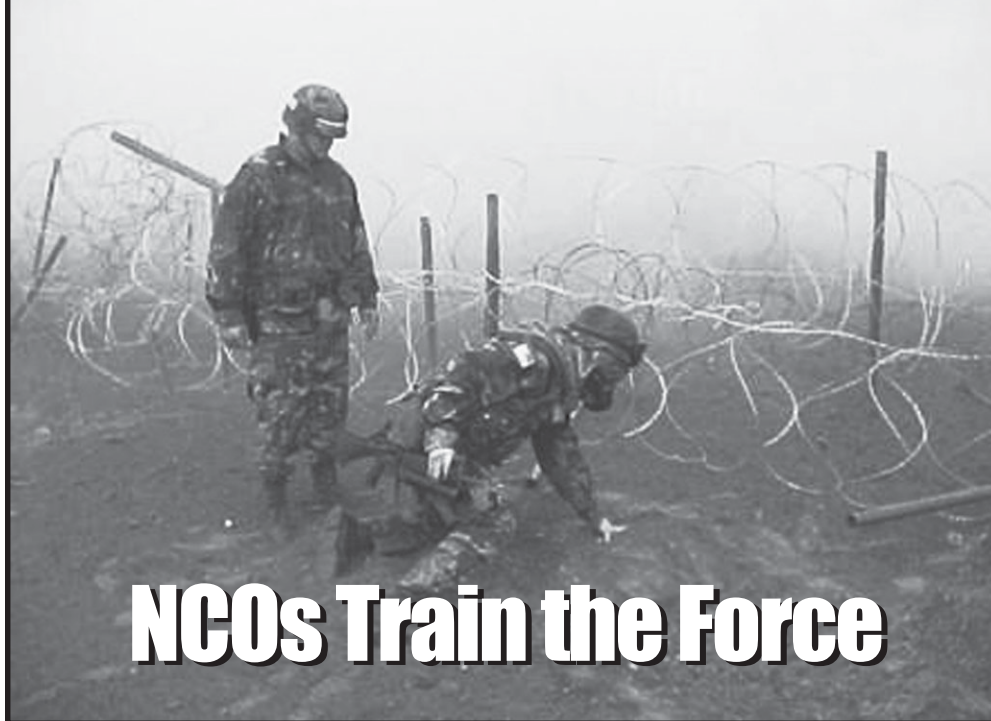




NCOs Train the Force

By Captain Maycros I. Baez

"United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) mobilizes, trains, prepares for deployment, and deploys units required to expand the Army to meet commander in chief (CINC) requirements. When directed, FORSCOM demobilizes units no longer needed to meet war or other national emergency requirements."

*—FORSCOM/ARNG/USAR Regulation 350-2,
Reserve Component Training*

The observer-controller/trainer (OC/T) noncommissioned officers (NCOs) are the backbone of the U.S. Army's Active Component (AC)/Reserve Component (RC) program. Responsible for the training, mobilization, and deployment of RC units, these NCOs are the silent heroes who ensure that nothing but highly trained soldiers augment and replace AC units on the frontline. The combat readiness and successful performance of RC units on the battlefield directly reflect the OC/T's enormous impact on their readiness. The OC/T's firsthand involvement in RC training directly supports the FORSCOM mission and has enhanced the Army's capability to fight and defeat the enemy around the world.

An OC/T, by definition, is a soldier tasked to provide administrative control, evaluate task performance, and give constructive feedback to participants during a training exercise. In reality, NCOs serving as OC/Ts are responsible for far more than teaching, coaching, and mentoring RC soldiers. Tasked with training, mobilizing, and deploying units to augment the U.S. Army on the battlefield, the OC/T NCOs are at the heart of the AC/RC program.

The vast majority of the AC forces are deployed around the globe in support of combat, peacekeeping, and humanitarian missions. RC forces play a critical role in homeland security and support military operations overseas. Federalized RC units support and

replace AC elements on the ground with their equipment, technical/tactical competence, and motivated soldiers eager to execute their missions. These RC units are a combat multiplier to the AC and a critical asset to the U.S. Army.

In 1992, after the first Gulf War, Congress mandated a FORSCOM training program requiring that AC OC/Ts be



An AC NCO conducts an after-action review with Charlie Company, 682d Engineer Battalion.

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An OC/T evaluates a Minnesota Army National Guard soldier during engineer qualification tables before deployment to Kosovo.

assigned to the training support brigades (TSBs) to monitor and train RC units and ensure their combat readiness. The OC/T's ultimate goal in this arduous backstage work is the TSB commander's certification of the unit as combat-ready and the certainty that the trained unit will magnify combat power on the front line.

The OC/Ts are the strongest link between the AC and RC, so only the best candidates are chosen for this duty. The NCOs serving in these positions are considered the most proficient and qualified soldiers within their duty military occupational specialty (MOS). The NCOs should be branch-certified with modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) leadership for 18-24 months to be selected. Sergeants first class who have successfully served in MTOE units as platoon sergeants, operations sergeants, and in many cases as first sergeants, are the NCOs typically assigned to this 3-year duty. These NCOs possess a wealth of knowledge and experience and quickly become an invaluable asset to the RC units they support. Doctrinally sound, proven leaders and professional soldiers, OC/Ts are the most effective tools to sustain and maintain the combat readiness of RC units.

Once selected, OC/Ts undergo a series of certifications before conducting hands-on instruction with RC units. The TSBs also follow a training plan to maintain their OC/Ts' proficiency at training, coaching, and mentoring soldiers. Annual training requirements ensure that the OC/Ts are experts on the latest doctrinal developments and the most modern equipment. Aside from the primary responsibility with the RC, OC/Ts are routinely tasked to augment the combat training centers and conduct training/certification exercises for AC units on MOS-specific training. Their expertise, experience, and professionalism make these NCOs the most efficient and versatile training tool FORSCOM has to accomplish its RC mission. In contrast with combat training center observer-controllers (OCs), OC/Ts in TSBs provide continuous coverage

for their assigned units. They are involved in each step, from the home-station planning and preparation phases to the execution and after-action reviews after the training event, as well as the planning and execution of follow-on training indicated by shortfalls in the initial training event.

This habitual relationship with specific RC units is imperative, ensuring maximum training effectiveness during the inactive duty training (IDT) conducted one weekend a month. The RC units have limited training opportunities to attain their expected proficiency level, so the unit assistants and the OC/Ts must orchestrate training events to ensure that they are effective and meet the unit's training needs during the 2- or 3-day IDT period. The average unit only has 39 days a year to train and prepare for its wartime mission. Nevertheless, the soldiers of these units are expected to perform and accomplish their mission whenever called into action. RC units understand their responsibility on the battlefield and recognize the importance of maintaining their personnel and equipment readiness at all times, so they count on their assigned OC/T for training support and oversight. Every training opportunity must meet the time restriction and the commander's intent and provide the desired training effect and valuable feedback to the unit.

Dedicated NCOs serving as OC/Ts often go above and beyond requirements when conducting hands-on training. They are the primary trainers and subject matter experts on tactics and the employment of military equipment. Sergeants first class who would traditionally train platoon-sized elements, train companies and their staffs. OC/Ts are typically responsible for three to five RC companies. Their scope of responsibility includes, but is not limited to, oversight on—

- Training.
- Mobilization.

- Certification and qualification on weapons systems.
- Overall equipment readiness.

OC/Ts also help senior leadership face challenges and solve problems that might interfere with mission accomplishment.

The OC/Ts assigned to 1st Battalion (Training Support) (Engineer), 345th Regiment (1/345th), at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, are responsible for twelve RC engineer battalions and detachments in the southeastern United States. As part of the 5th Brigade, 87th Division (Training Support), these NCOs are fully engaged in the training, mobilization, deployment, and redeployment of units supporting operations around the globe. The 1/345th has had a direct impact on operations such as Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom and the Kosovo Force (KFOR) peacekeeping mission. These engineer units range from combat mechanized and corps wheeled engineer battalions to firefighting detachments. The OC/Ts face a challenge as each of the supported units has different training needs and missions on the battlefields around the world.

NCOs serving as OC/Ts are subject matter experts in their MOSs, top-notch trainers, and role models to the RC units they support. Instructors at the Observer-Controller Academy at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California, state that OCs must—

- **BE**—professional, technically and tactically proficient, and the example.
- **KNOW**—the unit, the rules of engagement (ROE), and the standards.
- **DO**—provide observations, show cause and effect, and facilitate learning through the after-action review process by providing purpose and direction.

The OC/T NCOs are the backbone of the U.S. Army's AC/RC program. The combat readiness and successful performance of RC units on the battlefield directly reflect the OC/T's enormous impact on their training. The OC/T's firsthand involvement in RC training directly supports the FORSCOM mission and has enhanced the Army's capability to fight and defeat the enemy around the world.

Endnote

FORSCOM/ARNG/USAR Regulation 350-2, *Reserve Component Training*, 27 October, 1999, Chapter 1, Reserve Component (RC) Training Mission, Paragraph 1-1, page 3.



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