



(U.S. Army photo by Spc. Ethan Valetski taken Nov. 5, 2019) A U.S. Army Soldier with the Regimental Support Squadron, 2d Cavalry Regiment, carries a casualty to safety during a simulated indirect fire attack during Dragoon Ready 20 at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, Hohenfels, Germany, Nov. 5, 2019.

NCO C3

Required Competencies for CTC Success

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"The quality of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps determines in large measure the quality of the Army."

—Former Sgt. Maj. of the Army Leon L. Van Autreve
(Department of the Army, 2013, p. 24)

NCO Common Core Competencies (NCO C3) are leadership guidelines that enhance shared understanding of a ready and lethal force. NCOs at all levels should be competent in the six major topic areas of readiness, leadership, training management, communication, operations, and program management. This article examines both

positive and negative examples of NCO C3 from units training at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) over an 18-month period as each unit focused on improving their Large Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) within Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) tactics. A strong understanding of NCO C3 increases unit efficiency across the Army.

Operations

The success and failure of units training at combat training centers (CTCs) begin with operations. *Army Doctrine Publications (ADP) 5-0: The Operations Process* describes troop leading procedures (TLPs) as the “dynamic process used by small-unit leaders to analyze a mission, develop a plan, and prepare for an operation” (Department of the Army, 2019a, p. 2-18). TLPs include briefs, rehearsals, and inspections that help Soldiers understand their role in unit operations.

During an 18-month period, Observer, Controller/Trainer (OC/T) teams at JMRC observed several units failing to effectively utilize TLPs to prepare for operations. For example, one unit did not conduct a thorough convoy brief and drivers, unaware of the route, became lost. Another example is a medical unit that didn’t conduct rehearsals. This resulted in a poor performance and a 0% medical evacuation rate.

Rehearsals and internal battle drills are vital to the continued success of each element. Leaders should conduct rehearsals to practice essential tasks and skills, identify weaknesses or problems in the proposed plan, improve shared understanding of the concept of operations, and foster confidence among the Soldiers. According to *Field Manual (FM) 6-0: Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*, effective rehearsals should meet the following criteria:

- **Allocate time:** The time required will depend on the rehearsal type and method. A map rehearsal requires significantly less time than a full-dress rehearsal, but the trade-off is in the level of understanding. NCOs must be knowledgeable on various rehearsal types and select the appropriate rehearsal for the mission and time available.
- **Roll Call:** Units can increase shared understanding by ensuring all personnel are present, not just key leaders or critical personnel.
- **Assign Responsibility:** Every Soldier should understand their role and responsibilities. Members of a litter team during a mass casualty exercise should know when and where to be, with what equipment, and how to properly utilize that equipment. Soldiers should also understand how their actions support the operation as a whole.
- **Equipment on hand:** If conducting a map rehearsal, ensure a map large enough for all to view is available or that all personnel have a map to follow along. Terrain models should be complete and identify key terrain features and known friendly/enemy locations. Battle drills and standard operating procedure (SOP) rehearsals will require additional equipment.

- **Standards for success:** Leaders conducting rehearsals must have a standard in order to succeed. What constitutes a successful convoy back brief or casualty evacuation rehearsal? A properly executed rehearsal validates each leader’s role and positively impacts the overall operation.
- **Identify a recorder:** Rehearsals identify weaknesses in a proposed plan, but commanders are not always available to address these issues. Leaders must document problems to be resolved later but prior to the start of the operation.
- **Pre-combat checks (PCCs) and Pre-combat inspections (PCIs):** Unit preparation must include PCCs/PCIs to ensure all Soldiers and systems are operational, functional, and capable. First-line supervisors should complete initial PCCs/PCIs during rehearsals, and prior to the start of an operation (Department of the Army, 2014b).

The following is an example observed by OC/T teams at JMRC as a platoon sergeant successfully followed rehearsal guidelines:

Staff Sgt. Staley [name changed] informed his platoon of the 0600 convoy brief for their upcoming tactical movement. With roughly one hour until that brief, Staley conducted a communications check with all his drivers to ensure radios and Windows Team Awareness Kits (WinTaks) were operational. He then instructed his squad leaders to conduct roll over drills with their personnel while he verified load plans and inspected gear. He ensured ammunition was on hand, Individual First Aid Kit (IFAK) contents were present, vehicle fuel levels were full, and preventative maintenance checks and services (PMCS) were properly documented. He also provided each vehicle operator with a map annotating the planned route as well as a communications card. Finally, he made sure each gunner in the platoon could demonstrate understanding of the Rules of Engagement (ROE) and had their gunner’s harnesses verified.

Staff Sgt. Staley’s platoon succeeded conducting ground medical evacuation operations at JMRC because of preparation and rehearsals.

Program Management

NCOs ensure a ready and lethal force by supporting the chain of command and advising officers on various aspects of military operations. This includes the adoption



(U.S. Army photo by Spc. Meagan Mooney taken Aug. 21, 2019)
U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to the 1st Infantry Division conduct a combined arms rehearsal while an Observer, Controller/Trainer with the Joint Multinational Readiness Center observes during Combined Resolve XII at the Hohenfels Training Area, Germany, Aug. 21, 2019.

and regulation of Army programs within a unit. One of the most important Army programs, especially as it relates to CTCs and JMRC, is the Army Safety Program. *Army Regulation 385-10: The Army Safety Program* places the responsibility of preventing unsafe acts on every individual Soldier, not just senior leaders (Department of the Army, 2017).

Walking backwards while ground guiding, not wearing a helmet while operating a military vehicle, and speeding on ice-covered roads are prime examples of avoidable injuries that have occurred during CTC rotations. The prevention of accidents requires full unit support of the Army Safety Program and a trust between NCOs and officers that safety is a top priority.

Training Management

Key training responsibilities for NCOs, as outlined in *Training Circular 7-22.7: The Noncommissioned Officer Guide*, include individual tasks, battle drills, assigned weapons and weapons systems, and physical fitness standards (Department of the Army, 2020). PCCs and PCIs can identify deficiencies in tasks which can be corrected utilizing *hip-pocket training* during inactive training periods.

OC/T observations during CTC rotations revealed a trend of deficiencies in basic field craft that NCOs can rectify with leader presence and minor *hip-pocket training*. In a field environment, particularly during LSCO, basic field craft is a necessity and Soldiers should be familiar with the following skills:

- **Personal and equipment camouflage:** *Camouflage* will contribute to survival in future operations, especially under the threat of enemy drones (Department of the Army, 2019d)

- **Fighting positions/position improvement:** Soldiers must be knowledgeable in both hasty and deliberate fighting positions. Continuous improvement of Soldiers' fighting positions must be included in battle rhythms (Department of the Army, 2019d).
- **Waterproofing:** Personal and equipment waterproofing is instrumental to ensuring Soldiers remain ready and lethal. Failing to waterproof rucksacks, for example, can lead to wet uniforms, which can directly affect Soldiers' health and morale (Department of the Army, 1991; 2018).
- **Nonhazardous solid waste:** Digging cat-hole latrines and using brief relief bags ("wag bags") are essential field skills. Soldiers must know proper field sanitation to prevent affecting unit health. (Department of the Army, 2014a).
- **Water purification:** Water is as important as food and ammunition in combat. Soldiers must know how to chemically treat various quantities of water for use (Department of the Army, 2014a).
- **Wildlife identification:** Soldiers need to know how to identify hazardous wildlife and avoid dangerous animals and insects (Department of the Army, 2014a).
- **Clothing and insulation:** Both hot and cold climates can injure Soldiers if they are not educated on correct climate procedures (Department of the Army, 2014a).

Hip-pocket training is a valuable tool for NCOs to utilize during CTC rotations to correct deficiencies; however, training should begin at home station. NCOs should utilize *Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 7-0: Training* to take full advantage of available sergeant's time, training models, lane training, and situational training exercises (Department of the Army, 2019c).

Communications

Shared understanding is generated through efficient communication. In *ADP 6-0: Mission Command*, decentralized execution involves disseminating information to the lowest level, enabling subordinates' decision making based on shared understanding (Department of the Army, 2019).

LSCOs within Decisive Action Training Environment (DATE) rotations consist of rapidly changing battlefield conditions and often denied or degraded communications systems. The problem is units at home station are still training under the assumption communications platforms will be reliable, and the operational environment will allow guidance from higher command. Effectively exercising

disciplined initiative during these stressful operational environments requires *unity of effort* and proper communication of the commander's intent.

☞ *Tempo is our ability to operate at the speed of the problem... To gain and maintain advantageous tempo, our leaders must be able to see, understand, and rapidly exploit opportunities in both time and space, guided by their understanding of intent, their mission, environment, and the capability of their force. Decisions are far less likely to be routinely relayed up the chain for institutional contemplation and wisdom. To do so is to surrender the initiative to the enemy.* — Gen. Martin Dempsey (2012, p.4)☞

There are two constants when training at JMRC: The weather will shift, and communications platforms will fail. Units that are used to reliable communications are suddenly thrust into a stressful environment that does not support their current SOPs. Units can prepare for these battlefield conditions by doing the following:

- **Accepting risk:** Enabling subordinate leaders to exercise disciplined initiative comes with inherent risk – risk of failure, risk of leaders making the wrong decision, and risk of leaders not fully understanding the desired end state. Conversely, the risk of not enabling your subordinate leaders to perform with responsible initiative in complex circumstances also has inherent risks. These risks can be mitigated with applicable leader development and fostering a climate that supports a lower decision-making threshold (Department of the Army, 2019b).
- **Leader development:** Leader development starts at home station. Senior leaders must facilitate training on mission command, operations processes, and the unit's decision-making matrix/threshold. It is imperative all leaders understand these processes prior to any CTC or operational deployment (Department of the Army, 2019b).
- **Leadership climate:** A successful leadership climate accepts appropriate risk and enables leaders to make—and learn from—mistakes. Allowing leaders to make appropriate decisions during situational training exercises and other home station training exercises builds trust, confidence, and fosters the appropriate leadership climate.



(U.S. Army photo by Warren Marlow taken Jan. 27, 2020) A U.S. Army Observer, Controller/Trainer with First Army, provides guidance to trainees during a mass casualty training event, Jan. 27, 2020.

Readiness

Maintenance can be an obstacle to unit success while conducting DATE exercises at JMRC. For example, one unit used a High-Mobility Multi-Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) for security during a ground medical evacuation mission, but the vehicle broke down on the side of the road because no daily PMCS was conducted and the vehicle didn't have power-steering fluid. A second example is the growing number of medical units at JMRC unable to properly treat simulated or real-world casualties due to their medical equipment not being properly serviced. These examples address two important readiness issues: Communicate the importance of readiness to subordinate NCOs/Soldiers, and effectively track equipment maintenance.

Every Soldier must understand the importance of equipment readiness and understand their role in maintaining assigned equipment. Tracking equipment maintenance is a responsibility for every NCO — not just the maintenance NCO or executive officer. Equipment readiness tracking should forecast future shortfalls, include a PMCS schedule (for all equipment, not just vehicles), and identify current/future capability gaps created by those forecasts.

Leadership

Each of the six principles of NCO C3 complement one another. By incorporating these principles into mission planning and execution, leaders improve adaptability and enhance mission performance. The underlying component to mission success; however, is ultimately presence. NCOs must be present, active, and responsible because NCOs are the backbone of the U.S. Army.

Bottom Line Up Front: Spend time rehearsing appropriate battle drills, invest your free time checking on your Soldiers, and maintain a positive working relationship with your officer counterparts. NCOs are the driving force behind mission accomplishment, and with the proper integration of NCO C3, NCOs will lead their units to success. ■

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