



RETIRED SENIOR NCOs PARTICIPATE IN CTC MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

SERGEANT MAJOR (RETIRED) PATRICK CASTIN

This article provides an up-close look at the Combat Training Center (CTC) Mentorship Program and reveals significant insights into the extensive contributions senior NCO mentors are bringing to the CTCs. The article includes the history and philosophy of the program, duties and responsibilities of the senior NCO mentors, and information on how they maintain proficiency.

Today, there are many defense contractors that support the U.S. Army by performing numerous operational and training functions. MPRI, Inc. is an L-3 Communications company that supports military contracts throughout the United States and, on average, in 40 foreign countries. Since 2001, MPRI has supported the

U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA) at Fort Bliss, Texas, with senior NCO mentors at the military's four CTCs: Battle Command Training Program (BCTP) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California; Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, Louisiana; and the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) at Hohenfels, Germany (formerly known as the Combat Maneuver Training Center). The senior NCO mentors perform as advisers, trainers, and mentors, and discretely assist the senior NCOs at Army, corps, division and joint task force (JTF) staff levels, the brigade and battalion command sergeants major, as well as the operations sergeants major in units rotating through the CTCs.

They also provide significant assistance to many officers at these levels by sharing their military experiences from their own combat careers.

The senior NCO mentors are retired Army command sergeants major (CSMs) and sergeants major (SGMs) with numerous years of combat experience. They are assigned to either the CTC or operations group headquarters and are integrated into the operations groups' training cycles. Additionally, they are certified through a rigorous observer trainer/observer controller (OT/OC) training program through their respective CTC OT/OC certification programs. They perform as military contractors and work with the OT/OC teams. They provide assistance to combat units in many different functional areas as the units rotate through the CTCs. The senior NCO mentors provide a common sense look



Courtesy photos

Command Sergeant Major David Pierce of the Joint Multinational Readiness Center and Command Sergeant Major (Retired) Gerald Parks talk with 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment Soldiers.

Figure 1 — Senior NCO Mentor Assignments

NAME	CTC	LOCATION
SGM (R) Patrick Castin	BCTP	Fort Leavenworth, KS
CSM (R) Richard Colangelo	NTC	Fort Irwin, CA
CSM (R) Jack Hardwick	JRTC	Fort Polk, LA
CSM (R) Gerald Parks	JMRC	Hohenfels, Germany

at things that are sometimes overlooked due to the fast pace of combat operations in today's Army. Based on their extensive experience, some mentors also teach selected OT/OC certification classes.

Background

The conceptual treatment of senior leader development at the CTCs has typically been grounded on progressive, sequential training and education primarily directed to the officer corps focusing on junior and senior-level officers. Unfortunately, there have been limited training opportunities for senior NCOs (master sergeant (MSG), first sergeant (1SG), SGM and CSM. In November 2001, the U.S. Army initiated the CTC Mentorship Program to help rectify this shortcoming. The program includes four retired CSMs/SGMs that are responsive to USASMA and are assigned to each CTC (BCTP, NTC, JRTC and JMRC). The senior NCO mentors bring dynamic subject matter expertise to the U.S. Army, CTCs and training unit. In fact, their coaching and mentoring are considered well established in the US Army and CTC community as endorsed by the Army senior leadership. Examples of their efforts and success are identified in this article and substantiate that the mentors are well established, respected and capable of making significant contributions to NCO leader development goals and objectives.

The CTC Mentorship Program enhances the training and combat readiness of U.S. Army units from battalion to Army level, to include JTF-level organizations. In addition to USASMA and the CTCs, the program has been endorsed by training units deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan and other theaters of operations. It provides dynamic, capabilities-based training for rotational CTC units, with a priority to combat deployable units. The mentors offer

NCO staff leaders unparalleled realistic and rigorous tactical training that fosters warfighting competence. The training experience is valuable in providing senior NCOs opportunities to significantly improve and sharpen their skills in accomplishing wartime missions. Additionally, the mentors have the ancillary advantage of improving senior NCO competence in accomplishing tasks associated with maintaining peace and wartime readiness. The CTC Mentorship Program provides the following:

- Trained and qualified senior NCO mentors to assist CTC rotations;
- Pre-rotational visits to units scheduled for a CTC rotation, when requested, and workshops and training assistance to senior NCOs based on training requirements;
- Support to unit training objectives and focus areas during CTC rotations;
- On-site assistance in planning and executing relevant and administrative tasks in realistic combat settings;
- Feedback for both formal and informal hot washes and after action reviews (AARs) with the training unit;
- Liaison between the Army, USASMA and CTCs, reinforcing doctrine and tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) among senior NCOs of tactical units; and
- Lessons learned that are incorporated into the curriculum of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Course at Fort Bliss, Texas.

Senior NCO Mentors

As mentioned earlier, the senior NCO mentors are retired U.S. Army CSMs/SGMs who demonstrated professional competence and training expertise while on active duty. The senior NCO mentors are handpicked by the commandant of USASMA and commanders of the respective CTCs, and endorsed by the

Sergeant Major of the Army. Most importantly though, they are supported by numerous commanders and CSMs/SGMs throughout the military who have been recipients of their professional support at the four CTCs. They believe in and follow the tradition that embodies U.S. Army values and the warrior ethos. They coach, teach, mentor, control and observe the unit senior NCOs as they go through their CTC rotation, serving as their OTs/OCs.

Each mentor served on active duty in the U.S. Army for generally 25 to 31 years. They possess a variety of military occupational specialties, but they are all retired combat arms Soldiers. Each mentor has combat-related experience in Grenada, Panama, the first Gulf War, or conducted Stabilization Forces (SFOR) or Kosovo Forces (KFOR) peace support operations in the Balkans. They have served in every NCO leadership position from team leader to operations sergeant major, to command sergeant major. They are subject matter experts with the requisite experience and expertise to ensure immediate credibility and rapport with their respective CTC and training units. The mentors use lessons learned from their experiences on a wide range of subjects gained over their many years as senior NCOs and OTs/OCs, and their recent experience as senior NCO mentors. These lessons learned are incorporated into the curriculum of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Course at Fort Bliss.

Philosophy

The CTC Mentorship Program is an increasingly accelerated program that takes a systematic approach in enhancing the training experience and education of senior NCOs. This program has impact throughout the U.S. Army as units train at the CTCs for deployment to one of the theaters of operations throughout the world where U.S. forces are deployed for combat operations. The program methodology uses a "hands-on" training model and the planning, preparation, and execution training model. It further validates the effectiveness of leadership, integrates TTP and provides valued mentorship during the organization's execution phase of training, not only in a timely manner, but also in a safe training environment.

The CTC Mentorship Program

maintains a comprehensive communication network providing professional dialog among the Senior NCO Mentors addressing primarily lessons learned and other relevant information. This, in turn, reinforces cohesive team building between organizations within the combat units. The program also identifies and outlines positive corrective action to assist the senior NCO leadership in correcting issues identified during their training experience at the CTCs. This action provides the NCO leadership with more time to plan, schedule resources, and organize training events, which assists in correcting any deficiencies noted during the unit's rotation at the CTC.

The genuine benefits accrued from effective mentoring include higher motivation, increased personal development and confidence and, most importantly, improved performance. This occurs because, regardless if you are a ISG, logistics NCOIC or the brigade CSM, effective mentoring makes team members aware of one another's skills and how these skills can contribute to attaining the unit's goals and training objectives.

According to the senior NCO mentors, the CTC Mentorship Program offers great opportunities to make the best Army in the world an even better Army! They believe everyone should be a mentor to someone. Mentoring is a way to influence, so if you are a senior NCO from one of the CTCs, and are not mentoring the Army's future, you are missing an important opportunity to use your experience to influence and set our young leaders up for success. A commitment to mentoring future senior NCO leaders may require the mentor to take risks, like backing off occasionally and letting them make mistakes they can learn from. These mistakes, however, often have a big impact during training that is critical to the senior NCO's understanding of what the mentor tells him/her. Mentoring requires providing senior NCOs the opportunity to learn and develop while using proven experience to guide them without micromanagement. This will pay immense dividends on the battlefield where they will have to make decisions on their own.

Duties and Responsibilities

The role of the senior NCO in today's fast-paced U.S. Army is a challenge. They must be able to maintain U.S. Army standards and develop their subordinate NCOs to perform tasks that are sometimes above their experience level. Senior NCO mentors assist in being another set of eyes and ears and provide insight to the senior NCO leaders on related issues. They support and assist the commander's training objectives and focus areas. The mentors are able to provide different techniques for a specific challenge that the NCO leader will need to think through. The mentors do not provide the answers, but help the NCO leader think through challenging situations. They provide pointers on establishing battle rhythm, developing relationships with the staff and the subordinate commanders, technical assistance and feedback on new or changed TTP, and assisting in the development of junior NCO training programs.

The senior NCO mentors provide on-site assistance to the unit senior NCOs in planning and executing relevant tactical and administrative tasks in realistic combat settings. During the Cold War era, we had plenty of time to grow and obtain the experience

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that makes combat ready senior NCOs, and there were many Vietnam era combat experienced senior NCOs that provided very sage counsel. But now we are in a different time and era, and we are losing senior NCOs faster than we are developing their replacements. Now, a large number of senior NCOs have to mature and learn at the same time they prepare for deployment to war.

Throughout the senior NCO mentors' military careers, the focus on training was to prepare for a war in Europe against a known enemy. That all changed after 9-11. Our young men and women serving in the armed forces today are fighting a completely different kind of war with an unknown enemy. Training today is focused more on urban combat, which is the focus at the CTCs. Combat units training at the CTCs in preparation for their next deployment receive training for the entire unit down to the individual Soldier in subject areas such as negotiations, cultural understanding, language skills, counter-IED measures, escalation of force (EOF) and rules of engagement (ROE), detainee operations, and tactical questioning. In addition, training in how to establish and operate checkpoints and traffic control points, crowd control procedures, dealing with the media, and casualty evacuation is also received.

In their roles as the senior NCO mentor and advisor, they provide on-site assistance to the senior NCO leadership of the rotational unit in the planning and execution of both tactical and administrative operations. In addition, they provide observations and lessons learned in the areas of operations, intelligence, logistics, staff functions, and force protection. The observations and feedback are based on their own personal experiences during their active duty careers, changes and updates received from combat units that are in theater or those that have recently returned, and input received from the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL). In conjunction with their duties as the senior NCO mentor for the rotational units, they also provide mentoring and coaching to the CTC NCO OTs/OCs based on guidelines and directives received from the CTC command group. The mentors provide continuous feedback to the CTC commanders, operations group commanders and the training unit. They conduct numerous AARs and assist in putting many more together.

In training staff sergeants major, the major task of the senior NCO mentors is to train, mentor and reinforce the roles and responsibilities of senior-level staff NCOs. Additionally, they support combined arms training that replicates Joint-Interagency-Multinational (JIM) operations in a full spectrum contemporary operational environment (COE) at worldwide locations in accordance with the Army Forces Generation (ARFORGEN) model. This support focuses on brigade combat teams (BCTs), divisions, corps, Army Service Component Command (ASCC), Joint Force Land Component Commander (JFLCC), and JTFs in

order to create training experiences that enable Army senior battle commanders and senior NCOs to develop current, relevant, campaign-quality and expeditionary battle command instincts and skills.

Everything a senior NCO mentor does should be completely focused on making our deploying senior NCOs more productive, adaptive staff managers who can assist in all phases of military operations regardless of their working level. Whether on a battalion-level staff working in a fires cell, or on a JTF as the operations sergeant major, they believe when staff NCOs are well trained by their staff officers and senior NCOs, and they have attended the right schools, these NCOs — through training and practical experience — should be able to assume the duties of an officer in the event of the officer's temporary or extended absence from the command post. When a staff NCO is set up for success and is properly trained on staff functions, the quality of what you put into the training translates into a competent and responsive senior NCO. They will be major contributing factors in their sections or warfighting functional areas, and the staff NCOs will know exactly what is expected from their leaders.

Senior NCO mentors stress the officer's role in the command post as primarily one of "seeing the battlefield." Officers must be capable of assessing the tactical situation, anticipating the enemy's intent, and determining the long- and short-term impact of enemy/friendly actions. Officers issue instructions in accordance with the commander's or decision-maker's guidance. They develop estimates and plans via the military decision-making process. To support the officers, one of the functions of staff NCOs is to be information management managers. These responsibilities include collecting, analyzing, processing, updating, coordinating, synchronizing, and integrating internal command post and separate cell activities, just to name a few. Staff NCOs are the managers of the commander's required information. To know everything about the commander's required information needs, and then manage the information at the battalion, brigade and division staff levels, affects everything at the lower echelons (team,



The mentors have also written articles for the Center for Army Lessons Learned and Infantry Magazine as well as developed the Battle Staff NCO Review.

platoon and company).

In addition to their work with the CTC rotational units, senior NCO mentors also serve as liaison between USASMA and the CTCs, reinforcing doctrine and TTP among NCOs and officers. They also provide lessons learned and trend briefings at USASMA, the Battle Staff Course, the Command and General Staff College, and the Command Sergeants Major Designee Course. They participate in and brief at the JMRC Trends Conference, which keeps the Army OTs/OCs up-to-date on lessons learned from the CTCs. They additionally use instructors from USASMA and the Battle Staff NCO Course as augmented OTs/OCs at the CTCs, which further assists doctrine development efforts at USASMA. They also write articles for CALL and have developed the Battle Staff NCO Review.

Maintaining Proficiency

To maintain proficiency and relevancy to current Army combat operations, the senior NCO mentors review and become familiar with current doctrine, TTPs, lessons learned, CTC reports, operational issues, and developments in the proponent service schools. The mentors' primary focus is on current U.S. Army doctrine. They have a thorough understanding of military operations at platoon through JTF and Army levels. As liaison NCOs between

USASMA and the CTCs, they reinforce doctrine and TTPs among senior NCO leaders of units being trained. The mentors collect lessons learned from the CTCs and provide them to USASMA for use in updating doctrine and TTP. They conduct pre-rotation visits to units scheduled for CTC rotations and offer training advice. On a regular basis, they prepare and distribute lessons learned from their observations of units participating in CTC rotations to USASMA's Lessons Learned Directorate for inclusion into the curriculum of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Course at Fort Bliss.

Additionally, each senior NCO mentor conducts several visits/imbeds to OCONUS theaters of operations and other forward sites to observe realistic combat operations and training. This allows them to stay current on Army/Joint doctrine. Locations of recently completed proficiency visits/imbeds include Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Kosovo, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Japan, and Korea.

Summary

Senior NCO mentors repeatedly state that it is a privilege and an honor for them to be serving with a team of highly motivated and professional NCOs and OTs/OCs at the CTCs who take the time to provide our young men and women in uniform with the best training the U.S. Army has to offer. Knowing they play a small role in helping to train these outstanding young men and women, and that the training they provide may later save their lives, makes their job both rewarding and fulfilling.

When asked his thoughts on the value of using retired CSMS/SGMs as mentors at the CTCs, Command Sergeant Major David Pierce of the Joint Multinational Readiness Center said the CTC Mentorship Program is important to the U.S. Army today. "I want to share with you some statistics from the global war on terrorism," he said. "About 97 percent of our coalition partners in Afghanistan are from the U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) area of responsibility (AOR), and 77 percent of our coalition partners in Iraq are from the USEUCOM AOR."

He said what that means is that these forces have rotated through U.S. training commands and, more importantly, the JMRC.

“So you see, I can unequivocally endorse the importance and value of the senior NCO mentor in our command. He has become a member of the team,” he said. “He is known as a trusted and dedicated advisor to the commander of the operations group, his CSM, and the commanding general of this command. He is an invaluable key ingredient to the JMRC mission; his effective coaching, teaching and mentoring of our CSMs/SGMs are critical in the role they play on today’s battlefield.”

Command Sergeant Major Frank Graham, the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division CSM, said, “The value the senior NCO mentor provided us at brigade and battalion levels during our CTC rotation was immeasurable. He provided exceptional guidance to all my battalion and operations CSMs/SGMs that they needed. A couple main factors were his ability to mentor several CSMs on their relationships with their commanders. It was information that only an experienced CSM can provide. His input during our NCO professional development training to all my NCOs and young leaders was very constructive and vital to our wartime mission; I know the Soldiers are using the experience they gained now in combat.”

Editor’s Note: *Since this article was written, Command Sergeant Major (Retired) Gerald Utterback has replaced Command Sergeant Major (Retired) Gerald Parks as the CTC mentor at the JMRC. Parks is currently serving in Afghanistan where he is helping mentor Afghan soldiers.*

Sergeant Major (Retired) Patrick Castin enlisted in the U.S. Army in September 1976 as an Armored Reconnaissance Specialist (11D). During his career, he held many positions of responsibility to include cavalry scout, squad leader, scout section sergeant, platoon sergeant, senior instructor ROTC, platoon sergeant, assistant operations sergeant, first sergeant, operations sergeant major, and CTC senior observer trainer.

He currently is a CTC mentor for MPRI and assigned to the Battle Command Training Program at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

A Commander’s View

SUSTAINING MARKSMANSHIP WHILE DEPLOYED

LIEUTENANT COLONEL DAVID LIWANAG

So now you’re deployed from home station and are in the “Sand Box” or the “Rock Pile.” The rest-in-place/transfer of authority is complete, and your unit is developing its battle rhythm.

You assess your area of operations and key terrain from your map reconnaissance, patrol experience, and leaders’ recons and study the most likely and most dangerous enemy courses of action. You want dominating overwatch and supporting fires, precision fires in urban terrain, and squad and platoon counter-marksman capabilities. You want your Soldiers to be able to quickly engage and kill insurgents armed with AKs and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) who expose themselves for only a short time to let loose rockets at targets of opportunity.

Your unit may not have organic snipers or designated marksmen. You note your Soldiers’ marksmanship could use a tune-up, but you find

the need for longer shots to 300 meters and you don’t want to use the 25-meter zero and function-fire range. You wish you could have sent more troops to the known distance range, to the All-Army Championships or the Designated Marksman’s Course, but in the routine of pre-deployment, re-cock, and re-set there just wasn’t enough time.

You find the experienced NCOs who have shot in combat competitions, who

A Soldier takes part in a reflexive fire exercise.

Jorge Gomez



have been to designated marksman training, or who are former snipers. You give them the guidance that you want the troops to “own” everything from muzzle to 300 meters; you want some decent marksmen who can hit what they’re aiming at to 300; and you want your troops confident in their ability to hit “runners” within 100 meters.

They take stock of their assets. All your troops are armed with decent M16A4 rifles and M4 carbines. You’ve got enough M855 “Green Tip” Ball to support a decent sustainment program. Some of the Soldiers have ACOG telescopes issued by RFI.

They note on their maps that there are a few secure areas on or near your forward operating base with secure routes where you can put in a north-facing range (to keep the sun out of your troops’ eyes in both the mornings and afternoons) with suitable backstopping or downrange area that allows 300-meter shots.

They’ve asked you to speak with the engineers to get some “T-Wall” sections, and they’ve gone off to scrounge target materials. A few call or e-mail around to scrape up other low-tech training materials.

Soon your junior leaders invite you to inspect training. You find they’ve built two ranges — an improvised known distance or “KD” range and a field firing range. What’s more, they’re not only conducting advanced day and night shooting training but they’re also conducting rifle qualification in the field, and not on the 25-meter paper sheet alternate course of fire.

The KD range was built using “T-Walls” or stacked Hesco barriers. There are firing lines or berms 100, 200, and 300 meters from the T-Walls. They show you the score sheets of the first squads to shoot the alternate known distance qualification course, earning a few Soldiers promotion points for scoring as experts.

The NCOs have stapled cardboard E and F-type silhouettes to 1x4 boards and, from behind the solid reinforced concrete cover of the T-Walls, raise these over the top edge of the T-Wall for 3 to 5 seconds before pulling them down, mirroring the “snap”

exposures of the standard “pop-up” range. When a bullet goes through the silhouette, they place a paper or cardboard spotting disk, skewered with a golf tee or wooden spindle, into the last bullet hole in the target. When they raise the target over the berm, the shooter clearly sees where his last round hit without the need for binoculars or a telescope.

They repeat the exercise, only now when Soldiers raise targets over the top edge of the T-Wall they begin walking for 10 feet, paralleling the wall before stopping and pulling down the target. The shooter sees a left-to-right or right-to-left “mover” in the hardest engagement a rifleman has — a body moving perpendicular to his line of sight.

The NCOs repeat the exercises after dark, with the shooters illuminating and aiming their rifles and carbines with AN/PEQ-2 and AN/PAQ-4 aiming lasers and night vision devices at 75, 100, and 200 meters. Some of the squad leaders use tracers, and their fire teams “lock on” to where their leaders are pointing.

On the field fire range the NCOs have found enough empty 55-gallon drums to fill with sand and place at 200, 225, 250, 275, and 300 meters, the more difficult distances to hit when “turtled-up” in helmet, IBA, DAPS, and plates. They’re waiting on E-type silhouettes cut from steel plates to replace the drums. 5.56mm shots against the drums and plates give a solid “Whack!” once they’re hit, giving the Soldiers instant feedback. The E-type plates will be even better, as they won’t have to be replaced as often.

You notice the NCOs put up U-shaped pickets with pieces of engineer tape or bandolier webbing on them at 200 and 300 yards. The tape shifts lightly in the breeze giving those Soldiers without ACOGs or binoculars an idea of how the wind may be affecting their bullets. Some of the Soldiers will put engineer tape out on the concertina or from pickets, phone, and light poles at certain ranges around their FOB firing positions, giving them both range and wind direction once they’re pulling security.

You smile and shake hands all around with your leaders. They’ve done a good job. You know your Soldiers will be well set for the rest of their rotation and they’ll be able to keep their firing skills up. Your replacements will also have a range to keep their skills in good order as well.

Now, what was the next thing you had to try to solve...?



Specialist Sharhonda R. McCoy

Soldiers from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division fire their weapons at a range on Camp Liberty, Iraq.

Lieutenant Colonel David Liwanag is currently an advisor to the Counter-Terrorism Command, Iraqi National CT Force in Baghdad, Iraq. He previously served with the J3, Special Operations Command - Joint Forces Command at Norfolk, Virginia, and commanded the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit at Fort Benning, Georgia, from June 2003 until June 2006. Other previous assignments include commanding the U.S. Army Parachute Team and serving with the 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group.
