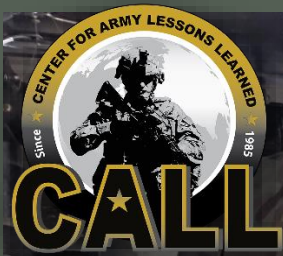


NEWS FROM THE FRONT

May 2019



Command Sergeant Majors' Perspective

Fighting with Afghan Fists: Insights from CSM Todd Sims

Command Sergeant Major, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and Operation Resolute Support

**MSG Nicholas Blevins
CALL Military Analyst (forward)**

Approved for Public Release
Distribution Unlimited



News from the Front:

Command Sergeant Majors' Perspective
Insights from CSM Todd Sims

Command Sergeant Major, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and Operation Resolute Support

DIGITAL VERSION AVAILABLE

A digital version of this CALL publication is available to view or download from the CALL website: <https://call.army.mil>

Reproduction of this publication is welcomed and highly encouraged.

FOLLOW CALL ON SOCIAL MEDIA



https://twitter.com/USArmy_CALL

<https://www.facebook.com/CenterforArmyLessonsLearned>

The Secretary of the Army has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business as required by law of the Department.

Unless otherwise stated, whenever the masculine or feminine gender is used, both are intended.

Note: Any publications (other than CALL publications) referenced in this product, such as Army Regulations (ARs), Field Manuals (FMs), and Technical Manuals (TMs), must be obtained through your pinpoint distribution system.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This News from the Front, a Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) publication, highlights Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Todd Sims' insights and observations during his deployment in support of Operation FREEDOM'S SENTINEL and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led RESOLUTE SUPPORT mission. The interview and unit information is provided solely by the CSM of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan on 2 December 2018.

The interview focused on these key topics:

1. The role of the CSM in performing duties under two named operations
2. Pre-deployment training
3. Successes and failures during their deployment
4. Working with NATO allies, and the future of performing missions as a combined force
5. Non-commissioned officer (NCO) and Soldier development while deployed

These are the key lessons and observations:

Preparedness. The biggest challenge was picking the right NCOs to assign to the staff. Battle staff training is key, as is sending NCOs to the Battle Staff NCO course. There is a lot better product from an NCO who understands the military decision-making process (MDMP) process.

Maintaining situational awareness. Everyone has to understand what is going on. Soldiers have to read the intelligence reports because the operating environment changes daily. If they do not have an understanding of the environment, they are not going to be value added.

Achieve balance. Soldiers have to find balance when conducting shift work. Leverage the 7-3-2 rule; try to get 7 hours of sleep, eat 3 meals a day, and spend 2 hours doing physical training and/or some kind of self-development.

These items address the adaptability and flexibility inherently needed in military operations. Additional details and insights are included within the base document.

Front Cover: CSM Todd Sims, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and Resolute Support Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations senior enlisted leader travels to Forward Operating Base Fenty, in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, to visit Soldiers assigned to Task Force No Mercy, Nov. 10, 2018. (U.S. Army photo by Lieutenant Colonel [LTC] Martin O'Donnell, 101st Airborne Division [Air Assault] Public Affairs)

In the final days of the most recent deployment with the “Screaming Eagles” 101st Airborne Division, CSM Todd Sims sat down with CALL to offer insights into the past nine months, as well as some good old fashioned NCO guidance.

After a tour in the Army National Guard, and a short stint in the Marine Corps, CSM Sims transitioned into the Active Army in 1993. CSM Sims has served in leadership positions at every level while rising up through the ranks. CSM Sims offered CALL insights to everyday life in Afghanistan, and how his team successfully executed their mission.

CSM Sims filled a variety of key positions and when asked how his roles differ to serving as the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) CSM, he bluntly described it as wearing four hats. He explained them as:

Hat 1) Task Force (TF) 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), the Division Headquarters, which also includes the 101st Sustainment Brigade and the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade.

Hat 2) United States National Support Element for Afghanistan, which coordinates all awards and administrative actions through Major General (MG) Andrew Poppas, Commander of the 101st Airborne Division.

Hat 3) Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Deputy Commanding General for Operations (DCG-O), United States Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A), MG Andrew Poppas.

Hat 4) Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations (DCOS OPS) Resolute Support (RS), MG Andrew Poppas



*CSM Todd Sims with MG Andrew Poppas in Kabul, Afghanistan, 04.12.2018;
Photo by CMDR Lesley Lykins*

Throughout the entirety of the deployment, the division headquarters’ primary focus remained on Afghanistan. CSM Sims further explained that his role as the Division CSM was different, due to having three brigades at home station as well as the two brigades in theater, though all participated in warfighting functions. Of the three brigades remaining at Fort Campbell, Kentucky (FCKY), one was preparing to deploy to Iraq while the other two maintained emphasis on focused readiness.

Despite the primary focus on the Afghan mission, CSM Sims continued to maintain touch points with the brigades at FCKY via (at minimum) quarterly video teleconferencing (VTC) with them. CSM Sims called the Brigade CSMs each month, once or twice, to keep informed about

what was going on back at home station. He remained abreast on what the division was doing back at Fort Campbell, and stayed connected to the FORSCOM CSM and XVIII Airborne Corps CSM.

CSM Sims felt confident that in the absence of division leadership, they had placed competent personnel at the rear, such that forward leaders could remain focused on the deployed units. He was pleased to later learn that those personnel at FCKY had effectively carried forward the good name of the 101st during their deployment. CSM Sims described the ability to maintain a forward focus as a luxury, citing what he called “very few issues” as a result of the quality of troops remaining at FCKY. He gave much credit to Brigadier General (BG) K. Todd Royer, the senior commander, and his senior enlisted advisors, CSM James Manning and CSM Jason Osborne. Put simply, they excelled at keeping the forces focused and ready, while helping prepare the 1st Brigade for deployment.

Pre-deployment Training

Prior to deployment, the 101st conducted three Warfighter exercises. These exercises were a training priority, and allowed the Screaming Eagles to hone their skills as a staff. The exercises focused on developing the staff in order to effectively execute the division’s wartime function. The 101st Warfighter exercises were heavily focused on integration and synchronization of staff functions to support the warfighter at the brigade level.

Fortunately, the 3rd Infantry Division (ID) had established a useful template for 101st operations prior to their arrival in theater. By way of comparison, when 3rd ID first began operations, they served more in a support role for the Combined Joint Operational Area in Afghanistan. General (GEN) John Nicholson, the previous USFOR-A and RS Commander, changed the structure and operationalized the 101st headquarters for the combat mission. This decision helped synchronize all the warfighting functions across Afghanistan, and in turn, focused the staff to better execute the mission.

CSM Sims repeatedly emphasized the importance of selecting the right NCOs to serve on the staff. It was his opinion that those NCOs should also be graduates of the Battle Staff NCO Course. The course helps identify the manuals and references used to conduct the operations process. While not mandatory, he felt the course gave NCOs a leg up on the difficulties of staff work that involved: the MDMP; creating products briefed to General Officers; and understanding the role they play in the operational environment. CSM Sims was able to attend the course twice himself, and felt that its graduates, on average, provide better products.

CSM Sims also stressed the importance of knowing his own role. In particular, he concluded that he had to figure out how to best fit within the staff. He recognized there are decision briefs and other staff actions where his influence and experience were needed most. As the Division CSM, he had the experience and ability to observe the staff throughout their processes. He felt he was there to help guide the ship if, or when, it strayed off course.

As the CSM, he admitted he was able to have very different conversations with the Commanding General. He saw the inside of the processes that the Chief of Staff and the

Operations Chief have with the Commander, and was present in many of the meetings to better understand their intent. This is essential to understanding the Commander's intent so CSM Sims can then go to the staff sections and give them advice accordingly. CSM Sims might say "Hey, that is not the Commander's intent, and he wants to attack it this way." By doing so, the Operations Sergeant Major (SGM) and CSM Sims were able to build trust amongst all the sections.

It was critical that the CSM was tied in with all the staff section SGMs, to ensure they were all thinking the same way. CSM Sims used his key leaders to let his SGM teammates know what the boss was thinking. This is how the division leadership was able to shape the staff. It was also key that all the SGMs bought in. Key to that was MG Poppas and CSM Sims making everyone feel they were part of the team. CSM continued to remind CALL that those three warfighter exercises were critical to develop that common level of trust amongst the SGMs and, to sum it up, said "CJ1 to CJ9, firing on all cylinders!"

Success and failures during their deployment

"Regardless who you are, every Soldier needs to know what's going on and understand the importance of why they are here." – CSM Sims

Understanding the current operational environment is a critical aspect of daily life while deployed in a combat zone. The inability to understand the operational environment makes an otherwise capable individual quickly irrelevant to the fight. Understanding the deployed environment gives the Soldier both a sense of purpose, and knowledge of their respective role. When he listened to senior leaders, beginning with the current USFOR-A and RS commander, GEN Austin "Scott" Miller, and his senior enlisted advisor, CSM Timothy Metheny, they always ask Soldiers the same question, "Why are you here?" The generalized answer is easy and usually sounds something like "protect America from another terrorist attack." This generalized response does not, however, identify the individual's role and purpose from an operational perspective. It is incumbent upon our Soldiers that they learn the mission, the "how" and "why" of their position, in order to translate their efforts into a force multiplier, or value added warfighter. CSM Sims is the type of leader to draw a comparison between advisors or trigger pullers, saying, "Regardless of who you are, every Soldier needs to know what's going on and understand the importance of why they are here."

The insights CSM Sims provided to CALL gives a view from the top. First, of the current situation and second, changes in Afghanistan. He stressed that Soldiers deploying still need to understand they are in a war zone. Quality of life has improved from living conditions and dining facilities however, there is still a daily threat. CSM Sims spoke highly of the Soldiers that protect the base, day in and day out. This includes Soldiers doing maintenance on aircraft, weapon systems, or collecting and analyzing intelligence to help better fight the enemy.

Serving Multiple Missions

CSM Sims partnered with the CSM of the Afghan Army, supporting the NATO-led RS mission. He had to know what was going on operationally, just like the CSM of the Afghan Army needed to know. CSM Sims also had to understand the differences operationally when supporting Operation FREEDOMS' SENTINEL and the USFOR-A mission, versus the NATO Operation RESOLUTE SUPPORT, which tied into his influence with the staff. He was able to guide their focus, and bring back information to MG Poppas, to keep everyone on the same page.

CSM Sims also highlighted working with our NATO partners and the differences they bring to the operation. Each country has its own national caveats that allow them to conduct different mission sets. They operate on their own national caveats, so our Soldiers need to understand what is allowed to be shared. The partners in the operations center might not be an American Soldier, but a Soldier from Italy, Germany, or 39 other countries. Understanding the operational environment, and being able to relay that information to them, goes a long way towards achieving success in each operation.

Soldiers that have previously deployed to Afghanistan remember kicking in doors or patrolling the valleys. Those operations still exist, but are now Afghan led. Some units might be assisting with certain aspects, but the majority are Afghan Forces providing the substance for all operations, or as CSM Sims says, "Fighting with Afghan Fists."

A lot of the success during the 101st deployment stemmed from the flexibility of the division staff. When 101st arrived in theater, GEN John Nicholson was the USFOR-A and RS commander. His philosophical approach was different than GEN Miller's. After GEN Miller took over, the division staff quickly adjusted to his operational design and ran with it. MG Poppas worked with his counterparts from other services and nations, and masterfully maintained the tempo without interruption.

Communication amongst the staff was key as well. CSM Sims credited many members of the operations section, as well as the intelligence section, with being plug and play enablers. They would work hand in hand on all levels, which allowed the unit to meet GEN Miller's intent and end state. It all started at the top with MG Poppas building the foundation, and allowing the staff sections to fully execute to the best of their ability. Shared knowledge and communicating across the Combined/Joint Operations Area (CJOA) from the top to the bottom proved vital to the successful deployment of the 101st.

No unit is perfect, and CSM Sims was the first to admit where 101st fell short. In the beginning of the 101st deployment, he pushed for a bigger role that involved the staff SGMs. The staff SGMs would end up being embedded with members of the Afghan Ministries of Defense. CSM Sims acknowledged that the Afghan Ministries needed more time to improve, but was confident that positive strides were made.

Important development for Soldiers and NCOs while deployed

CSM Sims was really impressed with how well the younger Soldiers on the staff were being developed. He recalled watching young troops briefing the Commanding General, and seeing him blown away by the troop's professionalism and quality of their products. This was a direct reflection of the NCO factor; sergeants and staff sergeants mentoring junior Soldiers to be a valued member of the team. He compared it to Soldiers in a line company, like in an Infantry or Military Police Company. CSM Sims said that cycle was great to watch.

CSM Sims explained a simple rule he used during the deployment, 7-3-2. Try to get 7 hours of sleep, eat 3 meals a day and spend 2 hours doing physical training and/or some kind of self-development. Soldiers have to find balance when conducting shift work, but how do they create that balance? If Soldiers are on shift for 12 hours, how do they maintain that 7-3-2 rule; what are they doing to maintain themselves physically and mentally? They still have to do it. Inside of that, how are they making themselves better? If they are working shifts, look to see how they can develop themselves by enrolling in college and/or take correspondence courses.



CSM Todd Sims, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and Resolute Support deputy chief of staff for operations senior enlisted leader, provides remarks as the keynote speaker during a Basic Leader Course graduation ceremony, Dec. 5, 2018, at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. (U.S. Army Photo by SGT Steven J. Lopez, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs)

CSM Sims said they got lucky because they had Basic Leaders Courses (BLC) for the past 9 months at Bagram Airfield. The development of young Specialists, to make them Sergeants, is a cycle that is critical to the Army. 101st also conducted monthly Leader Professional Development (LPD) classes

while deployed. CSM Sims credited his headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) First Sergeant for doing a phenomenal job, and making sure they stayed relevant with what was going on back at home station, and in the XVIII Airborne Corps, FORSCOM, and the Army.

The leader development model CSM Sims created for the units at home station was being implemented forward with the CSMs in Afghanistan, and via VTC for the leaders at Fort Campbell. This ensured everyone was getting the same information from him. He drew a contract with the CSMs the first time he came to the division. CSM Sims put a white board up and asked, "What do you want to learn from me?" He then wrote it all down, and set a contract with battalion (BN) and brigade (BDE) CSMs. It was that contract that allowed CSM Sims to continue to develop BN CSMs to be the next BDE CSM, or DIV CSM.

"If you're good at the basics, the old cliché 'shoot, move, communicate,' then you'll be successful in any mission." – CSM Sims

CSM Sims, being an 11-series Soldier, stressed the basics; knowing your fundamental job and being good at your MOS. "If you're good at the basics, the old cliché 'shoot, move, communicate,' then you'll be successful in any mission," said Sims. Master the basic fundamentals, and you are going to be good at what the Army asks you to do and what the Nation asks you to do.

Heading home and preparing for the next mission

The 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) will always be ready to answer the nation's call. It has never wavered in combat or other operations. CSM Sims follows a long line of highly dedicated and professional Division Command Sergeants Major that have served as a Screaming Eagle. He shared with CALL insights that all Soldiers should consider, saying "Feedback is a gift he learned a long time ago." Use products that people put out; they are the answers to the test. Almost everyone has done something before you, so why not learn from their mistakes and best practices. It has been documented, reviewed, and shared. Why not apply those lessons learned?

CSM Sims finished the interview by reflecting on being open minded. He mentioned there is some uncharted territory, especially if the Taliban come to the table and there is peace. CSM Sims asked "How are we going to continue to execute the mission with known terrorists' factions still operating in Afghanistan?" It will be interesting to watch how it plays out. "Never think you have all the answers since you've been here before. You have to study before you come back because it's a totally different environment."

"Air Assault"



MG Andrew Poppas, 101st Airborne Division commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Todd Sims, 101st senior enlisted leader, unfurl the division headquarters' colors, April 15, during a transfer of authority ceremony at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, and assume responsibility as the Resolute Support deputy chief of staff for operations.
Photo by SSG LERONE SIMMONS, 101st Airborne Division Public Affairs