



*Editor's Note: This post is part of the FTGN Army Broadening Series that we are running from March 15-30, 2021. Each day, we will publish new insights into the Army's various broadening assignments, starting March 15th, 2021 with an overview of AIM 2.0 and a discussion on how to educate others on assignment selection criteria.*

By Eric Shockley

When I was assigned as an Observer/Coach-Trainer (O/C-T) at the combat training center (CTC) at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), I initially struggled to understand how

such an assignment could be considered “broadening”, given my outsider’s perception of what was surely endless drudgery in rotation after rotation. Eventually I realized the opportunity that I had been handed, and enjoyed my time at Fort Polk, LA. I hope that relating my experience as an O/C-T can help show the value of such an assignment to those who might otherwise dismiss the opportunity of an assignment to a CTC.

Duty as an O/C-T is often considered “tactical” broadening, and is obviously going to be a much different experience than what you would find in a training with industry situation or in a strategic-level staff position. However, this doesn’t mean that it lacks broadening value. An assignment at a CTC is typically a 2-3 year tour, which gives you around 20-30 brigade-level rotations to observe and gather different insights and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs).

For starters, you get to see a wide range of how different units do things, which exposes you to more problem sets and solutions than your previous operational experience. Beyond that, you’ll get to see a number of different missions, which will be advantageous in future assignments, as it will provide second-handed experience. During my time at Fort Polk I was able to see units handle joint forcible entry (JFE) missions, defense support of civil authorities (DSCA), transitioning from large-scale combat operations (LSCO) to stability, and integrating enabler units of all types. Without an assignment at a CTC, I would likely have not seen that same level of variety without two or three times as much time in the service.

Second, duty as an O/C-T provides value through an amazing opportunity to get back into doctrine. The NCOs, warrant officers, and officers on my team were constantly aspiring to improve by reviewing, discussing, and coaching doctrine. In addition to our own independent efforts, we were able to make use of the local Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) library team to stay current on TTPs, best practices, and doctrinal changes. This

included information across the warfighting functions, which I found to be extremely useful, since most of my pre-CTC experience was in forward operating base (FOB)-based stability operations, which left me inadequately prepared for LSCO.

Improvement is part of the O/C-T culture, and we conducted our own internal AARs after each rotation. Our leaders constantly pushed us to research and publish articles for the larger force, and at times we would generate our own ad hoc rotation to “re-blue” ourselves and maintain our competencies as O/C-Ts. That mentality of continual effort to improve my craft has stayed with me, and most importantly has reminded me to remain humble as I ascend the ranks.

Third, my experience with the leadership at Fort Polk was one of the best I’ve had in 18 years of service. When my family had a significant emergency, my task force and Operations Group leaders made sure I had the resources and support to do what I needed to do. These great leaders were further enabled by the organizational structure of Operations Group.

My LTC and CSM were in charge of several dozen experienced leaders, ranging from SSG to MAJ, and they were able (and willing) to make time for each of us to ensure we grew within the profession. I imagine it was like being back at the platoon level for them, only with many more years of experience under their belt. So the opportunity to interact with a LTC and CSM fresh from their battalion leadership experience is something that I can’t understate, and is one more valuable aspect of duty as an O/C-T.

The last thing that I believe is worth highlighting about O/C-T duty is the way that it can open your eyes to the work that goes into a CTC rotation. Each rotation has its own unique challenges that may not be readily apparent to outsiders. Some O/C-Ts spend their entire time coaching units, while others move between coaching and planning.

I was able to hit the sweet spot and remain in a coaching position, but as a Task Force S3 I

had enough touchpoints with the planners to get a good understanding of all the coordination that goes into making a rotation happen, from real world logistics concerns to keeping the scenario realistic while accounting for a variety of outlying factors. When I returned to the force as a battalion XO in a CTC rotation, I was more aware and understanding of what the O/C-Ts were trying to accomplish. I still made plenty of mistakes, but since the CTCs are meant to be a challenge, I expected that.

I would encourage all leaders to consider a broadening assignment with duty as an O/C-T. It can be a hard life, especially in decisive action situations where you're with your unit for days on end, but the benefits are abundant and real. I was initially apprehensive about my O/C-T assignment, but I came out on the other side a better leader and Soldier.

*MAJ Eric Shockley is a company commander of a Logistics Advisor Company in the 4th Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) at Fort Carson, CO.*

Share this:

- [Email](#)
- [Tweet](#)
- 
- [Print](#)
- [WhatsApp](#)