00:00:00:00 - 00:00:11:15

last name. Sure. It's Eric. Eric Alexander. Alex. And, What's your current rank? And Lieutenant Colonel. And I'm the commander of First Battalion, second ASVAB.

00:00:11:15 - 00:00:18:21

So I've been with the state about 15 months. I took command in June of 2022.

00:00:18:23 - 00:00:54:06

Fabulous. And I keep asking, do this because I'm so interested in it. Do you speak any foreign languages? I've I've taught myself some French. I learned in high school. I took French in high school, and then it iterated rapidly because there are a lot of French people to talk to. But I started with Rosetta Stone when I found out I was coming to the U.S. Fair and I got to functionally passable when I went to Tunisia and Morocco and I was able to not necessarily converse fluently, but I was able to communicate with local nationals and my partners in one of their lingua franca is fabulous.

00:00:54:06 - 00:01:36:01

Fabulous. Okay. What is what is the mission of like an SVM? So an S MAB has many missions, but the main mission is to partner with foreign security forces, so foreign militaries to build capacity and relationships that will benefit in the future. We have a competition mission which is we will go out to a country in support of a combined command, and we will either build capacity, which is a specific authority, or we will train them, which is under exercise authority, or we also do operations with peacekeeping through Department of State funding.

00:01:36:07 - 00:02:01:11

And the goal is to train our partners and to build connections. We also have a crisis mission. So if if a crisis kicks off in a country and stab is there, you know, our job is to assist our partners in absorbing the the first blow of the of the crisis in order to allow the world community to come together to figure out how they're going to proceed.

00:02:01:13 - 00:02:27:04

If we're not in the country, we are also an option to go there to do exactly what I just said with that, with that partner, if it comes to combat, we also have a role there to either helping our partner generate forces for the fight or fighting alongside our partner and bringing U.S. capabilities to bear in support of our national objectives.

00:02:27:06 - 00:02:55:08

For your audience, I'd like to knock that. Obviously, this time You're fabulous. Thank you. Great answer. Why was Security Force Assistance Command stood up? It was stood up because of the same reason you say security. Your jersey security Force Systems command was stood up for the same reason we went to an all volunteer force in the 1980s. We realized that modern warfare required professional soldiers.

00:02:55:10 - 00:03:39:16

And we've realized over a decades of we realized over decades of conscripted, for lack of a better word, advisors who were just picked up and told, Hey, you're going to be an advisor, that we needed to professionalize that force because of the enormous impact it has on U.S. national security and military and military objectives. And the fact that we engage with these partners requires someone who is going to be both politically, culturally and militarily savvy.

00:03:39:18 - 00:04:02:05

And that's not something you just grab somebody and try and tell them to do. They need to be you need to be trained and they need to be a professional because of the impact that their actions can have in a foreign nation with a foreign partner. Fabulous. Okay, so this is an opinion thing, but I was sure I was getting all kind of interesting answers on this.

00:04:02:07 - 00:04:27:20

What do you think is the most impressive thing about SARS? I think the most impressive thing about the ASVAB is the ability of such a small organization to have such a large impact. And that comes down to the advisors and it goes back to what we talked about before, about why we decided to stand out the fabric and why we have professional advisors.

00:04:27:22 - 00:05:07:18

It is when you bring that many high quality men and women together, self-starters that take initiative and you give them a tough problem set, you be amazed at the catastrophic success that they can have. And we see that on a daily basis where a young captain or sergeant first class or even a staff sergeant goes and does something where outside their comfort zone that has outsized positive impacts for our mission, the embassy's mission and potentially even affects the U.S. national security objectives.

00:05:08:02 - 00:05:31:04

Catastrophic. I heard you so good. I like my parents name that you know your name could be anything. They want it to be catastrophic. Okay. So what are what are some of the challenges of working with a partner force?

00:05:31:04 - 00:05:45:18

So the challenges of working with a partner force are many, and they start at the very basic level of communication and cultural gaps which we we strive to overcome.

00:05:45:20 - 00:06:18:02

And they work all the way up to, you know, the larger pieces like planning and large maneuvers and things like that, depending on which partner we're working with. But ultimately it comes down to understanding where your partner is at before moving forward and not putting a U.S. solution on top of a partner, just because that's what we're comfortable with and that's part of being a professional advisor, is assessing, understanding where your partners are and what they need.

00:06:18:04 - 00:06:40:04

And so the biggest that's the biggest challenge and our best advisors do that really, really well and they're able to say, Hey, the way they do patrols is fantastic. Here's where they need a little bit of help. They need a little bit of help understanding once they get into contact that they have other assets available and we can help them bring their assets to bear.

00:06:40:07 - 00:07:02:20

Whether it's a Russian made indirect fire system, a Chinese made machine gun, you know, we help them solve that problem with what they've got as opposed to saying, no, you need to do it this way. You need to have a nine man squad and you need to maneuver in a fire team wedge. And then as soon as you make contact, you need to flank from the left.

00:07:02:21 - 00:07:16:18

You know that that that one turns our partners off and too can be counterproductive because now we're confusing them and we're trying to make them learn something that doesn't apply to their personal circumstances.

00:07:16:18 - 00:07:29:10

We've had a couple folks say things similar, but you said it fantastic. thank you. And we're not complaining. We don't need to solve it the American way because it doesn't work so well.

00:07:29:11 - 00:07:49:05

And you're doing a good job, too, giving us some context. I really like that. Yes. Russian made, you know, indirect fire, Chinese that that those types of things look good on film. Yes. That draws in our audience. So that's fabulous. You can please continue doing that. You talk a little bit about the challenges that are unique to an SVR as compared to like a conventional army unit.

00:07:49:07 - 00:08:13:01

So the challenges that are unique to an AC fab, again are many. I came from an infantry battalion, a commander and infantry battalion, so about as standard an army formation as you can possibly get. You know, the biggest thing you notice is that what we call a no BCT mentality. And what that really means is there's not as many people to throw at the problem.

00:08:13:01 - 00:08:34:19

You can't just throw people at a problem. You have to be efficient with your time and everyone has to work. You know, the things that other people used to do for you you may now have to do for yourself and solve your own problems as opposed to saying, Hey, you five guys go do this task. Now. It's like, Well, I got to go do this task.

00:08:34:21 - 00:09:06:04

I got to go pick up parts of the SSA, I got to manage my own calendar, I got to build this slide because I don't have a massive formation supporting this. And what you find is with the advisors that we have and the caliber of humans that we bring into the formation is that they're more than capable of keeping pace with a larger formation, whether it's routine garrison stuff or training or in combat.

00:09:06:06 - 00:09:41:19

So it's a fabulous if if the balloon goes up and U.S. were at war, what capabilities would that bring to the table? So as fabs bring multiple capabilities to the table in combat situations, the first one is what we call an operating mission set, and that would be we would fall in on a designated partner at Echelon and connect them to U.S. resource intelligence, long range fires, air support and those types of activities.

00:09:41:23 - 00:10:21:07

What we would also do is bring partner intelligence back up through the chain of command using our mission command network, almost like a parallel nervous system up to the US or coalition commander to paint that green picture. And what that would do is it allows those formations to integrate into an actual multi-domain fight. And so instead of just being really good at it, shooting and direct fire contact, now we've brought a partner formation up to a list, go MDO capability and that's critical when you're you're fighting at the speed of Multi-Domain operations.

00:10:21:09 - 00:10:45:14

If the partner is not able to keep up, that's the weak link and that's where the mission is going to fail. If you apply an S variable over that, it's like an exoskeleton. You add capabilities to already existing partners and you make the whole organization stronger. You heard the word affair. You know, I was going to throw convergence in there too.

00:10:45:14 - 00:11:09:15

But but, but I mean, you know, like you think about multi-domain I'm sorry I'm spitballing here, but you think about Multi-Domain operations and convergence. And convergence is all about unity of effects at multiple points. And if you're operating in a coalition like we always will be, you've got to have your partners able to operate at the same speed with similar capabilities in order to leverage all those effects at those convergence points.

00:11:09:19 - 00:11:37:19

And if they can't do that, then it all falls apart. You could have a cascade, a cascading convergence collapse, right? One one multi-domain partner falls apart, which undermines another partner, another partner, or a U.S. convergence objective, which then undermines another and another and another and another. And so the importance of who we augment and who we put on the line is critical, you know, and then who we don't like.

00:11:37:19 - 00:11:56:18

The partners after the assessment, Hey, this partner, we can't get them there yet. So we have to give them a different mission because if they're on the line in this MDO conflict, trying to get convergence and it doesn't work, it affects will be catastrophic for the whole operation. So that's just my thoughts and

00:11:56:18 - 00:12:26:05

what are the characteristics of a good as that is the characteristics of a good asset advisor number one, flexibility. Number two, humility. And number three, competence. And the reason I say that is the mission sets were given, whether it's in garrison with less people or advising on continent or in combat or nebulous at best, they're there, they're undefined, they've got squishy boundaries and they're wicked problems.

00:12:26:10 - 00:12:46:05

And folks that are not able to solve wicked problems by adjusting the way they think about them or seeking advice or looking for resources don't do well in the types of environments that we operate in. Number two is humility. And it goes back to some of the things that I talked about, about not having as many people. Sometimes you got them up the floors.

00:12:46:07 - 00:13:04:12

You know, the lieutenant colonel has got to take out his trash. You know, I got to pick up parts of the SSA. You got it. I got to turn wrenches on Humvees. I got to learn how to work my own radio. You know, that's humility, right? Nobody is too good for the stuff that we have to do. And and a humble advisor knows that.

00:13:04:12 - 00:13:23:17

And they're able to solve problems easier because they're not wrapped up in their ego. And number three is competence. They they have to understand how to do their job because you can't advise somebody else if you don't know how to do your job. That said, you also have to know when to like General Heel says Put down your tools.

00:13:23:19 - 00:13:37:02

You know, when the American way of doing your job doesn't work, you have to understand how to it. You have to be so good at your job that you can understand how to adjusted to meet your partner's needs to help them acquire the same fact.

00:13:37:02 - 00:13:51:09

Some of the fabulous brands that. So you have deployed with with SBA. Yes I've deployed with this firm to Africa.

00:13:51:11 - 00:14:09:03

And I got back about two weeks ago or a month ago. Awesome. Okay, Come back now. Thanks. Give us give us one of your best success stories from your deployment. Make sure to tell us where if you can, tell us where you were. Absolutely. Yeah. So the best success story I had from our recent deployment. Now, granted, this is the team that was down there.

00:14:09:03 - 00:14:33:19

I was doing circulation to all of the countries where the teams were out to check on living conditions and meet with partners and meet with the embassy folks to assess the mission sets. The best success that we had outright would probably be in in Zambia and Zambia. We were our team was able to integrate with their school of infantry and work with their commandant, which trains all Zambian infantry soldiers.

00:14:33:21 - 00:15:02:07

And in that role, not only were they they asking us to come back, which is huge, they were they wanted us to bring our kit to demonstrate to the Zambian senior leaders the importance of buying kit as a whole, as opposed to acquiring it piecemeal, and that the systems that we use, even from the helmet to the boots to the armor, to the optics, to the weapon, don't work unless you put it all together.

00:15:02:09 - 00:15:23:21

And that was something that our team was able to demonstrate just by just by being there. And the commander of the infantry school picked that up. He said, look, we're going to buy this stuff or I want to try and get us to buy some of this stuff. But I don't want just to scope just a rifle, a front plate, a back plate helmet.

00:15:24:03 - 00:15:49:10

You know, it all works together. And I want you guys to demonstrated. That being said is he came back and he said, it's expensive. I want night vision, but it's expensive. I said, well, first and I talked to him about this. I said, First of all, you don't have to buy the top shelf stuff because you know the need that you have for the threat that you're facing doesn't require you to have white phosphorous thermals that cost $50,000.

00:15:49:12 - 00:16:09:04

There's other stuff out there. Number two, when we were first fielding night vision in the Army, not everybody had it. And so we can give you tips and tactics, techniques and procedures on how to how to fight with limited night vision systems where the maybe the leaders have them in the sand and they use tracer rounds to orient fire.

00:16:09:10 - 00:16:42:17

And so our ability to kind of meet our partner where it was at and have them understand the value of our equipment, our advice or training was it was a huge success in the first major engagement we had in Zambia. So this was an this the second time in history they had been there and we were already connected at the institutional level and we were influencing our partners in a positive direction to solve their security problems.

00:16:42:19 - 00:17:11:00

Congratulations. That's awesome politics. What a conclusion to. Yeah, solve their security problem. Absolutely. Love it. How does a team hand over their responsibilities before projecting that? I'm really interested in this before they rotate? Absolutely. So responsibility handover between teams varies. At least in Africa where we work, we have what we call persistent missions, which is the entire employment.

00:17:11:00 - 00:17:54:12

The team is there and then we have what we call episodic missions where a team is only there for part of the rotation, for persistent missions. You know, we try as much as we can to do a heel to toe rip relief in place. However, some of the limitations of the TDY and 179 day rule limit that. So we solve it virtually, we solve it, and teams meetings and sync meetings prior to we solve it with our validation exercise and our mission readiness exercise, which takes real life lessons learned from the teams on the ground and puts it into the training for the team that is getting ready to come into theater.

00:17:54:14 - 00:18:17:01

And then we sometimes will send folks back, reset, and then bring them back in-person if it's required to, to reset with that persistent team. For the episodic teams, it's a little bit easier because they will go to a country for a few months and then they'll rotate back to Fort Liberty, North Carolina, and they will actually get face to face time with their their counterparts.

00:18:17:03 - 00:18:53:05

Finally, the continuity is the theater security cooperation enterprise at CTF in Italy, which is the two star headquarters that we are operationally controlled by. And so those folks are largely civilians, but augmented with the military functional area officers are the long term repository of the cases that we work, the missions that we have. And so they understand, they have the connections with the the embassy folks, the Office of Security Cooperation folks.

00:18:53:07 - 00:19:03:07

They have the long term view on on the case objectives. And they're able to spin our teams up once they get in the theater as well.

00:19:05:07 - 00:19:12:19

Can you tell me a little bit just the high level stuff about the 81818, because I think that's so unique.

00:19:12:19 - 00:19:40:13

So the slab three arm cycle is three eight month periods. Number one is an eight month foundational training period. And that's designed to focus on individual adviser skills. It's also allows our folks to go to schools so their primary military education, our combined arms training center, which is a requirement for advisors and basically to work on our deployment and our advisor specific individual tasks.

00:19:40:19 - 00:20:11:10

So we do that for eight months and that culminates in what we call training training readiness assessment program, which is trap. Think of modified EIB, ESB or E-3, B It is a series of individually tested tasks designed to validate an advisor's individual competence for the mission set. Once the trap is complete, we move into an eight month collective training cycle, which includes both large scale combat operations and competition training focus.

00:20:11:11 - 00:20:58:14

During that time, advisors go through a team live fire, which not a fire team live fire. So it's a advisor team on fire, which is a 12 person react to contact and break contact live fire. They also will go to a CTC or a validation exercise, which is a battalion task force level exercise of advisor skills at Echelon as a team, and it stresses everything from prolonged medical field care to planning with a partner to transition to crisis, to engaging with embassy, moving through customs, all the things you can think of or for that separately.

00:20:58:20 - 00:21:33:05

We also do the list of validation, large scale combat operations validation, which is either at a combat training center where we practice echelon and of forces and advising and liaising and supporting in combat to bring effects to the partner. And that validates our let's go skill set. Once we come back from that event during our collective, we re blue on our competition skills during a mission readiness exercise prior to an eight month employment, which doesn't necessarily mean eight straight months in the same country.

00:21:33:06 - 00:21:52:18

As I said in previous comments, some missions are persistent, which means it's the entire employment window. Others are episodic, which means you may go to one country for a short period or you may go to one country for a short period and then move to another country for a short period to achieve whatever the objectives for those countries are.

00:21:52:20 - 00:22:27:06

And then once that happens, we return and then we really end up in a reset cycle and we begin our foundational training all over again. Busy, busy, very busy, very busy. Okay. If you were recruiting someone to come join you at five, what would you tell them? If I were recruiting somebody to come to the ASVAB, I would tell them that this first and foremost is an amazing experience that's unlike anything else that you have in the conventional army.

00:22:27:08 - 00:23:00:09

You're going to work with all high end professionals at every grade plate. You're going to be given a large amount of autonomy to solve problems. You're going to be given the experience to engage with a foreign partner and to learn a foreign culture. You're going to travel and ultimately you'll be a more well-rounded officer NCO coming out of this organization because of the experiences that you had versus a peer who remained in the conventional force.

00:23:00:11 - 00:23:01:04

Fabulous.

00:23:01:04 - 00:23:22:22

I'd say the biggest external challenges the fabs face is more work than we have people to execute. It. Now that we are out there and the combatant commands and the theater armies and the embassies around the world have seen what we do and communicated that to each other.

00:23:23:00 - 00:23:41:03

Everybody wants an asset. Everybody wants a team to come in and work with their partner because they see the value in it. The problem is we're a small organization and that requires the leaders that employ us to prioritize where we go. And so we have more work than we can handle. We understand

00:23:41:03 - 00:24:05:02

can S.A. complete their mission without boots on the ground? So I don't think as fabs can complete their mission virtually. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that the the advisors need to be on the front line, although that is an option that can be exercised.

00:24:05:04 - 00:24:32:11

You know, our advisors have a generating capability where they could be employed in a third country, not in direct conflict, building capacity generating forces, organize, train and equip partner forces to then go back into their home country and be employed by the partner force chain of command. Now, that is an option for the for the. Yes and

00:24:32:11 - 00:24:33:05

fabulous.

00:24:33:05 - 00:24:51:01

Okay. This is the one that I'm going to I'm throwing you the slow softball. I want you does not does that. All right. I'll do my best. I want the intensity. I want it right here. All right. Why does the United States Army need assistance?

00:24:51:03 - 00:25:16:14

The United States Army needs US fabs because we have a ton of work to do. And you need someone to cover down on the advising and theater security cooperation missions. And what that does is that frees up maneuver brigades to focus on large scale combat operations and the bread and butter of why we have maneuver formations. If we don't have this fabs, then we have regionally aligned brigades.

00:25:16:14 - 00:25:44:11

We've got folks split out doing theater, security cooperation initiatives from your formations. And the more we do that, the the last year formation is able to focus on its core mission. That being said, the amazing folks that you give to the firm then get the skill and come back to you the next grade plate immediately ready to enhance your organization and focus back on the large scale combat operations that you need them to be oriented against.

00:25:44:11 - 00:25:52:07

this and then just ask not what you can do for the SBA, but what the fab can do for you.

00:25:52:09 - 00:25:54:22

Yes, he's wearing the beret, which is interesting enough,

00:25:54:22 - 00:26:22:21

my research on ASVAB employment and large scale combat operations led me to identify multiple opportunities during conflict and crisis where s fabs, enhanced division operations and along and along that line, I believe that divisions, cores and battalions and brigades should not ask what they can do for the ASVAB, but what the Arabs can do for them know

00:26:22:21 - 00:26:23:15

we are in both.

00:26:23:19 - 00:26:57:22

We gotta love, love, love, love it. Two more questions. Sure. Why does the world now we struggle? Why the army needs. Yes, that's once the world needs us. That's the world needs SS Because it's a dangerous place. And the only way we can keep the way of life that the majority of the world enjoys is by working together, because there are forces out there that seek to undermine everything that we hold dear, and we're not going to be able to stop them alone.

00:26:57:22 - 00:27:21:02

Okay, so what the world needs to know about fabs is that they work, and I believe that's catching on because a number of our allies and partners are building professional advisor forces and it's only going to strengthen our network and our connection for any impending struggles that may come

00:27:21:02 - 00:27:33:08

campaign today to win tomorrow. A little more good campaign today to win tomorrow. Good. A little break between the two. All right. Campaign today to win tomorrow.

00:27:33:08 - 00:27:44:10

Victorious together. The more victorious together, a little separation between the word victorious together.

00:27:44:10 - 00:27:47:22

The one and only Steve Rogers.

00:27:47:22 - 00:27:49:18

Captain America.