

“The MTW is the centerpiece of our leader development program; combat readiness is our number one priority.”

—Maj. Gen. Duane A. Gamble,
21st Theater Sustainment Command

Chief Warrant Officer Aaron Smith, 21st Theater Sustainment Command G-4, presents an overview of the command's maintenance terrain walk at the 30th Medical Brigade Senior Leader Forum at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, on Dec. 1, 2015. (Photo by Capt. Jeku Arce)



The 21st TSC's Maintenance Terrain Walk Program

■ By Chief Warrant Officer 3 Aaron T. Smith

About a year ago, the 21st Theater Sustainment Command (TSC) commanding general (CG) asked me to establish a maintenance terrain walk (MTW) program to develop leaders and increase readiness in the TSC. He provided me with his book of previous MTWs to use as a guide.

The CG's request seemed easy enough. I am the senior logistics maintenance warrant officer for the 21st TSC G-4 maintenance branch. I came up through the ranks in armored brigade combat teams and have been a part of and witness to numerous terrain walk events as a Soldier, noncommissioned officer (NCO), and warrant officer. But I quickly realized that this task was not cut and dry. I was out of my element a bit.

As I began my backward planning, I kept getting hung up on how to tailor a program for such a distinct command. The 21st TSC spans multiple countries with many

different mission-essential task lists and equipment. I wanted to make a program diverse enough to accomplish the CG's leader development and readiness goals without having to reinvent the wheel every time we conducted an MTW.

The 21st TSC is a multicomponent force consisting of a sustainment brigade, military police brigade, medical brigade, engineer units, a theater civilian support center, and an Army Reserve mission support command with a civil affairs brigade and transportation teams. The TSC can have Soldiers in as many as 50 countries at a time, so readiness is of the utmost importance and the top priority.

This MTW program could never be generic or vague. It needed to be the centerpiece of our leader development and readiness objectives.

Effecting Readiness

In order to develop the MTW, we had to get out and observe first-

If designed and implemented properly, a maintenance terrain walk can drastically increase long-term readiness.

hand the unique challenges that our junior leaders were working through. We needed to talk with Soldiers and leaders to evaluate the gaps. Change, progress, and readiness could happen only if we were equipped with information.

Standard battle rhythm events, such as brigade maintenance meetings, sustainment readiness reviews, and theater maintenance working groups, are effective for tracking readiness and prioritizing efforts. However, they are not adequate for training leaders at echelon.

An MTW, if designed and implemented properly, will take leaders out from behind their desks and force them to review their programs, talk to their Soldiers, make sound decisions, and implement the changes needed for long-term readiness.

The commander should be at the forefront of the maintenance program and enable the NCOs, warrant officers, and junior leaders to improve readiness. Over the years, commanders have backed off of influencing the maintenance program and relied solely on maintenance officers, warrant officers, and motor sergeants to determine the future of readiness for the unit.

But Army Regulation 750-1, Army Materiel Maintenance Policy, does not state that the maintenance program belongs to the warrant officer or motor sergeant; it says that it belongs to the commander.

The MTW is a commander's tool for developing leaders and achieving warfighter readiness. Embracing maintenance readiness as a priority, empowering NCOs and junior leaders to train Soldiers, and resourcing readiness at all echelons are all components of the MTW.

A Different MTW

The MTW is not directly discussed in any regulation. It is not spelled out in any one specific manual or technical bulletin. But having the freedom to design the MTW does not negate the responsibility to follow policies or regulations; it

simply means that MTW developers need to do their homework to make sure they capture all regulations governing maintenance.

The 21st TSC's program has all of the features of traditional MTWs. It contains training and evaluation outlines, policy memos, task orders, example slide decks, and statistical data.

What differentiates the 21st TSC's MTW from past programs is that it aligns with the unit's organizational inspection program and command maintenance discipline program (CMDP). The 21st TSC uses the organizational inspection program as a foundation to develop training goals and program modifications that outline long-term readiness goals and how the command can reach them.

The 21st TSC uses the MTW as a training progress review within 120 and 180 days after a battalion commander takes command. This review, conducted by the CG, gives the battalion commander the opportunity to gain insight and guidance from the CG that is specific to his or her command.

This invaluable face-to-face review opens the door for candid conversations and provides the CG's perspective of the overall readiness goals for the 21st TSC. The review encourages the battalion commander to make the changes required to align his or her efforts with the overall readiness goals of the TSC.

Equally important, it gives the battalion's command sergeant major a framework to shape the unit's training efforts in support of the commander's readiness objectives.

The 21st TSC uses the CMDP as a conduit for training. Because the MTW is an "at echelon" training event, incorporating the CMDP paves the way for battalion and company commanders to learn the basics of maintenance management. It also empowers senior enlisted trainers and enforces readiness down to the lowest level.

The 21st TSC wants to ensure that commanding officers and lead-

ers know the standards and how to enforce them. Therefore, the CG hosts the battalion MTW, the brigade commander hosts the company MTW, and the battalion commander hosts the platoon MTW.

All of the MTWs follow the same principle of focused training and take a deep look at how to improve programs and meet long-term readiness goals that are outlined in annual training guidance, are synchronized during quarterly training briefings, and ultimately are nested in the unit's training management processes.

Readiness Training at Echelon

Another differentiating feature of our program is how deeply the 21st TSC G-4 staff is involved. The MTW is training at echelon for the TSC G-4 and brigade and battalion S-4s. Each event enables the G-4 to learn, grow, and better understand the TSC's diverse unit structure.

The G-4 begins by shaping the MTW for the battalion commanders. Most battalion commanders view the MTW as an inspection by the CG. We curb this perception immediately with an in-depth commander's in-brief that outlines goals, initiatives, and lessons learned.

The G-4 also presents the battalion command teams with the state of readiness within the command. Through statistical systems analysis, the G-4 provides a weekly report on current readiness drivers for the battalion.

The equipment status for the maintenance plan may show only four overdue services. This gives a false reality; the average unit has 1,200 pieces of equipment that do not have maintenance plans in the system.

So, the 21st TSC G-4 built an equipment reconciliation database to inform units of which pieces of equipment lack maintenance plans and are potentially overdue for maintenance because of system oversights or data transfer faults.

Because Soldiers are still learning the Global Combat Support

System-Army (GCSS-Army), the TSC had to develop training to coincide with the MTW to make sure that the efforts of the maintainers, operators, and leaders were properly tracked and managed in the new system. This learning process increases the ability of the equipment records and parts specialists to properly update GCSS-Army.

Enabling Senior Trainers

Nesting the unit's approach to the MTW with the Army's 8-Step Training Model and preparing the CG are extremely important to the overall success of the MTW. After finalizing the battalion's MTW plan and training the trainers through in-progress reviews and rehearsals, the G-4 sends a progress report to the CG.

The CG must be aware of where the unit's readiness started and where it stands on the day of the terrain walk in order for battalion commanders to obtain the full training value of the MTW. Instead of simply briefing statistics, battalion commanders brief the CG about the program and how the CG's influence has improved long-term readiness.

The G-4 develops a 5-by-7-inch question-and-answer booklet for the CG that specifically represents the unit's challenges and accomplishments. It provides the CG with a quick reference to check on learning. The booklet contains all slides and statistical graphs to ensure the CG has all available information at his disposal.

Finally, a full pre-briefing is conducted a few days prior to the MTW to go over the data collected from the training. The G-4 assists and advises the CG on the remaining shortcomings or potential areas where he could apply the most influence to achieve the training objective.

This enables the CG to conduct the eighth step of the training model with each battalion commander, evaluate the training, and give guidance as required.

The Readiness Impact

The 21st TSC's MTW program was designed to encourage innovation and a holistic review of maintenance functions at all levels within the command. It has reduced shortcomings by more than 70 percent in each unit that has conducted an MTW.

The TSC has seen a sharp decrease in overdue services and in Army Oil Analysis Program and test, measurement, and diagnostic equipment delinquencies. Productivity with GCSS-Army has also improved. In units that have conducted an MTW, the number of GCSS-Army help desk tickets have declined to only a few per month.

Sustainment readiness review ratings have improved, and overall command emphasis on maintenance functions are overwhelmingly apparent in those units. Equipment status reports are shrinking, and policies and programs designed around time and cost savings initiatives have sprung up across the command.

The 21st TSC has seen an increase in cross-talk between commanders and maintenance leaders. They are sharing ideas and initiatives that otherwise would not have been shared.

An effective MTW program will help transform a unit into a well-oiled machine. The 21st TSC's MTW program was created and managed by the Soldiers, but it is owned by the commander. That ownership strengthens the bonds across the ranks and leads the way to a more ready, capable, and lethal sustainment force.

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