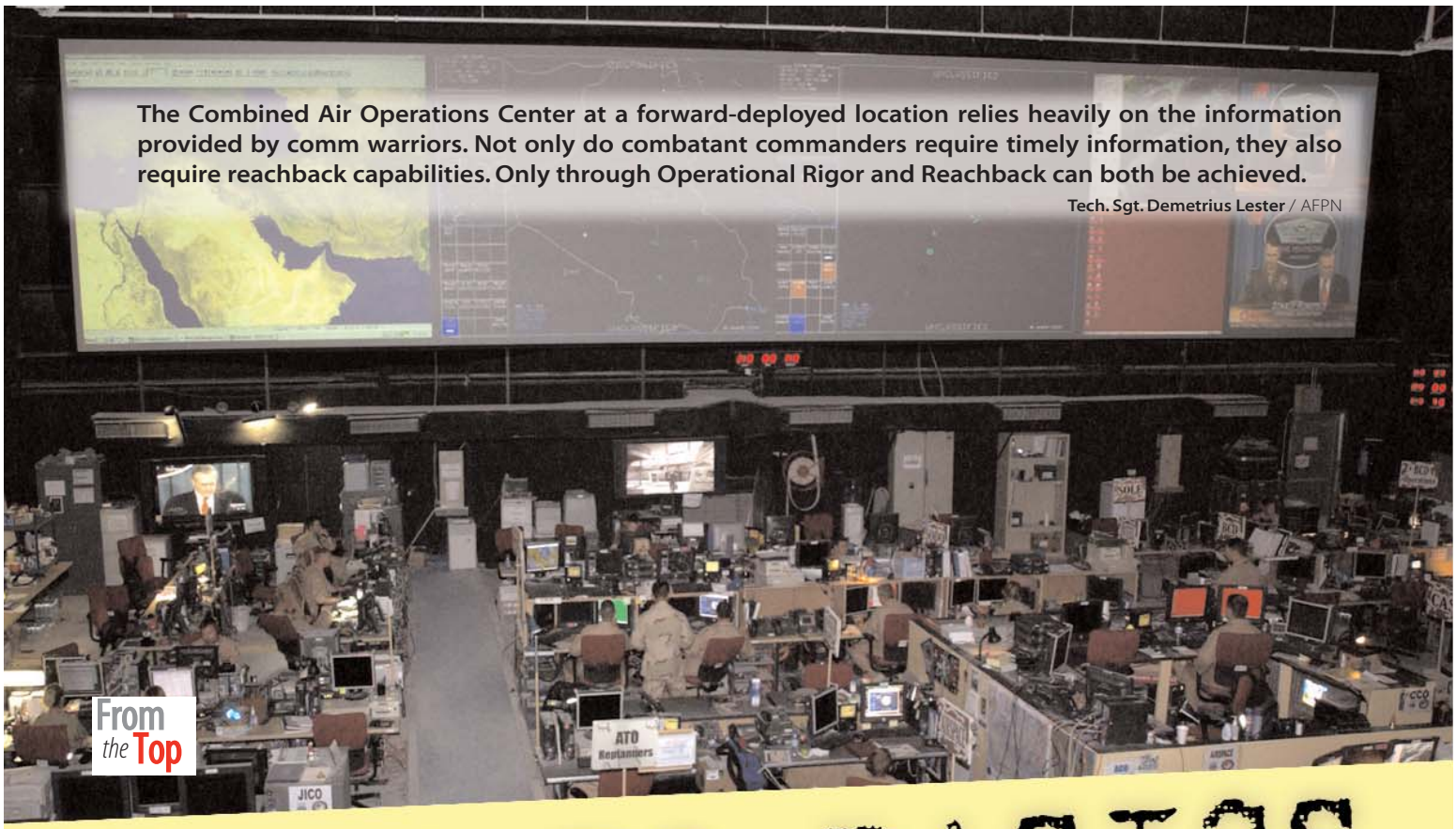

The Combined Air Operations Center at a forward-deployed location relies heavily on the information provided by comm warriors. Not only do combatant commanders require timely information, they also require reachback capabilities. Only through Operational Rigor and Reachback can both be achieved.

Tech. Sgt. Demetrius Lester / AFPN

From the Top

BACK TO BASICS

For PACAF, 'Operational Rigor and Discipline' is not just a catch phrase. It is a new mindset that elevates our thinking, a framework that optimizes the use of the means, and concept that ensures the right methods for flying our network weapons system for the warfighter.

By Col. Gregory Brundidge
PACAF Director of Communications and Information

HICKAM AIR FORCE BASE, Hawaii — The new sight picture for PACAF Network Operations is called "Ops Rigor and Discipline" and it constitutes a change in mindset. This back-to-basics approach is quickly gaining momentum and provides the bedrock for not only theater network operations but ultimately for all theater operations. "Ops Rigor and Discipline" is a simple concept but not so simple to implement.

A Global Hawk Unmanned Aerial Vehicle pierces the dark sky near the battlefield collecting valuable information. Live video feeds instantly appear on operator consoles 2,000 miles away, are reviewed by local analysts, intelligence is sent to the Air Operations Center and used for mission planning. The find, fix, track, target, engage, assess kill chain has begun and critical command and control is required every step of the way.

The combatant commanders require not only accurate and timely information but also tremendous reachback capabilities. Decision cycles will soon be measured in single digit minutes to achieve battlefield effects against time sensitive targets. Warfighters should focus on "the art of command" and the communicators should handle the flow of information and make the data they deliver as

transparent as possible.

PACAF's Area of Responsibility extends from Alaska through Hawaii to the U.S. territory of Guam and Diego Garcia. As Gen. William Begert, PACAF/CC, often says, "While 70 percent of the AOR is covered by water, all of it is covered by air and space and all of it requires assured command and control capabilities." Daily, the PACAF enterprise network delivers just that.

Imagine a weapons system operating 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, never lands, operates in an AOR covering more than half of the earth, undergoes constant hardware and software upgrades and every other weapon system in the theater depends on it. This challenge accurately describes the critical command and control provided by the PACAF enterprise network. The warfighters at the tip of the spear depend on guaranteed voice, video and data for mission success. Surveillance, reconnaissance, mission planning, operations and battle damage assessment all require connectivity. That connectivity must be available, reliable, secure and assured whenever and wherever required.

In July 2003, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, Gen. John Jumper said, "The day is coming when prompt global strike will be a reality, when the kill chain will be reliably and consistently compressed to minutes instead of hours or days, and when the sum of all our sensor, command and control, and information capabilities will be a cursor on the target and steel on the enemy. Our technology, conceived in the minds of innovative Airmen to answer warfighting needs, born and nurtured in our laboratories, guided and shaped by concepts of operations, refined in our battlelabs and joint exercises, and forged into revolutionary capabilities by our product and logistics centers, has given us unprecedented ability to achieve that dominance on the battlefield."

Communications for communications sake is pointless. It is a means—a means to achieve successful mission operations. It is a critical enabler providing the "how" for warfighters to globally command and control forces toward a military objective.

Network operations must be considered a science, and we must all strive to standardize our approaches. We must transform the way we conduct our business processes, tools, training, checklists, operations and maintenance.

If we consider the network to be a weapons system, then good Operational Rigor and Discipline clearly is critical to successful network operations. If we are to model our enterprise processes after operational processes, then the network must be monitored, managed and maneuvered. This begins with establishing a mindset where we equate net ops to core mission processes such as missile ops or maintenance where using checklists is the standard rather than the exception.

Those standards enable us to produce improved policies, enterprise infrastructures and core systems across the AOR. Additionally, they would permeate each layer of the Global

Master Sgt. Scott Wagers / AFPN

Airman 1st Class Melvin Casler, a tracking technician with the 611th Air Control Squadron at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, helps monitor 1.3 million miles of PACAF airspace as part of Operation Noble Eagle.

Information Grid construct, and establish a foundation for taking the next steps forward. With that vision in mind, we must take the next step and ensure the means are available to execute that mindset. We equate means not only to systems but also to tools, abilities, skill sets, training certification, and evaluation so our professionals work from a position of knowledge rather than guesswork. Training needs to be based on our environment, policies and procedures, preventing us from falling into the typical problem of training to the tool on hand.

Training should ensure we are able to affect knowledge transfer and understanding—something we can get only from hands-on experience and certification. In the end, we should work toward an environment where we have trained and certified personnel flying the network on a daily basis. Lastly, we should aggressively and systematically ensure the correct methods are in place to capture and document lessons learned as they emerge. These evolve into new TTPs and must stay updated to accommodate our new processes so we can replicate success as an Air Force.

Like any other large organization, we purchase services from a diverse group of vendors. The challenge, of course, is figuring out how to integrate those disparate services into a framework that provides the right information to warfighters at the right time. Disciplined configuration control is crucial.