

# Joint Services Team To Test and Evaluate Close Air Support at the NTC

by Sergeant First Class Roderick McCottrell

A joint services test force chartered by the Secretary of Defense will study the effectiveness of close air support (CAS) during NTC rotations with the goal of developing more effective tactics, techniques, and procedures that can be shared by all of the services.

Battlefield assessment teams will be gathering this data during Army and Marine rotations, but the BAT teams will not interfere with BLUEFOR or OPFOR players, nor will the rotating units be evaluated by the teams.

The NTC was selected as the test site because of the availability of its instrumentation, used to evaluate visiting maneuver units, and because the NTC reflects realistic force on force combat involving the joint services. CAS support, for example, comes from Air Force units

at Nellis AFB nearby. Data will be gathered from BLUEFOR and OPFOR participants from a series of force-on-force battles, both day and night. Additional data will be gathered from tactical air control parties (TACPs) which coordinate air support, and the CAS providers from the four services. Part of the data base will be gleaned from the NTC Instrumentation System, the Air Warrior Measurement and Debriefing System at Nellis AFB, recordings of tactical communication nets, and observation at TOCs and Tactical Air Control Party locations.

As a rule, there are 10 rotations through the NTC each year, assuring that there is sufficient data for analysis. Each combat arms branch has provided a subject matter expert as part of the JT&E teams, which will augment the O/C teams at the NTC in gathering data. All JT&E teams

are made up of a mixture of the services, with representatives from the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps.

The project actually got under way in October, when the teams began collecting baseline data on how units currently perform. The final analysis and report is expected to be issued in the second quarter of FY 2002. More and more frequently, maneuver units will be fighting as part of joint operations. While each service has its own capability to provide close air support, there is limited joint doctrine on some aspects of CAS, notably night operations, in *JP 3-09.3 Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for CAS*.

In addition to the field tests, several so-called "mini-tests" will evaluate alternative control procedures under day and night conditions, and equipment issues involving infrared pointer devices and laser target designators.

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