



Soldiers from “Shops” Platoon, 3rd Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment, 12th Combat Aviation Brigade load an Aviation Ground Power Unit (AGPU) into a container following deployment in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, December, 2014. (left to right,) Sgt. Seifu Tuffa, Spc. Brandon Cox, Spc. Chris Sargent, Spc. Michael Holgate. (Photo courtesy of Staff Sgt. Mark Wood)

# The Shop

*By Staff Sgt. Brandon Cox*

NCO Journal Staff

**W**e all have one shop we remember as “The Shop.” A group of individuals you’d be glad to spend the rest of your Army career with. Imagine the faces and names of those you once stood beside; hear their voices. Maybe they gave you grief about your most recent ef-up, told a joke out by the smoke shack, or perhaps you heard their footsteps as you marched closely behind them on a ruck, and it started to rain. Whatever it is, these are the moments that strengthen relationships, especially during hard times. They resonate in the mind for years and crystallize as the best moments of your career. But how did these things come to pass? How did these Soldiers from different walks of life come into the same platoon and become teammates, brothers, and family?

“The shop” started when I arrived in Illeshiem, Germany for my second assignment following a brief stint in South Korea. My wife, daughter, and I were greeted by a staff sergeant as we pulled up to the base. He was happy I arrived and told me to go with him to his battalion. But, as we loaded our bags and things in the car, another NCO pulled up and said, “you’re not taking him; he’s ours!” referring to the sister battalion on post, 3rd Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment, 12th Combat Aviation Brigade. “First Sergeant made a ‘deal,’ he’s coming with me,” said the Soldier who I came to know as Sgt. Chris Bernhardt, my new team leader.

Confused about what just happened but excited nonetheless; I felt like I was already part of a team. This was the first time I felt like I was needed and cared for in the



An AH-64D Apache Longbow with the 3rd Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment, 12th Combat Aviation Brigade awaits maintenance before conducting missions in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, 2014. (Photo courtesy of Staff Sgt. Brandon Cox)

Army. As I was introduced to my new platoon, “Shops,” I met people from around the globe.

There was Spc. Washington Molina-Romo, probably the best-educated Soldier I’ve ever met, insanely easygoing and kind.

The funny and charismatic “excuse me, Sergeant, but that’s not correct,” Spc. Chris Sargent. We called him by his first name because we refused to call a specialist, sergeant.

Spc. Michael Holgate, the hardest working member who loved getting his hands dirty.

The ambitious and goal-oriented, Spc. Boone Warren from Alabama.

The “I don’t take crap from nobody,” Pvt. 1st Class William “Billy” Byse, from Detroit.

Sgt. Seifu Tuffa, a former pilot in the Ethiopian Army.

Staff Sgt. Mark Wood, our squad leader, problem solver, coffee addict, susceptible to nosebleeds, but all in all, the best leader we could ask for.

And then there was “Jeff,” Sgt. Jeff Mussell, an NCO adopted from another shop. Jeff liked talking about politics and how the 101st Airborne Division was the best.

How did this “shop” of misfit Soldiers from around the world become the most outstanding team I’ve ever belonged to?

## Creating Space

Customs and courtesies, discipline, and respect are very rigid concepts, but the personal and professional balance we established in the shop was instrumental to our success. Yes, we’re Soldiers 24/7, but we’re also human. Soldier mentality is difficult to maintain, and there’s rarely a time to let loose. It’s essential to have an environment where you’re allowed to vent so when you need to be professional, it’s not difficult because you’re not burned out. Leaders are not without flaws, so not allowing Soldiers to make mistakes is irrational. They

should consider that not everyone can keep their cool in stressful situations.

As I walked back to the shop from an assigned task under “black flag” conditions, when temperatures ranged from 90 to 130 degrees on the flight line, I heard cheers and the boom of laughter coming from our hangar. Laughter wasn’t unusual in our group but seeing no aircraft was.

The hangar floor, for once, was empty. All the work on the helicopters we had for the day was complete. We took advantage of this. Holgate created a makeshift bowling alley out of a bike tire and two-by-fours. We took turns bowling and had a good time.

It was a space that didn’t fall within the average confines of military discipline, but it built team trust that contributed to respect up and down’ the shop’s chain of command, and furthered organizational discipline (Department of the Army, 2015).

“I really liked when we had a shop get-together, and everyone was included. We were all one family. That was my favorite memory from our time. We could [BS], and it wasn’t about work. We had pride in our shop and how we presented our team to everyone,” said Wood.

Too often, we were in situations where there was no time for anything other than completing the mission. Those situations created a cohesive unit environment with high morale and pride in the team.

## “The Whole ‘Shop’ Mentality”

Having technical expertise in your field is a powerful thing, but being able to teach your skills to peers or leaders can make all the difference in mission accomplishment (Department of the Army, 2019).

Too often, Soldiers don’t ask for help. Knowing they can lean on others in their platoon can help accomplish the mission and decrease stress in the workplace.

Wood was our squad leader, but that didn’t mean he wouldn’t help. I remember being tasked with replacing an AH-64 Apache’s windshield. This was no easy feat for one person, and Wood, who wasn’t trained in the work, offered to help. I guided him to properly drill holes in the new windshield while I removed the old one. We worked well together and got it knocked out in no time. This kind of scenario says a lot about a leader who directly offers to help you to accomplish a difficult task.

This was the same with Holgate, Molina, and Sargent. If they weren’t actively engaged in engine or hydraulics work, they were willing to help however they could. Because it wasn’t about the individual, if one person fails, we all fail.

Our ability to cross-train each other added to our mission effectiveness and professional expertise. We were

highly proficient in all our assigned tasks, regardless of who was responsible for completing them.

There was an occasion when another platoon, not cross-trained, needed to extract screws from an aircraft. This was a common task, but it required skill to perform. By the time we were notified, they mangled more than 30 screws and the repair was more challenging to fix. Bernhardt, in typical fashion, got very upset. Knowing he had multiple high-priority tasks to complete, he and Byse spent the day helping the maintenance platoon fix their screws I'm sure "pleasantries" were shared, but at the end of the day, we worked well with our sister platoon and even offered to cross-train to prevent this from happening.

### No Two Squads Are the Same

Not all squads will have a Wood, Holgate, or Sargent, but as a leader you can find your "shop's" strengths, build on them, and then strengthen your weaknesses. Writing this article made me reflect on those formative times and why they were important. There are many things I've learned from this shop that I plan to take with me such as transparency, expectation management, taking pride, celebrating and going to bat for your Soldiers.

### Transparency is Key

Whenever Wood came back from a meeting, he shared the information with us and explained it, so we knew exactly what was about to happen and quickly developed a plan to tackle the task. (Department of the Army, 2015) As a leader, you should communicate with your Soldiers, keeping them informed fosters a strong team



Soldiers from "Shops" Platoon, 3rd Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment, 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, hold a going away celebration following deployment in support of Operation Inherent Resolve in 2015. (left to right,) Spc. Brandon Cox, Staff Sgt. Mark Wood, Sgt. Boone Warren, Spc. Washington Molina, Spc. William Byse, Pvt. 1st Class Tyler "Junior" Nicholls, and on bottom, Spc. Chris Sargent. (Photo courtesy of Staff Sgt. Brandon Cox)

united in their dedication to mission accomplishment.

### Expectations Managed

Soldiers may know they're going to the field in three months but they don't know if they'll be home for dinner that Friday. It's important leaders stick to a schedule by pinpointing priorities and focus on time management. They should treat their Soldiers' time like it's their time.

*"I believe there are only two things in life that matter: taking care of your family and your Soldiers, and doing what's right, especially when it's hard. If you do that, everything else falls into place." (Staff Sgt. Brandon Cox)*

### A Heavy Rucksack (Sharing your Burden)

There's a perception, not doctrine, that Army leaders should not ask their subordinates or others for help. Regardless of who you are, you should be able to lean on your "battles" and subordinates if your plate is full. Having a full plate is normal, but sharing your burdens with your team will keep it from spilling. This is really where interpersonal relationships play an important part.

### Take Pride and Celebrate

We took pride not only in ourselves and our work but our teammates' work and the things they cared about. We celebrated our successes together. We bragged to our superiors about Byse and how he was the reason the aircraft were able to fly that day. We congratulated Molina when he received his bachelor's degree while on deployment, and when Holgate pinned on his sergeant stripes.

### Go to Bat for Your Soldiers

Tactfully stepping up to the chain of command and advocating for your Soldiers isn't easy, but it's necessary. As the old saying goes, "take care of Soldiers, and they'll take care of you." It's true, and they'll appreciate it.

"A good leader takes a little more than his share of the blame, a little less than his share of the credit" – Arnold H. Glasow, humorist and a successful American businessman.

### Conclusion

I'll be honest; I didn't know the Army Team Building Process (ATP 6-22.6) existed until I wrote this article. Funny enough, many of the concepts in this doctrine were things we did naturally. Now, I can use this knowledge to strengthen the teams I join moving forward in my career.

Today, many members of the "shop" lead

great teams across the world using the concepts we practiced together. Sargent, Holgate, Tuffa, Warren, and Bernhardt are all staff sergeants. Byse found his path as a civilian, working on aircraft. Jeff manages a construction company in Tennessee. Molina was promoted to staff sergeant before leaving the Army and getting a job as an Amazon network engineer. Sgt. 1st Class Mark Wood just checked in to his next command in Alaska to

take yet another leadership position. He is on his path to becoming a first sergeant, as he should.

Our bonds of brotherhood are unbreakable. We keep in contact and use each other for guidance and to share experiences. It was nice to be together, but the best part now is knowing that each of us has transformed into leaders in our own right and are sharing greatness across the Army. ■

---

## References

Department of the Army. (2015). *ATP 6-22.6 Army Team Building*  
[https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/pdf/web/atp6\\_22x6%20FINAL.pdf](https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/atp6_22x6%20FINAL.pdf)

*the Profession*. [https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/ARN20039-ADP\\_6-22-001-WEB-0.pdf](https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN20039-ADP_6-22-001-WEB-0.pdf)

Department of the Army. (2019). *ADP 6-22 Army Leadership and*

---



<https://www.armypress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>  
<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>  
<https://www.instagram.com/ncojournalofficial/>

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

