



Senior NCO CTC Mid-Rotation Success

By CSM James Etheridge

My previous article, Pre-Combat Training Center (CTC) Rotation Tips for Aviation Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs), in the July-September issue of the Aviation Digest was the first of three articles intended to assist senior NCOs through the CTC experience. This article, the second of three, focuses on gaining success during the mid-rotation portion of the exercise. While the emphasis in each of these articles is on a CTC rotation, each of the points discussed are equally applicable to a theater deployment. Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) rotational units consistently make the same errors as preceding units. This article will assist the unit senior NCOs identify those areas that they are able to influence to ensure mission success.

The senior NCO is key to an aviation task force success. They are the first sergeants, platoon sergeants, staff Non-Commissioned Officers-In-Charge (NCO-IC), and production control NCOICs. Each has their own distinctive role that, if ignored, can negatively affect the success of a CTC rotation or combat deployment. If senior NCOs are proactive, committed, and think critically, they can be the key to success. Senior NCOs need to be comprehensively involved in the Military Deci-

sion Making Process (MDMP) in preparation for deployment. They need to know the capabilities of the aviation task force, including those of our multinational partners. Most importantly, they must understand the CTC scenario and the aviation task force commander's training objectives. This article will focus on six areas in a multifunctional aviation task force, where the senior NCOs can make a difference during a CTC rotation. The seven areas on which this article will focus are Command Post (CP) operations, aviation maintenance, Forward Arming and Refueling Point (FARP) operations, Aeromedical Evacuation (MEDAVAC) procedures, and aviation sustainment.

Every Task Force, or TF, encounters challenges during a CTC rotation. It is the responsibility of the CTC Observer Coach Trainer (OC/T) to help the unit improve efficiencies within the unit by identifying obstacles blocking the path to success. One of the tools the JMRC uses to do this is the mid-rotation After-Action Review (AAR) that normally follows a major operation or objective.

Command Post Operations

The CP is the nerve center of the task force and is where unit leadership makes plans and decisions for current and fu-

ture operations, whether it takes place at a CTC or deployed forward to Iraq or Afghanistan. Within the CP, some of the obstacles blocking the unit's path to success manifest themselves as broad communication issues or lack of synchronization within current operations. For the senior operations NCOs, gaining success at mid-rotation begins by engaging Soldiers to ensure they understand their function within the CP and their contribution to unit success.

Within the Current Operations (CUOPS) section, everyone seems to have a different perception on missions and task. By the time the mid-rotation point arrives, CUOPS has completely changed the operation orders planned by the future operations section. Thus, if the CUOPS performed their tasks in harmony, rather than chaos, everyone would be working toward a common objective and the planning resources invested in planning not wasted.

The CP is the realm of the S-3 NCOIC. He is responsible for the synchronization of all staff functions for the commander. The S-3 NCOIC is knowledgeable of all Army Battle Command Systems, understands their function and organization within the CP, and supervises and instructs sub-

ordinates in proper work techniques and procedures. The effective NCOIC will be deeply involved in mission execution in support of the S-3. Many of the unit's NCOICs participating in a CTC rotation have no operations experience and no idea of how manage a successful CP. They do not understand the requirement for constant communication coordination between the radio transmitter operator, battle captain, and the battle NCO. The successful CTC rotation is a result of the six principles of mission command; build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide a clear commander's intent, exercise disciplined initiative, utilize mission orders, and accept prudent risk. All are required for success.

Aviation Maintenance

Aviation maintenance operations of a task force conducting a CTC rotation can be challenging. This is typically the first time that units from different organizations, and even different countries, come together to operate as one team immediately upon arrival. Task force integration and multinational interoperability are key factors in creating and sustaining a successful task force. It is imperative that leadership identify and address the strengths and weaknesses of each unit in order to help mold an effective organization. One of the hurdles that the senior NCO's need to overcome,

is identifying who has the authority to delegate maintenance support personnel within the task force. Maintenance personnel from the different units making up the task force need to understand the chain of command and the authority of the first sergeant, platoon sergeants, and production control NCOIC to task out key personnel during combat operations, providing mission support where it is needed the most.

Integration of maintenance assets of the units making up the task force should be a major planning consideration prior to deployment or conducted immediately on the unit's arrival. Typically, most rotational training units arrive and set up their own maintenance areas without regard to the other task force unit maintenance area locations. Senior NCOs should anticipate this and immediately consolidate all maintenance support in one central location to improve overall task force efficiency and continually focus on streamlining all available assets and specialties. Some multinational partners are not equipped to sustain high operational tempo in an austere environment for extended periods and will require additional support and expertise in order to maintain maintenance operations. Key leadership meetings and allowing Soldiers to become familiar with different airframes and support personnel specialties making up the task force will

expedite this process. This weighs heavily on a strong production control NCOIC to provide the required leadership and knowledge to delegate support personnel where and when required to ensure mission success.

Forward Arming and Refueling Point Operations

One of the most important missions for the Multi-Function Aviation Task force (MFATF) or E Company operation and sustainment of the FARP. Aviation units are relatively successful at issuing fuel to aircraft from a main FARP location; however, units struggle with proper procedure for planning and establishing a jump FARP and with proper accountability of fuel and ammunition. Not all aviation units deal with armament on a regular basis; therefore, the knowledge of properly storing and handling the different variants of ammunition is crucial to the success of an attack mission. Many factors go into planning and coordinating a jump FARP. Not only does the platoon leadership need to be involved, but the S-3 and S-2 play an integral role in determining the enemy situation and then selecting the site, route, and configuration of the FARP. Army Training Publication (ATP) 3-04.94, Army Techniques Publication for Forward Arming and Refueling Points, identifies the roles and responsibilities of each level of leadership. Active aircraft movements into and out of FARP



locations and the volatile mix of fuel and ammunition create one of the MFATF's most dangerous operations during a deployment. Leaders at every level need to be knowledgeable about FARP operations and ensure safety, situational awareness, quality surveillance, and petroleum accountability procedures are at the forefront of FARP personnel and aircrews.

Many units tend to struggle through the rotational drama of a CTC; however, with proper planning, training, and rehearsals, TF leadership can improve FARP operations. Senior NCOs need to ensure FARP personnel receive the proper rest cycles. Too many times, we observe Soldiers working until 2100 or 2200 and having to be up at 0200 the next morning for a convoy to conduct a jump FARP. Ensuring proper fighter management will increase productivity of Soldiers and contribute to the unit's success.

Medical Evacuation Operations

Forward support MEDEVAC platoon sergeants must assist the commander and platoon leader analyze the Hospital Service Support (HSS) plan. As the mission transitions from defensive to offensive operations, MEDEVAC leaders must recognize the need to adjust the HSS plan. As the Role 1 and 2 medical treatment facilities move forward to support offensive operations, planners will need to incorporate Ambulance Exchange Points (AXP) and Air Ambulance Exchange Points (AAXP) as far forward as possible to provide immediate and timely support to the combatant commander's offensive operations. Identification of these exchange points early in anticipation of ground force advances allows for a proactive evacuation plan rather than a reactive hasty plan.

The mid-rotation point provides the unit an opportunity to adjust the current medical common operational picture and incorporate changes into the sustainment annexes of the operations order. The brigade surgeon, support operations officer, or medical operations officer will conduct planning and analysis for medical support for future offensive operations; however,

the forward support medical platoon leaders must ensure they have a seat at the table. They should be prepared to discuss current capabilities, Mission Essential Information (MEI) requirements, and be ready to address any issues with utilization and synchronization of air and ground MEDEVAC assets that occurred in the previous phase of the rotation.

Aviation Sustainment

The Logistical Status (LOGSTAT) report is an essential tool reflecting the current logistical and sustainment status of the unit. As importantly, it reflects consumption trends that support future operations. The TF S-4 must consistently contend with units that fail to submit the LOGSTAT or provide inaccurate information. Senior NCO involvement with logistics and sustainment is essential and emphasis from the Command Sergeant Major (CSM) down is key to ensuring the units deliver their LOGSTAT accurately and on time. A method that has shown success at JMRC is requiring staff NCOs to remove themselves from the confines of the CP to personally collect unit LOGSTAT information. This emphasis demonstrates the level of importance to the line companies and, more times than not, corrects LOGSTAT issues. Additionally, the old-fashioned radio call to the company CP from the CSM is also a method to ensure timely turn-in. If the battalion command teams emphasize a topic of interest, it will become an item of interest to the company command teams.

Rotational units will typically sacrifice a sustainment rehearsal or downplay its significance in order to leverage more time to plan and execute combined arms rehearsals. Sustainment rehearsals provide shared understanding of battalion casualty care; resupply operations of all classes, but especially Class III (petroleum, oils, and lubricants) and Class V (ammunition); equipment repair parts; and the endless other items necessary to keep the unit operational and in the fight. Sustainment must clearly be the business of senior NCOs if the unit is to be successful. These areas are often times friction points for aviation battalions by the mid-

point of the rotation. NCOs are simply uninformed on battalion logistics operations standards due to the lack of proper rehearsal at the start of a rotation. When units take the time to create a rehearsal agenda and formulate a script to ensure smooth sustainment operations, battalion synchronization and shared understanding greatly improves.

Conclusion

The role of the NCO is critical at all levels. Understanding these roles and performing the tasks expected for their position is vital for success. NCOs are the backbone of every organization and they have a tremendous impact. The sergeant first class supervises Soldiers, integrates assets and personnel, and coordinates operations. The first sergeants **manages** personnel, mentors and develop Soldiers, and oversees sustainment operations. The staff NCOs **plans**, synchronizes, and resources. The command sergeant major shapes, influences, and drives the commander's intent. Each role is significant to the operation of the unit. It is essential that the NCOs train Soldiers for combat and ensure they are committed to mission success.

Train To Win!

A special thanks to the following co-authors; SFC Edward Keopuhiwa (CP Operations), SSG Kendrick Robinson (CP Operations), SFC Michael Bishop (Medical Evacuation Operations), SFC Francis Donnelly (FARP), SFC William Johnson (Aviation Maintenance), and **Jerad Hoffman** (Aviation Sustainment).



CSM James Etheridge is currently serving as the Senior Enlisted Aviation Trainer at the Joint Multinational Training Center (JMRC), Hohenfels, Germany. Previous assignments include Command Sergeant Major, 1/228th Aviation Regiment; Operations Sergeant Major, 128th Aviation Training Brigade; and Operations Sergeant Major, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. CSM Etheridge is a graduate of the Joint Special Operations Forces Senior Enlisted Academy and has Bachelor of Science Degree in Homeland Security from Austin Peay State University.