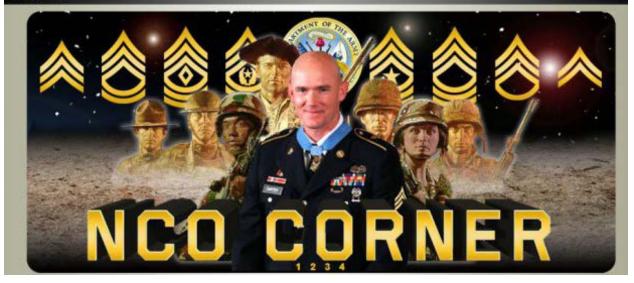# Tools Available To Help NCOs Lead Training

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester — NCO Journal

As Soldiers prepared for duty in Afghanistan or Iraq during the past 13 years, much of the planning and resourcing for their training was handled without NCOs needing to think much about it. The training was laid out to quickly prepare Soldiers to serve in a war zone.

But as Soldiers and NCOs return to garrison, it is necessary for NCOs to reassert their role in training Soldiers. To that purpose, the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center-Training at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., has some important training resources NCOs should know about, said Sgt. Maj. Richard Johnson, sergeant major of CAC-T.

"One of the gaps that is out there is the ability to conduct unit training management," Johnson said. "Out of necessity, you had pre-deployment training tasks that you had to do. There wasn't a lot of preparation because it was pretty much standardized based on your unit's capabilities and what your pre-deployment tasks were. It was laid out and planned for you, and also resourced in most cases. So, as we draw out of Iraq and draw down in Afghanistan, and as we get back to unified land operations, leaders are going to have to get re-educated on unit training management. The Army Training Network provides those tools.

There are a lot of how-tos, and a lot of lessons learned from experiences across the force."

Army Training Network

The Army Training Network is an excellent place to start for noncommissioned officers seeking best training practices, Johnson said.

"What [ATN] provides is a central repository and central access to anything that has to do with training in the Army, across all domains, whether the institutional Army, the operational Army, or self-development," he said. "It tells you what resources are out there to help you plan, conduct and assess training, for both individual and collective tasks. It's a one-stop shop for leaders, commanders and Soldiers to look at what the training requirements are. It can then guide leaders on how to conduct that training, how to assess that training, and then do any necessary re-training."

A prominent link on ATN is to the NCO Corner, a site focusing on the needs of noncommissioned officers, Johnson said.

The NCO Corner "has professional development and unit training management items specifically targeted toward noncommissioned officers for small unit training," he said. "We just opened a counseling page on NCO

The Army Training Network offers NCOs resources on unit training management. "There are a lot of how-tos, and a lot of lessons learned from experiences across the force," said Sgt. Maj. Richard Johnson, sergeant major of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center-Training.

Corner that I think is critical. Counseling helps improve readiness. The page provides guidelines on all types of counseling scenarios to allow leaders at all echelons to prepare to counsel. The page has 58 counseling scenarios. Now, you can't just cut and paste, but it will give you a baseline and some ideas."

Another important item within ATN is the Digital Training Management System. The DTMS allows leaders to easily plan training, knowing they are checking all the needed boxes, said Harold Sommerfeldt, program manager for Combined Arms Training Strategies.

"Every single collective task and reference to individual tasks are identified in the Combined Arms Training Strategies on ATN," Sommerfeldt said. "Soldiers need to get into the DTMS to be able to utilize it. Otherwise, it's just a PDF document. But if you go into the DTMS — based off the proponent's analysis and our development of the training strategies — you can lay out a training plan on a calendar for your unit in four clicks. It will have all the tasks that are recommended to be trained to obtain proficiency.

"People say, 'Really, you've done that?' Yes, and we have that capability in DTMS," Sommerfeldt said. "But you have to go look for it. The great information is out there, but you have to take the initiative to go find it."

Integrated Training Environment

Another big step toward improving training in garrison is the Integrated Training Environment, which the U.S. Army National Simulation Center describes as "a seamless interconnected combination of live, virtual, constructive and gaming simulations, scenarios and Mission Command information systems."

The ITE is an effort to raise the bar on the training at home station, said Marcos O. Navarro, military analyst for the U.S. Army National Simulation Center at Fort Leavenworth. The ITE allows leaders to plan and execute rigorous, multi-echelon, progressive training that can be repeated and tailored to replicate a complex operational environment.

"Training within the current operational environment poses great challenges in providing the rigor and realism

required to counter an opposing force that is unpredictable and technologically savvy," Navarro said. "Soldiers must be provided with a training environment that challenges them to react with agility and resiliency."

"In the past, the Combat Training Centers were the only venues that provided leaders with the capability to replicate many of the high-fidelity tasks for training in a complex operational environment. The ITE enables leaders to evaluate and assess their unit readiness by providing the highest level of fidelity in replicating the operational environment in their own backyard."

To learn more about the capabilities of the ITE, NCOs should visit their post's Mission Training Complex, Navarro said.

Training in an ITE means that you can quickly make basic training more challenging by adding complexities. For example, you can quickly add snow, rain or even other organizations in the virtual environments, Sommerfeldt said, and you don't have to wait until you have a large group.

"If you look at the unit task list for a rifle company, there are about 120 collective tasks that — based off the mission statement in the table of organization and equip-ment — we expect a rifle company to be able to do," he said. "How do I create a training plan for that? Well, we talk about that inside the Army Training Network. We talk about utilizing the ITE, so once you have the basic knowledge of that task, you can refine it and become an expert at that task.

"And through gaming, it motivates NCOs and Soldiers to take initiative and train on their own," Sommerfeldt said. "They don't have to wait for an exercise. Maybe they'll need a little bit of help from the Mission Training Complex setting it up, but once they have it, they can select their tasks and train.

"ITE is not just for your larger organizations," he said. "It's already broken down all the way to the platoon level. Because at the platoon level, you can use virtual battlespace. Even at the squad level, you can effectively train on tasks. OK, it's not perfect. It's not a live environment, but it will help you focus on the fundamentals.

"As an NCO, you can take your squad into a virtual battlespace suite, and you can practice those tasks that you identify that are critical to the larger organization's mission," Sommerfeldt said. "But you have to read the doctrine on 'plan, prepare, execute and assess,' so that

A 1st Armored Division Soldier trains on the Aviation Combined Arms Tactical Trainer, at Fort Bliss, Texas. The exercise combined live, virtual and constructive training as part of the Integrated Training Environment. The Integrated Training Environment is evolving to a single synthetic environment that combines constructive, gaming and virtual systems and is coupled with live training. (Photo by Mike Casey)

you can lay that out, so that you can say, 'OK, they are going to do a large ITE event here. I need to backward-plan so that I can get in.'"

Combining the power of ATN, the DMTS and the ITE allows NCOs to perform unit training management at a high level, Johnson said.

"If you are going to do a collective training event, you pick the task: 'Conduct an attack,'" he said. "If you go on ATN, it has a link to the Combined Arms Training Strategies, which will lay out all the individual tasks that relate to all the collective tasks to do that training event. It will also lay out a training methodology that will allow you to integrate other capabilities, such as simulations, whether it's constructive or virtual. That will tie in to the 'crawl, walk, run' methodology, so that when you get into a live environment out in the field to conduct that training exercise, you're at a higher level of proficiency. So the Integrated Training Environment allows you to bring the capabilities of live, virtual, constructive and gaming into your whole training management process."

ELITE

Though successfully working in the ITE takes some study and coordination, there is a much simpler virtual training program available to any Soldier with a common access card. The Emergent Leader Immersive Training Environment provides training on the important NCO skill of counseling.

ELITE allows NCOs the opportunity to practice having the difficult conversations and counseling sessions that are a part of Army life. But in the case of ELITE, the conversa¬tions take place with a virtual Soldier. It's a way for leaders to practice before using their communication skills in real life.

The software provides an after-action review of every question that the NCO asked and every response. The software may be used by individuals or during group training, said Anthony Rolfe, military analyst at the U.S. Army National Simulation Center.

"ELITE is available for download to everybody in the military," Rolfe said. "All they need is a common access card. They can go to the MilGaming website, and they can download the software and start implementing it. It's not just a niche market where you are using it at the Warrior Leaders Course or other professional development institutions. You could use this in a company dayroom. You could use this as part of your noncommissioned officer professional development program."

Making sure your counseling skills are sharp is an important part of being a good NCO, Johnson said.

"Counseling is critical, especially when we are trying to maximize human performance," he said. "Soldiers' cognitive thinking skills, their physical, mental and spiritual strengths have got to be optimized. Not maximized; optimized. If you maximize something, it's going to blow up. If you optimize it, it can run at a steady, optimum pace for a long time.

"One thing ELITE can do is provide repetitions," Johnson said. "Junior leaders are often uncomfortable in counseling because they are not exposed to it. Sometimes these conversations can be on topics that are unpleasant. So, if you can use the gaming technology to provide an environment where a leader can get multiple repetitions — and have the ability to manipulate the circumstances — a leader will get more comfortable and more confident in his or her ability to interact with somebody to conduct counseling."

Whether it's by using ELITE, or diving into the resources available from the Army Training Network, it's time for NCOs to reassert their primary place in training Soldiers, Sommerfeldt said. He said a recent Inspector General report about unit training management found that the majority of company commanders relied on subjective assessments and did not use Army standards (Training and Evaluation Outlines) to evaluate training.

"NCOs need to get back to being NCOs and taking the initiative for training, finding out what's available, finding this information," he said. "They are supposed to be the subject matter expert for training, and the training of Soldiers. They can't sit back and wait for somebody to hand them a book. They need to take that initiative. We've provided the tools, i.e. with the Army Training Network, the Digital Training Management System, the Combined Arms Training Strategies and the Integrated Training Environment. It's out there.

"That NCO, that platoon sergeant, that first sergeant, that operations sergeant major needs to get out there and say, 'Hey, what's out there to help train my folks?'" Sommerfeldt said. "They can look at the ATN to see how others have done it. They can hit the ITE site and find the best practices and see how somebody else has been successful. They're the person who the commander should go to and say, 'Hey, we have to train on these things. How do you think we should do it?'" ∎

Quick links

- Army Training Network homepage: https://atn.army.mil/
- Integrated Training Environment homepage: https://ite.army.mil/
- More on the "Leaders Guide to Training in the Integrated Training Environment": https://www.army.mil/article/138539/
- Emergent Leader lmmersive Training Environment software, known as ELITE, may be downloaded from the Army MilGaming portal: https://milgaming.army.mil/

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