



News from the Front

Achieving Unity of Effort

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A Case Study in Leadership

35th Combat Aviation Brigade Perspective

The National Guard, 35th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) Headquarters (HQ), is from Sedalia, Missouri, with the 2-211th General Support Aviation Battalion (GSAB) in Utah. The headquarters and three of its battalions, the GSAB, the 1-108th Assault Helicopter Battalion and the 935th Aviation Support Battalion, deployed to Kuwait in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (OIR) with the headquarters in the fall of 2018. Brigade commander, COL Charles D. Hausman and CSM Richard. J. Acosta also led aviation task forces from the 1st Infantry Division, 4th Infantry Division, 3rd Cavalry, 10th Mountain, an Italian, and Spanish aviators.

During their deployment the lessons learned were:

- 1) Deployments in a dispersed environment require junior leaders to step up. Senior leaders must take a vested interest in identify and mentoring junior leaders to set the conditions to ensure they have the knowledge, skills, and attributes to operate under mission orders and “alone and unafraid.”
- 2) Physical distance and weather makes sustainment problematic in this operational environment (OE). A strong Support Operations (SPO) team is critical to push parts as fast as possible to keep aircraft flying.
- 3) The modified table of organization and equipment should be modified for units deploying to dispersed OEs like OIR. The maintenance soldiers and test pilots must be stationed throughout the area of operation; not having this diverse capability can constrain flexibility should a contingency arise.
- 4) The use of the force tracking number (FTN) improves the sourcing and tracking of request for

forces and rotational force requirements throughout the deployment process and enhances force-closure reporting. However, when deploying units based on a FTN for one mission, with knowledge they will perform other missions adds to pre-deployment staff work. To mitigate this flexibility should be built into the mission using “on-order” or “be prepared to” language to ensure the unit can adequately prepare.

- 5) Leadership, team-building, standards and discipline are critical to integrating cross-leveled soldiers and deploying as a single cohesive team.

Before the 35th CAB deployed, the leadership arranged for the National Guard Bureau’s Mission Command Training Support Program, Mobile Training Team (MTT) to train the brigade staff. This was excellent training and we recommended it to our battalions, said COL Hausman. The skills learned during the MTT were applied to real-world staff challenges—deploying 1,500 trained and mission-ready soldiers and their rolling-stock to a combat zone.

The 35th CAB deployed half-way around the world. That was the easy part. The hard part for COL Hausman and CSM Acosta, was molding these Soldiers from 15 different states into a cohesive team. To do this, they established a single standard operating procedure (SOP), a command presence that overcame soldiers’ natural habit of working through their previous chains of command and parent unit’s SOP, and enforced a single standard and discipline among the entire formation.

A U.S. Army Soldier surveys the ground from a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter at the Udairi Landing Zone, Camp Buehring, Kuwait, Feb. 9, 2019. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Emily Finn)

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The 60 days of post mobilization¹ training at Fort Hood, Texas (FHTX) enabled the whole formation to begin achieving unity and cohesiveness of a single command climate, and identify leaders. The dispersed OE required Soldiers to be out there “alone and unafraid,” said COL Hausman. CSM Acosta wanted to put the junior soldiers in a leadership role from the beginning. Pre-deployment preparations and the training at FHTX enabled senior leaders to identify and mentor junior soldiers for leadership positions they would fill in theater.

Leader development in the Army, especially after almost two decades of war, resulted in something CSM Acosta calls “rank maturity.” Soldiers, despite a junior rank on his/her uniform, routinely demonstrate their leadership abilities and thus earn the trust of the command team. National Guard Soldiers are unique from their active duty counterparts because they may not have the opportunity to stand in front of a formation as often, but many times in their civilian lives they hold positions of responsibility commensurate with a higher rank.

In preparation for deployment, the 35th CAB completed the Soldier Readiness Program (SRP) process to validate a Soldier’s ability to deploy. Some states, such as Missouri, conducted a SRP as soon as they received their deployment order (about 18 months out). While many issues identified during the SRP can be resolved, sometimes soldiers have to be replaced. The brigade headquarters held a second SRP which was optimal to double-check the battle roster. The states that waited to the last minute to hold their SRP generated addition churn with late additions to the battle roster, which also meant less time to build and mold the team.

The 35th is dispersed among 13 different sites in four countries in the U.S. Army Central area of responsibility. They have command relationships with CJTF-OIR and to TF Spartan,² currently led by the 34th Infantry Division.

Units that deploy to Kuwait and even Iraq tend to move through reception, staging, onward-movement, and integration fairly efficiently. For the 35th CAB

¹ Post mobilization for National Guard and Reserve units is after the unit is on orders, or mobilized, but prior to their departure to go down-range.

² As of 2019, there are two TF Spartans in the CENTCOM AO: 34th ID and a Marine battalion with separate missions.

Second-person up

“The biggest lesson is talent management and figuring out the skill sets people have and who can do it more so than the rank. Those young soldiers that are exercising those traits tend to do well and they had the opportunity to exercise initiative here. It’s been a great learning opportunity and it’s been great to watch their success.”

~ COL Hausman ~

“It is very important to let the E4s and E5s take lead because the middle managers are the ones on the front lines. The E6s and E7s are so dispersed that the junior NCOs have to step up. If you don’t help them build confidence and help them get technically and tactically proficient, you will have holes in your operation, so you have to train them early.”

~ CSM Acosta ~



with Soldiers at so many remote locations, the standard two-week relief in place model is insufficient. Outgoing units, particularly National Guard or Reserve units that have a release from active duty date, have to move together, and delays—which can occur all too easily with bad weather—can result in minimal left-seat/right-seat with those knowledgeable of the lay of the land.

While deployed, the 35th CAB conducted offensive, defensive, and stability missions. Additionally, they were part of the building partner capacity effort with the Iraqis and Theater Security Cooperation with the Jordanians.



Soldiers from the 35th Aviation Brigade conduct medical evacuation training at Kuwait Naval Base, Kuwait, Feb. 21, 2019 (U.S. Army Reserve photo by Capt. Jerry Duong)

To offset the lack of an attack and reconnaissance battalion, the 35th CAB leveraged the offensive capabilities of the 4-4 CAB and their AH-64 Apache Air Weapons Team. The Apaches conduct deliberate strikes for Special Operations Joint Task Force-OIR. An element the 10th Mountain Division provides is an intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capability with the MQ-1 Predator³ unmanned aerial system or Gray Eagle.

Defensive missions took the form of armed overwatch during key leader engagements and convoy movement.

Because of the internally displaced persons that were in the Middle Euphrates River Valley, the 35th and their heavy lift capability, the CH-47 Chinook, also conducted stability missions.

³ The predator can function in a dual-role capacity-offensive and persistent ISR.

They moved personnel and equipment around the combined joint operations area. Many of these flights are between major hubs and smaller outlying bases that do not see fixed-wing aircraft on a frequent or routine basis.

The CAB supported ground commanders through the full range of military operations with 24/7 medical evacuation at seven locations and an Aerial Reaction Force of one UH-60 Black Hawk, one CH-47, and a platoon of infantry from the 101st Airborne Division TF Bastogne. The 35th has a tactical control command relationship with the infantry platoon.

Helicopters are highly complex machines and failing parts can result in the tragic death of the crew or bystanders on the ground. To ensure proper maintenance is conducted, two Supply Support Activities are maintained: one in Camp Arifjan, Kuwait and the other at Camp Taji, Iraq. Intra-theater travel is difficult, so getting the parts to the helicopter was a challenge despite the best intentions of the brigade’s SPO team.

“The biggest challenge is getting the part to the aircraft, not getting the part into theater.”

- COL Hausman -

“[The SPO] has been critical to setting up the ground lines of communication. Everywhere we land, the SPO shop has two or three soldiers that we call ‘parts expeditors,’” said COL Hausman.

Moving parts was not only hampered by ground or air movement and weather, but also by international borders. It takes 5-7 days to obtain a country clearance to cross a border and with the 35th in four different countries, there was a lot of paperwork being processed. The team tried to mitigate this by having a constant flow of clearance documentation working its way through the diplomatic process, so they could always move something once a week. Unfortunately, if the clearance is for Friday and a helicopter goes down on Saturday, then there is an inevitable delay.

The Theater Aviation Support Maintenance Group with a general support relationship to the 35th, liaised with the government contractor to coordinate maintenance contract support and the shipment of helicopters into and out of theater. As helicopters in Iraq perform about three rotations' worth of missions, there is always a flow of inbound and outbound aircraft.

Upon receipt of the Theater Provided Equipment (TPE), the 35th CAB identified that the TPD was not loaded into the Ground Combat Support System – Army. This caused secondary effects of not being able to order new parts for non-mission capable equipment. In order to overcome this deficit the 35th committed resources to input the TPE into the system and restore functionality of the equipment back to a fully mission capable status.

The 35th CAB Maintenance Test Pilots (MTP) were dispersed to the point of being one deep at remote locations. This created the potential to have a critical gap at a given location without the depth to maintain continuity should a contingency arise. To get the aircraft certified to fly missions, the 35th had to play a bit of a shell game to move MTPs around on a couple occasions.

Similarly, the dynamics of the Central Command OE is such that one company of Apaches and four Chinooks were sent to Afghanistan. With the dispersal of aircraft, so too are maintenance soldiers. Losing assets to another theater and being dispersed as they are for OIR constrains the 35th's flexibility to respond to major unforeseen events.

Team building was not only limited to the U.S. soldiers from fifteen different states. There were social events among the Spanish, Italians, and Americans and fortunately everyone had an intellectual curiosity about each other, said COL Hausman. Warfare characterized by international coalitions requires everyone, but especially among pilots who fly together in austere conditions, to establish rapport and build a team that is well in tune with each other.

Additional insights:

- A flight physical does not satisfy the deployment medical screen criteria.
- The brigade trained on the Command Post of the Future (CPOF), but CPOF is not used in theater.
- There are inconsistencies in medical screening and what one doctor considers a no-go, another doctor may call a go.
- Get someone trained to be a Foreign Disclosure Officer. There are 74 nations in the OIR coalition and disseminating *releasable* information is critical to a shared understanding of the OE.

The changing OE in OIR may cause more challenges for the aviation brigade in Iraq. Even the force structure in Kuwait is likely to change. Leadership and cognitive agility to solve problems is what ultimately carried the 35th CAB across the finish line and it is those traits the next CAB will rely upon to execute a dangerous mission in a manner that differs slightly from standard procedure.



Missouri Assistant Adjutant General Visits Middle East (Photo by Capt. Aaron Shaffer)