

Making the Acquisition Warrior Fully Mission Capable

System Program Office Leveraging Web-based Technology to Strengthen Its Training Program

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In the acquisition business we have always struggled with training. Not so much formal training, which tends to be plentiful and generic, but the informal training needed to specifically do one's current job, and to do it better. While formal training is much improved, the intervals between opportunities tend to be long, and Operations Tempo (OPSTEMPO) often takes precedence. The discipline for what could be called "continuation training" is largely ad hoc. The "menu" is often nice-to-know "gravy" instead of "meat and potatoes."

"Continuation Training" Lacking

In the flying world of today's Air Force, commanders know the status of each aircraft as well as which aircrew members are ready and trained for the missions. To address this lack of "continuation training," one System Program Office (SPO) in the Electronic Systems Center (ESC) at Hanscom AFB has developed and employed an innovative, Web-based program to track individuals' training levels. Just as the Air Force deems aircraft "Fully Mission Capable" based on maintenance parameters, ESC's Global Air Traffic Operations/Mobility C2 (GATO/MC2) SPO has extended this concept into the acquisition training arena.

A Tool to Track Mission Capable Status

We all know that we must balance formal training with informal, "On-the-Job" Training (OJT). In ESC/GA, we introduced these concepts to ensure we

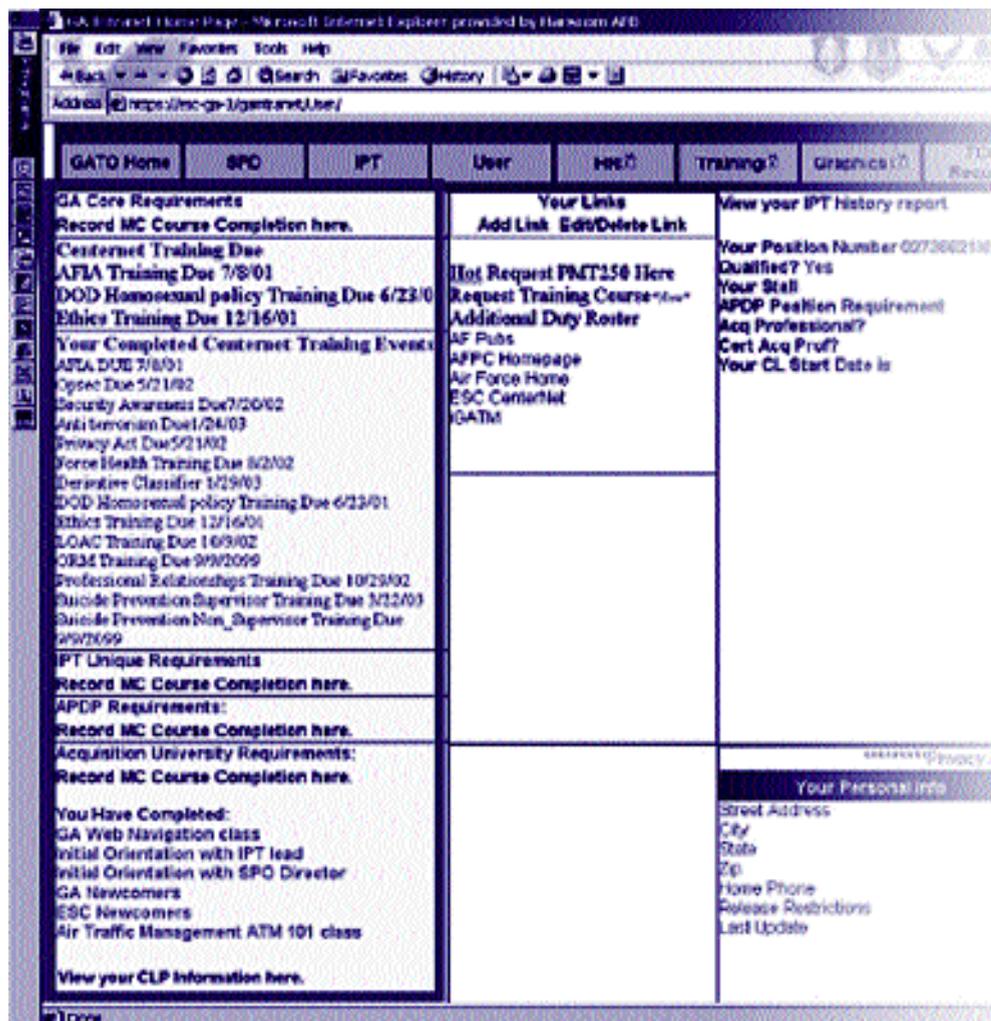


FIGURE 1. User Only View of Personal Training Portal

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focused on the right kind of training, at the right time.

Evaluating its “weapons systems” (in this case, people) based on a combination of factors—including Acquisition Professional Development Program (APDP) training, Professional Military Education (PME), formal education, and OJT—GATO/MC2 has developed an innovative Web-based tool to systematically track its employees’ Mission Capable status vis-à-vis acquisition requirements. Using individual workstations, supervisors and members can instantaneously gauge their team and individual real-time status, respectively, in real time.

Improving Acquisition Training by Leveraging Technology

Training is crucial in any profession, but is particularly imperative in the unique and specialized world of acquisition, especially given declining entitlements. No amount of formal education will equip even the sharpest new troop to become a “seasoned” veteran. The Air Force could stand to improve the informal OJT of its acquisition officers.

In the world of lean SPOs and increasing demands on acquisition to become faster, better, and cheaper, we can and must construct an acquisition foundation upon which to undergird our workforce—or prepare to suffer the consequences. The Command and Control (GATO/MC2) System Program Office, often referred to as ESC/GA, has taken a lesson from the operational world and applied it to acquisition, leveraging Web-based technology to strengthen its training program.

Mission Capable in the Operational Environment

For individual Air Force weapons systems, such as the F-16, the pinnacle of performance occurs when the system is determined to be Fully Mission Capable (FMC). At this point, the weapon system can accomplish all of the missions that it’s expected to perform.

If certain critical subsystems are inoperable, maintainers cannot rate the en-



tire weapon system FMC. However, depending on the criticality of the dysfunctional component, an aircraft might still be mission-worthy in a Mission Capable (MC) or Partially Mission Capable (PMC) state. That is, while not at optimal performance, the weapon system can still fulfill at least some of its mission requirements.

There also exist MC rates at the squadron and wing levels. Depending on what percentage of the unit’s individual aircraft are mission-ready, the squadron or wing is either FMC or MC. Thus, at any point in time a squadron commander can determine what proportion of assets are available for combat and to what degree these assets can perform. Fortunately the top-tier Air Force maintenance community keeps our aircraft operating better than any others in the world. As acquirers, we ought to “steal shamelessly” from their playbook.

Is There a Hole in the Current Acquisition Training Mix?

Just as there are maintenance and performance metrics for Air Force weapons systems, there are analogous training milestones for Air Force acquirers. This “maintenance” for the acquisition weapon system comes in the form of training people. Thankfully, the APDP currently exists to provide a broad training base in various acquisition-related disciplines, such as Program Management, Systems Engineering, and Test & Evaluation (13 in total). Professionals can obtain up to a Level III certification in each discipline.

Despite this solid but general training foundation, experience has shown that even some Level III-certified individuals are not immediately ready for acquisition combat, so to speak. These professionals still need to be trained on the particular systems, programs, and environment that comprise their current job. And the faster we get them ready, the faster we can win the acquisition battle!

To be clear, there is no dearth of training. The problem is it’s either not di-

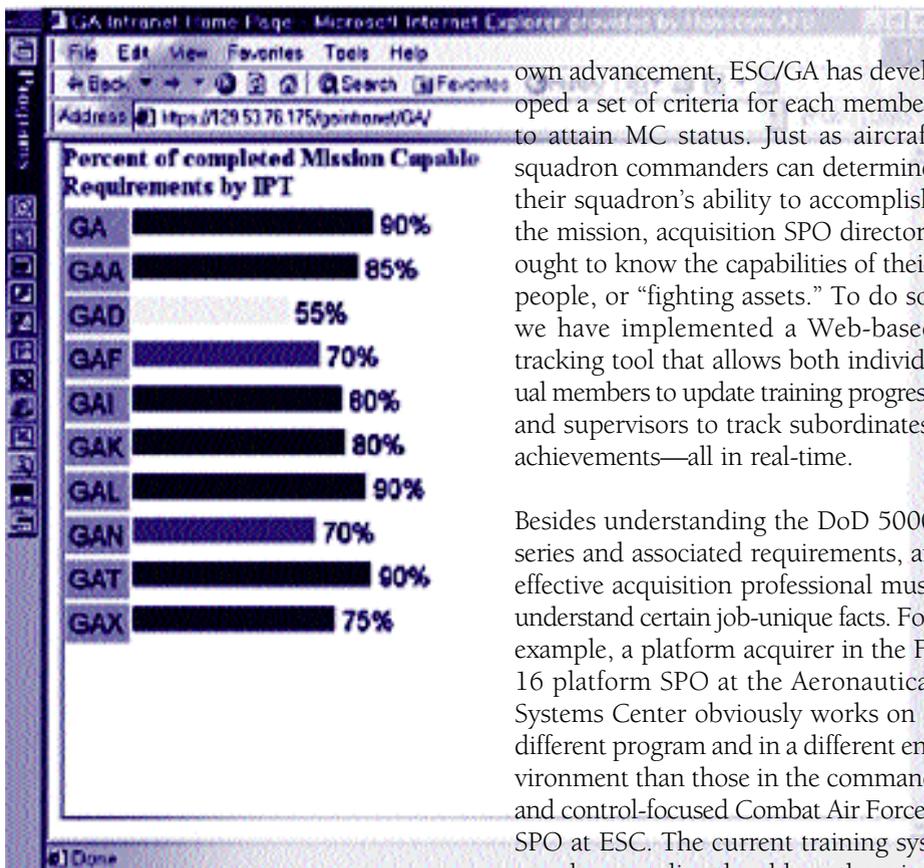


FIGURE 2. All Personnel View of Completion Rates

rectly related to doing current tasks or it's too far off or too far past to impact today.

Beyond APDP, Air Force acquisition professionals have a myriad of mandatory Air Force- and base-wide training from which to choose, but unfortunately such training is often not directly related to the core acquisition mission. For example, the litany of mandatory annual training requirements includes topics like Suicide Prevention, Anti-Terrorism, Classification, Ethics, and Family Liaison Officer. Also, the Air Force mandates PME at certain points, and graduate degrees have become almost imperative for career progression. All of these training requirements are important, but few—if any—are aimed at helping the SPO with its current work.

ESC/GA's Mission Capable Acquisition Training Program

To both fill the holes in this “swiss cheese” of general APDP, PME, and Air Force-mandated training and hold individuals accountable for ensuring their

own advancement, ESC/GA has developed a set of criteria for each member to attain MC status. Just as aircraft squadron commanders can determine their squadron's ability to accomplish the mission, acquisition SPO directors ought to know the capabilities of their people, or “fighting assets.” To do so, we have implemented a Web-based tracking tool that allows both individual members to update training progress and supervisors to track subordinates' achievements—all in real-time.

Besides understanding the DoD 5000 series and associated requirements, an effective acquisition professional must understand certain job-unique facts. For example, a platform acquirer in the F-16 platform SPO at the Aeronautical Systems Center obviously works on a different program and in a different environment than those in the command and control-focused Combat Air Forces SPO at ESC. The current training system does not directly address these important nuances. Consequently, ESC/GA required that a team member must complete the following training, *and do it within 30 days of arrival*, to be “Mission Capable” in our SPO:

ESC Newcomers Briefing. Provides overview of entire product center and enables understanding of how SPO fits onto ESC Commander's radar; provides Center's Vision, Mission, and Goals/Objectives.

GA Newcomers Briefing. Gives overview of all Integrated Product Teams (IPTs), with member from each respective IPT briefing the team's role/mission; provides SPO's Vision, Mission, and Goals/Objectives. Note: Briefing is done directly from the Web!

Initial Orientation with SPO Director. Enables member to learn leader's philosophy and how specific job and IPT fit into SPO.

Initial Orientation with IPT Lead. Enables member to understand how specific job fits into context of 3-letter level team.

Air Traffic Management 101 Class. Given by SPO's Chief Engineer, ESC/GA's focus is on systems that enable safe flight worldwide, and all members must have exposure to Air Traffic Management concepts in order to work specific programs that comprise Air Traffic Management.

GA Web Navigation Class. As the Air Force's Integrated Digital Environment (IDE) leader, ESC/GA members are

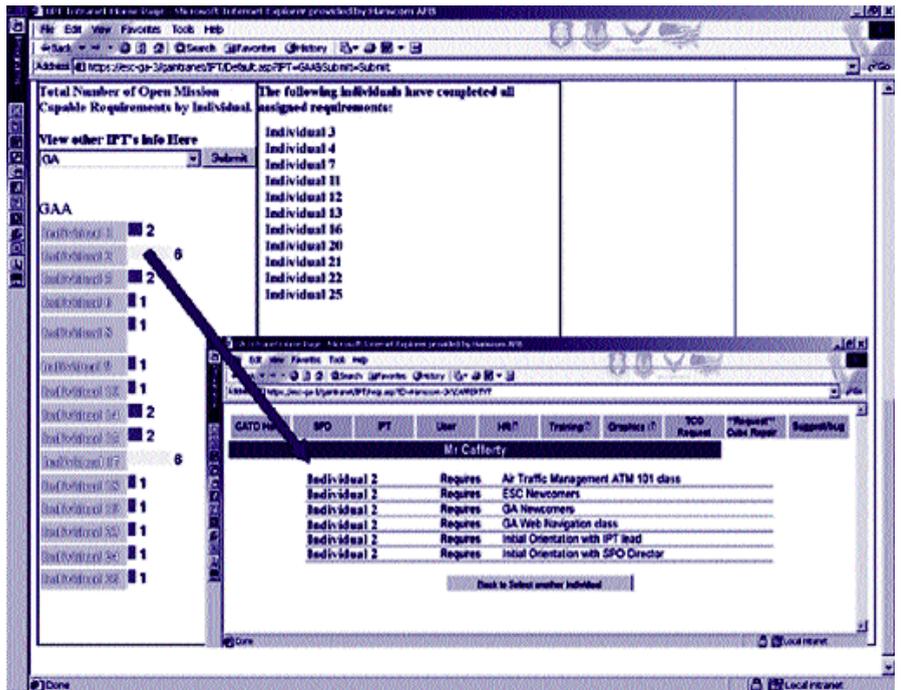


FIGURE 3. By-Name Mission Capable Status for Each Team Member

trained to work from the Web from the outset.

ESC/GA's Mission Capable "Training Tool—"User" View

We empowered SPO individuals and supervisors to track their status vis-à-vis these MC requirements. Figure 1 on p. 22 shows what an individual sees when entering their personal training portal. This particular individual has completed all Mission Capable training requirements, as seen in the lower left-hand corner in the "You Have Completed" section. Any training that had not been completed would be listed under "GA Core Requirements" in the upper left-hand corner.

Although the MC training requirements are the origin of this Web-based tracker, its functionality is obviously much broader. From Figure 1, this individual can also view, complete, and update training required by the Product Center ("Centernet Training Due" and "Your Completed Centernet Training Events").

In the lower left corner where it reads, "View your CLP [Continuous Learning Points] Information Here," the user can see how many of ESC/GA's Wednesday Schools they've completed. Every Wednesday our SPO has a variety of acquisition OJT "core" classes such as contract types, source selection, PPBS [Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System], etc., as well as general Air Force topics. Also, the individual can customize the "Your Links" section with the Web links that they most use and need. Finally, and not training-related, job and personal information is available and updated with ease on the right-hand side of the screen.

System Program Director (SPD) View

As useful as the training tracker is for individuals, its value also extends to supervisors. By clicking on the "SPD" tab in the top-left portion of Figure 1, we arrive at Figure 2 (preceding page), which all personnel in the organization can view.

Although personal information on the right-hand side of the screen remains

the same, the individual MC tracking is replaced by completion rates for each of the organization's three-letter offices, or IPTs. The System Program Director has an instantaneous view by team of each IPT's MC rate, similar to the squadron commander's snapshots of aircraft status.

"IPT" View

For mid-level supervisors, one part of the tool's value comes when clicking on their respective IPT's colored bar. In doing so, they get the by-name MC status for each team member, as depicted in Figure 3 (preceding page). Furthermore, they can see each individual's remaining and completed MC requirements. Thus, the Web-based tool is a means to ensure the highest organizational proficiency by tracking each individual member's progress.

Training + Technology = Future Success

ESC/GA's training requirements and tool for tracking MC acquisition professionals provides a basis for an ever-evolving and ever-improving training process. It will continue to sharpen the point of the Acquisition training spear by evolving as we polish "MC" requirements in the acquisition world. As for GA's tool, the training tracking functions are only a fraction of its potential capabilities. The SPO is currently developing its criteria for "Fully Mission Capable" status that would take on the requirements of the specific IPT. For example, the National Airspace System (NAS) IPT may "require" a new arrival to visit a Radar Approach Control (RAPCON) to reach "FMC."

It's critical that the acquisition community leverage both the world-class training that has made our operators the world's best and the cutting-edge technology that is the spine of this country. We hope these GA processes provide a springboard for you to say, "Oh yeah? We can beat that!"

Editor's Note: The authors welcome comments on this article. Contact them at Bud.Vazquez@hanscom.af.mil or Brian.Payne@eglin.af.mil.

