



A Soldier with Operations Co., U.S. Army Pacific, watches the hand signals of an Air Force pilot as he loads a High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle into a C-17 on Sept. 21, 2012, at Joint-Base Pearl Harbor Hickam. The plane carried equipment and Soldiers from the U.S. Army Pacific Contingency Command Post (CCP), 311th Signal Command and 25th Infantry Division to Talia Military Camp, Tonga where they will participate in Operation Coral Reef, a week-long combined, joint training exercise. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Amber Robinson)

USARPAC's Contingency Command Post Gets There, 'Bleeds First'

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester

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Because the NCOs and Soldiers of U.S. Army Pacific are called to missions in such a vast area, it is important they be skilled in setting up quickly in new territory. When an earthquake, tsunami or other disaster strikes, Soldiers need to be on the ground providing humanitarian relief as quickly as possible. Getting to those sites first, preparing the way for the Soldiers behind them, is USARPAC's Contingency Command Post. The CCP is a 96-person post, with 47 NCOs making sure they always stay

flexible, light and deployable.

When disaster strikes, the CCP can have its Humanitarian Assistance Survey Team on the ground and helping in 24 hours. After the HAST is set up, it can be quickly augmented by other USARPAC forces. As Sgt. Maj. Christopher Grant, sergeant major of the CCP, says, the team gets there and "bleeds first."

"The one thing we always have to keep in our forefront is that the CCP has to remain 100 percent, 24/7



Master Sgt. Dwain Johns drives an ATV before a Pre JI inspection of U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) Contingency Command Post, Humanitarian Assistance Survey Team (HAST) vehicles April 4, 2012, at Fort Shafter, Hawaii. The USARPAC HAST is a rapidly deployable team of 8-14 soldiers with specific skill sets needed to assess the situation immediately after a disaster. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Bell)

capable,” Grant said. “That’s a no-fail mission from the commanding general. We’re a tool for the commanding general, so he can get an initial footprint in, get an assessment, then keep building.

“We are the only standalone contingency command post in the Army,” Grant said. “Everyone else — [U.S. Army South, U.S. Africa Command] — they all have them, but they’re [pulled from the command]. We’re our own standalone organization. I’m not saying we’re better than them, but it makes us unique. If the U.S. Pacific commander tells [Lt. Gen Francis J. Wiercinski, commanding general of USARPAC], ‘Hey, I need this capability,’ we’ve already trained together. We do our exercises together, so we have synergy.”

Having USARPAC’s CCP as a standalone organization is a relatively new development and is part of the Army’s rebalance to the Pacific, said Sgt. Maj. Kanessa Trent, USARPAC’s public affairs sergeant major.

“During the past 18 months, there has been a

constant evolution to shape the CCP to be able to give USARPAC the ability to posture itself, whether it’s humanitarian assistance, disaster relief or in support of what might happen on the Korean peninsula,” Trent said. “To be able to have a manning document that supports what the CCP needs to go forward is something the headquarters didn’t have until President Barack Obama said, ‘This will be the focus for our Army.’ That, in and of itself, is unique to this [area of responsibility].”

Because the CCP is a small organization with many military occupational specialties represented — some just one deep — NCOs get to learn and experience parts of the Army they may have never noticed before, said Master Sgt. Dwain Johns, logistics NCO in charge for the CCP.

“I’m logistics, but also since I’ve been here, I’ve done civil affairs on my own; I’ve done G-1 (Personnel) on my own, and several other MOSs. All the

NCOs are like that here,” Johns said. “We might be a certain skill set, but there are times when we’re needed, and we step out of bounds, and we go into the next skill set, and we run with it.”

The NCOs of the CCP are quick to step up and help in various areas, Grant said.

“We have a lot of capabilities,” he said. “Me, coming from an infantry background, I had never seen so many jobs that I had to learn. It was almost overwhelming at first. Here, the infantryman is an anomaly.”

In addition to the close-up view of various MOSs, being at the theater level gives the NCOs at the CCP a broader view of the Army and its mission, Grant said.

“The Soldiers in the CCP are going to leave here thinking at a higher level than their peers; I am totally convinced of that,” Grant said. “When they go back down to a battalion or a brigade or wherever they go, they are going to be able to explain to their Soldiers really how the Army is working. And they’re probably going to be able to answer a lot of the ‘whys:’ ‘Why are we doing this? What’s the second- and third-order effect of me doing this?’ When these NCOs leave, they are going to have more wisdom on how a lot of this works; I’m definitely going to be a better person for it. I’m going to be able to explain. ... Shoot, they already mess with me and tell me I’m using words infantry-

men aren’t supposed to be using.”

The NCOs who come to the CCP have to be ready and willing to take on new challenges in different countries with different cultures, Grant said.

“When they come here, they have to perform at a level that they’ve probably never had to perform at before, meaning they’re going to be asked to do things that aren’t in their comfort zone,” Grant said. “We try to set them up for success. I interview every NCO who comes here, and some don’t cut it. It can be as simple as a Family Care Plan. A lot of people may have them, but are they good ones? Are they valid? I’m not going to let a Soldier come to the CCP if they don’t have a valid Family Care Plan, because we are gone a lot. In 60 days, from February to March, I was home six days. It does wear and tear on the family. So I lay that out right when they first get here.”

The CCP has an important role and mission for USARPAC, and it can be demanding. But it’s a mission that prepares NCOs to excel in their careers in the Army. Both Grant and Johns said they are grateful for all they have learned during their time at the CCP.

“We go to all these different places and interact with high-level officials from foreign countries,” Johns said. “If I had to go downrange again, I’m better prepared to teach my Soldiers not only what we’re doing there, but what’s going to happen next.” ■



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