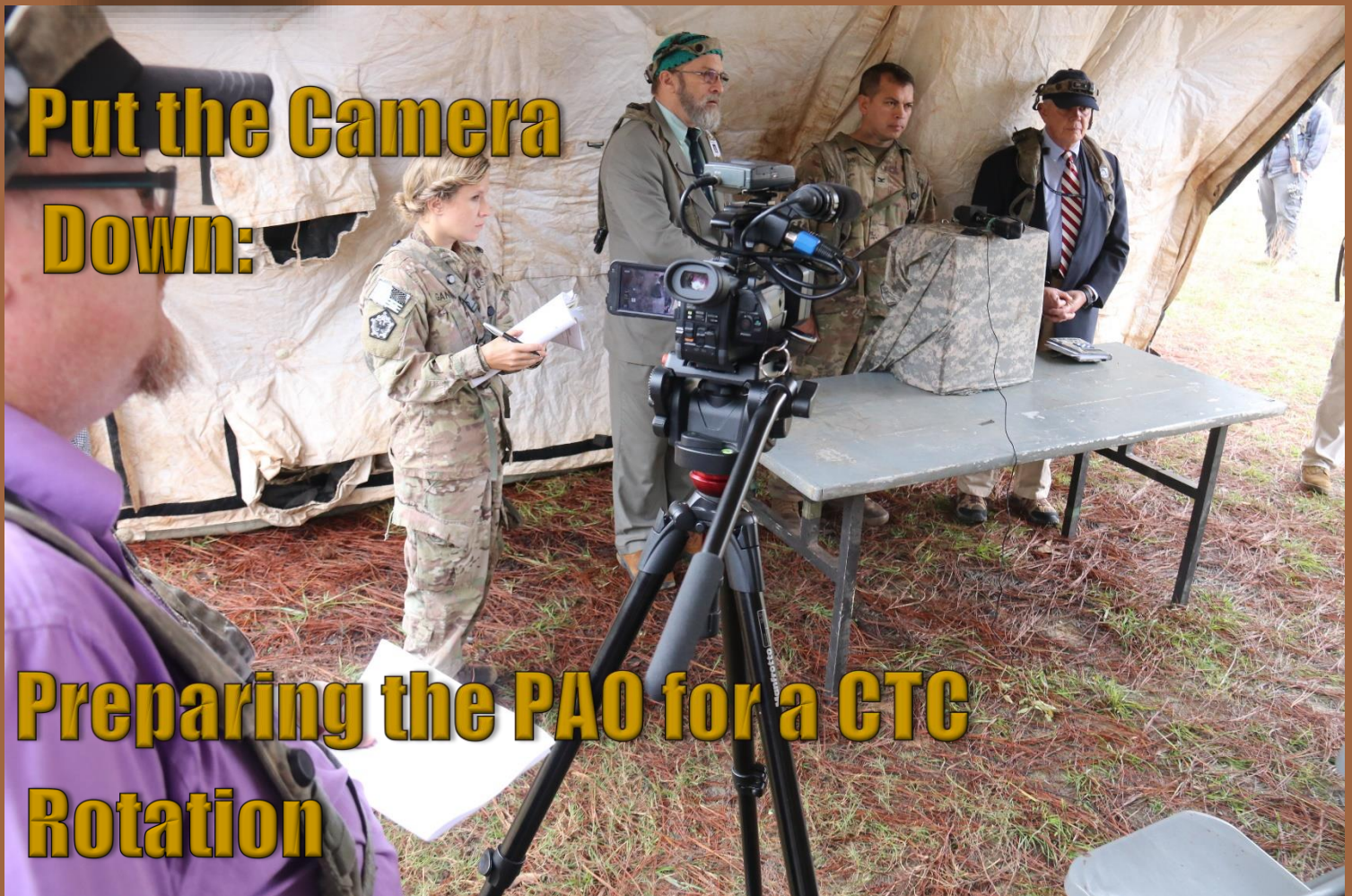


NEWS FROM THE CTC

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**Put the Camera
Down:**

**Preparing the PAO for a CTC
Rotation**

CPT William Brink

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Executive Summary

This article is intended for all units conducting home station training to prepare themselves for a combat training center (CTC) rotation. The author discusses a recurring trend at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) and the challenges that the Public Affairs Officer (PAO) face. Fig 1. Shows the results of misplaced PAO home station training. A Soldier during a recent JRTC rotation covers the camera lens of a credentialed, American Media on the Battlefield (MoB) Role-player. Public affairs officers and sections at the Brigade Combat Team (BCT) level are struggling with media interaction training due to its removal from AR 350-1 training requirements, reduced section size, and command emphasis on command information content acquisition instead of communication planning and training.

Put the Camera Down: Preparing the Public Affairs Officer for a JRTC Rotation

CPT William Brink

Information is key terrain in the decisive action training environment (DATE) that is designed to prepare the Army to defeat a near peer adversary. Future potential adversaries have well-developed information confrontation strategies that are much more robust than the crude propaganda and violence used by terror groups during the past 18 years. The Department of Defense recognizes the importance of information in the current and future operating environments and included information as the seventh joint warfighting function in Change 1 to the Joint Publication 1, Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the United States on 12 July, 2017. Brigade Combat Teams have the opportunity to fight in a contested information environment at the JRTC against a near peer. Unfortunately, BCTs arrive at JRTC unprepared and untrained to do so.



Fig 1. Shows the results of misplaced PAO home station training. A Soldier during a recent JRTC rotation covers the camera lens of a credentialed, American Media on the Battlefield (MoB) Role-player.

BCTs have a field grade public affairs officer and a staff sergeant non-commissioned officer (NCO) on their Modified Tables of Organization and Equipment (MTOE) to manage public affairs for the commander. The Joint

Publication 3-0 describes their role as, “contributes to the achievement of military objectives by countering incorrect information and propaganda through the dissemination of accurate information. Public affairs also supports operations security (OPSEC) procedures by determining if information is appropriate for public release and working with the OPSEC team to prevent information from being released to the media and public prematurely. Public affairs (PA) personnel advise the Joint Force Commanders (JFCs) on the possible direct and indirect effects of joint force actions on public perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs, and work to formulate and deliver timely and culturally attuned messages” (JP 3-0 Operations).

The Army Public Affairs Center (APAC) published its Combat Training Center (CTC) Evaluation Guide in January of 2019. Its collective tasks are a road map to success for managing the public

affairs portion of the information environment at JRTC. It begins with planning. The commander issues guidance; informs relevant audiences to deter the enemy and maintain the trust and confidence of the American public and our allies; and integrates national themes and messages. The PAO assesses the PA situation by analyzing guidance from higher, coordinating with unified action partners and other entities in the area of operations, and assessing the information environment. Next, he or she develops the PA plan by creating a running estimate, developing proposed PA guidance (unit level themes and messages), producing Annex J to the operations order, and developing assessment tools. During the prepare phase, the PAO coordinates PA operations by synchronizing logistic support to civilian journalists, accrediting civilian journalists, advising the command on operations security, and training members of the command how to interact with media. In the execution phase, the PAO facilitates media coverage; coordinates with the other information related capabilities (IRC) to prevent messaging fratricide; monitors the support and attitude of key audiences; communicates with key audiences; and implements higher headquarters themes and messages. Lastly, the PAO assesses the effectiveness of PA operations and reviews the measures of performance (MOP) and measures of effectiveness (MOES)s. A BCT will receive multiple warning orders and fragmentary orders in addition to the base order for a rotation, and each order will require the PAO's planning, preparing, executing, and assessing inputs.

Noticeably absent in the joint publication's requirement for public affairs, and only implied as a tactic in the CTC Evaluation Guide, is taking pictures and posting them to social media. However, this is exactly what many unit commanders demand of their PA sections in preparation for and during a JRTC rotation. In fact, public affairs officers and NCOs often say they do not need to train because they do their job every day by writing stories and taking pictures and videos of events around their unit, installation and community. This training method will cause the unit to fail in the information environment when they come to the JRTC for a DATE rotation.

JRTC requires the PAO to be fully integrated into the staff's planning process and be a member of the commander's personal staff. His role, in both the Joint Pub and CTC Evaluation Guide, is to advise, plan and train. This is similar to the expectations of any other primary or personal staff officers. The BCT's fire support officer will not personally pull the lanyard on a howitzer, and the support operations officer (SPO) will not personally operate a fuel truck at JRTC. Similarly, the PAO's role is not to take pictures.

The keys to a successful JRTC rotation begin long before arriving at the Leaders Training Program (LTP) or even the D-180 planning conference. The PAO needs to determine the training, equipment, connectivity, and augmentation his section will require.

The Tactical Information Operations Course helps the PAO understand all aspects of the information environment. This is important, because, as a major, he or she will be the senior officer for the Information Related Capabilities (IRCs) on the staff. The Joint Expeditionary Public Affairs Course includes training in media operations, joint operational planning, communication planning, media facilitation, conducting public affairs in a contingency

environment, providing communication counsel to senior leaders, and assessing PA effectiveness while replicating a no-notice deployment. The NCOIC needs to be complete with the required NCOES and, if possible, Battle staff. Battle Staff enables the NCO to assist the OIC with planning and staff functions. If the NCO cannot attend Battle Staff, then it is upon the OIC to train the NCO on staff functions. Without Battle Staff or deliberate training from their leaders, the NCOIC provides little value in the command post and would be best used to gather command information products or supporting the Media on the Battlefield (MoB) journalists.

The PAO will need to identify how many and what type of internet connections will be required. In garrison, it is easy to ensure every Soldier has a NIPR connection. At JRTC, the PAO and NCOIC must also have SIPR connectivity because that is where operational planning occurs. Hot seating with another section for SIPR access will cause both sections to fail to meet the short planning timelines encountered at JRTC. This problem is exacerbated in a deployed environment where the PAO also requires commercial internet. He must also ensure they have access to a NIPR and SIPR phone. In addition to communication systems, the PAO needs to decide if the section's vehicle is required. If the PAO and NCOIC are confident they can move around the battlefield with other sections, then the vehicle is not necessary. If they need to be able to move themselves, then they need the vehicle and requisite drivers' training.

The PAO must also request augmentation from a public affairs detachment (PAD). The ST 45-07-01, Army Public Affairs Handbook, states, "Under the Focus Area Review Group reductions to the BCTs structure, effective in FY17, the PA Section will only be able to complete all of its capabilities when augmented by an SRC 45 PA Unit" (Army Public Affairs Handbook). A PAD team of four Soldiers would provide the ideal additional capabilities. PAD Soldiers can attach to subordinate units to collect command information, counter misinformation and propaganda, support embedded media, manage media response to queries (RTQ), work with media encountered on the battlefield, and other tasks as necessary. If PAD support is unavailable, the PAO must rely on unit additional-duty, public affairs representatives (UPARs). It takes several months to develop a quality UPAR, and they are going to be stressed with their primary responsibilities during JRTC. UPARs may not be as reliable at JRTC as they are in a garrison training environment.

The most difficult, and probably important, preparation for JRTC, is training soldiers and leaders across the BCT how to interact with the media. This has been the most significant failure for recent rotational units at JRTC. There have been multiple instances of soldiers physically threatening, assaulting, detaining, and trying to take camera equipment from the MoB journalists. There have also been many examples of soldiers of all ranks not knowing how to effectively answer journalists' questions, such as, "why are you here?" in support of the commander's communication plan. Army Regulation 350-1 no longer requires annual media interaction training. Therefore the PAO must find a way to teach BCT soldiers and leaders how to properly engage with the media. Attaching PAD augmenters to units the PAO identified during the planning process as likely to encounter journalists is a way to ensure someone is qualified to speak with the media, prevent confrontations, ensure that Soldiers who speak with

the journalists have the correct messages, and understand how to give an effective response to further the commander's information plan.

JRTC is one of the Army premier training crucible where the BCT will fight in a decisive action scenario against a near peer adversary. Every function in the BCT will be tested, including public affairs. Success at JRTC begins long before arriving at Fort Polk and involves properly manning, training and equipping the public affairs section. If a PAO waits to arrive to Fort Polk before asking the S6 for a SIPR computer and has never conducted mission analysis because he or she is too busy taking pictures of award ceremonies and STX lanes, then he or she will likely fail in developing, executing, and assessing the commander's communication plan.

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