



Eagle Attack NCOs Mentor Cadets

By Sgt. Duncan Brennan

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Cadets from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., and the Reserve Officers' Training Corps recently got a first-hand look at NCO leadership at Fort Campbell, Ky. Noncommissioned officers with 3rd Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), mentored students participating in cadet troop leader training from July 17 to Aug. 7.

The students, assigned to the 3rd Battalion "Eagle Attack," saw what it is like to serve as a platoon leader in an active aviation unit. During the assignment, the students gave briefings and assisted in planning day-to-day missions under the mentorship of the battalion's senior NCOs.

The mentorship opened the lines of communication between the soon-to-be junior officers and the Soldiers they will be working hand-in-hand with once they receive their commissions. By working with NCOs, the cadets gain experience in seeking guidance from their enlisted counterparts and establishing relationships founded on trust.

"I have 24 years in the Army," said Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Nichols, production control NCO in charge for D Company, 3rd Battalion, 101st CAB. "I have heard jokes about second lieutenants not having experience in the Army but having a lot of authority when they get to their unit. When good NCOs mentor the cadets, it gives us a chance to make sure that doesn't happen nearly as much. It gives us the opportunity to make sure that when they commission, they can lean on and learn from the knowledge and leadership of their NCOs."

For the cadets, establishing that trust provided a new perspective. By working in an active-duty unit with their NCO counterparts, the cadets learned some of the realities of working with the Soldiers they'll be leading.

"You really can't compare what we learned here to what we learned back at school," said Cadet Olivia Lynch, a student at Embry Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, Fla. "In the Reserve Officers' Training Corps at my school, we only learned about our duties as an officer. Here, we're learning what it's actually like

working with the enlisted, what their day-to-day jobs are, what it's like for them to live in the barracks. We learned what a platoon really needs out of a platoon leader. We learned that even something as small as going to a softball game can make a huge difference in morale."

Though taking care of Soldiers is the realm of NCOs, command climate is often influenced by the officers in an organization. Mentoring the cadets is a great way for NCOs to hone their skills training Soldiers and set the cadets up for success, Nichols said.

"One of our basic functions as NCOs is to train Soldiers," Nichols said. "Our job is to get privates and specialists mission-ready. Now, instead of training a private, you're training a cadet. As my father used to say, 'Get them young, start them young, train them young, and they'll work forever that way.' If you bring the cadets here to the active-duty Army and establish good habits of working with NCOs, only good things can come out of it. Pairing NCOs and cadets gives leadership opportunities to both sides. It gives junior NCOs the experience of reporting to a platoon leader, in a training sense. Those junior NCOs will become senior NCOs who will be reporting up the chain of command. It gives the cadets the opportunity to lead Soldiers, which will ultimately be their job. It shows both sides how an effective line of communication works both ways."

Building avenues of communication is an important part of building any team. When it's time to make things happen, other skills are needed. Time and resource management have to be included in the process.

"I think it's absolutely necessary for the cadets to get the enlisted perspective as well as the officer mentorship now and as they progress through their careers,"

said Sgt. 1st Class Robert Carter, D Company component repair supervisor. "It gives a new set of eyes and vision for fixing future problems. If it takes five Soldiers 30 minutes to move the aircraft, that's 2.5 hours of manpower. The cadet needs to understand that maybe the time spent moving the aircraft can be better spent on other tasks. Instead of just giving direction, working smarter with your Soldiers would benefit the Army no matter what kind of unit you're in."

Leading Soldiers is a big responsibility. Having a taste of what they'll be doing when they become platoon leaders will better prepare cadets for their responsibilities.

"What I see as a command sergeant major is that sometimes new officers don't understand the responsibilities of being a platoon leader and the gravity that position possesses," said Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Brock, senior enlisted advisor for the "Eagle Attack" Battalion. "I think it catches them by surprise. I think the NCOs at ROTC or West Point need to convey that, unlike privates, a newly commissioned officer is a leader from day one by virtue of the fact that he or she is a second lieutenant or a first lieutenant."

Giving the cadets a bigger toolbox before they receive their commissions helps them build and maintain positive relationships with their NCOs.

Officers have a lot of responsibilities placed on them because they are officers, Brock said. Every officer has an NCO. It's NCO business to keep officers informed of Soldier issues because NCOs have more experience dealing with them. If officers and NCOs establish that communication and work together as teammates, the organization benefits. ■



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