at SFAS. It’s a school designed to stress you and to test you with stress. You’re under pressure, you’re sleep deprived, you’re in a new environment, etc. Even if you “know” SF is not for you, you deserve to at least finish SFAS and then make a clear, conscious decision when you get home. Then you can at least be proud that you are one of the few who gave it their best shot at Selection and even got selected. If you make an impulsive, emotions-based decision at SFAS, you will only regret it as there is zero benefit to quitting.*

**Don’t Self-Select** – *Similar to the one above on never quitting, it’s critical to never to self-select; in other words, never decide in your own mind that you’re not going to be selected. That is not your job. There’s whole team of paid experts (the cadre) who handle the selection part and your only job is to do the best you can every day. Of course, this is easier said than done. Like most people, I obsessed over whether I would be selected and, like most people, I looked for every telltale sign of it. On two occasions, I interpreted what the cadre were saying / doing as evidence that I wasn’t going to be selected. One time, I was placed in a group of other candidates that seemed to be “the weak ones.” “Damn,” I thought, “I am in the weak group…guess I’m not going to be selected.” I later learned that the group had nothing to do with whether I would be selected. Another time, a cadre member called me over to talk with him. Again, feeling that I must be in trouble, I found myself getting dangerously short with him. But again, it turned out to have nothing to do with anything; he just wanted me to pass the word on something to the team.*

*Looking for evidence of whether you will be selected is a dangerous and counter-productive. For me, believing I wasn’t going to be selected destroyed my attitude for about ten valuable minutes during team week and I found myself becoming grouchy with my teammates…not a good situation. Don’t do it!*

**Be Social** – *Take every opportunity to meet and get to know someone new.  Get your first name out there so people remember you; a good nickname is even better.  You don’t want to be the gray man to/for your peers.  If you are, they won’t know you come Team Week and it will reflect in your peers.*

**Treat your Weapon like it’s Real** – *Losing your fake M16/rubber duck is often an instant drop from the course. To prevent this, I saw some guys write the word “WEAPON” on the backs of their hands as a reminder to always have their weapons in their hands. Likewise, throwing a rubber duck to the ground, treating it like it’s a hammer or doing any other thing that you would not do if it was real will get you negative attention. To help with never losing a weapon, I did a couple things. First, I NEVER leaned it up against anything but my leg. Lots of candidates would lean their weapons up against trees to check their maps, and then walked off without them. Most recovered weapons were found like that. Also, to make things easier, I created a little resting area for my rifle by tying the end of the elastic cord of the cargo pocket to the nearest button of my back pocket. This created a little space between my leg and the cord where the barrel could easily rest if I needed to use both hands. If I ever forgot the weapon was there and walked off, I would feel and hear it fall away.*

**Practice Self-Healing Techniques** – *I used meditation and breathing techniques at SFAS to relax and perform better and I found that even just basic techniques worked amazingly well. Once when I was lost during LandNav and had just spent a frantic twenty minutes trying to find myself on the map, I decided to sit down and meditate. It felt contradictory to what I needed to be doing: “I am running out of time; is now the best time to sit down and relax?” However, almost as soon as I sat down and started calming myself with some deep breaths, a wave of relaxation came over me and I started to think clearly once again. When I looked at my map again two minutes later, I recognized where I was almost immediately. Another technique I used was whenever I was nervous about speaking in front of a group of other candidates, I would look away from everyone and smile the biggest smile I could and hold it for seventeen seconds. Smiling, even when it’s forced, releases a flood of endorphins which boosts your happiness and self-confidence. I was then able to speak in front of anyone without any problems.*

**Be Proactive about Chaffing** **From your Ruck** – *There are several things you can try that will help or even eliminate chaffing on your back from your ruck:*

*1. Put 100 mph tape on the areas you know there will be friction*

*2. Use suspenders with no belt to keep you pants high.  Suspenders can be better than a belt as often it’s the interaction of the belt with the back pad that can cause the injuries.  It also allows you to keep the waist of your pants loose.*

*3.  Don’t wear a belt at all or only loop the belt through the front four belt loops.  I saw several guys to this with a shortened belt.  This will keep you pants tight while eliminating the need for the belt to go across the back.*

**LandNav Tips**
     *1.* ***PUT YOUR SCORE SHEET IN A ZIPLOC BAG AND PUT IT IN A SECURE POCKET.****I saw many, many unnecessary LandNav drops from Soldiers that put their score sheet in their map case.  Either their score sheet fell out, got hopelessly damaged, or was lost when the entire map case was lost.  AVOID THIS TRAGEDY BY PUTTING THE SCORE SHEET IN AN MRE ZIPLOC BAG AND PUTTING IT IN A SECURE POCKET THAT YOU KEEP NOTHING ELSE IN.  For me, the best pocket was the chest pocket:  it was secure, covered by the FLC, and high up so out of the way of the water.*

*2.  Tie a small loop of gutted 550 cord to your best compass and hang it off the sternum strap of your FLC.  It makes getting a quick and accurate compass reading fast and efficient.*

*3.  Modify your protractor*

*a.  Carefully shave away the excess plastic from around the 1:50,000 triangle*

*b.  Run a loop of 550 cord gut through the hole in the middle to get a quick and accurate azimuth*

*c.  Take a permanent marker and create a 5k ruler across the top of the protractor.  I marked out each kilometer with a long tick mark, and then every 200m’s in between with short tick marks.  I found it very accurate.*

*4.  Carefully write the grid-to-magnetic / magnetic-to-grid conversion numbers of the declination diagram on your map so that they are always visible, even when the map if folded.*

*5.  When you get your compass, thoroughly check it and DX it if you need to.  You may not be able to DX it for several days, but they will give you a chance to.*

*6.  Mark your map up any way you need to.  I highlighted stuff, wrote notes in the margins, and even put an inspirational quote in it.*

*7.  Cut out a square of the hard MRE box cardboard to make a map table and keep it in your pocket.*

 *8. ALWAYS replot your azimuth if you stumble across a “Happy Stake”. Happy Stakes have the exact grid coordinate on them and, even if you are super sure you know where you are, it’s always better to go to the stake you see and replot your azimuth. Too many times I was over confident and walked right by a Happy Stake, thinking I knew where I was and I was wrong.*

**Role your Ponchos in your Sleep Mat** – *This saves a lot of space in your ruck.*

**Bring PT Shorts to Field** *– Great for sleeping in.*

**Woobie -** *I found that my woobie was more than enough to stay warm at night and never used my sleep system.*

**Highlight Your Weapon** *– It’s up to you, but lots of Candidates put reflective and glow-in-the-dark tape on the weapons, presumably to help them find it during the day and night in case they lost it.*

**Monitor your Personality** – *SFAS isn’t always the best place to show off the uniqueness of your personality.  It’s kinda like you want to stand out for your ability to fit in…so work to fit in.*