



AN ESSENTIAL LINK

The Aviation Captains Career Course and the Combat Training Centers

By CPT David M. Volz

As Army Aviation deployments continue to draw down, the combat training center's (CTC) aggressor forces are the Army's principle means of executing large scale, force-on-force operations and validating training objectives. The professional military education (PME) courses, specifically the Aviation Captains Career Course (AVCCC), remain a primary means of educating future company commanders in the doctrinal foundation necessary to train their units. The three domains of leader development—institutional, operational, and self-developmental—when balanced, coalesce to ensure that our officers stand ready to effectively lead their organizations. Unfortunately, the officers attending these courses often demonstrate doctrinal knowledge and training management deficits that significantly impact their ability to maximize their unit's combat potential. As Army Aviation makes its transition from years of extended counterinsurgency (COIN) operations to large scale combined arms maneuver, the officers who will lead this effort need the instruction and coaching provided by the coordinated efforts of the AVCCC and the CTCs to correct these deficiencies.

Adapting to the transition from COIN operations experienced in Iraq and

Afghanistan to the more complex and conventional engagements stressed in decisive action environments, the AVCCC underwent a re-design over the last year. In conjunction with the AVCCC's academic changes, the United States Army Aviation Center of Excellence (USAACE) leadership directed a closer relationship between the AVCCC's Small Group Instructors (SGI) and the combat training center's observers/coaches/trainers (OCT). The intent of this association is to create a symbiotic relationship between the personnel of the organization that teach doctrine and training management and those who evaluate and critique unit implementation in the rigors of the CTC simulated combat environment. This places the AVCCC SGI in a position where he is able to observe, first hand, rotational unit strengths and deficiencies that might be brought back to the classroom and incorporated as changes to improve the AVCCC program of instruction. The exchange also keeps the CTC's OCTs current on doctrine, training management, and other concepts currently being presented in USAACE PME.

Earlier this year, the first SGI served as a National Training Center (NTC) OCT augmentee with the Eagle (Aviation) Observer Team. The plan is to continue

augmenting the CTCs with SGIs so that they see and understand unit mission planning, preparation, and execution from an OCT's perspective and build upon that relationship in order to allow the AVCCC to maintain relevancy in the preparation of capable Aviation company commanders. Additionally, the AVCC; the OCT teams at the NTC, Joint Readiness Training Center, and Joint Multinational Readiness Center; and the USAACE Directorate of Training and Doctrine, responsible for the AVCCC and all other USAACE PME program of instruction and Army Aviation Doctrine, conduct scheduled video teleconferences to share current and emerging doctrinal information, individual unit trends that might reflect institutional training deficiencies, and changes required to better refine the Aviation officers and future commander PME. This cooperative relationship between the CTCs and the AVCCC standardizes the areas in which the force receives emphasis and enables instructors to address observed doctrinal deficiencies quickly, thus bridging the gap between doctrinal understanding and operational execution. The intent is to develop an Aviation company commander who understands Army doctrine and unit training management and is, therefore, better prepared to train his unit for combat.

The relationship between the CTCs and the AVCCC allows both organizations to benefit from the other's developmental domain. Students attending PME courses frequently state that unit application of Army Aviation principles rarely align with current doctrine. Yet, from observation, most students are not familiar with Army doctrine or the application of unit collective training. As a result, the increased emphasis on cooperation between the CTCs and AVCCC is intended to correct this training deficiency with more emphasis on doctrinal aspects of decisive action operations and preparing and conducting unit collective training events. In the short time span that this initiative

now intensely focuses on this aspect, ensuring that students undergo multiple planning iterations using troop leading procedures. This change, made in parallel with the Maneuver Captains Career Course, further aligns the two captain's career course programs of instruction and will assist the OCTs as they continue to observe and coach units undergoing CTC training rotations.

The CTCs also observed a fundamental disparity between Aviation officers' capabilities to conduct analog and digital battle tracking and planning. Again, the AVCCC corrected for this observation in the new program of instruction to ensure

gaps and collective training capabilities and addressing them with future Aviation company commanders. Following 15 years of COIN operations, an evaluation of potential future threats to national interest, and while not ruling out a continuation of COIN operations, PME has shifted to bring doctrine involving the application of large scale maneuver forces back to the forefront. The AVCCC requires its students to plan every type of major aviation operation in a decisive action environment. While student input is important, Aviation officer PME does not rely solely on student critiques to identify and fix course deficiencies in subsequent classes. Rather, regular communication between SGIs and OCTs allows the AVCCC to make almost instantaneous course adjustments to correct deficiencies identified during the practical application of warfighting skills at the CTCs.

Constant communication and coordination between the CTCs and the AVCCC enable SGIs and OCTs to focus on doctrinally correct institutional instruction and operational application. Ultimately, this relationship will benefit our Aviation organizations by creating and then continuing to coach Aviation officers as they progress into and through their commands and staff time. These Army leaders must display critical thinking but must also understand the doctrine of decisive action operations. Continue fostering of this relationship will create well-rounded leaders capable of leading our nation's greatest asset – our Soldiers.



has been enacted, there have been numerous benefits of the CTC and AVCCC cooperative relationship. For instance, OCTs noted that Aviation officers do not always understand how to implement troop leading procedures in aviation operations, even though it is listed in almost every mission essential task list. They communicated this observation to the AVCCC in an effort to affect the courses' emphasis and correct the shortcoming. The AVCCC redesign

AVCCC students demonstrate proficiency with analog planning, monitoring, and executing combat capabilities before they proceed to using digital systems thus affording the CTCs and the AVCCC the opportunity to emphasize the same areas in both the instructional and operational domains.

This relationship between the CTCs and the AVCCC enables a quicker turnaround between observing doctrinal knowledge

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Acronym Reference

AVCCC - Aviation Captains Career Course	PME - professional military education
CTC - combat training center	SGI - small group instructors
NTC - National Training Center	USAACE - United States Army Aviation Center of Excellence
OCT - observers/coaches-trainers	

