



By: [Jim Greer](#)

Someone recently asked me, “Why should an officer attend SAMS (the US Army School of Advanced Military Studies)?” But, in fact I think that is exactly the wrong question. The question ought to be, “Why would any officer not want to attend SAMS?”

Our sole reason for serving is to accomplish our assigned missions while preserving the lives of our Soldiers (or other Servicemen from any Service, law enforcement agency, or any other occupation for that matter). I served as an officer for thirty years, in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, and in armed peacekeeping in the Balkans and Palestine. I graduated as the distinguished graduate from professional education at every level from the Basic Course to the War College, earned three Masters Degrees, commanded at every level through

brigade, was an operations officer four times, and studied personally by reading, reflecting and writing. My point isn't to brag about my accomplishments, which are minor compared to so many other people, but rather to suggest, that even with all that preparation, IN THOSE THIRTY YEARS THERE WAS NEVER A SINGLE DAY THAT I THOUGHT...I KNOW EVERYTHING I NEED TO AND AM FULLY PREPARED TO MAKE THE DECISIONS MY SOLDIERS NEED. Every command decision I made, planning session I led, staff action I led, I always wished I knew just a little bit more.

So, how does SAMS, or any of the other Service Advance Schools, educate us to be better prepared to lead Soldiers? Simply put, SAMS develops in each of its students an improved capacity to learn, think, make decisions and communicate about our profession. The deep learning one gains through reading the key works on military theory, doctrine, history and practice is expanded through daily discourse with like-minded students of our profession.

Over a year of study of campaigns, learning and experience through wargames and exercises one comes to understand warfare in the comprehensive way that a professional leader must in order to lead the transformation of units, teams and individuals to overcome the very complex challenges of today and future security environments. SAMS develops each student as an Agent of Change for our Army, while providing them the knowledge, skills and abilities to be a better FG immediately after graduation, and eventually one more prepared to command at battalion and higher levels.

What are the usual excuses for not going to SAMS? The first and most often heard is, "I don't have time in my career to go to SAMS and to serve in the requisite qualification positions as a field grade. Well, if you are going to be in CGSC as a captain or first year FG, you have plenty of time. If not, did you know you can go back to SAMS after your FG time? You can apply to SAMS any time after you complete MEL 4 (CGSC or other Service equivalent). Just contact SAMS at (913) 758-3302 and find out how.

Probably the poorest excuse is the one your branch manager makes for you, “you don’t need to go to SAMS, you already are at the top of your year group.” Let’s think about that for a second. The leader who proved themselves in company command and a captain’s staff position, maybe was selected below the zone, is being told by their branch manager that if they keep on doing as they have will probably command a battalion, or the functional area equivalent. If you are pretty sure you will command hundreds of our Soldiers, don’t you want to be as prepared as you can?

You owe it to those men and women to learn as much as you can before you take command. You owe them your best planning, your best assessments, your best decision making and your best leadership...and that is what SAMS prepares you to do. The man or woman who thinks they don’t need to go to SAMS has no business commanding troops in our Army.

The third excuse is, “I am not smart enough to go to SAMS.” BS...SAMS isn’t about being the smartest guy or gal in the room, its about being the best learner in the room. Do you really want to learn about your profession, but are afraid you aren’t smart enough. Start studying now. Read history, theory and doctrine in order to learn how to learn. Write about some aspect of our profession. Writing forces you to learn in depth, to master a subject and to communicate effectively, all skills every officer needs. Demonstrate as a captain that you are a student of our profession and you will have a shot at SAMS. Then, when you get to CGSC, work your butt off the first few months to demonstrate to your faculty that you deserve a chance at SAMS, a recommendation from them goes a long way toward selection.

There is no shame in trying for SAMS and not being selected. It is a competitive school and many talented folks are also trying to attend. There is shame in not wanting to attend SAMS. There is shame in not being humble enough to admit that we don’t know everything and we still have more to learn, even when we are in senior positions of responsibility.

If you are a captain or lieutenant, talk to a SAMS grad who you trust and get their guidance.

If you are a FG headed to CGSC, try out for SAMS selection. If you are post-CGSC, then apply to SAMS as you finish your FG time. If you are a LTC and selected for Senior Service College, ask to attend the Fellowship. And, if all else fails, teach yourself. Get ahold of the SAMS curriculum, read the books, start a book club and reflect on what you read with your peers. After all, when the day comes in combat for you to direct or recommend a critical COA amid danger, complexity and uncertainty, you owe your Soldiers your best learning, thinking, communicating and decision making.

*[Colonel \(Ret\) Jim Greer](#) is a graduate of the United States Military Academy who commanded armor and cavalry units at every level through brigade. A veteran of combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and peacekeeping operations in Balkans, he served along the Inter-German Border defending NATO during the Cold War. When not in combat units he served primarily in leader development positions, including instructing tactics at West Point and as the Director of the U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies. Since retiring he has taught leadership, planning and organizational effectiveness in the private sector.*

Share this:

- [Email](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Pinterest](#)