

Outco

Targeting the Intangible

Photos and Story by
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The staff sergeant sprinted to his connecting gate to discover his flight was delayed. He collapsed into the first chair he could find, very aware that the delay was all that stood between him and R and R leave. A nearby conversation distracted him from his own frustration. The noncommissioned officer turned around to see a group of privates. Fresh out of initial entry training and en route to their first units, they gabbed away about what they'd just accomplished. He wanted to catch a nap while he waited, but he couldn't help but think that these green privates weren't much different than those he'd led for the past six months in Iraq – so he kept listening. One private bragged that his whole platoon managed to get a first-time go on the qualification range. “It was too easy, and we were off the range by noon,” he said. Another private replied, “Wow, we were out there for days; firing, walking to our targets, discussing, adjusting and firing more – again and again.” The NCO waited for a comeback, but while the others kept talking and sharing what they'd learned and applied in their training, the once bragging private now hid in silence. On paper he'd met the standard and fast, but he really had no clue “how” he'd done it because he'd simply been told what to do the whole time; his trainers never explaining or expecting him to understand why. The veteran imagined that the private's silence was probably a bit embarrassing as they lounged around in the airport's cushioned chairs, but as a combat experienced NCO, he knew that the new Soldier's lack of confidence and understanding could be deadly on the asymmetric battlefields of Iraq or Afghanistan.

Confidence, awareness, initiative, accountability, and the ability to think through and solve problems — these intangible attributes are the training

outcomes the NCO subconsciously searched for when listening to the privates' conversation. Based on combat experiences and feedback from warriors like him, Army leaders have discovered that these attributes are what Soldiers need to succeed on today's ever-changing and often unpredictable battlefields, and they've spent the past few years focusing on educating Army trainers on why and how to achieve these intangible outcomes.

Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* describes the full-spectrum environment Soldiers currently operate in as one of persistent conflict that requires adaptive and thinking warriors. Drafts of Field Manual 7-0, *Training for Full Spectrum Operations* recognize that the Army's traditional training and education, primarily designed for conventional warfare, may need to adapt in order to develop Soldiers who are confident in today's full-spectrum operational environment, which is asymmetric versus conventional in nature.

The Army's traditional input-oriented approach to training would suggest that the way to meet these new training needs would be to come up with lists of additional tasks or rewrite programs of instruction. But leaders at training installations and units throughout the Army have instead been working with the Asymmetric Warfare Group to show trainers that they can achieve these intangible attributes in themselves and their Soldiers by using the Outcome-Based Training and Education methodology to train existing tasks and POIs.

Activated in March 2006 and based at Fort Meade, Md., the Asymmetric Warfare Group was created to help units combat the asymmetric tactics, such as suicide bombers and improvised explosive devices, employed in full-spectrum operational environment. According to the unit's Web site, AWG fills the gaps in military capabilities by assisting units in defining, planning and executing missions based on unique needs and situations.

Just such a gap was found when Army researchers and leaders determined the value of an outcomes-based training methodology but needed a vehicle for explaining the new concept to the senior leaders and trainers who would support and use OBT&E. To fill that gap, AWG began working with training centers at Fort Jackson, S.C., and Fort Benning, Ga. The group's subject matter experts began conducting OBT&E workshops, and created the Combat Application Training Course to serve as the vehicle for explaining and spreading the methodology.

What exactly is OBT&E? AWG describes it as a way or method of training that emphasizes the development of an individual based on operational expectations in regards to necessary tangible skills and desired intangible attributes, ultimately producing Soldiers and leaders who

can improvise and adapt their knowledge to solve problems when facing altered situations.

But how does a drill sergeant or a squad leader translate that definition into something he or she can use to produce more confident and accountable Soldiers, and why should a brigade command sergeant major encourage his or her NCOs to use OBT&E? These are the questions AWG advisor Morgan Darwin attempts to answer through his OBT&E workshops. The retired command sergeant major conducts the training for NCOs and senior leaders.

During an August workshop at Fort Benning, Ga., Darwin asked the cadre and Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course students in attendance to write down five characteristics or traits they'd like to see in their Soldiers. Words such as confident, knowledgeable and responsible filled the room as they shared their lists. Darwin said, "NCOs consistently list these as traits [they] want in their Soldiers, but what is it that we [as trainers] focus on in training — we focus on the task, conditions and standards — not these intangible traits."

He explained that historically Army leaders have conducted a mission analysis, which generated a task list and training was then conducted on those tasks, but today's missions are too complex as they incorporate often unpredictable combat, civil and humanitarian aspects — "You just can't simply create a task list for real life today — hitting 23 out of 40 rounds in target for qualification was good enough when we fought as division-sized elements versus the Soviets, but is it really good enough for a squad operating in Anbar Province today?"

Under the OBT&E methodology, it's more important for training to result in a Soldier feeling confident about operating his or her weapon or navigating from one point to another for example, while still being able to quickly assess a problem such as a weapons malfunction or an obstacle in their path and solve that problem without losing sight of other interrelated tasks happening on the battlefield.

Darwin used the example of training Soldiers on the task of applying SPORTS [Slap, Pull, Observe, Release, Tap, Shoot] in response to a weapons malfunction. The example reflects the difference between an input-based method of training and OBT&E. "In the input-based system, [the trainer] gives Soldiers a task — correctly conduct the steps of SPORTS, conditions — given a malfunctioning rifle, etc., and a standard — complete in five seconds," he said. "Soldiers can successfully complete the task to standard without ever really knowing why they conducted any of the steps, or how it's actually applied in combat — maybe once the Soldier has corrected the malfunction, [he or she] shouldn't automatically perform that last step and shoot, but should instead perform some other interrelated task."

He added that by explaining the "why" and "how" of the task, then putting it into a combat-related context and determining the task complete when Soldiers understand



(Top) Combat Application Training Course students at Fort Benning, Ga., disassemble and review the fundamentals of weapons maintenance, paying attention to the “hows” and “whys” of each piece of the weapon. (Above) Master Sgt. Jason Gueringer, right, practices his coaching fundamentals by observing and providing feedback to a fellow CATC student. Gueringer is slated to be a CATC instructor at Fort Benning as the AWG instructors depart to teach the much-demanded course at other posts.

and can confidently execute it in that context, the trainer has taken the existing task of applying SPORTS and deliberately used it to develop both tangible and intangible attributes in their Soldiers. “This outcome is more important on today’s battlefield than Soldiers being able to conduct SPORTS in five seconds.”

Darwin’s explanation is complimented by retired Maj. Donald Vandergriff’s day-long Adaptive Leaders Methodology workshop, often held in conjunction with the OBT&E workshop.

“OBT&E is more philosophical in nature, a way of looking at an overall approach to training, whereas in the adaptability workshop, I’m providing these trainers with tools like tactical decision games, and discussing how to facilitate those games in a way where they can be used for employing OBT&E,” Vandergriff explained.

Vandergriff’s adaptability workshop first engages attendees by putting them through a tactical decision game that requires them to personally employ intangible at-

tributes like critical thinking while remaining self-aware, asking questions and eventually finding and justifying a solution to a problem. He then asks them to create and facilitate their own tactical decision games. By using the OBT&E method, their focus as a trainer is on ensuring the way they facilitate helps produce the desired outcomes in participants. Vandergriff emphasized that there really are no fundamentally wrong answers or ways to facilitate during his workshop, as long as facilitators’ methods lead to the desired outcomes – increasing participants’ adaptability and critical thinking skills.

Both experts acknowledged that whether trainers realize it or not, many throughout the Army are already using OBT&E to develop intangible attributes in their Soldiers, but Darwin said, “It’s still not the institutional norm that’s needed for this cultural shift in training.”

As a catalyst for achieving that goal, AWG developed the Combat Application Training Course. It serves as a vehicle for demonstrating OBT&E in a practical way.



(Top) CATC students continue to focus on applying the fundamentals during timed movement and varied position drills as a way to help them develop confidence while moving safely with a weapon under time pressure. (Above) A course instructor discusses a student's firing group, encouraging the student to apply the fundamentals when determining which adjustments to make and why.

By applying the methodology to marksmanship – a basic Army skill – CATC reveals that when a trainer combines the standard rifle marksmanship POI with an outcome-based mindset, Soldiers leave the training better shooters, but more importantly they understand how and why their weapon works the way it does, take accountability when it comes to weapons safety and maintenance, and are confident with operating their weapons in unpredictable situations, said retired Sgt. Maj. John Porter, a CATC instructor.

According to its mission statement, CATC uses mentorship and a principle-based training program to demonstrate a safe and effective training method that enhances Soldier responsibility and accountability.

AWG instructors first taught the course to 82nd Airborne Division Soldiers at Fort Bragg, N.C., during their pre-deployment training in 2006, and then to 101st Airborne Division Soldiers at Fort Campbell, Ky. and brigade combat teams at Fort Hood and Fort Bliss, Texas. For a little more than a year now, CATC has been consistently attended by cadre of training institutions at both Fort Jackson and Fort Benning to include the Army's newly consolidated Drill Sergeant School at Fort Jackson.

Porter said, "More than 1,200 folks have gone through the course at Fort Benning alone. Sometimes we'll have 10 in a course; sometimes we're turning people away. If we have more than 40 in a class then we really can't be true to the methodology we're trying to demonstrate."

The course's instructors are quick to tell students that if they walk away from the training thinking it was a shooting course, they didn't get it at all.

"Sure, it'll make somebody a better shooter, but its purpose is to demonstrate a different method of training that can be applied to other basic skills like navigation, maintenance, driving or safety," Porter said.

The course is delivered in two programs. The five day basic program and the 10 day advanced program, which builds on the basic program and incorporates MOUT and room clearing fundamentals. The basic course is grounded in first achieving a mastery of fundamentals such as weapons safety, maintenance, functions and malfunctions, ballistics, operations and coaching; mastery meaning an understanding of the "hows" and "whys" of each fundamental. Using that same idea of mastery, each day of the course builds on the previous day never losing sight of mastered fundamentals, and always exercising safety as a training enabler versus disabler.

The students begin by wearing eye and ear protection, but no other gear so the instructors can actually see what they're doing wrong as they fire their weapons at targets from different distances. They first fire just five rounds, then walk to their targets and discuss why their rounds hit or missed the targets in certain areas. The instructors are there to provide feedback and answer questions, but they encourage the students to consider the "hows" and "whys" of the fundamentals they've already mastered and then confidently decide which adjustments to make to

solve the problem at hand, Porter said.

"This method encourages Soldiers to constantly ask "how" does this or that work or "why" do we do the things we do," said Staff Sgt. Alvin Fields, a cadre member who mentors new Infantry lieutenants at Fort Benning's Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course. "I've deployed twice to Iraq and twice to Afghanistan – I mean, it's marksmanship, something we all do; you'd think after years in combat, we'd know everything, but this course really opens your eyes to how much you know of, but don't really understand or feel confident about."

Porter said, "There's no such thing as advanced fundamentals; there's just basic fundamentals done well and applied in different situations," which is why the course replicates stresses of combats through timed position and movement shooting while also incorporating shoot/no-shoot and weapons malfunction scenarios.

"You really have to put it all together in the drills, remembering the fundamentals even though you have other things to deal with and decisions to make," said Sgt. 1st Class Walter Perez, a drill sergeant at Fort Benning who attended the five day course. "Going through the course, I can really see the value in using this method of training, I can feel myself getting more and more comfortable and confident as the course goes on."

Perez, like the majority of the training cadre and drill sergeants at Fort Benning and Fort Jackson, attended the course to understand the OBT&E methodology so he can now utilize it when training other Soldiers.

"I send all of our new cadre members to CATC, and we're in the process of working an abbreviated form of the course into our Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course curriculum, so even more NCOs will be exposed to this way of training," said Command Sgt. Maj. William Ulibarri, the U.S. Army Infantry Center command sergeant major. "I already see the difference as our drill sergeants and NCOs are applying what they've learned. When I go out to the ranges today, the level of mastery and confidence has increased incredibly versus when I'd visit them just a year ago."

Ulibarri and USAIC are in the process of assuming an even greater role in CATC as all but one of the AWG instructors move on to other posts, leaving USAIC NCOs to instruct the course at Fort Benning.

"The demand for the course and workshop continues to increase; Army G3 has embraced the idea; the new Field Manual 7-0 will call for the OBT&E methodology; and the list goes on of initiatives all across the institutional Army," Darwin said. "I believe that the American Soldier is more adaptable than any creature on earth; it's the [way] we train that needs to change. But [OBT&E] is not an experiment; it's growing Army-wide and on a wave that's just two to five years from hitting shore."

Until then, AWG officials predict, and Army leaders hope, that NCOs and other trainers will target the intangibles in their Soldiers by continuing to discover ways to implement OBT&E across the training spectrum. 