



Sgt. Ivy Barton, center in black padding, watches as Soldiers go through drills during a combatives course as part of training conducted by the Aviation Mission Readiness Integration Company at Fort Carson, Colo. (Photo by Pablo Villa)

4th CAB Reception Company NCOs Move Fast To Make Assets Of Incoming Soldiers

By Pablo Villa — NCO Journal

Spc. Kenneth Schunke barks orders as he saunters through a padded room filled with rows of barefoot Soldiers at Fort Carson, Colo.

“Work it, work it!” Schunke shouts as the Soldiers pair off and go through grappling and defensive drills. The temperature slowly rises inside the small, unassuming brick building giving the air a stifling thickness and rendering the setting fit for elite-level martial arts training. But these Soldiers aren’t in a top-flight fighting gym. They are in-processing.

The Soldiers are being trained in combatives by the Aviation Mission Readiness Integration Company, a reception company of the 4th Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division. The company helps the 4th CAB integrate incoming Soldiers and ensure they receive mandatory training before reporting to their units. The combatives training is one element of a three-pronged qualification regimen taught by AMRIC’s noncommissioned officers. It allows incoming Soldiers to complete requirements that might otherwise be shelved while

tending to the brisk pace of an aviation company’s needs.

“We’re different from a lot of other places that just focus on basic orientation,” said Sgt. 1st Class Taylor McReynolds, first sergeant for AMRIC. “These additional things we train them on, they don’t have a lot of time to get those things done, especially on the aviation side of the house. That kind of stuff gets put on the back-burner some of the time. But those are certifications they need. Here, we make it a priority.”

A Leader-Centric Culture

The impetus for the unit’s formation in 2014 came from Col. Robert T. Ault, commander of the 4th CAB, who believes the basic foundations facilitated in AMRIC help foster a total Soldier philosophy.

“We are setting up a leader-centric culture that is firmly grounded in the Army Values,” Ault told the Fort Carson Mountaineer earlier this year. “AMRIC allows us to get to know our new leaders and they, in turn, get to know us and our standards. We certify our best leaders



Spc. Kenneth Schunke, left, instructs incoming Soldiers of the 4th Combat Aviation Brigade during a combatives course as part of training conducted by the Aviation Mission Readiness Integration Company at Fort Carson, Colo. (Photo by Pablo Villa)

through the process of selecting, training and trusting them. AMRIC also facilitates the development of the culture we are trying to deliberately create by helping privates to battalion commanders understand the CAB's philosophy and be able to do basic Soldier tasks before going to their subordinate units."

The company has been in-processing Soldiers for more than a year, taking new arrivals through combatives training as well as driver's training and a combat lifesaver course. The new in-processing method has already done much to instill a culture of leadership, said Sgt. Matthew Cox, AMRIC second platoon sergeant.

"Everybody has to come through this, so you're already building some continuity there," Cox said. "It sets the tone for the unit you're about to get into. It's a no-nonsense type of situation. It kind of reflects the mentality the Soldiers that come through will need — 'Hey, we're getting this training. There is no time to mess around. We're going to hit the ground running.' They may not know where they're going to be or when they might have time to do this later on."

That shortage of time is a natural component of being part of the 4th CAB, said Sgt. James Sessoms, a section sergeant for AMRIC. Training Soldiers before they report to their units eliminates the need for a squad leader or section sergeant to pull an NCO away to train troops. That, Sessoms said, makes every Soldier who goes through AMRIC an instant asset. Leaders are able to focus on advancing Soldiers in their jobs rather than basic Soldier skills.

"It's a great program," Sessoms said. "Aviation is a very high-tempo, demanding asset to the Army. I've been in the Army almost eight years. It took me seven years to get combatives certification. In my last unit, I was aviation and I couldn't get a combatives slot to save my life.

Here at AMRIC, it's pretty much already given to you, which also helps the troop because it gives them points. Not only are you helping the troop, you're helping the unit because the troop or the Soldier who goes through this is able to get qualified for combatives.

"You also get driver's training. It took me four months to get driver's training in my first unit," Sessoms said. "That's because we were at such a high tempo, every time we turned around there was a mission this or a mission that. They couldn't conduct a driver's training. Here, we conduct one a week. They get to walk away with some type of driver's training, so when they get into a unit they're already able to be utilized as drivers or TCs (tank commander or track commander). They can't TC a vehicle without knowing how to operate it, so it's an automatic asset once they get to their unit and they're done with this training.

"It's the same thing with CLS, their combat lifesaver's qualifying," Sessoms said. "There is a requirement for ranges or other types of training — you need somebody to be in medical besides an actual medic. So with this training, they're able to CLS a range or CLS whatever they need them for. The training gives that Soldier points, too. So this way, when they finally get to their battalions and their units, they're already ready to hit the ground running and not slow anyone down."

It Builds Camaraderie and a Team Atmosphere

If the pace of daily work in the 4th CAB is swift, then the pace at AMRIC is blistering. New Soldiers arrive almost daily, creating an extensive schedule of in-processing activities. The sheer amount of work for AMRIC's NCOs recently prompted 4th CAB leadership to trim the time spent in the company from a one-year detail to about six months.

"That's the high tempo expected here. We're constantly on the move," Sessoms said.

That notion is never more evident than during combatives training. There, Spc. Schunke and Sgt. Ivy Barton imbue new Soldiers — ranks ranging from private to lieutenant colonel — with their fighting expertise. Motions for various offensive and defensive maneuvers — such as nullifying and striking an enemy attempting to take your rifle — are broken down into easily executable steps, then performed until proficiency is reached. In the stuffy confines of the mat room, incoming Soldiers earn certification in combatives level 1. They also form bonds that serve to strengthen their respective units, Cox said.

"There's a very wide diversity of ranks and grades," Cox said. "The officers and the senior NCOs who come through attend the same training. So they're getting their ducks in a row at the same time as the troops. So they get to see how these new Soldiers are receptive to all this training. It builds camaraderie and a team atmosphere.

“They also learn the basis of hand-to-hand combat,” Cox said. “Going forward, after you receive that training, you have the basis and the understanding of how to defend yourself in hand-to-hand combat. Soldiers never really know where they’re going to end up or what may happen. So combatives is a valuable tool that could possibly save some lives down the road.”

The combatives training also tests the mettle of Soldiers when they are struck. Sessoms says it is far better to figure out how to react to being hit in training than downrange.

“There’s nothing pretty about combat,” Sessoms said. “It’s gritty. If you get into hand-to-hand combat and you don’t know what you’re doing, you won’t know how to react. During clinch day here, you’re going to get hit. What we look for is, ‘How are you going to react?’ I’d rather know now and learn from someone who is my fellow Soldier and teaching me. We have fantastic trainers here for combatives, for everything we do, really.”

We Take Care of Soldiers’ Needs

Such intensive training requires high-caliber NCOs, Cox said. They need to be physically fit, intelligent, competent and transparent, he said.

“They need to understand what we do here and convey the colonel’s intent with this program to everybody who comes through,” Cox said. “So you have to be a very well-rounded Soldier, for one. It kind of goes back to NCOs being the ‘backbone of the Army.’ NCOs make it happen. This company was a really good idea. Col. Ault implemented it and hand-picked NCOs in the positions to make it happen. It really does reflect the lineage of

NCOs being the ones out front leading troops and accomplishing the missions.”

Sessoms said AMRIC NCOs benefit from regular meetings with the company commander and first sergeant, which help further implement Ault’s intent. Sessoms added that incoming Soldiers get an early taste of the passion and pride of the 4th CAB because of visits from Ault himself. He said it is one of the few places he’s seen the brigade commander and brigade command sergeant major make the effort to speak to incoming Soldiers. It further fosters a leadership culture, Sessoms said.

“We’re a leadership organization. That’s the only thing the colonel wants,” he said. “The NCO is the ‘backbone of the Army,’ and that’s what we do. It’s been the Army way — we do what needs to be done.”

In keeping with the energetic pace of daily operations, Sessoms adds that being an AMRIC NCO means the job can’t be done from 9 to 5. Preparing troops for the 4th CAB is a 24/7 operation, he said. That includes ensuring Soldiers have what they need even when the uniforms come off.

“We take care of Soldiers’ needs,” Sessoms said. “Every NCO here is all in on this, not only training but also helping the troop. That’s your job as an NCO — lead, train, mentor. You take care of that Soldier, personally, financially, mentally, physically. That’s your job. Just because I go home and take this uniform off does not mean I won’t come back.

“We are competent, passionate and willing to work. We’re constantly moving. Soldiers first — if you’re going to be an NCO, that’s how it needs to be. If you’re going to be an NCO here, that’s definitely how it needs to be.” ■



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