

Operation Keystone Fury Using Aviation Warfighting Simulation Training to Stay Army Strong



PHOTO BY CSM FRANK ZANDOME

SPECIAL FOCUS SIMULATION TRAINING

The "white cell" monitors and observes all communications and interactions with the flight crews flying missions in the AVCATT. All missions were recorded and compared to the plans and rehearsals at all levels and discussed later during the after-action review.

By LTC David E. Wood and
SGM Walter S. Zapotoczny, Jr.



First organized as the 28th Aviation Company in June 1960, the 28th Combat Avn. Brigade of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard is today comprised of units from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, West Virginia, Texas and Tennessee.

Consisting of over 2,400 Soldiers and 110 aircraft, the brigade's units have deployed in support of numerous operations over the past four years to include NATO's Kosovo Force, Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, Hurricane Katrina relief and various homeland support missions.

With the most recent return of its Aviation Support Battalion assets from Iraq, all members of the brigade and battalion staffs were home and a window of opportunity was identified for the brigade to focus on a simulation exercise that would help sustain and validate the aviation brigade

staffs and their military decision-making process execution.

COL Christopher Latchford, brigade commander, focused his staff on preparing for a simulation exercise identified as *Operation Keystone Fury* and requested the Pennsylvania Joint Headquarters staff to resource and fund the aviation training exercise (ATX) at Fort Rucker's Aviation Warfighter Simulation Center (AWSC).

The 28th Cbt. Avn. Bde. became the first reserve component unit to undergo such a training event from April 9 to 20 while not scheduled for imminent deployment.

The Road to War

The "road to war" for *Keystone Fury* began with several planning and observation meetings held at both Fort Rucker, Ala. and the 28th CAB's home station at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa.

Observing the mechanics of several ATXs with units such as the 36th and 12th CABs, the 28th CAB staff quickly grasped the processes and battle rhythm that they could expect to encounter in this environment.

The 28th CAB turned to the 75th

Division (Training Support) in Houston, Texas, and the First Army's 1st Bn. (Avn.), 291st Regt. (Tng. Spt.) of the 166th Avn. Bde., to coordinate for and provide observer-controller and trainer support.

To further prepare, the 28th CAB shifted its annual training focus to the brigade and battalion staffs with objectives including: exercise the staff on military decision-making process (MDMP), exercise tactical operations center (TOC) battle drills, perform actions on contact (with rules of engagement and graduated response matrix) type exercises, validation of unit standard operating procedures (SOP), mission execution products, and rehearsals.

The 28th CAB deployed as a fully transformed brigade with approximately 80 percent of its BDE and BN staffs, as well as company-level elements to provide for aircrews and staff support.

The total brigade footprint for *Keystone Fury* was over 200 Soldiers, and with aircrews available for all of the brigade's assets to include AH-64, CH-47, UH-60 and HH-60 aircraft.

Upon arrival at Fort Rucker in April, the brigade simulated a relief-in-place and transfer of authority (TOA) task in order to conduct a full spectrum of aviation operations in support of the Multi-national Division-North in the Iraqi theater.

The Brigade was laid out in a realistic scenario, locating its headquarters at Contingency Operating Base Speicher in Tikrit, with an aviation task force each located at Forward Operation Base Sykes in Tal Afar and at FOB Warrior in Kirkuk.

Using a division operations order to move to the assembly area, and real-time enemy and friendly forces intelligence, the realism of the simulation was unparalleled and reflected what current deployed combat aviation brigades encounter.

Three days were allocated for the brigade to conduct the TOA activities. During this time, brigade and battalion staffs "covered down" on their command posts, setting up operations and planning cells, installing the tactical local area network (TACLAN), and training up on the common operating picture tools available to the CAB.

Other training events sponsored by the Directorate of Simulations

included tactical terrain visualization system (TTVS), maneuver control system, integrated work station and planning whiteboard, the electronic data manager and the Force XXI Battle Command, Brigade-and-Below (FBCB2) with Blue Force Tracker.

The highlight of these training events included a classified "shoot-down" briefing, ensuring that all participants were familiarized with the tactics in use by the enemy.

Organization

Upon completion of this initial training, the operational portion of the exercise began. Starting on D Day, the brigade received over 20 air mission requests daily, with multiple fragmentary orders (FRAGO).

The brigade managed the daily operational tempo (op-tempo) through working groups assigned to the Plans, Operations and Sustainment cells, while its organic division, the 28th Infantry Div. (Mech.), provided a white cell and higher command direction and support.

Execution

Within the planning cell, working groups consisted of the Air Mission

Request Team, Future Operations Team (the MDMP working group), and the Orders Management Team. Under the S-5's direction, the AMR Team focused on the continuous planning and coordination of aviation requirements throughout the area of operation.

AMRs included personnel and cargo movements, ring-route missions, reconnaissance of named areas of interest, medical evacuations, quick reaction force, and VIP and morale flights, among others.

Despite the op-tempo occurring in the current fight, the AMR Team's responsibility was to keep the brigade's aviation support flowing on a continuous basis.

The 28th CAB conducted four major operations, providing for air movement, air assault, recon and security tasks, and cordon and search missions.

In each case, the Future Operations Team provided for the staffing of major missions – usually received in FRAGO format from the division – mission analysis, course of action development, analysis, comparison, and decision briefs in order for the brigade commander to execute the mission.

TRANSFORMING LEARNING

Bifilar Assembly

UNDERSTAND FASTER. REMEMBER LONGER. DECIDE QUICKER.

Interactive based learning is the ultimate method to explain complex concepts. Users remember content longer and understand multifaceted messages due to the sensory enhancing computer mediated communication capabilities.

Navigator transforms learning with interactive 3-D and virtual reality solutions. Partnering globally with the best and brightest, our team uses real-time, interactive and photorealistic visual learning objects for the classroom environment.

Understand 33 percent faster.
Remember 37 percent longer.
Make decisions 48 percent quicker.

334.347.7612 | FAX: 334.347.2582 | WWW.NDGI.COM



PHOTO BY CSM FRANK ZANDONE

A large terrain model was constructed and used by 28th CAB aircrews during mission briefings to better help crews visualize the terrain and discuss actions.

Using the MDMP, the Future Ops Team incorporated staff assets as necessary to provide for the best solutions in supporting the ground commander's intent. Terrain models were used extensively for mission rehearsals. The Orders Management Team within the planning cell was critical to the development and preparation of FRAGOs and warning orders, and the rapid dissemination of information to the battalions.

The Orders Management Team provided for "gatekeeper" duties, focusing on reducing order "dwell" time, and meeting the staffing rule of one-third, two-thirds planning time.

Once orders were complete, the team funneled the products via the TACLAN to the commander and S3 for approval and publication. The operations cell was tasked with fighting the current battle.

All brigade battle drills, flight tracking, and the command, control, communications functions were conducted by this team located in the brigade TOC.

Led by the S3, battle captains and NCOs, the brigade operations cell managed the fight in such scenarios as quick reaction force launches, surface-to-air enemy fire events, and downed aircraft recovery missions.

Using MCS and FBCB2 products, the operations cell worked directly with battalion TOCs to ensure mission accomplishment.

The brigade's sustainment cell provided the logistics support necessary to successfully execute missions in a high op-tempo environment.

Although a simulated environment using the AVCATT [aviation combined arms tactical trainer] devices, the class III, V and IX supply limitations were programmed and had to be managed.

The sustainment of assets, as well as personnel, contributed to the availability of brigade assets, and played a crucial role in determining available courses of action for the commander.

Results

On D+5, the end of *Operation Keystone Fury* was called. The next day, the AWSC and the observer-controller/trainer staffs provided the brigade with a robust after-action review using state-of-the-art facilities.

The playback of audio tapes and graphical flight displays, with open Soldier discussion, ensured that all "sustains" and "improves" were recorded.

With a take-home package detail-

ing the ATX results, the brigade can now formulate a training plan, employing lessons learned and continuity of training.

In Summary

The 28th CAB's ATX was a milestone event in terms of developing and executing brigade-level aviation operations. With over 300 simulator flight hours flown, numerous rehearsals using terrain models, digital maps and TTVS, validation of the staff's military decision-making process, and execution of realistic aviation missions, *Operation Keystone Fury* was an outstanding success.

The results of this ATX contributed greatly to the ongoing readiness of the 28th Combat Aviation Brigade and the professional development of its officers and enlisted Soldiers.

For more information on this training contact SGM Zapotoczny at (717) 861-9033 or DSN 491-9033.



LTC David E. Wood is the S3 operations officer and SGM Walter S. Zapotoczny, Jr is the aviation operations chief for the 28th Combat Aviation Brigade, Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa.