



CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders

From: Company Commanders

Air-Ground Integration

(Army Internal)



U.S. Army, CW2 Mitch Carver

And if I concentrate while he divides, I can use my strength to attack a fraction of his. There, I will be numerically superior. Then if I am able to use many to strike few at a selected point, those I deal with will be in dire straits. —Sun Tzu

Effective integration between the Army's air and ground forces is critical in today's operating environment. Soldiers on the streets, in the desert and atop mountain ridges must coordinate daily with Soldiers flying above them to ensure mission success. As these junior leaders fight together, the CompanyCommand forum has become a place to share what they're experiencing and learning. In this ongoing conversation, some focus areas are emerging:

- *Predetermined SOPs (TTPs, graphics, etc.)*
- *Pre-deployment training (home station/training centers)*
- *Habitual relationships between units (either pre-deployment or during deployment)*
- *Pre-mission preparation (OPORDs/rehearsals/use of liaisons)*
- *Radio Communication (ad hoc, hasty planning)*

Here are some specific lessons that company commanders are learning and sharing via the CompanyCommand forum:

[THOUGHTS FROM AIR COMMANDERS]

Marshall Tway

D/1-1 CAV & HHC/2-501st AVN

Okay, so I'm flying along in an OH-58D Kiowa Warrior under NODs (night observation devices). We get a call from the battalion whose sector we are in asking us to drop down to a company net. We arrive on the radio net and perform our check-in call. We receive this reply, "Okay...I'm in the HMMWV at Grid MB 12345 67890..."

The "911 Call": Hasty AGI

One of the things we were called upon to do daily during OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM was to conduct AGI with troops on the ground when no prior coordination had been conducted (we call this a "911 Call," as most often it involves friendlies in contact of some sort). The lack of prior planning in these types of missions generally translates into a lack of situational awareness (SA) on the part of the aircrews. In order to offset this, a lengthy conversation ensues and in some cases, we are forced to land to conduct a face-to-face meeting. So here are some tips for conducting AGI when you need us and we have not planned anything:

Pre-Mission Preparation

We were operating in two-aircraft teams, dispersed a good distance apart. We picked a hilltop, settled into a good overwatch position, and I started using the optics to examine the likely avenues of approach. My right-seater said, "What's that in front of us?" I looked up, and saw one individual stand up, then two, then another, then all three picked up rifles. Yikes.

We beat feet out of there and reported to higher. The individuals in question turned out to be a friendly ground team emplaced to overwatch the same AO. They were nowhere on our graphics, nor was it ever mentioned in any of our mission briefs that ground teams might be anywhere in the vicinity.

This could have been a real tragedy. If we had been carrying ammo, we almost certainly would have laid down some type of suppressive fire to cover our egress, and someone could have been injured or killed.

The Lesson: Situational awareness is critical. Find out who owns the battlespace you're operating in and get a good sense of who's there and what they're doing. If you can't get that information, then be real careful about the extent to which you try to influence that battlespace.

Radio Communications

During a home station training exercise, one of our teams was late taking off due to maintenance and weather issues. In the hurry to get on-station and checked in with the ground force, they abbreviated the check-in call and did not mention what ordnance they were carrying. When the ground troops requested that one aircraft suppress a dug-in troop position, there was silence for a moment, and then the aircraft commander mournfully replied that he was only carrying Hellfire and Stinger, not the most useful weapons for such a target!

The Lesson: Aircrews need to make sure they do a good check-in and that they've got both point target and area target capability in a team (if not on each aircraft), and they need to make sure the supported ground force understands the difference. They must also ensure the ground force gets all the necessary information during the check.

—Ray Kimball

■ **Check-in:** Grids get us the location, but no situational awareness. Once we tell you we have you, we both need to confirm the identification via a signal and exchange some vital information in order to begin coordination.

■ **Target ID:** Finding and positively identifying the target should preferably be done with an azimuth (degrees magnetic or clock direction) and distance from your position. Include some sort of target description. DO NOT pass a grid; we like to fly heads out of the cockpit as much as possible—passing a grid ensures that one of us will have to come inside to find it on a map, orient it, and then confirm it.

■ **How low can you go?** Push as far down as you can. You will be better served by pushing the aircraft down to the company command net and letting us talk to people there. It allows the platoon leaders, company commander and aircraft to share information, and it reduces reaction time. It also builds a working relationship between the aircrews and the ground crews. Ask a ground cavalry trooper—he knows this works.

■ **Task/Purpose/Intent:** Assign a task and purpose, and give your intent to the aircraft. Don't worry if it may not be exactly doctrinal or you aren't sure we'll understand. We will ask, or interpret what you tell us. Aviation works the same as ground forces when it comes to this portion of operational planning.

■ **Too Much Information:** We can, and will overwhelm you with all the information we can pass. We can see more; it is that simple. If this is starting to happen, let us know; tell us how we can best help you.

■ **Talk To Me!** We love to talk to you, but we like it even better when *you talk to us*. I ran an air assault security mis-

sion once where we were trying to get a blocking position to stop a car that was attempting to exit the cordon. The car got away. When we asked the leader on the blocking position if he had heard us, he replied, "Yes, but I was nervous about talking to you."

■ **Pre-determined TTPs:** Air/Ground Integration (AGI) is not hard, but it can become so when the communications are not clear. Pre-determined TTPs go a long way towards enhancing the effectiveness of the AIR-GROUND Team. When possible, get with a group of your supporting aviators and work out some TTPs. This will pay huge dividends later.

Ray Kimball

F/3-7 CAV, 3rd ID (M)

Face-to-face training always trumps everything else. This should be especially doable with the new brigade combat team structure—aviation units should be identified to the units they support and train with them. To actually train on employment and integration, you need living, breathing people and an area to maneuver.

Predetermined SOPs are the next best thing to pre-deployment training—if you can't train with your air assets, at least train with an SOP that you'll both be using, so you're better prepared when the time comes.

Radio communication only can be risky, especially if there are no predetermined SOPs. It's very easy to misunderstand terminology and directions.

Rehearsals are great, but there's always some guy who doesn't get the word. If a rehearsal is the only chance you've got, get as many key leaders there as possible (down to the platoon and squad level).

Habitual Relationships

We were nearing the end of our tour in Iraq. I had been detached from SQDN for a year, and due to ongoing operations we did not get the chance to attend briefings or rehearsals for an upcoming mission. The one saving grace was our relationships with the "Bandit" Troopers on the ground (my troop even called ourselves "Bandit Air").

The mission started easily enough. We established communications with the battalion and started the route recon along the ingress route about 1 km ahead of ground forces. As the mission progressed, things got steadily worse. I think the battalion was overcome by events and was experiencing some pretty severe communications problems. The end result was that Bandit Troop and my troop ended up running the operation and coordinating the mission. My aircraft would point out targets and the B troopers would react. We had individual airplanes talking directly to the TCs and vice versa. The mission turned out to be a resounding success.

Afterwards, one of the 1SGs came up to the B Troop 1SG and said, "Wow, you guys really know this Air Ground Integration piece, it was almost as if you had worked together before!" to which the B Troop 1SG replied, "Back home, if I want to talk to the D Troop Commander, I walk across the hall."

The Lesson: Even without attending rehearsals and briefs, we were able to utilize our personal relationships with the leaders of our sister troop and leverage that to pull the mission off. While far from the ideal, it shows the value that a personal relationship between units can have.

—Marshall Tway

[THOUGHTS FROM GROUND COMMANDERS]

Matt McGrew

HHC/1-24th IN (SBCT), 25th ID (L)

The ability to employ aircraft is no longer just a combat arms skill. Like close quarters marksmanship and combat-ives, it is a critical skill for all Soldiers who leave the wire. I also agree it is a critical part of home station training to get leaders comfortable with talking to aircraft. It would be nice if we could train with the unit that will be supporting us, but unless you are in a unit that has its own organic assets, this isn't likely to be possible. In a year in Mosul, I worked with aircraft from three different units at one time or another (as different units rotated through). With that being said, here are some of the keys to our success using aircraft in Iraq:

- If the unit is based in your area of operations (AO), you need to get your arms around them early. The sooner you start building relationships, the better. Part of this is giving them the Common Operating Picture (COP) for your AO. This includes not just your graphics but an overlay with common names for key terrain. After a year in one location, we had names for most key/distinctive terrain in our AO, allowing us to rapidly gain situational awareness across the battalion when units were in contact. After a couple of days in sector most pilots were familiar with our reference system. You must also ensure that everyone has the most recent listing of the frequencies and call signs for all units in your AO and our intelligence staff's assessment of the AO. Doing these simple steps cuts down on the planning time.

- Concise communications are important if you are going to keep aircraft on a busy radio net. You don't want to tie up a net that others have to use. Concise communications are directly tied to the pilots understanding your COP.

- Trust in lower-level leaders to effectively use aircraft in the best way to support their mission. This started with home-station training but was solidified after several

months in combat. This is a function of your leadership climate and it is different for every unit.

Chris Danbeck

F/2-2nd ACR

- Get as low as you can go: I cannot agree more and implore fellow commanders to heed your advice about pushing down as low as possible. This allows the pilot to talk directly to the PL or PSG and communicate what was going on at the objective. I never found it to be overwhelming to the PLs, since they were ready for the additional radio traffic. If I felt I wanted to keep a tighter rein on the aircraft then I would ask for the wingman to stay on my net.

- Knowing the mix of weaponry available to the leaders on the ground is vital during check-in. The onus is on ground commanders to educate our platoon leaders about what packages you guys can carry and what the effects are.

- For the ground guys who are in units that do not have frequent access to OH-58D aircraft or pilots, do some research. Make some calls and put together some kind of OPD to get your junior leaders to understand the capabilities and limitations of the aircraft. We were able to get in the aircraft for familiarization flights, and the pilots were able to ride around in our Bradleys and tanks. It was a blast and we had a much better understanding of the constraints that the aviators were under and they could get the same from us.

- It was commonplace in my unit for Soldiers to confidently talk to aviators, and using SOP cheat sheets, they could perform AGI. The farther apart we get in the garrison environment the poorer our abilities to meld and mesh on the battlefield will be.

Bryan Carroll

B/1-24th IN (SBCT), 25th ID (L)

- Air and ground assets need to be incorporated at the lowest possible level. A platoon leader or squad leader needs to be trained and feel comfortable talking to aircraft.

Here are some references that company commanders are finding helpful for Air-Ground Integration:

- FM 3-21.38 (FM 57-38), *Pathfinder Operations*, October, 2002, (https://akocomm.us.army.mil/usapa/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_aa/pdf/fm3_21x38.pdf).
- "Air-Ground Integration" by CPT Shawn Hatch, *ARMOR Magazine*, JUL-AUG 2005, (<http://www.knox.army.mil/center/ocoa/ArmorMag/CameronIndex/4CPThatch05c.pdf>).
- 101st ABN DIV (AASLT) *GOLD BOOK*, July, 2002, (<http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/army/docs/101st-goldbook/>).

In the current environment you will use them nearly every day. That leader needs to be able to accurately and quickly give his position, the enemy or suspected enemy positions, and his intent for the aircraft.

■ Conduct an Air Mission Briefing before any major mission. These are paramount to success. Brief the pilots your order. Make sure you all have the same graphics. Make the pilots back brief you on how they understand their mission unfolding. In short, treat them as you would one of your platoons. The amount of power they bring to the fight in regards to recon, surveillance and fire is huge.

■ Train as you would fight in country. If your pilots aren't part of the unit, go find them and talk with them. Our Apache squadron was a National Guard squadron out of South Carolina. They started coming to our Brigade meetings and events six months before we deployed. Integrate them into everything you do. Get your Soldiers out talking with them and conducting missions. Send your fire support officers and noncommissioned officers and their teams to train with them.

"Back home, if I want to talk to the D Troop Commander, I walk across the hall."

Keith Kramer

A/3-69th AR, 3rd ID (M)

■ To truly integrate the assets, you have to conduct regular coordination and synchronization at the supported lev-

els to ensure the aviation and the maneuver all understand each others' upcoming operations and graphics. This can be accomplished with regular Task Force (TF) synchronization meetings that include all commanders and slice elements, and brings in the attack aviation elements as well.

■ One challenge with integrating attack aviation is that most of the operations in which we need attack aviation are very hasty or time-sensitive. The vast majority of the time that attack aviation is required is for "troops in contact" situations to help isolate an area or provide Close Combat Attacks so the maneuver unit can close with and destroy the enemy. The attack aviation I usually worked with understood our city graphics and generally understood our local terms for areas as well (after a very short period of operating in our AO). If they were new, either I or a PL/PSG talked them into the area using clear landmarks and cardinal directions working from big to small. As a plus, the TF was quick to push the aircraft to the lowest level.

■ To train this integration, we must invest quality flight hours in a garrison MOUT site, with leaders talking Apaches and Kiowas on-target on a realistic objective that has numerous buildings, streets, vehicles, etc. After the leaders have talked them onto targets dry, they need to move the exercise to the range for live iterations. Raise all the range targets and have the leaders practice calling in the attack aviation from various safe angles and discriminating which set of targets is the threat so they can talk them onto the proper set using the same principles. The range fans and angles of attack can be used to teach them about adjacent units and weapons effects.

Connecting leaders

CC is Company Commanders.

The CC forum is a voluntary, grass-roots forum that is by-and-for company commanders. The forum is positive and practical—focused like a laser beam on the practice of company command and those things that are important to company commanders. Send article ideas to nate.self@us.army.mil.



in conversation

Art by Jody Harmon

Company commanders: We invite you to join the conversation and share what you're learning when it comes to integrating air and ground forces.

Company Commanders, connect at <http://CompanyCommand.army.mil>