



Fort Benning Leans on NCOs in Transition to Maneuver Center of Excellence

By Pablo Villa

NCO Journal

Fort Benning faced a unique challenge as a result of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure, or BRAC, process.

The latest round of BRAC recommendations involved the relocation of the U.S. Army Armor School from Fort Knox, Ky., to Fort Benning, Ga., where it joined the U.S. Army Infantry School to form the U.S. Army Maneuver Center of Excellence. Two schools with two vastly different histories and curricula were now to serve the same Army mission under one leadership group. It was a considerable task. The solution was found within the ideology of a system where countless numbers of people go to enhance their knowledge — academia.

Much like a university divides its academic structure into separate colleges — such as business, liberal arts, etc. — the Maneuver Center of Excellence adopted a similar approach, said Command Sgt. Maj. James J. Carabello, command sergeant major of the MCoE.

“The co-location allowed the Maneuver Center of Excellence to see additional possibilities associated with

information sharing, training effectiveness and resource efficiencies while still maintaining branch-specific traditions,” Carabello said. “With two high-profile Army schools here, it made sense to model training after the tenets of the university system, reorganizing to a functional brigade alignment.”

Fort Benning’s reorganization and realignment is in line with a U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command initiative to have Army schools model the university system of academia, aligning schools around warfighting functions, Carabello said. The idea is to centralize like functions at so-called centers of excellence instead of decentralizing them into separate schools.

The MCoE resides within McGinnis-Wickam Hall on the western edge of Fort Benning. The building — a cold, Spartan structure when originally built in 1964 — is now a dazzling glass-and-brick centerpiece as a result of a \$155 million renovation completed in 2011.

Just as grand as its new home is the scale in which the MCoE is applying TRADOC’s recommendations,



Command Sgt. Maj. William D. Hain is the commandant of the Henry Caro Noncommissioned Officers Academy at the U.S. Army Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning. (Photo by Pablo Villa)

organizing Initial Military Training and functional training under brigades and battalions within the Armor and Infantry Schools. NCO professional military education, along with officer candidate and officer training, fall under departments assigned to a separate “leader brigade” that reports to the MCoE’s commanding general. This functional realignment, Carabello says, improves coordination for maneuver training because it provides better opportunities for combined arms integration in professional development training.

“Right now, Fort Benning is leading a lot of initiatives based off how we can become functionally better — especially with resources, combining smart folks with smart folks,” Carabello said. “When you combine several sets of good ideas about how we can better serve our Soldiers, and better train our Soldiers and our leaders, then you’re going to have a very powerful organization. I think we’re really setting a lot of that right now. It’s the ultimate tenet of mission command of trusting your subordinates to be able to do what’s right given the parameters of left and right guidance. And let them do it.”

The three ‘colleges’

NCOs are a big part of providing that guidance.

Command Sgt. Maj. William D. Hain, commandant of the Henry Caro NCO Academy at Fort Benning, describes the MCoE’s structure as comprising three “colleges.” Armor and Infantry are two. The third is what Hain calls the leadership development college — the NCO Academy — which is aligned with the 199th Infantry Brigade. The 199th has been designated as the leader development brigade, charged with developing committed, adaptive leaders who can lead and influence diverse organizations. Hain says this structure allows NCOs and officers to learn and develop alongside each other.

“Not only do the Basic Officer Leaders Course, the Maneuver Captain’s Career Course and the NCO [Education System] all teach the same things, they also enjoy some interaction,” Hain said. “So if you have staff sergeants here who are learning, they’re given an opportunity to learn with the lieutenants who are in the basic course who they’re going to be squad leaders with when they get out to their units. Then at the Senior Leader Course, they’re with the captains

who they're going to be platoon sergeants for. It works both ways as far as development, because both get the benefit from the other.

"As an example, a future platoon leader gives an operations order to his fellow students, who are also future lieutenants, who have never heard an operations order before. He's gonna get a little bit different feedback than if he gives that same operations order to a group of staff sergeants who have been getting operations orders their entire careers."

Hain adds that though Fort Benning's transition to the university model has required a shift in thinking, it hasn't rendered significant operational changes because all the functional courses that are taught at the MCoE have been aligned with their proponents.

In addition to the MCoE's structure of Initial Military Training and functional training, staff and cadre personnel will be assigned to a provost battalion and will act as the registrar. Also, this battalion will manage U.S. Soldier and international student populations of approximately 600 Soldiers assigned to two companies.

Carabello says this functional realignment improves coordination for maneuver training, because it will provide better opportunities for combined arms integration across initial entry and professional development training.

As such, all schools have retained their identity while falling under the same command umbrella, Hain said. This has allowed efficiencies to be created, which meets the TRADOC recommendation and is a benefit for the Army as it adapts to fiscally challenging times, he said.

The benefit of NCOs

Hain said students at the NCO Academy have the benefit of learning from those who have come before them.

"The cadre is all NCOs and civilian instructors," Hain said. "All of the contractors are retired noncommissioned officers. It benefits the students in that every cadre member has been successful at the job that we're training these noncommissioned officers to be. So they're speaking from a position of, 'I've done it.' It's not speaking from a position of, 'This is what the book says.' So, having noncommissioned officers who have been successful at the job gives credibility to the instruction as well as experience."

Carabello echoed those sentiments, adding that the expertise of NCOs is a boon especially in the MCoE's Basic Officer Leaders Courses.

"The good thing you see at the BOLCs is that the primary instructors are noncommissioned officers," Carabello said. "It's real critical that you have your young officers seeing the professionalism of noncommissioned officers at their initial base-training level of their PME (professional military education). That's

why we reviewed instructor certification and the emphasis on the Army profession and made sure that all of those things are really ingrained in our instructors so that when a staff sergeant or sergeant first class stood up in front of these officers, that they were a professional, they looked like a professional and they spoke like a professional.

"To have noncommissioned officers teaching that, it's an incredible impact to our junior officers when they see that here at Fort Benning, with the extreme emphasis that's been on the professional Army NCO," Carabello said. "It's going to provide those young officers with that confidence going out into the operational force that they saw what 'right' looks like, and have that trust and confidence in our noncommissioned officers. We're the only Army in the world that does stuff like this, and we're certainly going to lead that charge for our Army with making sure that our noncommissioned officers are ingrained in the professional Army ethic and that they pass that on to the junior officers who are going to lead our Soldiers.

"I think the most important thing we have to do is we have to have a very professional Army, and we have an extremely professional NCO Corps," Carabello said. "And we can never, ever lose momentum on how we have professionalized the NCO Corps. We have to make it better each and every day. Having our young NCOs as they grow up, having them fully understand about our doctrine, the basis of everything we do operationally, tactically — it's something that maybe we got away from during the past 12 years. We have an opportunity to bring everyone back to understanding what our doctrine is, understanding what is the basis of all the fundamentals for all the operations we conduct, so that we can just become better as an organization."

Support from the top

Furthermore, Carabello credits the guidance and support of Maj. Gen. H.R. McMaster, commander of the Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning, with outlining a clear approach on execution of the MCoE's university-model approach.

"Gen. McMaster has simplified his vision, guidance and intent," Carabello said. "That vision, guidance and intent was easily understood and disseminated to all of our organizations. When you operate off a very clear, simple-to-understand mission set, it makes things so much easier to understand and be able to incorporate. That has enabled all of our organizations in being able to blend and adapt to the environment we're changing."

That environment, Carabello says, produces the MCoE's younger leaders who accept the tone from the top and who are able to see that it is for the betterment of the Army as well as for Fort Benning. He applauds the young leaders on the ground and instructors in the

classroom, saying they are the ones creating a positive environment where Soldiers can be agile and adaptive.

Hain, the commandant of the NCO Academy, says the addition of the Armor School to Fort Benning and the transition to the MCoE is another successful milestone in the post's storied legacy of innovation.

"It's really the way it's supposed to be anyway," Hain said. "If you go back (in history), Fort Benning is where the Army leadership pre-World War II came together

and were thinking about the evolution of the tank. So 'armor' really started here.

"And, of course, this has been the home of the infantry forever. The way we've been fighting, we've been fighting in combined arms for the past 13 years — so much, in fact, that most of our units are all task-organized anyway. Two-thirds of our force is already permanently task-organized, and they interact with (armor). So it only makes sense to bring them here. ■



<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

