

What's Old ... Is New Again:

Multi-Functional Aviation Decisive Action Training Environment

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Upon redeploying from Operation Enduring Freedom in November 2014, 1-229th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion (ARB), 16th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) received an order to prepare to assume the I Corps Contingency Response Force (CRF) mission beginning in October 2015. The CRF mission requires the 1-229th ARB Tigersharks to operate in a decisive action (DA) fight under expeditionary conditions from land or sea. Because 16th CAB is aligned with the Pacific Command (PACOM) area of responsibility (AOR), the Brigade is focused on training to overcome the unique challenges of fighting, communicating, maintaining, and sustaining on or near water and in close proximity to a near-peer competitor.

This alignment presents an entirely different set of challenges for an aviation organization that has trained to succeed in Afghanistan and Iraq. In response to this "new" problem-set, the 1-229th ARB developed a rigorous, nine-month training plan that would ensure the unit was ready to adopt the CRF mission at the beginning of Fiscal Year 2016 while remaining nested within 7th Infantry Division's (ID) overall training strategy, referred to as the Integrated Training Strategy (ITS), and remain a global responsive unit. The 1-229th ARB plans and trains alongside each of the 7th ID's major subordinate commands utilizing an expanded crawl, walk, run methodology. By planning and executing training events corresponding with the seven gates of the ITS, 16th CAB ensures it will be mission-ready and fully-integrated with all of the 7th ID's units.

The 1-229th ARB leadership immediately identified three key tactical objectives

for succeeding as the CRF in the PACOM AOR. These were: maneuver the AH-64E against sophisticated air defense (AD) threats, counter or destroy AD threats, and fight through to accomplish the mission. The unit recognized that it was not proficient at these tasks and leveraged the combined experience and knowledge of the officers, warrant officers, and non-commissioned officers to develop a training plan to educate all pilots and Soldiers to a collective base level of knowledge in the decisive action training environment.

ITS Gates 1-3: Decisive Action Training Program of Instruction

The first phase of the ITS (Gates 1-3) involved training company and staff aviators during a three-week DA program of instruction (POI) led by a cadre of trainers from the battalion and companies including the battalion master gunner and battalion aviation mission survivability officer and an instructor pilot from each company. The DA-POI consisted of one week of academics each on radar frequency threats; AH-64E aircraft survivability equipment/electronic warfare (ASE/EW) capabilities; and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) to defeat a myriad of weapon systems, EW platforms, and other theater-specific threats common to the PACOM AOR.

The DA-POI instructors directed academic training towards the selection and pairing of combat crews into two-aircraft teams while maximizing the effectiveness of

organic systems to defeat enemy AD assets. The Attack Weapons Team, has been the workhorse of AH-64 support of ground forces throughout the Global War on Terror. The DA-POI maintains the flexibility of a two-aircraft section in a hybrid threat/anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) environment but the training can be scaled in order to facilitate multiple sections, platoon, company or battalion-sized elements as mission requires. Ultimately, the goal is to train air mission commanders (AMC) to retain their section's freedom of maneuver and survivability in contested airspace.

The DA-POI enabled staff and company pilots to plan and execute missions against near-peer competitors. Trainers introduced company commanders and AMCs to the advanced AD and EW threats intrinsic to the CRF mission, the planning complexity of multi-section events, and the increased mission command challenge therein. Furthermore, pilots honed their individual skills to outmaneuver and defeat AD threats during simulated and live flights. Finally, to prepare for the likely scenario of a CRF company planning and executing missions independent of an aviation battalion or brigade staff, the training curriculum included lessons and exercises on company planning cell organization. At the end of the instruction, battalion instructors designed culminating training scenarios which forced air crews to synchronize attacks in task, purpose, and time in order to achieve maximum destruction

An AH-64E lifts from the tactical assembly area for a night live fire iteration.



against an array of targets without the aid of a robust aviation staff.

For many pilots, these exercises were their first exposure of their careers to DA threats and company planning cells. For the more senior aviators, the DA-POI was their first departure from the counterinsurgency (COIN) method of planning and conducting operations since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. In both cases, the DA-POI prepared staff, commanders, and aviators to plan and operate in the PACOM AOR against capable, well-equipped adversaries.

ITS Gates 4-5: Operation Arrowhead Hammer II

After completing the DA-POI, the battalion reorganized as a multifunctional aviation task force and deployed to Yakima Training Center (YTC) for Operation Arrowhead Hammer II (AH2). This exercise was a 3-2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) training event focused on DA operations in preparation for their upcoming National Training Center (NTC) rotation. Task Force Tigershark was headquartered by Headquarters Company/1-229th ARB with operations and logistics staff support from the 2-158th Assault Helicopter Battalion (AHB) and 46th Aviation Support Battalion. The resulting battalion training plan blended expeditionary aviation operations and mission command, air assault, air resupply, and attack reconnaissance operations into 3-2nd SBCT's overall training scheme. Task Force Tigershark was constantly manned by a rotation of 200 personnel, 62 vehicles, numerous aircraft maintenance shops, 6 UH-60M, and 5 AH-64E from every line and support company in 16th CAB.

Task Force Tigershark conducted all of its ground and air operations from a tactical assembly area (TAA) on Silica Drop Zone at YTC. Tactical Assembly Area Silica was co-located with the 296th Brigade Support Battalion in the 3-2nd SBCT Brigade Support Area (BSA). TF Tigershark's tactical planning and arrival at YTC simulated the introduction of the aviation task force into combat operations after 3-2nd SBCT had already expanded a lodgment following initial

entry into theater. Task Force Tigershark and 3-2nd SBCT shared local Class I, III, V, and VII* logistics support requirements. Any additional support arrived from the notional aerial point of debarkation, Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

The 3-2nd SBCT tasked TF Tigershark with support for three lanes that included company attack (offense), company defense (defense), and air assault and high value individual targeting (security). The AH-64E companies planned and participated in the company attack and security lanes while the UH-60M companies planned and participated in

basic life support equipment that had not been used regularly in over a year.

Task Force leadership encouraged each aviation company to be fully-integrated with their infantry company's mission planning and rehearsals. In addition to conducting troop leading procedures, the partnered units used these planning days to gain a shared understanding of the capabilities and limitations of each unit's organic equipment. For example, aviators rode along in Strykers during the company attack and defense mission rehearsals while infantrymen sat in the front seats of the AH-64E and



AH-64Es in the forward arming and refueling point at Tactical Assembly Area Silica receive fuel from 46th Aviation Support Battalion.

the defense and security lanes. The 3-2nd SBCT and TF Tigershark maneuvered against a live, hybrid-threat opposing force (OPFOR) from the 2-2nd SBCT in each lane. The company attack and defense lanes simulated a decisive action threat, while the security lane resembled a familiar, albeit more technologically and tactically-advanced, COIN threat.

Each line company from the 1-229th ARB and the 2-158th AHB completed three iterations of their respective lanes with infantry companies from each of the 3-2nd SBCT's battalions. Each rotation lasted 10 days, with a "day zero" administrative and setup day followed by three consecutive three-day operational rotations. Company footprints included tents, generators, heaters, and other

UH-60M helicopters to see the pilots' and gunners' battlefield perspectives and optics capabilities. In addition to achieving the pre-determined training objectives, the collaborative, company-level planning process enhanced the habitual relationship, camaraderie, and familiarity between the Soldiers and leaders of the 16th CAB and the 3-2nd SBCT.

Although companies from the 3-2nd SBCT conducted each lane one time, the aviation companies had three full iterations of each of their lanes as they supported each company. In order to maximize the training value of these iterations and encourage each company to employ their TTP from the DA-POI, each of the AH-64E and UH-60M missions became progressively

* Class I - rations; Class III - petroleum, oils, and lubricants; Class V - ammunition; Class VII - medical supplies.



more complex. While the actual OPFOR situation did not change for the infantry companies, TF Tigershark introduced sophisticated radar AD threats, heavily armored ground opposition, and more intricate enemy TTP on each objective. Crews integrated intelligence briefs, brigade unmanned aircraft system reconnaissance resources, and aviation mission planning system tools to generate requests for information and multiple courses of action. By the third iteration of each lane, AH-64E and UH-60M crews were flying masked routes based on threat restricted intervisibility (IV) plots, implementing joint fires platforms to suppress enemy AD threats, and ultimately outmaneuvering, engaging, or destroying their objectives prior to supporting the infantry companies as they executed their lanes.

One of the highlights of these missions was AH-64E deliberate engagement area (EA) development to defeat an overpowering armored and mechanized threat. Air crews utilized suppression of enemy air defense, tactical emplacement of direct fires, and single and two-ship maneuvers to shape a three-dimensional battlefield in its favor. Operation Arrowhead II was the first time Tigershark aviators had encountered or trained EA development in over a decade. The battalion-generated enemy threat

forced even the most senior aviators to rethink how they would approach a complex, mature enemy threat. As each iteration progressed, aviator and staff proficiency in the DA mission set rose to meet the new challenges. Recording and implementing the lessons learned

Lessons Learned - Integration with Ground Forces

Operation AH2 was the most extensive integration between conventional air and ground assets in the 16th CAB and 7th ID's histories. The close collaboration between aviation and ground planners



An AH-64E lands at an AAR site after completing a dry fire attack mission.

from each mission's after action review (AAR) is critical to the brigade's success in future exercises and operations as the I Corps CRF.

inspired unique training opportunities for the 3-2nd SBCT, 16th CAB, and mission-enablers participating in the operation. Because neither the 3-2nd SBCT nor 16th CAB had ever participated in a similar training exercise, each iteration of the lanes generated numerous AAR comments and lessons learned. Many lessons were learned during the 30 day rotation, such as the importance of airspace deconfliction, but, the most distinct lesson each company encountered was in planning and executing mutually supportive fires and maneuver.



A/5-20 Commander gives his commanders intent to his company and AH-64E aviators from A/1-229 ARB.

Even disregarding differences in unit TTP, ground and aviation maneuver leaders entered the exercise without a clear understanding of each unit's capabilities, limitations, and doctrinal role in a DA fight. Side-by-side planning ensured air and ground assets understood each others' capabilities and roles and positively altered unit TTP. For example, without aviation assets, Stryker units opposing an armored threat would approach an



IV line, dismount troops with anti-tank weaponry to scout forward, remount their Strykers and proceed to the next IV line. AH-64E crews ensured their advanced optics and weapons payload were leveraged on the attack lane to scout beyond ground force IV lines and neutralize mounted and dismounted enemy threats. Ground forces effected the battlefield by suppressing and destroying enemy AD threats during forward movement. The result was the ground force commander dismounted troops less often and neutralized his objective with greater efficiency and fewer casualties. Similarly, aviation assets had greater freedom of maneuver and aviators were able to maximize the use of their airframe. On the defense lane, UH-60M crews were able to deliver dismounted troops forward of enemy lines to exploit weaknesses beyond the forward line of troops. In turn, the ground force commanders maneuvered their forces to destroy AD threats and secured the airspace for UH-60M and AH-64E helicopters to loiter, provide resupply, or screen enemy avenues of approach. This increased shared understanding between combat arms leaders was essential to planning and executing missions to defeat a near-peer competitor.

ITS GATE 6: ASE Lanes & Gunnery

In October of 2015, 1-229th ARB deployed to the Idaho Army National Guard's Orchard Combat Training Center (OCTC) to conduct the unit's first ever aerial gunnery aligned with standards established in the Army Aviation Gunnery manual. This gunnery, combined with training missions against live radar emitters on an electronic warfare range at nearby Mountain Home Air Force Base, served as the battalion's culminating training event prior to deploying to the NTC in early 2016.

During this training event, air crews completed basic and advanced aerial gunnery tables ranging from individual aircraft through platoon-level missions with battalion mission command. Simultaneously, companies not executing gunnery tables planned, rehearsed, and executed attack missions against a theater ballistic missile (TBM)



View from a 2/3 Stryker from a 1-229th downed aviation recovery team Soldier.

site protected by an integrated AD network. Crews again adopted the crawl-walk-run methodology in fighting these live systems by going through academics on radar threats and specific defeat techniques from the battalion aviation mission survivability officer and the 1-2nd SBCT Brigade Aviation Officer. Next, crews flew single- or two-ship missions to gain familiarity with in-cockpit indications and specific avoidance TTPs. Finally, upon receipt of mission orders from the battalion headquarters, the company planned, briefed, and executed platoon-level (four AH-64E) attacks not in close proximity to ground forces in order to destroy the

TBMs while countering the AD threat. Each company developed different methods to counter the AD network protecting the missiles, but proficiency in company-level mission planning and execution, as well as execution of mission command at company and battalion headquarters rose visibly throughout the training exercise.

As a culmination of the battalion's training in Idaho, each company planned and executed a platoon-plus sized Gunnery Table 12 at the OCTC. This mission again required an attack not in close proximity to ground forces and stressed airborne mission



command by integrating a ZSU-23-4 live emitter adjacent to the gunnery range. Crews were forced to call for fire from air and ground systems to defeat this threat before being able to maneuver against the armor column they were sent to destroy.

ITS GATE 7: NTC 16-04 (DA)

While the 1-229th ARB was ultimately relieved of its CRF requirement, the battalion turned its focus to an upcoming DA rotation at the NTC. After completing staff-oriented training at the Leader Training Program and further training and rehearsals at home station, the battalion deployed to “Atropia” as a maneuver task force alongside elements from 3rd Cavalry Regiment (3CR). The battalion task force fought against a hybrid / neer-peer motorized infantry threat, and regularly accounted for the majority of the regiment’s assessed battle damage. The task force successfully executed requirements from 3CR to provide attack, reconnaissance, security, and sustainment operations in zone while also executing out-of-sector attacks assigned by 3CR’s higher headquarters, the 28th Infantry Division.

This dual role for the task force highlighted a unique requirement emerging in Army Aviation – to be able to operate as a



A simulated Fallen Angel (UH-1) is recovered off of the objective by a combined 2/3 Infantry and 1-229th ARB DART team.

maneuver element for one or multiple units, while also serving higher echelons in a more traditional fire support role. As Army Aviation continues to redefine its role on today’s battlefield, leaders at battalion and brigade levels must reinforce our ability to shape deep, while also providing close effects for the ground commander. By focusing on a gated training strategy which links crew qualification to company and battalion collective task proficiency, we will

deliver the best possible support not only to companies and platoons in contact, but also provide necessary responsiveness at the operational level.



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Acronym Reference

3CR - 3 rd Cavalry Regiment	EW - electronic warfare
A2/AD - anti-access/area denial	ID - infantry division
AAR - after action review	IV - intervisibility
AD - air defense	ITS - integrated training strategy
AH2 - Operation Arrowhead Hammer II	NTC - National Training Center
AHB - assault helicopter battalion	OCTC - Orchard Combat Training Center
AMC - air mission commander	OPFOR - opposing force
AOR - area of responsibility	PACOM - Pacific Command
ARB - attack reconnaissance battalion	POI - program of instruction
ASE - aircraft survivability equipment	SBCT - Stryker brigade combat team
BSA - brigade support area	TAA - tactical assembly area
CAB - combat aviation brigade	TBM - theater ballistic missile
COIN - counterinsurgency	TF - task force
CRF - contingency response force	TTP - tactics, techniques, and procedures
DA - decisive action	YTC - Yakima Training Center
EA - engagement area	

