



Staff Sgt. Chantel Duhart of the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, reviews course work during a resident Battle Staff NCO Course class at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Jason Stadel)

Battle Staff NCO Course: Providing assets to the battlefield

By Staff Sgt. Jason Stadel

NCO Journal

The tactical operations center is the collective brain behind any battlefield operation. From headquarters at the battalion, up to a corps (and often higher), the TOC is a bustling network of Soldiers, computers, projectors and charts. It's where staff sections come together to issue orders and make battlefield decisions. It's almost a supercomputer of officers and NCOs working together to update the commander and support troops on the ground.

Throughout their careers, officers are schooled on the types of situations that might arise in a TOC. To assist

them, the Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officer Course will give NCOs the same type of training so they can excel alongside their officer counterparts and become TOC assets in their own right.

The BSNCO is for any staff sergeants to sergeants major who are working in a staff position, regardless of their military occupation specialty. NCOs not working on a headquarters staff can apply for a waiver to attend the course.

BSNCO is taught by resident instructors at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas; at



Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Hendrickson, a VTT instructor for the Battle Staff NCO Course at USASMA, prepares for an on-camera class session Nov. 7, 2012. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Jason Stadel)

Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa.; at Camp Williams, Utah; and at Fort McCoy, Wisc. The course is also taught via video teletraining from USASMA around the world. When NCOs successfully complete the course they are awarded the “2S” skill identifier.

All BSNCOOC instructors and staff are graduates of the course, said Sgt. Maj. Richard Beaver, BNCOSC’s director.

“That NCO can go out and can help the command and the staff officers in the military decision-making process,” he said. “That NCO will be exposed to 28 hours of [MDMP] here, which allows that NCO to be more viable in a TOC setting. He or she can do other things besides go make copies. NCOs can be a vital part of the planning process.”

No matter the medium or location, the course work is exactly the same.

“It’s 159 academic hours regardless if you physically attend here at Fort Bliss [or the other locations], or if you are attending via VTT,” Beaver said. “We have six testable blocks of instruction. They will cover topics that include the military decision-making process, graphics and overlays, plans, orders, and attachments.”

Getting enrolled in the course

To enroll in BSNCOOC, NCOs must go through their unit’s schools NCO or Army Training Requirements and Resources System manager. Each resident course at Fort Bliss has 64 slots available through ATRRS, though Beaver said that can be increased to 80 slots. Fort Bliss typically conducts five residential courses each year.

A record, passing Army Physical Fitness Test from the student’s unit is required, and each student enrolled will be screened for height-and-weight requirements when the class starts. NCOs attending through VTT will be screened by assistant instructors or at that post’s NCO academy.

Beaver said the VTT courses are set up two to three years in advance of the course start date.

“The post asks for so many slots, and it goes through ATRRS. If they get the slots they ask for, then they’re responsible for filling the slots and making sure they meet all the requirements that have to be met,” Beaver said. “There are a bunch of timelines that have to be met through the VTT course manager. Most of the installations we do it with have done it in the past on a regular basis, so they know everything that needs to happen.”

The course curriculum

BSNCOOC started in 1988 for reserve-component Soldiers, but soon after, USASMA completed a program of instruction that opened the course to all NCOs. Since then, the course has changed many times and will soon see more changes, said Master Sgt. Philip Eville, the BSNCOOC course manager at USASMA.

“It has dramatically changed,” he said. “I think from when I went back in 2006, it has been three course iterations. Ironically a lot of the lessons are the same. We still teach a lot of the same material, but they’ve been updated. When I went back in 2006, the focus of the Army was a lot different. It’s still a lot of the same subject areas, I would say. But how it’s taught and the emphasis has changed a little bit.”

One of the bigger changes recently was moving from two phases to a single phase. There used to be an online distance learning component prior to the start of the resident and VTT courses. However, the distance learning phase has since been written out of the program's curriculum.

As the course manager, Eville develops the BSNCOG curriculum. He said curriculum changes are designed and implemented a few different ways

"Doctrine drives a lot of what we do. So when a doctrinal update comes out, we have to reassess the lessons and then figure out how the doctrine changes the lesson," he said. "Some of it is based on feedback from the field, former



From USASMA, Master Sgt. David Foulkes teaches BSNCOG students via video teletraining in November 2012. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Jason Stadel)

students and people who have experience in there. When we do get feedback from a student who makes a good recommendation, we'll say "That's a good idea. How can we implement it in the course?" We take it very seriously."

Eville said the curriculum is designed for NCOs to be part of a unit's military decision-making process and give them the best information available to make those decisions. Students are given instruction based on current operations as well as the basic principles of war that remained unchanged.

"We train NCOs how to track a battle, how to manage a battle, how to fight a war," Eville said. "A lot of students say, 'Why are we still teaching basic combat operations? We've been fighting these stability operations for the last 10 years. This is what the Army is.' Well, you still have to understand basic combat operations. So we try to balance it. We focus a lot on stability operations, but still have to teach the basic fundamentals of combat and how you track a battle. Because someday, we may have a full war again, and we need NCOs who know how to track battles as well as the stability operations."

VTT vs. resident course

Although the resident and VTTs courses teach the same curriculum, each format has advantages.

Obviously the VTT course costs units less to send NCOs to the course, said Master Sgt. Terrance Foster, the BSNCOG VTT course manager at USASMA.

"It's a money-saver for the units," he said. "They don't have to pay [for temporary duty]; the units just have to let their people go to a location on their post to get the same training. It doesn't matter if we teach 80 students or 16 [via VTT], the cost is the same."

Each VTT instructor can teach up to five locations

at time. For example, one of the 10 VTT instructors at Fort Bliss could be teaching the same course at the same time to students at Fort Drum, N.Y.; Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Carson, Colo., and Fort Stewart, Ga.

Though the VTT instructors are available to answer student questions, the resident course students get more hands-on training from the classroom instructor. Battle rooms are available to the students during their off time and weekends for study, and in the classroom environment, there are on-the-spot class discussions with the instructors. Sometimes, during a VTT session, an instructor might be working with a different location, which might take more time for questions to get answered.

Assets to the TOC

In a TOC, most sections are run by an officer in charge and an NCO in charge who work together to make decisions relevant to their section. Master Sgt. William Coleman, the Fort Bliss BSNCOG resident manager, said an NCO who is a BSNCOG graduate will only make that working relationship better.

"We are the officer's counterpart," Coleman said. "Take a sergeant first class, for instance, who just finished platoon sergeant time and comes up to a battalion TOC or brigade or division TOC. His counterpart is that captain who came out of company command. That NCO needs to be equivalent to the officer as far as knowledge base and [ability to] process orders."

Because most career Army NCOs will be on a staff at some point in their career, earning the 2S skill identifier will allow them to be assets to their commands, said Sgt. 1st Class Wesley Taylor, a Fort Bliss battle room instructor.

"This is one of those things that will teach you 'what right looks like,'" he said. "I know from my experience on a

battalion staff, we kind of flew by the seat our pants a lot. I went to the battle staff course after I was on battalion staff, but this would have been a good tool for me [beforehand].”

Beaver said the BSNCOE can offer NCOs the opportunity to continue their formal professional development after they complete NCO Education System courses. After an NCO completes the Senior Leader Course, there isn't an opportunity for military education until being

accepted to the Sergeants Major Course at USASMA. Though BSNCOE isn't part of NCOES, Beaver said the course will assist an NCO's career and help the NCO's unit during a deployment.

“I would challenge all the NCOs out in the force: If they have the opportunity to take this course, do so,” Beaver said. “I think it's a great asset for themselves and the Army as a whole.” ■



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