



A Psychological Operations team briefs Brig. Gen. Richard K. Sele (right), Deputy Commanding General, U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), and Master Sgt. Kevin S. Williams (center), G7 Training Directorate NCOIC, USACAPOC (A), on the training strategy leading up to an National Training Center deployment. (U.S. Army photo by 1st Lt. David W. Cline)

Combat Training Center

What it takes to arrive trained and prepared

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This article offers recommendations to Army Reserve junior officers and noncommissioned officers in developing a coherent training strategy that prepares their units for decisive action combat operations. An integral component of a pre-deployment training strategy is the successful execution of a mission rehearsal exercise at a Combat Training Center, which is the focus of this article. These recommendations were conceived through personal observations and inspections of Army Reserve Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Soldiers from more than a dozen CTC deployments during the past year and a half.

Expect to Make Mistakes

As we tell our Soldiers during on-site inspections, we expect them to make mistakes at a CTC. One could even say, we want them to make mistakes. A CTC is the place to make honest mistakes and learn from them – not downrange while taking enemy fire. A coherent training strategy enables Soldiers to plan and prepare to minimize errors during execution.

Terminology

For starters, let us discuss terminology because words mean things. We cannot emphasize the importance of

having the right mindset for deploying to a CTC. Note the word “deploy.” Unless the unit treats this event as a deployment, Soldiers will consider it “just another exercise.” Also, many junior leaders wrongly perceive a CTC as an annual stand-alone event. On the contrary, it is a critical component of the training strategy occurring before a deployment to a combat operation. It is a rehearsal for their real world mission. A CTC rotation is *not* the place to be trained but the culminating event of a unit training plan. Treat a CTC as a mission rehearsal deployment and the unit will have the right mindset as they step into the “box” or area of operations. Finally, Army Reserve units deploying to CTCs today are part of the Ready Force X pool. They are an aggregation of units of action providing capabilities to collective training events or combat operations.

Planning Phase

The Major Subordinate Unit must immediately begin the planning phase in anticipation of a CTC deployment, upon notification of a RF-X force pool unit, part of an Army Reserve major subordinate command. This should occur more than a year out, ideally two to three. The RF-X unit will need that time to train supporting individual and collective tasks to standard.



Brig. Gen. Richard K. Sele (far right), deputy commanding general, U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), receives a yearly training strategy brief from the 7th PSYOP Group. (U.S. Army photo by 1st Lt. David W. Cline)

Using the military decision making process, the MSU assigns the anticipated CTC mission to a subordinate echelon, which assigns it to an RF-X unit. After receiving the mission, the CA company commander and first sergeant or PSYOP detachment commander and noncommissioned officer-in-charge and key leaders review their unit’s mission essential task list assessment, combined arms training strategies on the Army Training Network, the unit’s tactical standard operating procedures, and

view updates, if any, to doctrinal publications such as [Army Doctrine Reference Publication 7-0, Training Units and Developing Leaders](#), and [Field Manual 7-0, Train to Win in a Complex World](#).

Here is an important nuance to note: an active component maneuver division and its supporting Army Reserve MSU both receive specific CTC mission assignments around the D-365 mark, or one year out. This is the start of the active component unit’s long-range planning cycle. Because Army Reserve Soldiers do not train full time, a Reserve unit must plan for a CTC deployment much earlier. If a reserve unit waited to begin planning a year out, it would be tantamount to that active component unit planning for a CTC about one quarter out. This underscores the importance of the reserve unit to begin planning much earlier based on the assumption that it will have a CTC deployment.

In the case of our own CA companies and PSYOP detachments, the units supporting a brigade combat team during a CTC deployment, the commander and senior NCO use the troop leading procedures to conduct a thorough mission analysis, develop training objectives, conduct a “before action review,” and note observations and after action reviews from previous deployments. Then, they develop a draft training strategy.

Since the unit may not have a CTC date, the CA company and PSYOP detachment must develop a plan based on assumptions. Working backwards from an estimated CTC deployment, unit leaders build collective training events, which support general and mission specific team and individual training tasks to include CA and PSYOP mission specific tasks, Army warrior tasks, communication exercises, crew-served and individual weapons qualifications, and protective mask fitting and confidence training ranges. The company or detachment command teams should document their planning strategy in the Army’s digital training management system. It is important to get the strategy right. Units who cut corners or misuse the limited time they have before execution may eventually lose Soldiers in combat.

The planning phase is the time to identify academic, individual, and team training requirements based on METL assessment, training objectives, and mission assignment. We recommend the following, based on our observations:

- Gain competency in assigned communications equipment, to include full inventory of subcomponents, field maintenance, integrating into the supported unit’s communication plan, and field expedient communications techniques.
- Tactical Operations Center operations using both digital and analog maps with acetate overlays and graphics.
- A thorough refresher on maneuver terminology, to include understanding the effect that a particular maneuver term is intended to achieve.

- Land navigation with map and compass in addition to GPS technology.
- Driver training, with particular attention to night driving under NVGs.
- Tactical vehicle recovery using a tow bar or strap.
- Night optical device operation, driving and dismounted.
- Operating in a contaminated environment.
- Combat life-saving skills.
- Battle drills such as react to indirect fire, call for fire, etc.
- Mounted and dismounted movement techniques.
- Proper vehicle and weapons maintenance.
- Sand table mission rehearsals.

Given the threats of a denied or degraded electronic environment, units should become proficient on functioning without technology, use of proper hand and arm signals, recognize GPS denial, and know how to read maps and terrain associate. Train on all of these basic Soldier skills, in addition to the respective mission specific skills for CA and PSYOP missions. Command teams must understand how to employ CA and PSYOP techniques to support the BCT commander's objectives and articulate those techniques in maneuver terminology.

Once the commander has a draft training strategy, he or she should begin a dialogue with the next higher commander. The higher commander may issue further guidance to ensure the subordinate commander is on the right track.

Once the company or detachment commander finalizes the training strategy, he or she briefs the battalion commander and command sergeant major. The battalion commander may concur or non-concur, issue corrective guidance, commit to providing necessary resources, and identify where risk will be assumed. The company or detachment commander is now ready to issue the order through a written orders process and translate the training strategy into monthly training schedules. Therefore, remember, written orders must follow verbal orders, and company and battalion commanders review and approve training plans, as documented in company training schedules.

Executing the Training Strategy

The CA company first sergeant or PSYOP detachment NCOIC "owns" the responsibility for training the unit's Soldiers on identified individual and small team tasks, which marks the "preparation phase" for their unit.

It is the senior NCO's responsibility to execute the training strategy. Training each month should successively build on the previous month, executing training tasks simultaneously where possible. From observation, too often commanders simply do not understand the first sergeant's or NCOIC's role and fail to leverage their experience. Our recommendations to commanders are

simple: empower your NCOs to execute training early in the planning cycle, provide oversight to ensure it meets your intent, and assess training throughout the process.

When assigned a CTC mission, around D-365, commanders should contact the supported maneuver unit and obtain its tactical standard operating procedures. Each CA and PSYOP team within the unit should receive copies of the supported maneuver battalion TACSOPs, which explains how a BCT functions in a deployed



A Civil Affairs team briefs Brig. Gen. Richard K. Sele (bottom right), deputy commanding general, U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), on their operations in support of a brigade combat team at the Joint Readiness Training Center. (U.S. Army photo by 1st Lt. David W. Cline)

environment. Many training shortfalls, during CTC deployments, should be addressed through unit SOPs. Every Soldier in the RF-X unit deploying, to support a BCT, must read the unit's TACSOP to ensure they are on the same page as the supported unit.

The CA company or PSYOP detachment command teams must refine their training strategy based on the specific CTC mission assignment and brief their respective chains of command, no later than D-270. Around this time, key personnel, such as sustainment and communications NCOs, conduct a leader reconnaissance through face-to-face coordination with the supported BCT. In the past, constraints on unit funding or available training days were limiting factors. We strongly recommend that units should factor these



A team briefs Brig. Gen. Richard K. Sele (second from left), deputy commanding general, U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), on their operations in support of a brigade combat team at the National Training Center while Master Sgt. Kevin S. Williams (left), G7 Training Directorate NCOIC, US-ACAPOC (A), records his observations. (U.S. Army photo by 1st Lt. David W. Cline)

additional cost estimates into their training budgets and utilize all available resources. Simultaneous with this, during the leader's recon, the CA or PSYOP commanders should transmit their training objectives to the CTC operations group's observer coach/trainers, which ensures effective scenario planning to include key mission-specific events and training opportunities. CTC operations groups currently cite the lack of input from CA and PSYOP rotational units for the lack of mission-specific injects and events, during CTC rotations.

Unit command teams should attend the initial planning conference, the first event in the joint training system's joint event life cycle, which usually occurs around the D-210 mark. By D-180 two critical milestones occur. Command teams, and their sustainment and communications NCOs, must attend the CTC mid-planning conference and bring their training objectives for inclusion into the training scenario and the BCT's mission letter.

Following the MPC, the command team again briefs the battalion command team and identifies additional logistics and communications requirements. The battalion command team plays a critical oversight role, ensuring the training strategy is sound, posturing units to support BCT objectives, and resourcing RF-X units properly to execute the mission. Not long after the MPC, around the D-150 mark, the maneuver division commanding general briefs the CTC plan to the U.S. forces commanding general.

Leader Reconnaissance

Up to this point, the RF-X unit started training long before the BCT received its mission. Unit leaders met face to face with the supported BCT, and the CTC training scenario has incorporated the enablers and their objectives. Command teams should conduct an additional leader reconnaissance to the supported unit and identify pre-mission training events to observe or in which to participate. CA teams and tactical PSYOP teams should participate in field training exercises with their supported maneuver battalions. The civil-military operations center should also conduct collective training. Again, additional engagements and possible participation in the BCT's training must be forecasted in the budget.

Unit participation in a field exercise with the supported BCT prior to their CTC deployment pays tremendous dividends in integrating

with the force. The earlier a unit integrates with the supported BCT, the more successful it is during the rotation, as many mission distractors are resolved prior the unit conducting reception, staging, onward movement, and integration.

At this point, the draft exercise order is in production, and the BCT typically receives the final OPORD around the D-45. Supporting CA and PSYOP units are on a tight timeline to provide input.

The CA company or PSYOP detachment command teams attend the final planning conference, approximately four to six months from the deployment. The command teams and key leaders should conduct a site survey and "ride-along" to observe another unit going through a CTC rotation.

The MDMP Phase

Around the D-90 and D-60 marks, the chain of command should require another pre-execution brief and final confirmation brief, respectively, at the brigade or one-star command levels. Around this time, the CTC conducts the leader training program, a critical event for CA company and PSYOP detachment command teams attendance. The LTP is a military decision-making process event for the BCT to refine staff processes and develop an initial draft OPORD for the CTC rotation. Command teams must participate in the LTP to ensure that proper planning inputs are submitted into the BCT's plan and the draft OPORD.

At D-45/60, the BCT receives the actual scenario and mission statement for the CTC rotation and begins conducting MDMP to develop the final OPORD. Because this event is off cycle, it is essential supporting enablers remain closely integrated to the BCT and are incorporated during final plan development.

Prior to execution, we recommend units exercise their alert roster, confirm family support plans, practice additional battle drill lanes training, conduct pre-execution checks, and deploy their advance party. Additionally, the advance party should include sustainment and communications support personnel to receive incoming personnel and set conditions for a successful RSOI.

The Execution Phase

The unit is now in the execution phase. They should exercise mobilization plans and conduct a deployment readiness exercise to ensure mission readiness. The first sergeant or NCOICs must take advantage of down time during execution to retrain any tasks the command team deems necessary. This is also the time to validate and/or update the unit TACSOP. Based on previous observations, training on react to contact, indirect fire, and communications is time well spent.

Assessment is ongoing throughout this process. However, there is also a formal assessment phase in the operations process. The CA company and PSYOP detachment commanders reassess their METL proficiency, capture lessons learned and observations, record their mission products and assessments in DTMS, and pro-

gram time in their training calendar to retrain additional tasks as necessary. As a final word on assessment, leader visibility throughout the chain of command is critical to this process, and they must develop a circulation plan, enabling them to observe and ensure to standard training, while identifying resource and training gaps.

Time is an additional factor to consider for Reserve components – both time constraints unique to this component as well as lead times required to secure resources and additional training. Time constraints of Reserve Soldiers must be balanced with civilian employment and civilian schooling. Reserve component units typically lack the organizational agility to shift timelines and priorities quickly as snap requirements emerge. Overcoming challenges start with strong mission analysis, identifying the right risks, and solving the *right* problems throughout the process.

Conclusion

It is best to think of a CTC rotation as the Super Bowl. The penultimate execution of our skillsets at the tactical level. The road to the Super Bowl is difficult and requires progressive training from individual skills to collective skills to executing collective tasks in support of the assigned METs. Professional teams do not throw together untrained teams on the road to the Super Bowl. They practice, scrimmage, and build upon learned experiences. Executed properly, smartly, and with the proper coordination, they will successfully support BCTs during mission rehearsal and in combat operations. ■

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