

LEVERAGING FORT RILEY RESOURCES TO EXCEL IN CHALLENGING CONDITIONS

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As military units prepare for missions anywhere in the world, leaders must employ different types of resources to train their formations and develop a high level of readiness. A lack of resources at many installations, the high costs to fund unit movements to traditional aviation training locations, and the desire to reduce family separation times prompted installations and commanders at every level to re-look and re-invest in home station training. Using a combination of live, virtual, constructive, and gaming resources to execute realistic mission essential task list (METL) focused training can yield forces ready to execute wartime missions in a decisive action environment. Ranking among one of the best training installations within the continental United States, Fort Riley and nearby Smoky Hill Weapons Range Complex offer resources to collectively train all METL tasks to proficiency. In August of 2015, Task Force Gunfighter (1-1 Attack Reconnaissance Battalion and additional assets from the 1st Combat Aviation Brigade) completed a successful National Training Center (NTC) rotation, destroying the largest number of enemy forces by an Aviation unit in recent memory and receiving positive feedback from the trainers and observers due in large part to the advantages provided by Fort Riley's resources. Since returning to Fort Riley following their NTC rotation, they continue to execute a retraining plan based upon after-action review

comments at NTC while sharing training lessons learned across the Army.

Task Force Gunfighter consisted of 14 AH-64D Apache helicopters, six UH-60M Blackhawks, three UH-60 medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) aircraft, three CH-47 Chinooks, and nearly 400 Soldiers. Task Force leaders understood how to solve complex problems and its Soldiers were highly trained. Both were prepared to engage an unpredictable enemy in a challenging environment by leveraging Fort Riley's live, virtual, and constructive training facilities to include the Douthitt Digital Multi-Purpose Range Complex (DMPRC) and the training resources at the Smoky Hill training area to ready their formations.

Live Training at Fort Riley

To replicate the austere environment the Gunfighters would encounter at NTC, they conducted METL focused training during a field training exercise (FTX) in April 2015. The Task Force focused on three METL tasks – conduct mission command, coordinate operational area security, and conduct sustainment operations. With 14 helicopters located in the tactical assembly area, the unit emplaced access control points, conducted mounted patrols, and initiated additional force protection measures to defend the formation from enemy attacks. While the command post (CP) controlled all operations, the companies

conducted multi-echelon training down to the lowest level. They trained on a wide variety of tasks to include maintaining aircraft and vehicles in the field, forward arming and refueling point procedures, field feeding, first aid, and responding to an attack. The Gunfighters conducted helicopter gunnery at DMPRC and completed objective METL tasks - conduct offensive operations; perform intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance integration; as well as conduct reconnaissance. The DMPRC provided a flexible environment permitting live fire engagements that successfully exercised crew and platoon level gunnery skills. The Apache crews were challenged with stationary and moving targets in the open terrain and within mock urban areas requiring crew/platoon coordination to engage targets using a combination of hover, running, and diving fires. Although weather and other factors challenged the aviation gunnery portion of the FTX, the staff at DMPRC remained flexible and often adjusted hours to allow leaders to maximize training. Over a period of two weeks, the Gunfighter's Apache crews effectively employed all AH-64D weapon systems and firing modes on the battlefield to meet the commander's objective training tasks.

Through May and June 2015, Task Force Gunfighter used the extensive maneuver areas on Fort Riley and the surrounding



training areas to prepare their leaders and Soldiers for decisive action operations at NTC. Apache, Blackhawk, and Chinook pilots focused on training tactical flight tasks to refine tactics, techniques, and procedures to mass fires at decisive points, air assault ground forces to positions of advantage on the battlefield, and conduct MEDEVAC of simulated casualties. During Victory Week, the culmination of home station training prior to deployment to NTC, the Gunfighter's Apache crews conducted a company level combined arms live fire exercise at DMPRC where joint terminal attack controllers (JTAC) integrated their fires with ground force small arms fires, artillery fires, and Air Force close air support aircraft.



by this training center are the ability to conduct 360 degree weapons and tactics training at the company level as well as resourcing external assets to create more robust training packages.



Building on the decisive action collective training conducted within the Fort Riley training area, Smoky Hill provides access to training enablers such as the Kansas ARNG 284th Air Support Operations Squadron JTACs and the myriad of Air Force

train and instill the importance of effective coordination measures.

The proximity of the range complex is an added bonus in that it allows aviation units

to conduct training with no stopover for refuel, yet provides enough distance to challenge mission command for over-the-horizon missions. An additional resource within Smoky Hill is the unmanned aircraft system (UAS) presence that operates in the military operations area and enables manned-unmanned teaming to conduct the movement to contact, attack, reconnaissance, and security tasks essential to effective decisive action training. Attack companies leveraged this resource on three different occasions to maneuver while working with JTACs and fixed wing aircraft and utilizing team employment tactics in support of a ground maneuver force in contact with an opposing force. Overall, the Smoky Hill environment provides invaluable training for ground, rotary-wing, UAS, and fixed-wing assets to achieve the common end-state of better prepared American warfighters.



Live Training at Smoky Hill

In addition to the vast training resources on Fort Riley, 1st Infantry Division (1ID) units can leverage nearby areas to train their forces on wartime tasks. The Kansas Air National Guard's (ARNG) Smoky Hill Weapons Range Complex located approximately 60 miles west of Fort Riley provides over 100 tactical targets and an electronic warfare range within a 51 square mile training area. The advantages provided

and Joint and Coalition Special Operations Force elements that use this unique training area. This added element provides realistic and challenging training for aviators and the opportunity to conduct air ground operations with Kansas ARNG and non-traditional units operating aircraft such as the A-10, F-16, AC-130, and B-1 that utilize the range on a daily basis. Incorporating them into planning allows for more realistic synchronization of firepower and helps

Virtual and Constructive Training at Fort Riley

Task Force Gunfighter leveraged multiple virtual and constructive platforms at Fort Riley to train leaders and Soldiers for decisive action operations at the mission training complex (MTC). The MTC has extensive capabilities to train the mission command systems necessary to succeed in complex environments. Over the year preceding their NTC rotation, Soldiers attended individual and collective courses at the MTC. The courses ranged from learning specific systems, such as the command post of the future, to executing CP functions as a complete staff.



For two weeks in June 2015, Task Force Gunfighter executed its culminating training event before leaving for NTC. The Gunfighters established their CP at the MTC along with company CP for the Apache, Blackhawk, Chinook, MEDEVAC, and support companies. The MTC's infrastructure and personnel facilitated task force and company level mission planning, rehearsals, and execution. Each of these events was followed by detailed after-action reviews. Over two weeks, Task Force Gunfighter replicated all the mission sets they expected to encounter at the NTC. Staff and companies received valuable training on how to recognize event triggers based on expected enemy contact and then massing Apache fires at decisive points to inflict maximum destruction on the enemy. Multiple daily missions such as MEDEVAC, air movement, and air assaults served as a rehearsal for the NTC. At the command group's direction, the MTC injected battle

drills and enemy contact to challenge the staff and companies forcing leaders to employ mission command while countering an unpredictable enemy. The Gunfighters set the conditions for the NTC while executing this culminating training event.

While the companies and staff were finalizing training at the MTC, aircrews used Apache, Blackhawk, and Chinook flight simulation devices to maintain individual proficiency. Additionally, platoons and companies executed attacks, movement to contacts, air movements, air assaults, and MEDEVAC collective missions in the Aviation Combined Arms Tactical Trainer while linked with the MTC, allowing the staff to track missions, provide guidance, and execute mission command.

Conclusion

Task Force Gunfighter leveraged training resources at Fort Riley to fight and win

in the demanding environment of the NTC, destroying a significant percentage of the opposing forces and providing focused support to ground forces. The large number of enemy forces destroyed and positive feedback from the observer/coaches/trainers was a direct reflection of the readiness achieved at home station. A combination of live, virtual, and constructive resources at Fort Riley and nearby Smoky Hill ensured the Gunfighters were ready to execute wartime missions in a decisive action environment at the NTC. Soldiers and leaders were ready, validating Fort Riley as the best place to train, live, deploy from, and come home to. Following NTC, Gunfighter elements continued a retraining plan using the Fort Riley training resources and incorporating the trainers' after-action review comments to better prepare for future operations anywhere in the world.



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Acronym Reference

1ID - 1st Infantry Division	MEDEVAC - medical evacuation
ARNG - Air National Guard	METL - mission essential task list
CP - command post	MTC - mission training complex
DMPRC - Digital Multi-Purpose Range Complex	NTC - National Training Center
FTX - field training exercise	UAS - unmanned aircraft system
JTAC - joint terminal attack controller	

