

RIMPAC 2004

Rim of the Pacific

TODAY'S CAOC, ITS HISTORY AND THE RESERVES

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PEARL HARBOR, Hawaii—At a remote fenced-in containment area near Hospital Point at Naval Station Pearl Harbor lie a cluster of tents surrounded by air conditioning units, power generators and cable feeds strewn on the ground leading to various antennae and satellite-linked dishes.

The tents house the nerve center of Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2004 Command Air Operations Center (CAOC).

Approximately 60 Naval Reservists worked at the CAOC.

Service members from the U.S. and seven nations gathered in Hawaii for Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2004 move in and out of the tent with a sense of urgency.

CAOC's mission is to coordinate air assaults during multinational exercises such as RIMPAC. Relatively few people are aware of the CAOC's existence. CAOCs were first used during World War II. The Navy, Army Air Corps and the Marine Corps quickly learned that separate air commands needed to coordinate their attacks lest they contradict, or worse, minimize the effectiveness of an attack.

Today's CAOC have the same mission, but rely heavily upon Reservists in the pre-planning, implementation and operations of daily procedures.

"After World War II, we moved away from this (CAOC) concept," said CAPT Stu Hinrichs, executive officer, NR AADC Pacific in support of Third Fleet. "Not until Desert Storm was the first Combined Command used again. Over time we realized it would be more efficient if the Allied Forces worked together. When CAOCs were reinvented in the early 1990s, Reservists have played a part in CAOC's development."

CAOC's layout is similar to an airport's air traffic control center. While both are responsible for projecting a plane's flight path during operations, the similarities end there. CAOC coordinates attack flight trajectories, project ordnance needs, scramble in-flight refueling squadrons and alert medical and rescue teams.

"Most people do not realize the logistics required to put a plane into the air," said IT1 Norman Harward. "AWACS and refueling planes are needed, ordnance movements must be planned, air and ground support must be alerted, and medics must be notified, in the event if needed."

"Desert Storm was the crucible, it became apparent to us that air operations work better combined, not separate. The coalition forces began to analyze the CAOC model," said Hinrichs. "Military leaders realized the importance of coordinating various countries' forces." It was also the birth of future Reserve involvement in the CAOC.

"CAOC became the standard of how we operate air commands today," he explained. "When active-duty officers who worked in CAOCs during Desert Storm transitioned to the Reserves, they called attention to the concept to Reserve leadership."

Today's model relies on the efforts of many Reserve Sailors. "The CAOC is responsible for all battle flight plans," said Harward. "Refueling planes—assuring that planes receive refueling during flight; we help coordinate supply allocation and we work with all branches of the military during an operation. No flight or air combat mission can go in the air without the assistance of CAOC."

Harward, an 18-year veteran of the Navy, is attached to Command Third Fleet Joint Forces Air Component Command (JFACC) Det 170, Ft. Worth, Texas. He has been deployed with RIMPAC since June 20, 2004.

"My job is to make sure the CAOC's equipment is up and running efficiently," said Harward. "In many ways we run just like an office. One of the main components I am responsible for is the Theater Battle Management Combat System (TBMCS)."



Reservists who previously had worked CAOC during Desert Storm brought their interests and expertise; they then began drawing upon other Reservists in subsequent exercises. For RIMPAC 2004, teams from both active duty and Reserves began pre-planning six months before the exercise even began.

These teams met six months, three months and one month before the commencement of the exercise to determine the right manning mix. Those involved in the planning identified the billets to be filled and the personnel to man them.

To prepare for RIMPAC 2004, the Navy, Air Force, United States Marine Corps and officers from the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Japan, South Korea and Chile all worked together to work out the final details of the operation.

Typically, yeomen, information specialist technicians, and operations specialists staff the workstations in CAOCs. These personnel gather information that is passed on to the commanding officers. From that point, air-ground combat decisions are based on the intelligence gathered up to this point. The Air Force's CAOC model was studied for its advantages and implemented during Operation Desert Shield. It was decided with such a large coalition present, the need for coordinated information was a necessity.

"In the past, as now, we make every attempt to man each wave with experienced Reservists," said Hinrich. "In addition, we imbed new personnel, both Reservists and active duty, so everyone receives training from those who already know how things work. This diminishes the learning curve and increases the effectiveness of our CAOC operations."

The current CAOC model is based upon an Air Force model. The Navy joined later after recognizing its effectiveness. Every CAOC exercise has increased the efficiency. Reservists have played a large measure of that success. Most Reservists receiving training for this assignment attend courses at the USAF's Hurlburt Field in Florida.

"This was significant during the past year-and-a-half, our Reservists contributed greatly to Operation *Iraqi Freedom*," said Hinrichs. "During the period of April to October 2003, Reservists were the backbone of some command centers."

Each time we've been involved, we gain more experience," he said. "Many Air Force personnel have complimented us on how well we operate. We were gratified they recognized us not as Reservists, but as an integral part of the team."

One advantage of the CAO model is their flexibility. CAOCs operate both in the field as well as on an aircraft carrier. During training simulations, CAOCs alternate between land and ship. By doing so, a greater variety of scenarios can be played out. For RIMPAC 2004, the CAOC command center was land-based at Pearl Harbor.

"We Reservists are enhancing the Navy's ability to operate more efficiently," said Hinrich. "We are presenting the right people with the right expertise for the Navy's operational needs. We have forged together a seasoned team with the Active Duty fleet. Our reputation amongst the fleet has grown immensely since the inception of CAOCs. We are becoming a community known for our skill and expertise. Our interests and expertise have caused the Navy to rely on us more and more."

"I've been very lucky this year. I have worked for the Navy for over 80 days this year; working at RIMPAC has been a good experience for me," said Harward. "With a new combat system coming to replace the TBMCS, I will need to learn more. I have been given a lot of opportunities in the past two years. I really appreciate the chance to work for the Navy."

"Our personnel take great pride in knowing we contribute to our country's defense. Reservists saw this as a mission worth doing," said Hinrich. "As our training increases our skills, our goal is to better support the fleet. This allows the Navy to capitalize upon Reservists' expertise."

Both Hinrich and Harward feel gratified that they have been able to contribute to the Navy's mission, both at RIMPAC and *Iraqi Freedom*. ♦

AD3 James Marsh of Helicopter Support Squadron (HC) 85 conducts a pre-flight inspection on a UH-3H Sea King helicopter. HC-85, known as "The Golden Gators," operates the oldest active aircraft in the Navy and maintained over 98 percent aircraft availability supporting of RIMPAC 2004.