

Logistics Training at the Joint Readiness Training Center

BY CAPTAIN JULIO J. REYES

Assignment as an “observer, coach, trainer” at the Joint Readiness Training Center provides opportunities to mentor deploying units and receive professional development training.

The Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, Louisiana, provides the Army with some of the most realistic unit training for deployment and home-station missions. JRTC provides complete coaching and training for squad- to brigade-sized elements of every Army branch and military operational specialty (MOS). Fifty percent of the Army’s brigade combat teams that have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 have trained at JRTC. On average, the JRTC Operations Group conducts 10 training and mission rehearsal exercises each year. JRTC has also provided training assistance for combat support hospitals, security force assistance teams, and village stability operations teams working with special operations task forces and group support battalions.

As one of the Army’s premier training centers, JRTC needs experienced combat veterans who have faced the logistics challenges of both Iraq and Afghanistan to serve as “observer, coach, trainers” (OCTs). Leaders who serve as OCTs gain experience that benefits them and the units they train at JRTC. The purpose of this article is to inform junior leaders about the benefits and rewards of choosing this kind of assignment.

The Mission of OCTs

The sustainment warfighting function is fully exercised at JRTC as trainers focus on preparing sustainment units for

tough logistics missions in Afghanistan and other contingency locations all over the world.

OCTs assigned to Fort Polk help to provide this multi-echelon, tough, and realistic training. OCTs have a duty to rotational units and the Army to observe unit performance, control engagements and operations, teach doctrine, coach to improve unit readiness, monitor safety, and conduct professional after-action reviews that enhance a unit’s training experience.

The OCT positions range from senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) who provide feedback to the staff NCOs and platoon sergeants to senior captains and field-grade officers who provide support to primary staff and support operations positions, forward support companies (FSCs), brigade support battalions, battalion and brigade administrative and logistics operations centers (ALOCs), and sustainment brigade units.

The FSC OCT Team

I was selected to serve as an OCT for an infantry battalion FSC. In the Sustainment Division at JRTC, the typical FSC OCT team consists of a logistics captain (area of concentration 90A, multifunctional logistician) who has completed a company command, a sergeant first class with the MOS 92A (automated logistical specialist), and a sergeant first class, MOS 91B (wheeled vehicle mechanic).

Augmenting the other logistics functions in an infantry battalion is an ALOC OCT team consisting of another logistics captain, an MOS 42A (human resources specialist) sergeant first class, an MOS 92Y (supply specialist) sergeant first class,

A sustainment observer, coach, trainer” watches a hasty recovery during a tactical convoy operation.

Forward support company Soldiers from the 4th Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, exercise medical rules of engagement and treat a civilian casualty during a situational training exercise lane in the town of “Khaista.”



and an MOS 68W (healthcare specialist) sergeant first class.

During each rotation, the OCT teams deploy to the training area to provide real-world training for an infantry battalion of a brigade combat team. The OCTs follow and coach the unit during prerotational training, situational training exercise lanes, and the force-on-force exercise, which is the unit’s culminating event.

Other Sustainment Division Support

Other sections within the Sustainment Division offer OCTs for the brigade support battalion’s companies, including the brigade support medical company, the distribution company, and the field maintenance company.

The Sustainment Division also has OCT teams for the brigade support operations section, the brigade S-4, and the brigade surgeon. Each sustainment OCT has served multiple deployments within the Army and provides cutting-edge feedback and mentorship to the rotational units. Knowing that our team can assist and quite possibly provide guidance that can save a Soldier’s life overseas gives us great satisfaction.

An Opportunity for Growth

I had the opportunity to be assigned to Fort Polk after serving as a company commander and completing the Combined Logistics Captains Career Course. When my branch manager offered the JRTC assignment, my first thoughts were not favorable. However, after discussing the option with my family, I decided to take the assignment because I felt the Army needs quality leaders to serve as OCTs and the assignment would allow me to develop even more as a tactical logistician. The decision to become an OCT has turned out to be one of the best career decisions I have ever made.

Serving as an OCT provides leaders not only the opportunity to support Army units preparing for deployment but also a chance for self professional development. Here is how.

OCTs are responsible for knowing the most current doctrinal practices. This requires professional development, which benefits both JRTC and the individual OCTs.

When not training rotational units, OCTs have the opportunity attend schools. This opportunity lets them return with lessons learned that benefit rotational units at JRTC. Since being assigned here, my fellow OCTs and I have had the opportunity to attend the Operational Contract Support

Course, the Mortuary Affairs Officers Course, the Basic and Advanced Airborne Courses, Ranger School, the Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officers Course, Pathfinder, and other quality courses that enhance the leader’s operational skill set.

OCTs have the opportunity to travel abroad and train with foreign allied forces. Recently, the Sustainment Division sent trainers to Germany to support the 173d Airborne Brigade Combat Team’s full-spectrum operations (FSO) joint exercise, which included an airborne assault exercise into Germany. Other OCTs have had the opportunity to travel to the Canadian Maneuver Training Center near Edmonton, Alberta, to learn about Canadian forces FSO training and joint combat missions.

Since being at JRTC, I have had the opportunity to develop myself as a leader and to gain valuable knowledge that will better prepare me for future assignments as a support operations officer, brigade S-4, or sustainment brigade staff officer.

JRTC is one of the best assignments an officer or NCO can have. The amount of operational and tactical knowledge learned from working with each rotational unit and the ability to build relationships with sustainment leaders throughout the force are invaluable. The training opportunities and chances to travel enhance personal growth of OCTs and may be considered an incentive to seeking an OCT position.

CAPTAIN JULIO J. REYES IS AN OBSERVER, COACH, TRAINER AT THE JOINT READINESS TRAINING CENTER AT FORT POLK, LOUISIANA. HE HOLDS A BACHELOR’S DEGREE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT FROM SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY—EDWARDSVILLE AND IS A GRADUATE OF THE ORDNANCE OFFICER BASIC COURSE, THE COMBINED LOGISTICS CAPTAINS CAREER COURSE, AND THE ARMY AIRBORNE AND JUMPMASTER SCHOOLS. HE IS CURRENTLY ATTENDING THE THEATER LOGISTICS PLANNERS PROGRAM.

