

Arkansas Wing Training Encampment

TACTICAL OFFICER'S HANDBOOK



Cadet Programs, Arkansas Wing
United States Air Force Auxiliary
Civil Air Patrol

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Chapter 1

THE ROLE OF THE TACTICAL OFFICER

1-1. Overview. The role of the Tactical Officer at Encampment is one of the most rewarding, difficult, strenuous, and exhaustive jobs there are. You are mentor, safety officer, chaperone and parent all in one and all at once. This handbook is not meant to tell you how to do your job, rather it should be used as a reference to answer questions, clarify information or to generate ideas.

For an encampment to function effectively, good Tactical Officers are essential. The TAC is not part of the flight but is part of the flight training staff. You do not command or direct the flight; this is what the cadet staff is for. The cadet staff cannot learn if senior members are doing their job for them. A TAC serves by being that constantly available source of wisdom, common sense, knowledge and sometimes just an extra set of eyes and ears.

To some degree the Tactical Officer role is something you will have to “feel.” There will be times when your comments and critiques are welcomed and there will be other times when the cadet staff does not need the help. Of course there will be the times when the staff does not want the help but needs it anyway. Feeling which situation is apparent will come with the experience.

1-2. Responsibilities. As a Tactical Officer you will have a number of responsibilities. Some of these will be exclusively yours while others you will share with your Flight Staff. Below are the responsibilities that most TAC officers will handle.

a. Exclusive Responsibilities

- (1) Custody of barracks facilities
- (2) Initial “shakedown” inspection
- (3) Custody of contraband and POV keys
- (4) Supervise cadet calls to home
- (5) Sick-call, blister check and Medical Officer referral
- (6) Personal counseling and Chaplain referrals
- (7) Custody and release of cadets to authorized personnel

b. Shared Responsibilities

- (1) Safety of all flight members
- (2) General welfare of cadets including heat exhaustion prevention, fluid intake, availability, use of latrine, etc.
- (3) Observation, training and correction of military customs and courtesies violations.

c. Delegating Responsibilities. As you, and possibly your assistant, are the only seniors directly assigned to the flight there are very few opportunities to delegate these responsibilities. The exclusive responsibilities cannot be delegated and are your duty to complete. The shared responsibilities fall to both you and the cadet flight staff, but ultimately you must monitor their completion. From time to time you may need to leave the flight for short periods. You may ask another TAC to cover the flight for you, but you should not ask them to handle any of your exclusive responsibilities without first consulting the Chief Tactical Officer or the Commandant of Cadets.

1-3. Supervision and assistance. You are not alone as Tactical Officer. Within the encampment structure there are a number of people who are here to help you.

a. Chief Tactical Officer. Depending on the size of the encampment you may have a Chief Tactical Officer. The Chief Tactical Officer is charged with supervising the Tactical Officers for the Commandant of Cadets. This person is available to answer your questions, coordinate coverage if you need a break, and to help things run smoothly. The Chief TAC is someone that you should share concerns, problems or positive feedback about certain cadets. Also, if there are issues with the cadet squadron staff or cadet executive staff you should bring these up to the Chief TAC as well.

b. Commandant of Cadets. The Commandant of Cadets serves in much the same role as a Deputy Commander for Cadets does in a composite squadron. The Commandant is responsible for ensuring that the encampment plan is being executed as designed and that the encampment objectives and standards are being

met. Most of your communications with the Commandant should go through the Chief TAC.

d. Chaplain. The Chaplain is available for many types of services and assistance. Counseling, mediating and listening are just some of the skills and abilities that the Chaplain brings to the encampment setting. Do not feel that you need to solve or counsel all of the problems that your cadets may have. Involve the Chaplain early on so that he can help “manage” the load. Remember that many of our cadets will bring emotional “baggage” from home. While we cannot usually change their situation and we did not create it, we do have to effectively work with it to help the cadet be successful in reaching the encampment goals.

e. Medical Officer. The Medical Officer is available 24 hours a day to help resolve medical problems. If you are not comfortable with any of the minor medical duties you have (blisters checks, etc.) talk with the Medical Officer. Also keep an open line of communication with the Medical Officer. Occasionally cadets will attempt to tell their TAC one thing and the Medical Officer something else. It is important that communications be open so that we can resolve these types of issues.

1-4. Additional duties and participation. In addition to the specific responsibilities listed above you may be asked to help out in other ways. From a training aspect you are part of the “flight staff.” You will be expected to participate in meetings and give your input and feedback about the flight’s progression and about the status of individual members. You may also be asked to help find solutions to problems, as have many more years of experience and wisdom to pull from.

One lesson that can be difficult for new TAC’s to understand, is that the flight you are assigned to is not “your flight.” The flight, and the ownership of that flight, really belongs to the cadet staff. Just as the encampment, in essence, belongs to the cadet executive staff. The senior staff, from the Tactical Officer to the Commander, serves as custodians of the encampment and its pieces. We give the encampment over to the cadets during the week. The seniors still maintain control and oversight, but the ownership of the success must lie with the cadets if they are to learn. If you allow yourself to think in terms of “my flight” then

you will exert too much control over the flight and the cadet flight staff will spend the week doing nothing but following. They are here to be leaders, not to just “fill a slot.”

You may also be tasked with other minor staff duties to help fill in certain jobs. For example you may be asked to coordinate communications, setup the computer network, monitor supply levels, etc. It is more likely that these types of responsibilities will be given to if you are an assistant or at a larger encampment (100+ cadets), but be ready to pitch in if asked.

Chapter 2

EXCLUSIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

2-1. Exclusive Responsibilities. In Chapter One we discussed those responsibilities that you are solely responsible for. Here we will review the responsibilities in more detail.

2-2. Custody of barracks facilities. This duty will largely depend on the facility used for your encampment. If the flight is assigned to its own building, then you are ultimately responsible for ensuring that the building is maintained and in an appropriate condition. This does not refer to ensuring the flight members meet the encampments' inspection standards. Meeting those standards is the responsibility of the cadet staff and the flight members. You are expected to monitor the building for overall livability and engineering issues such as leaky pipes, roof leaks, furnace/air quality issues, etc. In an encampment where you share a building you may be asked to monitor certain parts.

2-3. Shakedown inspection. Sometimes this is a duty that Tactical Officers have difficulty executing because they either do not understand its purpose or feel it is too "over the top." A shakedown inspection is a complete and thorough inspection of the gear, clothing and luggage that the cadet brought to the encampment. Prior to encampment each will have received a list of items that are considered "contraband." As experience has shown us, some cadets will insist on bringing these items. Some items are simple oversights (forgetting to take their knife out of their field gear) while others are done to expressly violate the rules (such as bringing tobacco or alcohol – both of which have happened).

The reasons we do shakedown inspections are varied. First, we strive to remove any distractions from the training environment that the cadet may have brought with them. It is difficult to motivate a cadet to make his bunk when he can listen to his CD player. Second, the inspection process allows us to identify and address any cadet who has the intent of expressly violating the rules and engaging in conduct that could seriously impact his or her fellow flight members. These cadets are the ones who bring alcohol, tobacco or drugs to our activities. During encampment we want to ensure that the

cadets are eating a well-balanced diet and receiving good nutrition. This is the third reason we do shakedown inspections – to eliminate the candy, junk food and soda (and its associated sugar and caffeine) from the cadets' diets. Lastly, we use the shakedown inspection process to set a tone. Encampment is not just another summer camp. Conducting a shakedown inspection sends the message that we are serious about training and about standards.

The shakedown inspection must be thorough and complete. This means opening every bag, holder, etc. including toiletry bags, and so on. It is recommended that you have the cadet spread everything out, while you are present, so that you may check every item. Your encampment may have a specific procedure for this. If you have mixed genders in your flight, it is recommended that you have a staff member of the opposite gender (either cadet or senior) assist you when you conduct a shakedown inspection of the cadets that are not of your gender. For example, if you are a male TAC you will want to ask a female TAC or female cadet staff member to assist you in inspecting the belongings of your female flight members. Using support staff members for this task is a good idea. Don't forget to check the luggage itself and any pillows or sleeping bags the cadet brings! If you don't do a complete shakedown the first time you will likely end up redoing it later as evidence of the contraband begins to surface during the week.

2-4. Custody of personal items. As you conduct the shakedown inspection you will come across a wide variety of contraband. The cadet is not allowed to have these items during the encampment, but the encampment must also return the items to the cadet at the end of the encampment. To facilitate this you should have some Ziploc bags that you can write on (or masking tape and a marker). As you take items from the cadets, place them in the bag and record the information on the form that will be provided by the encampment. You are responsible for securing these bags and safeguarding them until the end of encampment. It is also recommended that you have a combination lock to secure the bags in a footlocker or a closet.

Certain contraband items will not be returned to the cadet. Any items that are prohibited by CAP regulations (as compared to encampment standards) or by law will be taken and not returned. If you find these items you should immediately notify the Commandant of Cadets, as these are serious offenses that must be addressed immediately. Items that this would include are illegal drugs, drug paraphernalia, tobacco products, firearms (or facsimiles) or alcohol.

Your encampment may ban certain food items (candy, soda, etc.) and may stipulate that these items shall not be returned. Storing food and candy is often difficult as they are bulky, become stale, etc. If the policy is for the food to not be returned, you should inform the cadet of this at the time of the inspection.

If cadets from your flight drive a personal vehicle (POV) to the encampment you are also responsible for securing their keys. The cadet may not operate their vehicle during the encampment without the express permission of the Encampment Commander.

2-5. Phone calls home. Occasionally cadets will need to call home during encampment. The reasons for these calls can be varied from saying “Happy Birthday” to an illness or death in the family. However, since the majority of calls home are due to family emergencies or homesickness, you should be present whenever these calls are being made. If you feel it is warranted you should involve the Chaplain as well. You should actively monitor the entire conversation by remaining in the room with the cadet. Many times parents do not understand what we are doing at encampment. All the parent knows is that their child is calling home, in tears, and asking to come home. Some parents will tell their child to stay and work through their homesickness. Others will tell the cadet to come home. Obviously, for the sake of the cadet’s education, we do not want the cadet to go home. The challenge of homesickness is something the cadet will have to face some day. By remaining in the room you are in a better position to discuss any issues with the cadet or his/her parent. You may even want to place the call for the cadet so that both parties understand that you are there. Lastly, don’t forget to arrange for someone to monitor the flight while you are taking care of this duty.

2-6. Sick call, blister checks and health matters. At an appointed time each day the Medical Officer will conduct a sick call. This is the time when cadets who need “routine” medical treatment (icings, wraps, heat rash, etc.) should be allowed to see the Medical Officer. You should require those cadets who need these types of treatments to use the sick call to receive them. Otherwise you will have to interrupt the training day to address the cadet’s needs at a later point. Of course if these issues arise earlier in the day and need to be treated then you should allow the Flight Staff to handle the issue at that time. Do not force a cadet to wait until Sick Call to receive help, but encourage cadets to use Sick Call whenever possible to consolidate your medical leaves.

One of the most important duties you have is conducting blister checks. Encampment is made up of a lot of marching, standing and running. It is hard to make it through encampment with bad feet. Treating blisters early will help prevent problems later in the week. If you are unsure of how to handle blisters, consult the Medical Officer.

2-7. Personal counseling and Chaplain referral. Encampment can be a very stressful experience for some cadets. It may be their first time away from home, it may be the stress or they may just be overwhelmed – in any case cadets sometimes need an ear to talk to. As a general rule, the cadet flight staff members should not be the ones conducting this type of counseling. They have an image and a “distance” that they need to maintain. This is why the TAC is so important. You can counsel the cadets and allow the flight staff to continue their operations.

You should also be ready to involve the Chaplain in any counseling process. Sometimes the needs of the cadet will be too much for you to handle. That’s okay. The Chaplain is always available to assist you. Also, if a cadet should ask to see the Chaplain, the cadet is always allowed to do so. The only exception to this is when the flight is very far away from base or when it would be unsafe to leave the flight. But then every effort should be made to take the cadet to the Chaplain (or bring the Chaplain to the cadet) as soon as it is possible.

Chapter 3

SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES

3-1. Shared Responsibilities. As part of the Flight Staff you must work with cadet staff to ensure that these responsibilities are covered. As you will see they are largely those duties that require every set of eyes and ears possible.

3-2. Safety. Encampment is no fun for a cadet if they are hurt and unable to participate. While “everyone is a Safety Officer,” as a TAC you are required to be even more attentive to safety related items. Some common safety pitfalls:

- Running in barracks.
- Too much drill and not enough fluids.
- Poor eating habits.
- Running up/down stairs.
- Dehydration/heat exhaustion.

Rare is the flight commander who tries to purposely hurt or endanger his/her flight. Far more common is the flight commander who becomes so focused on accomplishing the mission that he/she loses sight of the more common sensible things like not sitting in the sun but instead under shade; not stopping for fluids; not allowing bathroom breaks, etc.

3-3. General welfare of the cadets. This is strongly related to safety but also includes other areas such as hygiene emotional health and stress management. Many of the cadets are experiencing their first time away from home in a large group and may need some assistance with hygiene issues. Other cadets may need someone to talk to or just some tips on how to manage the stress they are faced with.

3-4. Customs and Courtesies. Customs and courtesies are a very big deal at an encampment. Teaching them, enforcing them and executing them is a major part of the training curriculum. For many cadets (and seniors) this is the one time they will be faced with having to use their customs and courtesies on a continual basis.

As a TAC you are expected to be familiar with the military customs and courtesies. More importantly you are expected to assist in the enforcing and review of these habits. One of the reasons we have so many staff on hand is to allow the staff to observe and correct as many

deficiencies as possible. Do not be afraid to correct a cadet. When you do so, be direct, firm and ensure that the cadet understands what they did incorrectly and the correct way to do it. As a general rule you should not simply refer the violations to your cadet flight staff. When you do this, it takes too long from the violation to the correction. However, if a cadet continuously makes errors or shows an indifference to training then that is something you should bring up to the flight staff.

If you are unfamiliar with military customs and courtesies it is recommended that you review CAPP 151. Also, consult your Chief TAC or fellow TACs for advice and information. If you are unsure of the proper way to do something do not attempt to teach it! It is better to delay the correction and teach the proper way, than to stop the cadet and then teach them something equally incorrect. Of course, the best option is to stop the cadet, have the proper knowledge, and teach the correct way!

3-5. Tactical Officer/Cadet Staff Relationship. As the week progresses you will become more and more of a team. You will become familiar with the cadets who make up the flight staff. However, you must remember to maintain the professional distance that being a TAC requires.

During the week you will need to correct or advise the flight staff many times. You should always strive to make all corrections in private. This can be accomplished by having the Flight Sergeant (in the case of an error by the Flight Commander) take the flight as you speak to the Flight Commander. You may find yourself giving advice over things like drill technique, leadership suggestions, notes about interactions with certain cadets or a number of other options.

One major exception to the “correct in private” rule is safety situations. While you should strive to correct in private, sometimes a situation that is unsafe will require you to make a correction in front of the flight. This is okay and acceptable as long as it is necessary. The safety of the flight is paramount in our training efforts.

3-6. Cadet Protection Monitoring. You should always be watching for situations that violate the Cadet Protection Policy. The cadet staff faces heavy stressors that may cause them to make poor decisions. You are the safeguard against that. Watch for things like physical punishment (push-ups, etc.), hazing, emotional abuse and even physical abuse.

Cadet staff should not be assigning physical requirements to the cadets for failing to meet a standard. While the legality of push-ups as punishment in CAP may be debated by some, there can be little argument that it is largely ineffective as a teaching tool. Most physical punishments simply teach the cadet “not to do it again,” but they fail to teach the offending cadet how to do it properly.

Hazing usually generates the most questions of all the Cadet Protection issues. Hazing can come in many forms and can be difficult to identify at first. To help you in identifying hazing or conduct that may border on hazing try using this three-part test.

- Do the actions of the flight staff have a direct and apparent relation to the training issue at hand?
- Are the flight staff’s actions in good taste and do not “shock the conscience?”
- Can the staff remain professional while conducting the actions?

If the answer to any of these three questions is “no” then you probably want to address the staff’s behavior and find out what their ultimate goal and purpose is.