

# SKILL FOCUSES AND SUPERIOR AREAS OF EXPERTISE

The following article expands on the skills available to operatives in Covert Ops. Also included are rules for those areas of interest and knowledge not covered by the main rules.

*Ideas for many of the descriptions in this article are based on TSR's TOP SECRET/S.I. system, specifically the Commando supplement, 1988.*

## Skill Focuses & Specialisation

A number of the skill descriptions in Covert Ops require operatives to chose a Skill Focus. Characters are also allowed to specialise in their chosen focus. Covert Ops is, by design, a lite system and the designers left a lot of choice and decision making up to the players. For some this will be a welcome level of freedom while others may find the idea rather daunting. Below are some suggestions for skill specialisations; the lists are by no means complete and only intended to help provide inspiration. Specialisations are also suggested for skills that do not have specific focuses.

### Academic

Scholar Specialisations	Scientist Specialisations	
Accounting	Animal Science	
Agriculture	Biology/Biochemistry	
Anthropology/Archaeology	Botany	
Architecture	Chemistry	
Economics/Business	Ecology/Meteorology	
History	Engineering	
International Law	Aeronautic	Hydraulic
Law	Construction/Civil	Industrial/Mechanical
Literature	Electrical	Nuclear
Philosophy	Environmental	Transportation
Political Science	Forensics*	
Religion	Geography	
Social Sciences/Sociology	Mathematics	
World History/Current affairs	Metallurgy	
Writing/Journalism	Oceanography	
	Physics	
	Space Sciences	
	Toxicology	

\* Includes Ballistics, Fingerprinting etc.

### Martial Artist

Unarmed Fighting Styles	Armed Fighting Styles
Aikido	Eskrima (Filipino Martial Arts)
Boxing	Estoque (Fencing)
Judo	Jittejutsu (Baton)
Jiu-jitsu	Kendo (Japanese Sword)
Karate	Nunchaku-Do (Nunchaku)
Krav Maga	
Kung-Fu	
Tae Kwon Do	
Wrestling	
	Ranged Fighting Style
	Archery (Kyudo)

The above fighting style are just a small sampling of the vast array of martial skills in use around the world. The GM should work with players to pre-define fighting styles as suggested on pg 31 of the Game Masters Operations Manual.

## Pilot

Land Vehicle Specialisations	Air Vehicle Specialisations	Sea Vehicle Specialisations
ATV	Airship	Canoe/Kayak/Raft
Motorcycle	Balloon	Sailboat
Snow Skiing/Boarding	Corporate Jet	Speedboat
Snowmobile	Glider	Yacht
Sports Car	Hand Glider	Submarine Operations
Transport Truck	Helicopter	Underwater Diving**
Tank Driving	Parachute*	Wind Surfing

\* Every two levels operative should also select one of HAHO/HALO/RT Jumping.

\*\* Every two levels operative should also select one of SCUBA/LAR V Draeger/MK 15, MK 16.

## Scout

Scout Specialisations	
Camel Handling (includes riding skill)	
Dog Handling	
Horse Handling (includes riding skill)	
Survival	
Desert	Plains
Forest	Sea
Jungle	Tundra
Mountain	Urban

## Technician

Technician Specialisations
Computers/Programming
Electronics
Mechanics
Robotics
Security Systems
Surveillance

## Thief

Thief Specialisations
Disarm Security Systems/Traps
Disguise
Forgery
Hacking
Lock-picking
Pickpocket
Safecracking

## Medics and Soldiers

Medics and soldiers should also be allowed to specialise (e.g. surgeon, field medic, sniper rifle, crossbow, bomb disposal, booby traps, etc).

## Superior Areas of Expertise

Superior areas of expertise are intended to allow a character knowledge in areas not otherwise covered by the regular skills in Covert Ops. Three very broad categories are listed. The categories themselves serve no real purpose other than to help group the listings - a character can choose areas of expertise from whichever category he likes.

The number of Levels that a character can assign to Superior Areas of Expertise is determined as follows: **(Logic ÷ 10 (round up)) + Rank**

Areas of expertise are not tied to any one ability; rather, they use whichever ability is deemed most appropriate for the scene. The full ability score is used and each level provides an additional 5% to the score. No superior area of expertise can have more than 6 levels assigned to it.

*Example:* Operative 294 has a Logic score of 65, Dexterity of 55 and is currently at Rank 2. This means he has 9 levels to assign to superior areas of expertise. He decides that he wants two levels in golf. When discussing the recent Masters tournament over a drink the GM determines that using Logic is best, giving the character a 75% chance of remembering specific questions about the match. Later on, when playing a round of golf, the GM decides Dexterity should be used, granting the character a 65% skill when playing golf.

If a character's Logic or Rank increase sufficiently during a game, extra levels may be assigned to areas of expertise at no extra cost. If a player wishes to buy over his current limit then each additional level costs 3 DP.

## General

Board Games	Jewelry
Cinema	Mimicry/Mime
Climbing/Rappelling (Abseiling)	Music
Construction Equipment	Musical Instrument
Connoisseur	Rare Collectibles
Cooking	Singing
Dance	Stage Magic
Fine Arts	Theatre/Drama
Gambling	Ventriloquism
Hypnosis	Wargaming

## Sports

American Football	Golf
Baseball	High Diving
Basketball	Ice Hockey
Bowling	Lacrosse
Cricket	Polo (requires Riding)
Cycling	Rugby
Equestrian Arts (requires Riding)	Speed Skating
Field Hockey	Squash/Racquetball
Figure Skating	Surfing
Fishing	Tennis
Football (Soccer)	Water Skiing

Athletics and swimming are not listed as it is assumed all operatives have basic skills in these fields (pg 16 GMs Operations Manual).

## Espionage/Military

Cartography	Radar
Cryptography	Sonar
Escapology	STANO
Forward Observer	Steganography
HRST	Torture
Photo Analysis	Traps

## Optional Method of Calculating Skill Score

If using levels is not desired for determining the level of knowledge in a skill, the rating score for a superior Area of Expertise may be determined by a percentile roll, adjusted as follows:

01-20	+50
21-40	+40
41-60	+30
61-80	+20
81-00	-- --

The result is the score used whenever an Area of Expertise is used and the score can never increase through development. This method should ensure that superior Areas of Expertise exceed normal average knowledge in those fields.

## Descriptions of Skill Specialisations and Superior Areas of Expertise

The following descriptions are intended to help clarify some of the more obscure skills mentioned in this article.

**Cartography** gives the character the ability to prepare clear and understandable field maps based on his own reconnaissance. The character's score in this skill is used to determine his accuracy in fine detail (the precise location of grid coordinates for example) and the overall clarity of the map (i.e. how well others are able to interpret his map).

**Connoisseur** allows a character to accurately assess food, drink, tobacco, and etiquette. The character knows from where the food, drink, or tobacco is sourced, how much it should cost, the overall quality of the item, and how to consume the item in the proper manner.

**Cryptography** is the ability to encrypt and decrypt messages. A skill check is always required to encode or decode a message. For every level of skill the encoder has above 1 the difficulty to decode the message is increased using the Difficulty Table on pg 55 of Covert Ops Main Rulebook (i.e. at level 3 the difficulty becomes Hard giving a -10 modifier). If using the optional Skill Score method then the difference between the Skill Score and the number rolled is the difficulty modifier used decryption attempts. In either case a critical success doubles the difficulty modifier.

**Escapology** incorporates techniques to gain freedom from ropes, chains, and restraints of all sorts. The GM is encouraged to assess a negative penalty to Escapology skill checks based upon how well a character is bound.

**Forward Observer** means the operative is trained in spotting targets and adjusting fire for artillery of all types. Provided they are in contact with the firing battery or its fire control, a forward observer can attempt to adjust friendly fire. For each round of fire, the FO can report and adjust the fire coordinates.

A forward observer can also attempt to call friendly fire on a position if he is able to observe the target point. A successful skill check allows him to relay the target coordinates. Once fire has arrived, the FO can attempt to adjust it normally.

**HAHO** (High Altitude High Opening) is a High-altitude military parachuting (or military free fall (MFF)) technique used to airdrop personnel at high altitudes when aircraft are unable to fly above enemy skies without posing a threat to the jumpers. In addition, HAHO parachute jumps are employed in the covert insertion of military personnel (generally special operations forces) into enemy territory, in circumstances where the covert nature of an operation may be compromised by the loud noise of parachutes opening at low altitude. HAHO jumps also allow a longer travel distance due to increased under canopy time, allowing travelling distances of more than 40 miles (64 km).

In a typical HAHO exercise, the jumper will jump from the aircraft and deploy the parachute at a high altitude, 10–15 seconds after the jump (typically at 27,000 feet (8,200 m) or so). The jumper will use a compass or GPS device for guidance while flying for 30 or more miles (48+ kilometres). The jumper must use way points and terrain features to navigate to their desired landing zone, and correct their course to account for changes in wind speed and direction. If deploying as a team, the team will form up in a stack while airborne with their parachutes. Usually, the jumper in the lowest position will set the travel course and act as a guide for the other team members.

Any character performing a HAHO jump must have an oxygen tank, protective clothing/mask and altimeter.

**HALO** (High Altitude Low Opening) is a High-altitude military parachuting (or military free fall (MFF)) technique used to airdrop supplies, equipment, or personnel at high altitudes when aircraft can fly above surface-to-air missile (SAM) engagement levels through enemy skies without posing a threat to the transport or load. In the event that anti-aircraft cannons are active near the drop zone, the HALO technique also minimises the parachutist's exposure to flak.

For military cargo airdrops, the rigged load is cut free and rolls out of the plane as a result of aircraft deck angle (ADA). The load then proceeds to fall under canopy to a designated drop zone.

In a typical HALO exercise, the parachutist will jump from the aircraft, free-fall for a period of time at terminal velocity, and open their parachute at a low altitude. The combination of high downward speed, minimal forward airspeed, and the use of only small amounts of metal helps to defeat radar and reduces the amount of time a parachute might be visible to ground observers, enabling a stealthy insertion.

Any character performing a HALO jump must have an oxygen tank, protective clothing/mask and altimeter. Characters with this field of experience are also able to control the rate of their decent in free fall, potentially giving them an advantage in a free fall chase.

**HRST** (Helicopter Rope Suspension Technique) is a military term for techniques and methods of rappelling, fast roping, Special Patrol Insertion/Extraction (SPIE) and Jacob's Ladder operations. Helicopter Rope Suspension was developed as a means to insert and/or extract, by helicopter, ground forces (primarily reconnaissance teams) into or from rough terrain, urban areas or water. HRST is designed to be used in situations where aircraft landings are impractical due to terrain or tactical situation.

**LAR V Draeger** Rebreather, designated as the MK 25, is a closed circuit SCUBA device. Running on 100% oxygen, all expelled breath is recycled into the closed circuit where it is filtered for carbon-dioxide. The result is a complete elimination of expelled bubbles which makes the Draeger ideal for clandestine amphibious operations. With a maximum depth of 70 feet, the LAR V Draeger rebreather cannot operate as deep as open circuit SCUBA systems. The unit's relatively small size and front-worn configuration makes them suitable for shallow water operation. Dive duration is affected by depth, water temperature and oxygen consumption rate. LAR V Draegers are used by Spec Ops units around the world.

**MK 15, MK 16** Closed Circuit Mixed Gas Rebreathers recycle the diver's expelled breath while filtering for CO<sub>2</sub>. Unlike the pure oxygen used in the Draeger, the MK 15 / MK 16 dilutes the oxygen supply with another gas (typically air but may also use Timux or Heliox as the dilutant). This mixture maintains a present partial pressure of oxygen (PPO<sub>2</sub>) level and allows for operation at much greater depth than the Draeger (depths down to 1,800 feet have been recorded). Unlike the LAR V Draeger, the MK15/MK 16 is too bulky for clandestine use in shallow waters.

**Photo Analysis** is the skill of reading and interpreting reconnaissance photographs, particularly aerial and satellite photographs. Things a good analyst can learn include camp layouts, ground features, approximate numbers and locations of personnel, weapons and equipment present, and possible identifications of rank or identity.

**Radar** operators are skilled in using radar equipment and in reading radar screens.

**RT Jumping** (Rough Terrain or Tree Jumping) is a form of military parachuting, into a forest or jungle without a suitable DZ (drop zone), typically from a relatively low altitude. It is generally considered to be a particularly dangerous form of parachuting. Tree jumping is also especially damaging to the parachuting equipment. If a parachutist becomes snagged in the trees he must rappel from a letdown line tied into his parachute risers.

**SCUBA** (Self-Contained Underwater Breather Apparatus) as used by special ops units consist of cylinders of compressed air worn on the diver's back, typically 2 aluminium cylinders, each holding 80 cubic feet of oxygen, otherwise known as 'Twin 80s'. They are open circuit systems which means that the exhaled air is released into the water. Swimmer Delivery Vehicle Team divers may also utilise the open circuit breathing systems fed from air tanks inside the swimmer delivery vehicle (usually a MK8 MOD 1 SDV). Aside from the size and weight of the tanks, the downside of open circuit systems is the tell-tale trail of bubbles released into the water that are visible to the naked eye and to infrared.

**Sonar** operators are skilled in using sonar equipment and analysing sound patterns and shapes. This skill also applies to small hand-held sonar units used on underwater missions.

**Sports** knowledge means the character understands the sport, can play it, and knows the culture and history surrounding it.

**STANO** (Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and Night Observation) includes the operation of a wide range of video, audio, thermal, night imaging, and motion detectors. The type of equipment included in this grouping are night vision devices, intrusion detection devices, man portable surveillance radar, laser aiming, ranging and detecting devices, certain specialised optical systems such as stabilised optical monoculars and binoculars. The most common equipment utilised by this skill includes night vision products, ranging from starlight weapon-sights, goggles, and viewers to standard infrared viewing products.

**Steganography** is the practice of concealing a file, message, image, or video within another file, message, image, or video. The advantage of steganography over cryptography alone is that the intended secret message does not attract attention to itself as an object of scrutiny. Plainly visible encrypted messages - no matter how unbreakable - arouse interest, and may in themselves be incriminating in countries where encryption is illegal. Thus, whereas cryptography is the practice of protecting the contents of a message alone, steganography is concerned with concealing the fact that a secret message is being sent, as well as concealing the contents of the message.

Steganography includes the concealment of information within computer files. In digital steganography, electronic communications may include steganographic coding inside of a transport layer, such as a document file, image file, program or protocol.

Older physical techniques include microdot photography, invisible ink, concealed "plaintext" (such as every tenth word on a specific page of a specific book), physical body movement (such as blinking eyes in Morse Code), etc.

**Torture**, unlike Interrogation, involves the use of physical coercion to get a subject to provide information.

**Traps** knowledge covers primitive traps and alarms of a non-technological nature (covered pits, nooses, falling spikes, etc.).