



Colorado National Guard observer coach/trainer Master Sgt. Mark Poinsett (*sitting center*) observes exercise participants 4 March 2018 during exercise Dynamic Front 18, which was conducted at the 7th Army Training Command in Grafenwoehr, Germany. (Photo by Pfc. Hayden Allega, U.S. Army)

# National Guard Officers and Noncommissioned Officers Should Serve as Guest Observer Coach/Trainers

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**I** recently served as a guest observer coach/trainer (OC/T) at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) during Dynamic Front 18

(DF18), a joint and allied artillery interoperability exercise. Although I was a lieutenant colonel, it was my first time performing the duties of an OC/T. Going to a

combat training center (CTC) as an OC/T has always been something that I wanted to add to my professional repertoire. A former battalion commander of mine had served as a guest OC/T at the Joint Readiness Training Center and often spoke of the lessons he learned there. One lesson that he hammered home with me was the importance of a thorough assessment and evaluation program and how essential it was to a coherent unit training program. Having now served as an OC/T has solidified in my mind this lesson and many others. What good are lessons learned, however, if they are not shared? Below I have listed the top ten reasons why I think every Army National Guard officer and noncommissioned officer (NCO) should seek out the opportunity to serve as a guest OC/T at the JMRC.

### **Reason Number Ten: Joint Experience**

Serving as a guest OC/T during DF18 reintroduced to me the demands of a joint environment. With twenty-eight different nations coming together for a premier artillery exercise, OC/Ts needed exceptional interpersonal skills to coach and mentor multinational officers and NCOs to achieve collaboration and interoperability, which are key for success in a joint environment.<sup>1</sup> Guest OC/Ts exposed to these demands walked away from their JMRC experience more appreciative of these interpersonal skills but also with the knowledge that JMRC participation required something different than their normal jobs demanded. At the JMRC they “could not simply rely on their own accumulated experience and knowledge to succeed.”<sup>2</sup> They had to learn to integrate and empower others, apply critical thinking, and think strategically to coach and mentor the rotational training units to success. Additionally, the respective National Guard units benefited because the guest OC/Ts returned to their units having learned from exposure to the interagency and multinational cultures and capabilities of characteristic of the DF18-type exercise.<sup>3</sup> Seldom is this level of joint experience gained in a garrison environment.

### **Reason Number Nine: Multinational Partnerships**

Military-to-military engagements have been a long-standing practice of the National Guard.<sup>4</sup> The National Guard State Partnership Program is a low-cost security cooperation program that cultivates

personal and institutional relationships between the U.S. Army and armies from seventy-three other countries. Serving as a guest OC/T while your state’s international partners participate in a JMRC exercise is a great way to build on these existing relationships and expand access and influence. For example, guardsmen from the Pennsylvania Army National Guard (PAARNG) volunteering as guest OC/Ts during DF18 linked up with their Lithuanian counterparts to explore interoperability lessons learned for artillery digital fire systems.<sup>5</sup>

The success that the PAARNG guest OC/Ts had with their Lithuanian counterparts during DF18 led to a commitment from Lithuania for Dynamic Front 19. While the obvious benefits to the two organizations run the gamut of full-spectrum operations, the leaders are able to grow too as officers and NCOs participate in the delicate balance of war and statecraft. They, in a sense, become operational artists who transform the medium of a training exercise into a masterpiece of national political significance.<sup>6</sup> Overall, the exercises at the JMRC offer an incredible opportunity for the National Guard to develop its officers and NCOs into the strategically minded tactical envoys they need to enable success in their international partnerships.

### **Reason Number Eight: Premier Exercises**

The U.S. Army CTC program includes the Battle Command Training Program at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana; the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California; and the JMRC at Hohenfels, Germany.<sup>7</sup> Of these, only the JMRC habitually participates in United States Army Europe (USAREUR)-led exercises such as Saber Junction, Combined Resolve, Dynamic Front, Noble

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British soldiers fire howitzers 6 March 2018 as part of Exercise Dynamic Front 18 at the U.S. Army's Grafenwoehr Training Area in Germany. Exercise Dynamic Front is an annual U.S. Army Europe exercise focused on the interoperability of U.S. Army, joint service, and allied nation artillery and fire support in a multinational environment, from theater-level headquarters identifying targets to gun crews pulling lanyards in the field. (Photo by Gertrud Zach, U.S. Army)

Partner, Saber Strike, Saber Guardian, Rapid Trident, Immediate Response, and Trident Junction.<sup>8</sup> These exercises are a smart investment for the National Guard as an organization as well as for its officers and NCOs serving as guest OC/Ts. For the organization, these exercises “build allies ... increase military proficiency, and ... create trust and understanding between the soldiers and leaders of Europe and the U.S.”<sup>9</sup>

As guest OC/Ts, National Guard officers and NCOs are paired with expert resident OC/Ts from the JMRC, and they witness firsthand the value of a sound knowledge base of doctrine and tactics, techniques, and procedures for coaching, training, and mentoring multinational partners, junior leaders, and subordinates. On this scale, no other CTC affords this opportunity for guardsmen.

### **Reason Number Seven: Network with Peers**

U.S. Army CTC exercises include a melting pot of talent from across multiple Department of Defense organizations. A typical unit rotation requires not just OC/Ts, but also opposition forces, higher command

elements, and a myriad of other operational supporters. During DF18, for example, leaders from the 138th Fires Brigade from the Kentucky Army National Guard formed the higher command element, while the OC/T cadre was made up from multiple organizations including the Fort Sill Field Artillery School; Army National Guard units from Colorado, Florida, Kentucky, Illinois, Oklahoma, New Hampshire, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin; the United States Army Reserve; nearly all of the JMRC teams; and members of the 101st Airborne Division Artillery.

With so many organizations involved in the exercise, the formal organizational hierarchy becomes modified as officers and NCOs work to create efficient and effective solutions to complex problems. Very quickly, these leaders band together and work toward common goals. The immediate and obvious effect is that those complex problems are tackled and resolved. A more longstanding and subtle effect is that these bands of leaders forge personal friendships and acquaintances that have been forged by a common resolve to endure adversity and overcome challenges. The organizational benefit to

the National Guard is the “creation of much broader networks and a much more diverse collection of senior leaders across the organization. It’s a powerful way to improve goal sharing, communication, and cohesion in an organization.”<sup>10</sup> The advantage to the individual leaders is that they can grow in perspective, leverage support for problem solving, advance their careers, enhance their credibility, and gain esteem for their own abilities.<sup>11</sup> Diversity rich, short-burst opportunities such as these are perfect for National Guard leaders who strive to balance both their civilian and military careers.

### **Reason Number Six: Interact with Key Leaders**

Not all relationships are created equally. Officers and NCOs value their interaction with key leaders because of the decisions those leaders make together with their own ability to shape the quality of an organization. Completing a rotation with the JMRC as a guest OC/T casts a National Guard officer or NCO into the trajectories of these key leaders and allows them to get a glimpse of how they can garner support for their ideas, immerse themselves into a task, lend meaning to words and deeds, and mobilize troops toward a common goal. Witnessing this type of positive leadership by key leaders creates a model of excellence for National Guard leaders and perpetuates this model across the depth and breadth of their own organizations when they return and share their experiences with their superiors, peers, and subordinates.

### **Reason Number Five: Be Seen by Senior Leaders**

The flip side of interacting with key leaders is being noticed by senior leaders. During a CTC rotation, senior leaders are able to see much of the available talent pool within the National Guard as an organization. National Guard officers and NCOs are more visible to senior leaders after serving as guest OC/Ts at the JMRC for two primary reasons. First, because of the nature of the way Tour of Duty packets are built and approved, senior leaders are aware that you are volunteering for an assignment that will showcase your talent, stretch you as a planner and leader, and align your efforts with the organizational needs.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, and more conspicuously, there is intense media coverage for USAREUR-led exercises. Public affairs officers from across the organization complete photo

essays and stories. For DF18 there are no less than four stories, each with multiple pictures and links to YouTube videos. The Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) provides additional coverage. From Initial Impression Reports to CALL handbooks, National Guard leaders can contribute in numerous meaningful ways and catch the eye of senior leaders in their own organizations.

### **Reason Number Four: Fills a Critical Need at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center**

With nearly four thousand participants from twenty-eight nations, DF18 stretched the JMRC teams to the limit of their capabilities. In fact, “the extra manpower provided by the citizen-soldiers was mission critical to ensuring enough qualified OC/Ts were available to properly fill the requirements for DF18.”<sup>13</sup> DF18, however, is really no different than other USAREUR-led exercises in terms of the demands it places on the JMRC. Allied Spirit involves just over four thousand participants and ten nations.<sup>14</sup> Saber Strike is no less important or demanding. It involves about 4,300 participants from twenty nations.<sup>15</sup> Each of the USAREUR-led exercises are similarly resource intensive, and without the support provided by National Guard leaders serving as guest OC/Ts, the mission could not be achieved.

### **Reason Number Three: Builds on the Army Total Force Concept**

The Army Total Force concept is how the Army integrates active and reserve component forces in order to expand and rapidly sustain Total Army capabilities.<sup>16</sup> When the JMRC invites National Guard leaders to serve as guest OC/Ts, it is building on the Total Force concept and demonstrating the strategic depth of the Army across components. In this sense, DF18 demonstrated how the Army trains and builds readiness as an integrated force and supports Total Force values.

### **Reason Number Two: Assignment as Guest Observer Coach/Trainer Supports the Army Leader Development Strategy**

An officer or NCO’s career spans the three domains of leader development—institutional, operational, and self-development.<sup>17</sup> Education in these domains rarely happens all at once and typically happens

at key milestones, such as promotion to the next grade or assignment to a specific unit. A unique opportunity such as serving as a guest OC/T, however, lends itself to an education in each of these domains, albeit in short spurts. All guest OC/Ts are required to attend the JMRC OC/T academy where the resident OC/Ts inculcate in OC/T trainees the institutional knowledge required for observing, coaching, and mentoring a rotational training unit at a CTC. Essentially, guest OC/Ts are exposed in-depth to the knowledge of the CTC staff and learn how to develop competencies and impart tactics, techniques, and procedures to others by exploiting doctrine.<sup>18</sup>

A tour as a guest OC/T is an assignment that not only builds experience and extends education, it also serves as a broadening opportunity where an officer or NCO is exposed to a dynamic, complex environment that is atypical of a garrison assignment. Lastly, guest OC/Ts will be compelled to dabble in the domain of self-development. Before being able to adequately assess and develop others, they must have first reflected about themselves and assessed their own abilities. To be an expert demands that one “keep pace with changing operational requirements, new technologies, common weapons platforms, and evolving doctrines.”<sup>19</sup> Ultimately being a guest OC/T fulfills the Army Leader Development Strategy by developing an adaptive, agile, and flexible leader.

## Reason Number One: The Joint Multinational Readiness Center Is Where Leaders Grow the Most

With exercises such as Saber Junction, Combined Resolve, Dynamic Front, and a list of others, the supposition that the JMRC is where leaders grow the most gains significant credence. Why? Each of these exercises is predicated on a level of chaos and uncertainty that contribute to the realism of a decisive action environment, which requires a much faster

decision-making process for leaders working in it. John Boyd came up with the OODA (orient, observe, decide, act) loop to describe exactly how leaders do this.<sup>20</sup> As a learning model, this OODA loop helps explain how even in the midst of chaos and uncertainty, leaders can make quick and accurate decisions.

A leader's OODA loop is similar to a muscle work out. The more repetitions you get in, the better you get at it. Hence, as a leader, you grow the most when you are forced to accelerate your OODA loop in order to maintain situational understanding and stay in front of decisions.

Guest OC/Ts observing, coaching, and mentoring leaders through exercise decisions are an integral part of developing a faster OODA loop for the rotational training unit participants, and they learn during this process too. Exposure to the decision-making process of leaders in this environment, exploring unfamiliar ideas, participating in creative conversations, and witnessing initiative in action improves the OC/T's own judgment and analytical skills because the JMRC gives leaders more repetitions that build an intellectual rigor capable of ever-accelerating adaptability and decision-making.

In this sense, the JMRC is a crucible where leaders have to be engaged on multiple planes in order to make timely decisions, whether they are part of the rotational training unit or the OC/T team. As a result, a guest OC/T challenged to understand how people see problems and solutions grows in critical-thinking skills and discretion. Simply put, because the OODA loop spins faster during a CTC rotation on account of the decisive action training environment, applying a methodology of evaluation and assessment compels the guest OC/T to dramatically increase his or her analytic prowess and endurance, a principal reason for National Guard officers and noncommissioned officers to seek the opportunity for this experience. ■

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## Notes

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can post positions and select qualified candidates. When a soldier applies for a position, his or her chain of command is notified and must approve the action at every echelon within the National Guard organization. A soldier's chain of command must review the packet. Hence, a discussion ensues between commanders at various levels and a determination is made to allow or not allow a soldier to complete a TOD assignment. In most cases, the soldier is unanimously given approval as TOD assignments meet the needs of the organization and grant the soldier an incredible opportunity for career growth. Barbara Reinhold, "Four Ways To Get on Your Boss's Radar Screen," Monster, accessed 13 March 2018, <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/four-ways-to-get-on-your-boss-radar/>.

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