

# Infantry

Spring 2026

## FORGING EXPERT MORTARMEN

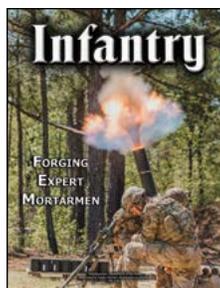
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**FRONT COVER:**  
Soldiers assigned to 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) aim and fire a 120mm M120A1 Towed Mortar System on 9 April 2025 during the 2025 International Best Mortar Competition at Fort Benning, GA. (Photo by CPT Stephanie Snyder)

**BACK COVER:**

Rangers assigned to the 2nd Ranger Battalion conduct a platoon live-fire exercise at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA, in June 2025. (Photo by SPC Samuel Dreher)



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# Infantry

SPRING 2026

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# Commandant's Note

BG PHILLIP J. KINIERY



In the crucible of ground combat, the Infantry Soldier stands as the ultimate instrument to achieve victory. The enduring mission of the Infantry — to close with the enemy by means of fire and maneuver to destroy or capture them, or to repel their assault by fire, close combat, and counterattack — rests squarely on the shoulders of these warriors. Fulfilling this responsibility requires more than just courage; it demands an unwavering commitment to excellence and the relentless pursuit of mastering fundamental infantry skills.

As this edition of *Infantry* is released, we are preparing to celebrate one of our most important events of the year — Infantry Week. In addition to our traditional events — Best Ranger, International Sniper, Lacerda Cup All-Army Combatives Championship, and Best Mortar Competitions — this year we will also host the inaugural Best Jumpmaster Competition to recognize excellence from within our Airborne community. These events provide opportunities for our service members to demonstrate expertise in these fundamentals as well as highlight their readiness, lethality, and resiliency. The Army's Soldiers are the world's best, and Infantry Week competitors exemplify the dedication, superior physical fitness, and mental fortitude that distinguish our fighting force.

The Expert Infantryman Badge (EIB) is another vital way our Soldiers solidify and demonstrate proficiency in the core warrior skills essential for combat. As U.S. Army Infantry School CSM Christopher Donaldson states in our opening article, "few achievements carry as much professional meaning as the EIB." The repetition of completing these basic tasks not only builds confidence but also reinforces the importance of standards and increases the collective lethality of our units. For more than 80 years, the EIB has served as the mark of a true Infantry professional, and to maintain this credibility, we periodically update requirements and tasks to account for the changing character of war. CSM Donaldson touches on these changes in his article, with more details to be released during Infantry Week. All Infantry Soldiers should aspire to earn their EIB as it represents the standard of excellence that keeps our force disciplined, proficient, and ready to fight and win on the hardest days of combat.

In this issue of our branch professional bulletin, I also wanted to specifically address the importance of our 11C Indirect Fire Infantrymen and upcoming changes that will not only improve the proficiency of our mortar Soldiers but enhance the lethality of our fighting formations. Indirect fires are a key component of combined arms maneuver, and

11Cs provide commanders with a powerful, versatile, and responsive asset — their value cannot be overstated.

In "The Transformation of Indirect Fire Infantryman Training Strategy," SFC Jessie Lauritzen and SSG Charles Pfferrer discuss the extensive updates of Training Circular (TC) 3-20.33, *Training and Qualification of Mortars*. The publication, which was released last August, prescribes a more standardized training methodology, ensuring a consistent high standard across all mortar units. It also updates qualification requirements and includes drills and procedures for the latest generations of mortar systems. The authors note that the TC updates provide both opportunities and challenges, and leaders will need to engage with their Soldiers to ensure proper implementation as well as to share feedback to ensure it meets the needs of the force.

The subsequent article written by the command team of the Mortar Training Company here at Fort Benning, GA, introduces an exciting development — the creation of the Infantry Master Mortar Trainer Course. This new program of instruction will forge expert NCOs who will serve as a commander's resident subject matter expert on planning, resourcing, and validating mortar training. Having these master trainers will create a conduit between the foundations learned during formal schooling and the rapidly evolving environment of our operating force. IMMT graduates will be able to train and evaluate mortar crews, sections, and platoons; develop and assist in implementing the commander's mortar unit training program; and plan, resource, and execute mortar qualification. This initiative is more than just a new course; it represents a fundamental change in the Army's approach to developing and maintaining mortar proficiency where it's needed most. The authors succinctly note, "By empowering our best NCOs with the knowledge to build and execute world-class training, we are ensuring that our Infantry companies will always have the responsive fire support they need to close with and destroy the enemy."

After reading through this issue, your feedback is essential. I also strongly encourage all Infantry Soldiers — officer and enlisted — to write and submit articles for our branch journal. Contact *Infantry* staff at [usarmy.benning.cac.mbx.infantry-magazine@army.mil](mailto:usarmy.benning.cac.mbx.infantry-magazine@army.mil) with your questions or ideas.

I am the Infantry! Follow me!





# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EXPERT INFANTRYMAN BADGE

CSM CHRISTOPHER K. DONALDSON

When I attended basic training in 1999, there was a quote painted on the walls of my barracks that I remember to this day and still holds true: “The EIB is the true mark of an Infantryman.” This is something that has stuck with me throughout my entire career.

Over the last few months, the U.S. Army Infantry School (USAIS) hosted two Expert Infantryman Badge committee meetings with sergeants major from across the force to discuss potential updates to USAIS Pamphlet 350-6. The panel looked at every task, having in-depth conversations on each before developing recommendations. The changes derived from these meetings will be rolled out during Infantry Week and then implemented at the beginning of Fiscal Year (FY) 2027. The panel recommended changes based on what Infantry Soldiers need to do at the individual level to succeed in large-scale combat operations (LSCO). One big change is to incorporate several tasks that will be performed under limited visibility conditions. The panel also reviewed and made recommended changes for how we execute EIB.

Within the Infantry Branch, few achievements carry as much professional meaning as the EIB. More than a piece of cloth worn on the uniform, the EIB represents mastery of the fundamentals, a commitment to excellence, and a standard of proficiency that defines what it means to be an Infantryman. Earning the badge is difficult by design. The rigor of testing,

*Above, a Task Force Iron Soldier receives his Expert Infantryman Badge on 18 April 2025 in Glebokie, Poland. (Photo by SPC Owen Hayenga)*

the precision required in every task, and the mental and physical discipline demanded throughout the process ensure only those who truly master their craft succeed. For these reasons, the EIB remains one of the most respected badges in the Army and one of the most important achievements for an Infantry Soldier seeking to grow, lead, and be competitive for promotion.

At its core, the EIB validates competence in the basics and fundamentals of warfighting. Infantry operations are built on simple, repeatable tasks executed to a high standard under stress. Weapons handling, land navigation, medical tasks, communications, and small-unit tactics are not advanced or exotic skills; they are the foundation upon which all combat effectiveness is built. The EIB forces Soldiers to rehearse and refine these skills until they can perform them instinctively. This repetition builds confidence and competence, ensuring that when conditions are chaotic and lives are at stake, the Infantryman can rely on disciplined training rather than guesswork.

The process of preparing for the EIB also reinforces the importance of standards. Every movement, every step in a sequence, and every detail matters. Candidates quickly learn that cutting corners or relying on “good enough” leads to fail-

ure. This emphasis on precision reflects the reality of combat, where small mistakes can have serious consequences. The EIB teaches Infantrymen to hold themselves accountable to the highest standards, a mindset that carries over into every aspect of their duties, from maintenance and training to leadership and planning.

The EIB also strengthens unit readiness. When leaders encourage and support Soldiers in pursuing the badge, they are not only investing in individual achievement but also improving the overall proficiency of the formation. Preparing for EIB testing requires units to train the fundamentals to standard, and that training directly translates to improved performance in collective tasks. A formation with a high number of EIB holders often demonstrates greater confidence, competence, and professionalism because its Soldiers have been tested and validated on the skills that matter most.

From a leadership perspective, earning the EIB enhances credibility. Infantry Soldiers respect leaders who have demonstrated mastery of the craft. When an NCO or officer wears the badge, it signals they have met a demanding standard and have invested the time and effort to perfect their skills. This credibility cannot be manufactured; it is earned through preparation, discipline, and performance. Leaders who have gone through the EIB process are often better instructors and mentors because they understand the standards in detail and appreciate the effort required to achieve them.

The EIB is also one of the most important accomplishments for promotion within the Infantry. The Army places significant value on demonstrated competence, and the badge serves



**A Soldier from 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment assembles an M4 after accomplishing the 12-mile ruck march during expert badge testing at Fort Drum, NY, on 7 November 2025. (Photo by CPL Mariah Aguilar)**

***Ultimately, the Expert Infantryman Badge represents far more than successful completion of a test. It signifies mastery of the fundamentals of warfighting, adherence to the highest standards, and the mental and physical toughness required of an Infantryman.***

as a clear, objective indicator of proficiency in essential tasks. Promotion boards and senior leaders recognize the effort and discipline required to earn the EIB, and it often distinguishes Soldiers among their peers. In competitive environments where many Soldiers have similar experience and education, the EIB can be the factor that sets one candidate apart.

Beyond its impact on promotion, the EIB fosters a culture of excellence. Soldiers who pursue the badge often inspire others to do the same, creating a positive cycle of training and improvement within the unit. The pursuit of the EIB encourages teamwork, as candidates rely on one another to rehearse tasks, share knowledge, and maintain motivation. This shared hardship builds cohesion and pride, strengthening the bonds that are essential in combat.

The historical significance of the EIB also contributes to its importance. For decades, Infantrymen have sought to earn this badge, and its legacy is tied to generations of Soldiers who have served in combat around the world. Wearing the EIB connects today's Infantry Soldiers to that lineage and reminds them of the responsibility they carry. It is not simply a personal achievement but a symbol of belonging to a profession that demands courage, competence, and commitment.

Ultimately, the Expert Infantryman Badge represents far more than successful completion of a test. It signifies mastery of the fundamentals of warfighting, adherence to the highest standards, and the mental and physical toughness required of an Infantryman. It enhances individual credibility, strengthens unit readiness, and plays a critical role in professional advancement. Most importantly, it reinforces the mindset that excellence in the basics is what wins battles.

For any Infantry Soldier committed to professional growth, pursuing the EIB is not just an opportunity — it is an obligation. The badge represents the standard to which every Infantryman should aspire, ensuring the force remains disciplined, proficient, and ready to fight and win our nation's wars.

**CSM Christopher K. Donaldson** currently serves as the command sergeant major for the U.S. Army Infantry School. He has served in every leadership position from rifle team leader to command sergeant major. His previous assignments include serving with 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR); 82nd Airborne Division Pre-Ranger Course; 1st Battalion, 508th PIR; 5th Ranger Training Battalion; 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment; Joint Readiness Training Center; 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division; 2nd Battalion, 505th PIR; Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC); 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division; and JMRC Operations Group. CSM Donaldson has seven combat deployments, (two to Iraq and five to Afghanistan).

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# A NEW ERA FOR MORTARMEN:

## *The Transformation of the Indirect Fire Infantryman Training Strategy*

SFC JESSIE E. LAURITZEN  
SSG CHARLES W. PFERRER

The world of the Infantryman is one of constant change, and the tools and techniques we use to dominate the battlefield must evolve to meet new threats. The recent release of the updated Training Circular (TC) 3-20.33, *Training and Qualification of Mortars*, marks a significant step forward in how the Army trains and certifies its mortar crews. This isn't just a minor revision; it's a comprehensive overhaul that will have a lasting impact on our indirect fire proficiency for years to come. So, what's new, what's different, and what does it mean for leaders and Soldiers in the field?

*Soldiers assigned to 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment prepare to fire an 81mm mortar during a live-fire exercise at Yakima Training Center, WA, on 3 November 2025. (Photo by SGT Michael Majors)*

### A Comprehensive Overhaul

The most immediate change in the August 2025 TC is its sheer size and scope. The document has been significantly expanded, with new sections, appendices, and a wealth of detailed information that was absent from the 2017 edition. This isn't just bureaucratic bloat; it's a reflection of a more sophisticated and data-driven approach to training. The new TC provides a clearer framework for training that aligns with the demands of modern warfare, ensuring that Soldiers are well-prepared to execute their missions effectively. The increased detail and organization will enable leaders to implement training plans that are both comprehensive and practical for their units.



One of the most significant additions is how the 2025 update fundamentally changes the scoring and documentation process by introducing new standardized Department of the Army (DA) forms. DA Form 7880 (Mortar Crew Section Fire Mission Scoresheet) and DA Form 7881 (Mortar Crew Platoon Fire Mission Scoresheet) are now used to evaluate individual mortar fire missions. Furthermore, DA Forms 7882 (Mortar Crew Platoon Roll-up) and 7883 (Mortar Crew Section Roll-up) are used to consolidate all scores and serve as the official qualification record, replacing the previous memorandum format. These new forms will streamline the qualification process and simplify the required data needed during combat training center (CTC) rotations. This move toward a more quantitative assessment of gunnery skills will enable commanders to identify strengths and weaknesses with greater precision and tailor their training plans accordingly. This systematic approach will ultimately lead to more effective training and better prepared mortar crews.

### **Standardization and Consistency in Training**

In the past, training guidance for mortar crews was often generalized, leaving much to the interpretation of unit leaders. The updated TC addresses this gap by introducing a host of new, specifically numbered individual and squad-level drills. This is a clear move away from the more generalized guidance of the past and toward a more prescriptive and standardized training methodology. The detailed drills will provide a structured approach that helps ensure every Soldier receives the same foundational skills necessary for effective mortar operations.

Furthering this commitment to objective evaluation, the new guidance mandates that both Table IV (Basic Live Fire) and Table VI (Qualification Live Fire) are now externally evaluated. The TC provides strict guidance on the criteria for these external evaluations, ensuring a consistent and unbiased assessment of a crew's capabilities across the entire force. This removes subjectivity and guarantees that all units are held to the same high standard.

This development will undoubtedly lead to greater consistency in mortar training across the force. Soldiers will receive a uniform training experience that aligns with the Army's overarching goals for readiness. However, this also presents challenges for leaders. Will this new level of detail stifle initiative and adaptability at the unit level? Or will it provide a solid foundation upon which leaders can build more advanced and creative training scenarios? The answer lies in how effectively leaders can balance the need for standardization with the flexibility to adapt to their unique operational environments. Leaders must ensure that the standardized procedures do not limit the innovative spirit that is often necessary in the field.

### **Embracing Modernization**

The new TC also reflects the Army's ongoing modernization efforts, with the inclusion of new drills and procedures for the latest generation of mortar systems, including the RMS6-L Stryker-mounted 120mm mortar. This is a welcome

***One of the most notable changes in the new TC is the elimination of a round requirement for qualification... it allows units to focus on the quality of training and the proficiency of their crews, facilitating a more tailored approach to meet the specific needs of each unit.***

and necessary update, ensuring that our training keeps pace with technological advancements. The incorporation of these new systems demonstrates the Army's commitment to leveraging cutting-edge technology to enhance combat effectiveness. By providing Soldiers with current training that reflects modern systems, we prepare them for the realities of today's battlefield.

However, this focus on modernization also highlights the ever-present challenge of keeping our training current with the rapid pace of technological change. As the world changes, tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) change with it. This can be seen from the war in Ukraine and how drones are being introduced into mortar TTPs. As new systems are introduced, it is imperative that training materials are regularly updated to reflect these advancements. Leaders must remain vigilant in ensuring that Soldiers are not only proficient with current systems but also adaptable enough to embrace future innovations. This adaptability is crucial as technology continues to evolve, and Soldiers must be prepared to incorporate these advancements into their operations.

### **Specific Requirements for Training and Qualification**

One of the most notable changes in the new TC is the elimination of a round requirement for qualification. Previously, units were often bound by rigid round-count mandates that could limit training flexibility and creativity. The updated TC recognizes that effective training and qualification do not necessarily hinge on a predetermined number of rounds fired. Instead, it allows units to focus on the quality of training and the proficiency of their crews, facilitating a more tailored approach to meet the specific needs of each unit. These changes will mean units must evaluate how to effectively allocate their round allocation based on their training objectives and operational requirements.

Additionally, the new TC delineates which missions must be fired analog (using a plotting board) and which must be fired digitally. This approach will ensure that units continue to stay proficient in analog operations, which will be vital in an electronic warfare environment. This clarity is essential for ensuring that Soldiers receive comprehensive training in both traditional and modern methods of fire support. By specifying these requirements, the Army is ensuring that mortar crews are proficient in a range of operational techniques, enhancing their versatility on the battlefield. The new TC provides

a structured approach that allows for focused training on critical skills necessary for mission success.

### **Expanding Applicability to More Units**

Another significant change in the updated TC is the expansion of its applicability to include infantry battalions and cavalry squadrons not assigned to a brigade combat team. This is a recognition of the critical role that mortars play in a wide range of operational environments and a clear signal that mortar proficiency is a priority for the entire force. For leaders in these units, the new TC will be an invaluable resource, but it will also require a renewed focus on gunnery training. Leaders must establish training schedules that incorporate the new standards while ensuring that all Soldiers are capable of executing their duties proficiently.

This change underscores the Army's understanding that effective indirect fire support is not confined to specific unit types but is essential for all combat formations. It encourages a broader integration of mortar systems into various operational contexts, ensuring that all Soldiers have the opportunity to develop and refine their indirect fire skills. These changes will allow leaders to modify their standard operating procedures (SOPs) to increase the survivability and lethality of mortar crews across the force. By fostering an environment that prioritizes mortar training, units can enhance their overall combat effectiveness.

### **Challenges and Opportunities Ahead**

While the new TC 3-20.33 presents numerous opportunities for enhancing mortar training, it also poses challenges that leaders must navigate. The increased emphasis on data collection and analysis will require leaders to invest time and resources into understanding how to interpret and utilize this information effectively. It may also necessitate additional training for leaders to ensure they are equipped to handle their new responsibilities. As leaders adapt to these changes, they must also consider the best ways to manage the influx of data to ensure it enhances training rather than complicates it.

Moreover, the shift toward standardized training may prompt discussions about the balance between prescribed drills and the need for unit-level innovation. Leaders will need to foster an environment where Soldiers are encouraged to think critically and creatively while still adhering to the foundational skills outlined in the new TC. This balance is crucial for maintaining agility and responsiveness on the battlefield. By empowering Soldiers to take ownership of their training, leaders can cultivate a culture of excellence and continuous improvement.

### **The Road Ahead**

The new TC 3-20.33 is more than just an update; it's a roadmap for the future of mortar gunnery in the U.S. Army. It



*A Soldier in 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment adjusts the sight unit on a mortar system during Table VI gunnery on 23 November 2025. (Photo by SGT Eric Allen)*

presents us with both new opportunities and new challenges. It will require us to be more data-savvy, more adaptable, and more committed than ever to the art and science of indirect fire. As we embrace these changes, it is crucial for leaders to remain engaged with their Soldiers, fostering a culture of open communication and continuous improvement. Soldiers should feel empowered to share feedback on the training process, which can help refine the implementation of the new TC and ensure that it meets the needs of the force.

### **Conclusion**

If we embrace the changes and rise to the challenges, the result will be a more lethal and effective force, ready to dominate the battlefields of today and tomorrow. The Army's commitment to modernizing its training and qualification processes for mortarmen reflects a broader understanding of the complexities of contemporary warfare. By focusing on quality, adaptability, and comprehensive training, the updated TC 3-20.33 ensures that Soldiers are not only prepared to execute their duties effectively but are also positioned to lead the Army into the future.

As we move forward, it is essential to recognize that the success of this transformation relies on the collective efforts of leaders and Soldiers alike. Together, we can harness the opportunities presented by the new training circular to build a more capable and resilient force, ensuring that we remain prepared to face any challenge that arises on the modern battlefield. The future of mortar gunnery is bright, and with the right guidance and commitment, we will continue to excel in our mission to support and protect our nation.

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**SSG Charles W. Pferrer** currently serves as the Infantry Mortar Leader Course master trainer in Mortar Training Company, 1-19 IN.

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# Dark Horse of the Infantry:

## *Reinvesting in the U.S. Army Mortarman*

1SG RYAN D. SHAW

For over a century, mortar men have been the Infantry's quiet advantage — an organic, lethal, accurate, and responsive indirect-fire capability unmatched at the tactical level. They are the Infantry's “dark horse:” a force with tremendous potential that — when properly managed, trained, and resourced — can shape the battlefield decisively. Yet today, I believe many formations underutilize and underdevelop this capability.

This article seeks not to criticize units but highlight an opportunity. Mortars are a core component of decisive maneuver, and renewed investment in their training and education will ensure the Infantry maintains its edge in future large-scale combat operations. A more informed Army — one that empowers its 11Cs and understands the value they bring — will significantly enhance readiness and lethality across formations.

### **A Critical Capability Under Strain**

Mortar men bring unique strengths to the fight: high-angle fires, rapid response, tactical autonomy, and flexible employment. Whether supporting a dismounted platoon in restrictive terrain or enabling the battalion to shape the deep fight, the U.S. Army mortar platoon is often the most lethal asset available in the first minutes of contact.

But today's mortar men can operate in a paradox. They are increasingly essential yet often overlooked in training prioritization. Their weapon system is complex, requiring proficiency in technical gunnery, fire direction, tactical employment, and maneuver. Without consistent training, these skills can degrade rapidly.

### **The Education Gap**

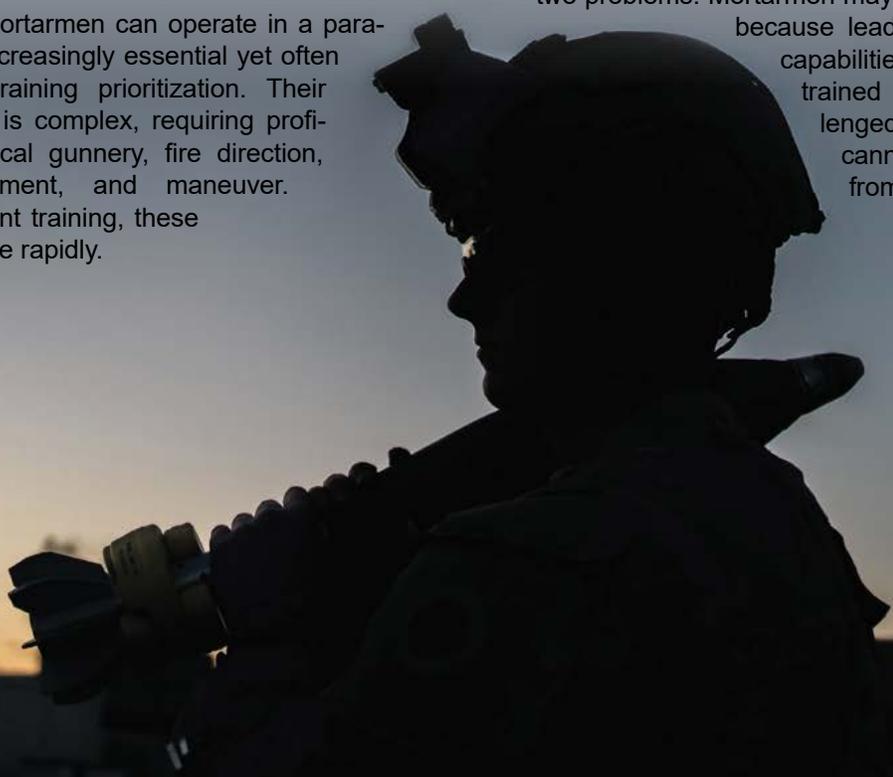
Today's 11Cs must be more than mortar gunners — they must be tacticians, communicators, and subject matter experts on fires. Yet military occupational specialty (MOS)-specific training opportunities are limited. The Infantry Mortar Leader Course (IMLC), while excellent, has a limited number of seats per year. Access can be inconsistent across brigades, and many sections struggle to send Soldiers.

Even when seats are available, units may prioritize other schools, or operating tempo (OPTEMPO) may prevent attendance. The result: a force with uneven expertise.

This problem can be compounded by a lack of doctrinal familiarity. The training circular governing mortar qualification is readily available, yet many Soldiers have not been taught how to interpret or apply it. Some do not realize they can initiate their own mortar training plan — and without senior mentorship, they don't know where to begin.

### **The Knowledge Gap Outside MOS**

Mortar employment is not solely the responsibility of 11Cs. Leaders outside the MOS must understand how to employ indirect fires effectively. A battalion or company that does not understand mortars cannot fully leverage them. This creates two problems: Mortar men may be misemployed or sidelined because leaders do not understand their capabilities, and complacent or under-trained mortar men may go unchallenged, rarely tested by leaders who cannot differentiate expert practice from mediocre execution.



*A mortarman with 2nd Squadron, 107th Cavalry Regiment holds a 120mm high-explosive round during a live-fire exercise in Syria on 20 February 2023. (Photo by SFC Nicholas J. De La Pena)*

Without widespread understanding, good decisions are delayed, and bad ones go uncorrected. Experience shows that when company-level leaders know how to employ mortars, training increases, employment improves, and readiness rises.

### Investment in Mortars: What Right Looks Like

A mortar platoon becomes lethal only when given the time and resources to train. Organizations that treat mortars as a combat multiplier — rather than an administrative task pool — see immediate gains. The formula is simple: You get out of mortars what you put into them.

Investment means prioritizing mortar-specific training, protecting white space from garrison tasking, funding appropriate ammunition and training resources, allowing mortarmen to train repeatedly (not once-a-year certification), integrating mortars into maneuver exercises, and leveraging doctrinal guidance from all training circulars and field manuals governing all things mortars.

High-performing units use mortars constantly during dry fires, blank fires, live fires, practical exercises, fire direction drills, terrain walks, and integration rehearsals. They ensure their mortar leaders are technically proficient and empowered to train their Soldiers.

### Bridging the Gap

The Army is already modernizing across all domains, fires included. To continue this trajectory, several initiatives would transform mortar proficiency across the force.

First is a mortar master trainer course. This course is already in the works and will be discussed in a subsequent article in this issue. Modeled after other master-level programs, the Infantry Master Mortar Trainer Course will develop experts in gunnery, fire direction, integrated planning, qualification standards, training program development, and external evaluation.

Second, establish brigade-level mortar master gunner (MSG/E8-prior 11C) billets. A designated senior mortar expert at brigade level would oversee mortar training, conduct external evaluations, standardize qualification, ensure doctrinal compliance, advise battalion commanders, and assist with fire planning.

Third, expand MOS-specific training at the 11C Advanced Leader Course (ALC). Intermediate-level education should deepen tactical employment, fire planning, fire direction and gunnery, sensor integration, target refinement, communications architecture, and mortar roles in LSCO. This is also discussed further in the subsequent article.

Fourth, increase IMLC capacity. More seats mean more trained leaders. Expanding throughput ensures battalions maintain qualified mortar leadership — especially in high-OP-TEMPO units.

### Culture: The Most Important Variable

No program, course, or structure will succeed without

culture. Leaders must believe in mortars — not as a niche specialty but as a central combat capability. This requires employing mortars routinely during field exercises, including mortars in maneuver planning, holding mortarmen to high standards, encouraging MOS-specific development, and listening to subject matter experts.

Mortarmen themselves must meet that expectation. They must be proactive learners, aggressive trainers, and stewards of the craft. The mortar community must take pride in competence and professionalism.

### Conclusion: A Call to Invest

The mortar platoon has always been a decisive asset — in the mountains of Korea, the jungles of Vietnam, the deserts of Iraq, and the valleys of Afghanistan. Today's mortarman continues that legacy, carrying out one of the most responsive and lethal tools in the modern fight.

But legacy is not enough. We must invest in time, training, education, funding, and structure. Mortarmen are the Infantry's dark horse, and their value grows exponentially when empowered. Because indirect fires win fights — and mortarmen are the Soldiers who deliver them.

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**1SG Ryan D. Shaw** currently serves as the first sergeant of the Mortar Training Company, 1st Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment, 198th Infantry Brigade, Fort Benning, GA.

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*Soldiers assigned to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division fire a 60mm mortar at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, LA, on 15 August 2025. (Photo by SPC Mariah Aguilar)*

# FORGING THE EXPERT:

## *Introducing the Infantry Master Mortar Trainer Course*

**CPT PATRICK M. ELSENBAST  
1SG RYAN D. SHAW**



*Soldiers fire a 60mm mortar during the Best Mortar Competition at Fort Benning, GA, on 11 April 2023. (Photo by SFC Justin P. Morelli)*

In the crucible of modern combat, the familiar thud of a mortar leaving the tube is the sound of assurance for the Infantryman. It is the promise of immediate, responsive, and lethal indirect fire support, a critical enabler for freedom of maneuver. As the U.S. Army continues to orient on the complexities of multidomain operations (MDO), the need to guarantee the proficiency of our mortar formations has never been more acute.

### ***How can we continue to elevate mortar training to dominate contested environments?***

For commanders at every echelon, this question is paramount. While our institutional training pipeline produces skilled 11C Infantrymen, sustaining and elevating that expertise at the unit level presents a continuous challenge. Who is the commander's resident subject matter expert for planning, resourcing, and validating a rigorous, standards-based mortar training program? The answer to this critical question has arrived. The U.S. Army Infantry School and Maneuver Center of Excellence are proud to introduce the Infantry Master Mortar Trainer (IMMT) Course, an initiative designed to forge expert NCOs who will serve as training multipliers and dramatically increase the lethality of our infantry formations.

### **A New Tier in Training Excellence**

The IMMT is purpose-built to fill the "master trainer" role, creating a vital bridge between the foundational knowledge

gained at the schoolhouse and the dynamic, demanding environment of the operational force. Aligned with the Army's broader transformation and the Integrated Weapons Training Strategy (IWTS), the IMMT is a direct investment in NCO leadership and a commitment to modernizing our force for the challenges ahead.

The purpose is clear and direct: To train select NCOs to assist unit leaders by planning, coordinating, implementing, and evaluating a comprehensive unit training program (UTP) for mortars.

These certified master trainers will be the stewards of proficiency, using the principles of IWTS to ensure their formations meet and exceed the Army's highest standards.

### **The 20-Day Course**

The IMMT is a 20-day course that immerses experienced NCOs in a curriculum designed to produce masters of their craft. The course is structured around three critical phases:

#### **1. The Basic & Advanced Fire Direction Center (FDC) Academy:**

Students dive deep into the center of mortar gunnery — the Fire Direction Center. The FDC Academy is NOT designed to teach NCOs how to process and execute basic

and advanced fire missions. The goal is to create an expert who can DESIGN, TRAIN, and EVALUATE critical FDC procedures for every key leader in their formation. This will ensure that when a call for fire is made, the response of their FDC is immediate and accurate, regardless of the operational conditions.

## **2. Mortar Qualification, Training Management, and Resourcing:**

This phase centers on the IWTS. Students will not only master the execution of Gunnery Tables I-VI but, more importantly, learn the detailed planning, resourcing, and execution of live-fire qualification events. This elevates the NCO from simply being a proficient mortarman to being a master manager and executor of a complete training program — one that systematically builds proficiency from the individual Soldier level up to a fully cohesive, qualified, and lethal crew, section, or platoon.

### **3. The Unit Training Program (UTP) Capstone:**

The course culminates with a challenge that validates the student's transformation into a master trainer. In this final capstone event, students develop a complete, resource-informed UTP from the ground up. Synthesizing all the knowledge gained, they will build a long-range training calendar, identify ammunition and resource requirements, create challenging training scenarios, and present a professional, ready-to-execute UTP that a brigade or battalion commander could implement immediately. This final validation proves they are ready to serve as their commander's most trusted

advisor on all matters related to mortar training, readiness, and qualification.

**Note:** 11C ALC is now enriched with critical, advanced-level mortar tasks, including complex FDC instruction — duties traditionally currently taught in the Infantry Mortar Leader Course (IMLC) at Fort Benning. This integration ensures graduates are more capable than ever before. Building upon this robust foundation, IMMT is strategically positioned as the next essential step. The IMMT is designed to be the primary follow-on course for 11C NCOs after they have successfully graduated from ALC, guiding them toward true mastery in their field. Subsequently, our Army's junior Infantry and Armor officers will still attend the new two-week Infantry Mortar Leader Course (specializing in tactics and employment of mortars).

## **The Graduate: A Commander's Training Multiplier**

The IMMT is designed for proven leaders. The course prerequisites target U.S. Army NCOs in the grades of E-6 and E-7 (with waiver consideration for exceptional E-5s) who are graduates of the 11C ALC. By selecting these experienced leaders, the Army ensures that IMMT graduates have the maturity, credibility, and leadership acumen to enact real change in their units.

Graduates of the IMMT will be able to:

- Train and evaluate mortar crews, sections, and platoons. They return to their units capable of running mortar gunnery



*Soldiers from the 198th Infantry Brigade conduct a live-fire demonstration on 11 April 2024 at Fort Benning, GA. (Photo by SGT Jacklyn Oxendine)*

and evaluating every aspect of mortar employment in accordance with doctrinal standards (Training Circular 3-20.33, *Training Qualification and Mortars*).

- Develop and assist in the implementation of the commander's mortar UTP. They are the architects of mortar readiness. They will work hand-in-hand with command teams to build a dynamic, challenging, and standards-based training plan that ensures the platoon is always prepared for its wartime mission.

- Plan, resource, and execute mortar qualification (Tables I-VI). The master trainer understands the ammunition requirements, the range safety protocols, and the doctrinal standards, streamlining the entire process from planning to execution.

### **A Call for Discussion, Sharpening the Spear Together**

The introduction of the Infantry Master Mortar Trainer Course should spark a professional dialogue across the force. It prompts us to reflect on how we currently manage and prioritize mortar readiness. We encourage commanders and command teams to consider the following:

- 1) As a commander, who is your principal advisor for mortar training and employment? While your platoon leader and platoon sergeant are responsible for execution, who in your formation holds the deep technical and programmatic knowledge to build the training program from scratch and validate its effectiveness?

- 2) Consider your last mortar live fire. How much of the planning and resource management fell on your company executive officer or first sergeant? Imagine having several NCOs in your formation who are certified to manage that entire process, ensuring it aligns perfectly with the IWTS framework and frees up your other leaders to focus on their primary duties.

- 3) In a multidomain environment, windows of opportunity for employing indirect fires will be fleeting and contested. How are you building resilience and expertise in your FDCs to operate effectively in a degraded environment, such as the loss of digital systems? How can a master trainer, with certified expertise in both analog and digital procedures, drive this critical capability within your unit?



*A Soldier with 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, fires a 120mm M120A1 Towed Mortar System during a combined arms live-fire exercise on 26 January 2026 in Bulgaria. (Photo by SPC Brandi Frizzell)*

This course is also a powerful statement about the Army's trust in the NCO Corps. For our 11C NCOs, it offers a new path to expert status and increased responsibility. It begs the question: How can you leverage this opportunity to take true ownership of your platoon's training readiness and become an even greater asset to your commander?

### **The Future is Lethal and Accurate**

The IMMT Course is a critical and timely investment in our NCOs and the close-combat lethality of our formations. It is not merely another course but a foundational shift in how the Army will cultivate and sustain mortar expertise at the tactical edge. By empowering our best NCOs with the knowledge to build and execute world-class training, we are ensuring that our Infantry companies will always have the responsive fire support they need to close with and destroy the enemy. The future of indirect fire support in the Infantry is in the hands of these new master trainers.

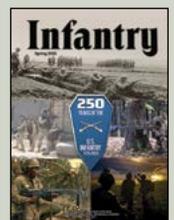
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**CPT Patrick M. Eisenbast** and **1SG Ryan D. Shaw** are the command team for the Mortar Training Company, 1st Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment, 198th Infantry Brigade, Fort Benning, GA. They lead mortar training on Fort Benning and are responsible for developing lethal, adaptive, and technically proficient mortar leaders within the U.S. Army and joint force.

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## **INFANTRY NEEDS YOUR ARTICLES**

*Infantry* is always in need of articles for publication. Topics for articles can include information on organization, weapons, equipment, training tips, and experiences while deployed. We can also use relevant historical articles with an emphasis on the lessons we can learn from the past. Find our Writer's Guide at <https://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/magazine/about.html>. For more information or to submit an article, call (706) 545-3643 or email [usarmy.benning.cac.mbx.infantry-magazine@army.mil](mailto:usarmy.benning.cac.mbx.infantry-magazine@army.mil).



# EYES IN THE SKY:

## How IMLC Is Transforming and Integrating sUAS

CPT PATRICK M. ELSENBAST

As the U.S. Army transitions toward large-scale combat operations and multidomain integration, the Infantry Mortar Leader Course (IMLC) is evolving to meet those demands of our force. Among the most significant advancements is the integration of small unmanned aerial systems (sUAS) into mortar operations — a capability that is reshaping how future leaders plan, direct, and deliver high-angle fires.

For decades, IMLC has served as the cornerstone of mortar leadership training, preparing both commissioned and noncommissioned officers to supervise and employ mortar elements effectively across the spectrum of conflict. Yet as the Army confronts new challenges in preparation for contested and technologically advanced environments, the course continues to adapt. The inclusion of sUAS represents a deliberate and data-driven effort to enhance accuracy, reduce the time required to deliver lethal effects, and ensure that mortar leaders remain at the forefront of battlefield innovation.

The expression, “*Rising to the occasion*”... is just another way of saying, “*You got lucky.*”

**WE DO NOT RISE TO THE OCCASION.  
WE FALL BACK ON OUR TRAINING.**

### Building Upon a Legacy of Fire

IMLC trains officers and NCOs (O1-O3 and E5-E7) in the full spectrum of high-angle fires. Students develop expertise in tactical employment, fire planning, mechanical training, and Fire Direction Center (FDC) procedures. Upon completion, enlisted Soldiers earn the B1 additional skill identifier, while officers receive the 3Z designation, marking them as leaders capable of directing and supervising high-angle fire in any operational environment.

Yet even the most time-tested systems must evolve. The Army’s ongoing Transformation in Contact (TiC) initiative calls for synchronization of modernization across every echelon of force. For IMLC, this means integrating new technology without compromising the mortar community’s bedrock fundamentals. As the course’s leadership recognized, sUAS could offer a decisive advantage — if implemented effectively and responsibly.

### The Research Effort: Measuring Precision and Performance

IMLC’s integration of sUAS began as a structured research effort designed to compare drone-assisted fire missions with traditional forward observer (FO) procedures.

Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, instructors and students conducted live-fire exercises (LFXs) employing both conventional and drone-derived firing data. The goal was straightforward: determine whether sUAS integration improved the accuracy and efficiency of indirect fires and identify how best to teach this capability within IMLC’s program of instruction (POI).

The results were unambiguous. When sUAS were used to collect firing data for dismounted 120mm mortar systems, eight out of nine initial rounds impacted directly on target. Fire for effect (FFE) was achieved with only a single adjustment. By contrast, under traditional FO methods, all nine rounds landed between 100 and 300 meters from the target, requiring an average of two adjustments to achieve FFE.

*A Soldier launches a small unmanned aerial system on 16 July 2025 at Fort Benning, GA. (Photo by CPT Stephanie Snyder)*



These findings represented a 50-percent reduction in the time and ammunition required to achieve lethal effects — an improvement that directly translates to greater survivability and operational tempo on the battlefield.

### **Instructor Insights: The Human Element Behind the Data**

While the numbers confirmed the value of sUAS integration, qualitative feedback from IMLC instructors offered equally important perspective. After each LFX, instructors conducted after action reviews (AARs) to capture lessons learned, identify friction points, and gather recommendations for refinement.

Their consensus was clear: The introduction of drone-derived data enhanced both accuracy and situational awareness, but to maximize its potential, students needed more hands-on engagement. Instructors recommended that future iterations of IMLC incorporate scenarios where section leaders and FDC chiefs actively collaborate with drone operators to acquire targets and process firing data in real time.

They also stressed the importance of assigning dedicated end user devices (EUDs) and drones directly to the Mortar Training Company. Reliance on external support created a single point of failure and limited opportunities for experimentation. By establishing organic control of sUAS assets, instructors could better refine training, conduct rehearsals, and integrate drone calibration into pre-live-fire risk reduction exercises.

Importantly, every instructor agreed that while sUAS provided measurable advantages, the integration must not overshadow the core purpose of IMLC: producing mortar leaders who can operate confidently in any environment, including degraded or denied conditions. As one instructor summarized, “Technology is a multiplier, not a crutch. When the screen goes dark, we rely on the fundamentals.”

### **Lessons from the Field: Advantages and Cautions**

The integration of sUAS within mortar platoons offers several tangible advantages. Drones can rapidly acquire targets, provide precise grid data, and enable mortar sections to deliver accurate fires with fewer adjustments. This accelerates the fires kill chain — allowing company and battalion commanders to deliver effects faster, more precisely, and with improved sustainment by reducing the number of rounds required per target.

However, this capability is not without its challenges. The same immediacy that empowers subordinate commanders can also risk desynchronization with higher headquarters’ targeting priorities. Additionally, increased digital activity introduces signature management concerns; adversaries with advanced electronic warfare capabilities can detect, jam, or exploit drone signals. Finally, instructors cautioned that overreliance on technology could erode proficiency in analog fire direction — a foundational skill that remains vital when communications or digital systems fail.

***By combining disciplined fundamentals with emerging technologies, IMLC is cultivating leaders who are technically competent, tactically adaptable, and ready to deliver lethal, accurate, and timely fires in the most complex battlespaces.***

### **Back to Basics: Fundamentals Remain the Foundation**

Despite the promise of emerging technologies, IMLC’s leadership maintains that true lethality begins with mastery of the fundamentals. Currently, the course maintains an average 83 percent pass rate, with ALL failures occurring during FDC testing. This underscores the importance of arriving at IMLC already proficient in basic and advanced FDC procedures.

Commanders sending Soldiers to IMLC are encouraged to conduct a deliberate, two-week train-up to reinforce FDC fundamentals. These skills form the foundation upon which technological proficiency is built. Technology should enhance, not replace, that competence.

### **Charting the Path Forward**

In the near future, IMLC aims to push and revise its POI to incorporate structured sUAS integration. This proposed modernization will include the use of virtual battle simulation systems such as VBS-technology in the classroom, allowing students to plan and execute fire missions with digital overlays before transitioning to live-fire environments. These changes would provide students the opportunity to operate and analyze drone data during both mechanical training and culminating LFX events, reinforcing hands-on learning and cross-functional coordination between FDC cells, section leaders, and drone operators.

### **The Way Ahead**

As the Army’s modernization priorities continue to evolve, the integration of sUAS within the mortar community exemplifies how innovation and tradition can coexist. The Infantry Mortar Leader Course is not seeking to reinvent the wheel — it is refining it. By combining disciplined fundamentals with emerging technologies, IMLC is cultivating leaders who are technically competent, tactically adaptable, and ready to deliver lethal, accurate, and timely fires in the most complex battlespaces. As IMLC continues to embody the Army’s commitment to readiness and transformation, it ensures that tomorrow’s mortar leaders will not aim to rise to the occasion — they will fall back on their training, ready to fight and win in any domain.

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**CPT Patrick M. Eisenbast** currently commands the Mortar Training Company, 1st Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment, 198th Infantry Brigade at Fort Benning, GA. He leads the Infantry Mortar Leader Course, responsible for developing lethal, adaptive, and technically proficient mortar leaders for the U.S. Army and joint force.

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# INNOVATION AT THE SPEED OF RELEVANCE:

## *Fielding Blast Overpressure Solutions Now*

THE 75TH RANGER REGIMENT'S BRAIN PROTECTION TASK FORCE

### **Introduction: The Unseen Threat**

For generations of mortarmen, headaches, tinnitus, and cognitive fog have been written off as the price of employing a devastating weapon system. These symptoms, often mirroring those of a traumatic brain injury (TBI), were accepted as an unavoidable cost of lethality. Now, the U.S. military is confronting the invisible cause behind them: blast overpressure (BOP). This silent threat, produced by the very weapons that ensure our dominance, represents a serious danger to warfighter health, particularly for communities in close proximity to high-caliber and explosive weapon systems.<sup>1</sup> The insidious nature of these injuries, coupled with a lack of objective, field-expedient diagnostic tools, makes this a complex problem for both leaders and medical personnel.

The urgency is heightened as warfighters report these symptoms even during routine training, not just in combat. This creates a persistent readiness challenge that cannot wait years for enterprise-wide solutions. It demands immediate, practical innovations from the operational force. In response, the 75th Ranger Regiment has stepped into this gap, establishing its Brain Protection Task Force (BPTF) to move beyond cautious, flawless solutions and implement data-driven, field-expedient solutions needed to protect the force today.

### **From Policy to Action: Building the Foundation**

The call to action is clear. The National Defense

Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2022 established the Warfighter Brain Health Initiative (Section 734), and a subsequent Department of Defense memorandum on 8 August 2024 mandated a comprehensive approach to addressing blast exposure.<sup>2</sup> The Regiment's task force was created to translate these high-level directives into tangible action at the unit level.

While the Department of War (DoW) pursues the necessary long-term, enterprise-wide solutions, the BPTF is bridging the gap by implementing agile, evidence-based tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that can protect the force right now. In partnership with academia, researchers, and partner units across Special Operations Command (SOCOM), the task force is developing "quick-win" solutions that both mitigate immediate risk and generate the critical data needed to inform the Army's long-term strategy. This dual approach — advancing immediate interventions while simultaneously shaping the solutions for tomorrow — is at the core of the task force's mission.

### **The Task Force Philosophy: Innovation at the Speed of Relevance**

To bridge the gap between long-term research and the immediate needs of the warfighter, the BPTF has operated under a clear and agile philosophy since its inception 12 months ago. This framework ensures that every initiative is not only grounded in data but is also immediately relevant to the Ranger on the ground.

**Preserve Cognitive Lethality.** The task force treats cognitive function as a core component of combat effectiveness. The goal is to develop solutions that preserve and enhance a Ranger's cognitive performance, ensuring they maintain a decisive advantage on the battlefield throughout their career and after their service.

**Empower the Frontline Leader.** The foremost authority is the leader in the field. The BPTF is designed to answer questions coming directly from the force and to put effective, data-driven tools into the hands of the individuals making decisions at the point of action.

**Provide Sustainable Solutions.** Innovation without a path to implementation is meaningless. All solutions are evaluated for their real-world feasibility, and any recommendations provided to command teams include a risk-associated assessment of the resources required and cost of implementation. This ensures that proposed TTPs are practical, sustainable, and ready for immediate adoption.

**Maintain a Bias for Action.** An 80-percent solution that can be implemented now is superior to a 100-percent solution that may never arrive. The traditional research cycle can take years, with findings often failing to reach the end user.<sup>3</sup> The BPTF subverts this paradigm by executing effective solutions based on emerging data, choosing to act decisively to protect the force today rather than waiting for a perfect solution tomorrow.

This entire philosophy operates within the 75th Ranger Regiment's unique role as the bridge between Special Operations and the conventional force.<sup>4</sup> The solutions developed by the task force are designed with this dual purpose in mind: While some are tailored to the specific needs of SOF, many are deliberately engineered to be scaled for adoption across the wider Army, ensuring that lessons learned within the Regiment benefit the entire enterprise. We are the Army's Ranger Regiment.

### Exposure Documentation — SF 600

In response to the DoW's urgent mandate to address warfighter brain health, the BPTF faced a critical challenge — how to begin capturing individual BOP exposure immediately, without waiting for the development of future enterprise-wide systems. The goal was to document BOP exposure into a meaningful system of record at scale, now.

The task force pioneered a simple yet powerful solution by leveraging an existing and universally recognized medical document within military medicine: the Standard Form (SF) 600 (Chronological Record of Care).

We developed a customized SF 600 template, formatted as a Subjective-Objective-Assessment-Plan (SOAP) note, with pre-populated fields to systematically and consistently document BOP exposure events. The approach is tailored for the Regiment's most at-risk operators — mortarmen, Carl-Gustav gunners, and breachers — ensuring that every significant exposure during training is captured in a standardized format.

Once completed by a medical provider, this document is uploaded directly into the service member's electronic health record in MHS GENESIS. This creates a permanent, longitudinal data trail of a Ranger's occupational blast exposure throughout their career. This initiative serves as a critical bridge, capturing blast exposure today while the DoW pursues long-term solutions in the Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER) and Deployment Occupational and Environmental Health Readiness System-Industrial Hygiene (DOERS-IH).

### The Surprising Power of the Wool Blanket

A core tenant of the BPTF is the pursuit of practical, data-driven solutions that can be rapidly implemented. While formal acquisition programs of record, managed by entities like Program Executive Office (PEO) Soldier and U.S. Army Combat Capabilities Development Command (DEVCOM) Soldier Center, pursue long-term, materiel solutions for the enterprise, the task force focused on identifying immediate, low-cost TTPs to protect Rangers from BOP associated with breaching operations. Unlike explosions in open areas, a blast within enclosed structures creates reflected blast waves that often amplify to higher pressures than the initial blast wave.<sup>5</sup> The goal was to find a readily available tool that could meaningfully reduce exposure without impeding training value.

To achieve this, the task force leveraged a powerful network of expertise, drawing on established lessons learned from partner SOCOM units and collaborating with leading research institutions. This collaboration provided access to a field-expedient BOP measurement tool: the biofidelic head form (BIHF), a human surrogate head designed to accurately measure the precise overpressure that reaches the skull during a blast event.<sup>6</sup>

With the technologies, the BPTF designed a series of rigorous tests in a realistic operational environment: a subterranean concrete room at Fort Benning, GA. During live internal breaching scenarios, the team evaluated several material types to disrupt and dissipate the blast waves. The results were both surprising and definitive. The most effective solution was not a piece of expensive, high-tech gear, but one of the most

Figure 1 — Mortar SF 600 Template

MEDICAL RECORD CHRONOLOGICAL RECORD OF MEDICAL CARE			
SYMPTOMS, DIAGNOSIS, TREATMENT, TREATING ORGANIZATION (Sign each entry)			
75th Ranger Regiment Indirect Fire (Mortar) Tier-1 Weapon System		Provider:	
Blast Overpressure (BOP) Exposure			
S: Ranger assigned to the 75th Ranger Regiment with MOS job duties and responsibilities requiring regular firing and/or exposure to 60-, 81-, and 120-mm mortars at various charges and round types.			
Chief Complaint (if applicable):			
O: According to the DoD Blast Overpressure Reference and Information Guide (D-BOP RIG), all three mortars produce well in excess of 4 psi (generally up to 10-14). The standoff distances recommended are not tactically feasible in combat or in training; therefore, Rangers are routinely exposed to greater than 4 psi BOP while firing these weapon systems. Mortarmen are exposed to significantly more BOP than any other high-risk demographic in the military (i.e., shoulder-fired rockets, breachers, etc.)			
In a 2023 Military Medicine article (Woodall et al.), 3d Ranger Battalion Mortarmen conducted a routine, 3-day live-fire exercise. On average, they were exposed to 600-1,300 psi over those three days (Charge 1 and Charge 2, 70-90 rounds on average/day). For reference, Carl-Gustav (Carl-G) Range Safety Officers (RSOs) in other research (Duckworth, 2021) took 3-years to reach 400-600 psi. This exposure often results in acute and/or chronic symptoms consistent with TBI (i.e., headaches, migraines, nausea, cognitive dysfunction, sleep problems, irritability, mood/personality changes, etc.). This is so ubiquitous it is generally accepted as "normal" within the community.			
Training Event Information (if applicable): Type of Range and Mortar:			
# of rounds by type:	Gauge Type:	Avg.:	
Peak/Max:	Cumulative/Impulse:		
A: Ranger was exposed to the above stated from (DATES), SM DOES or DOES NOT endorse and/or demonstrate clinical signs and symptoms that may be associated with Low or High-Level Blast Exposure.			
P: Ranger has been educated on the potential short and long-term effects of BOP and will fu/wPCM if/when symptoms occur.			
Coding Guidance attached from DHA/LLB Fact Sheet. See below for BOP specific coding guidance.			
BOP in Garrison: Y37.290_BOP while Deployed: Y36.290_ + Hazardous Exposure: Z77.9			
HOSPITAL OR MEDICAL FACILITY	STATUS	DEPARTMENT/SERVICE	RECORDS MAINTAINED AT
78th RHQ BAS	ACTIVE DUTY	USA	
		DEPARTMENT	DIVISION

CHRONOLOGICAL RECORD OF MEDICAL CARE  
Medical Record  
Standard Form 600 (REV. 11/16)



*A biofidelic head form (BIHF) is outfitted with Ranger personal protective equipment and other industry-standard sensors to measure blast overpressure. (Photos courtesy of the 75th Ranger Regiment)*

ubiquitous items in the Army's inventory: the standard-issue wool blanket.

The data captured from eight SOCOM-provided blast gauge sensors and sensors embedded within the BIHF was conclusive. A double layer of wool blankets hung 2-4 inches from the wall demonstrated a 30-70 percent reduction in reflected overpressure across all sensors. This simple, cost-effective, and immediately fieldable TTP provides a practical and effective method for Rangers to mitigate BOP, proving that impactful solutions can be found by combining operational ingenuity with scientific validation. Importantly, this project was completed in weeks, not years, demonstrating that with the right partners and when paired with frontline leaders, effective solutions exist right now while we wait for more rigorous studies years from now.

### **Instrumented Mouthguards in Airborne Operations**

A continuing challenge within warfighter brain health is the lack of objective data. For decades, the true incidence of head impacts during military parachuting was unknown, relying on self-reporting in a culture where jumpers are often conditioned to downplay injuries. To solve this, the 75th Ranger Regiment partnered with the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS) and the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR) to monitor and measure head impact during parachute landing falls and military freefall activities. This work built off previous instrumented mouthguard (IMG) testing with the U.S. Army Airborne School, the 82nd Airborne Division, and other SOCOM units.

The benefit of this technology is twofold: injury prevention and injury tracking. For prevention, the Regiment leveraged evidence from the contact sports community, namely rugby and ice hockey, demonstrating that mouthguards can significantly reduce the risk of concussions.<sup>7</sup> For tracking, the iMGs offer a revolutionary leap forward. These devices contain sophisticated sensors that measure the linear and rotational forces acting on the head during every phase of the jump,



*Wool blankets dissipate blast overpressure and reduce exposure on average by more than 50 percent.*

providing objective data on impacts that have historically gone unrecorded.

The preliminary analysis from the USUHS/WRAIR study is challenging long-held assumptions and revealing a dramatic gap between reported injuries and actual exposure events. Previously published research placed the rate of closed head injuries at approximately .15 percent per jump, or 1.5 out of every 1,000 jumpers.<sup>8</sup> In stark contrast, the instrumented mouthguards are revealing that 6-8 percent of all landings qualify as "hard landings," which is 60-80 out of every 1,000 jumpers, defined as those exceeding 40 Gs of force.

Even more alarmingly, the data shows that 60 percent of the jumpers experiencing these hard landings subsequently present with diagnosable signs of a concussion. This suggests that the true concussion incidence rate may be between 3.6 and 4.8 percent per jump — more than 10 times higher than the previously published rate. This paradigm-shifting data demonstrates that significant head impacts are not rare events but a common occupational hazard of military parachuting.

By participating in the study, the Ranger Regiment is helping to quantify the true risk, enabling leaders to move beyond anecdote and implement data-driven changes to TTPs, equipment, and medical surveillance to better protect the force. Figure 3 shows a proposed algorithm to be used during airborne operations with iMGs and other emerging technology that may offer field-expedient, objective options for the military.

### **Mortar Leader-Driven Questions, Straight-Forward Answers**

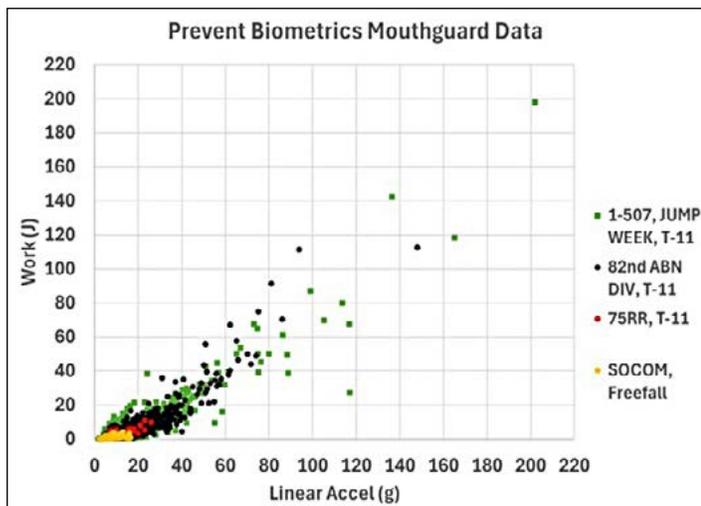
Perhaps the most compelling example of the BPTF's agility is its rapid response to a critical question raised directly by the Regimental mortar community: Can firing mortars without a helmet reduce blast overpressure (BOP) exposure to the brain? This question was not speculation but based on both operational experience and a known biomechanical phenomenon. Operators' anecdotal reports of feeling less

BOP effects firing without helmets in combat are backed by scientific research on how blast waves interact with combat helmets.

The phenomenon, called the “underwash effect,” involves the primary blast wave traveling around the helmet’s edge and reflecting off the torso, creating a secondary pressure wave that travels under the helmet. This can result in the blast wave becoming trapped and amplified in the space between the helmet and the head, leading to a significant increase in the overpressure experienced by the face and skull. Multiple studies have confirmed this effect, demonstrating that in some scenarios, the overpressure measured under the helmet can be two to 10 times greater than the initial blast wave itself.<sup>9</sup> What is unknown is if this effect occurs in mortarmen, based on standard body position, and provides a clear, ground-driven impetus for testing.

Answering this question swiftly with objective data is precisely what the task force was designed to do. In a collaborative project with the Infantry Mortar Leader Course (IMLC), the BPTF collaborated with Vanderbilt University to set out to measure the BOP experienced under various conditions. The test matrix was comprehensive, evaluating the effects of wearing no helmet, a standard Army Combat Helmet, an Ops-Core helmet, and a bump helmet. To further refine the data, each configuration was tested with and without a posterior helmet mitigating shield, the Delta-6.

**Figure 2 — Instrumented Mouthguard Scatter Plot Data from USUHS/WRAIR Study**



**BIHFs measure BOP in mirrored orientation to the gunner and assistant gunner.**

This initiative epitomizes the task force’s agile “weeks versus years” operational model. With full data analysis expected within three weeks, the BPTF will provide an evidence-based recommendation directly to the Regimental command team. This process — transforming an operator’s question, validated by scientific literature, into a data-driven policy change in a matter of weeks — is a powerful demonstration of how the task force is directly improving the health and safety of the force at the speed of relevance.

The 75th Ranger Regiment has long served as a “schoolhouse” for the Army, a role formalized by the 1986 Wickham Charter.<sup>10</sup> Today, its Brain Protection Task Force is writing the next chapter of that legacy. By combining operator-driven questions with scientific validation and agile implementation, the Regiment is not only protecting its own but also developing a playbook for the entire enterprise, ensuring the U.S. Army remains the most lethal and most protected fighting force in the world.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense Blast Overpressure Research Interest Group (DBOP-RIG), *Department of Defense Blast Overpressure Reference Information Guide*, Version 1.0 (Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD: U.S. Army Public Health Center, 2023), <https://health.mil/Reference-Center/Publications/2024/10/01/DOD-Blast-Overpressure-Guide>.

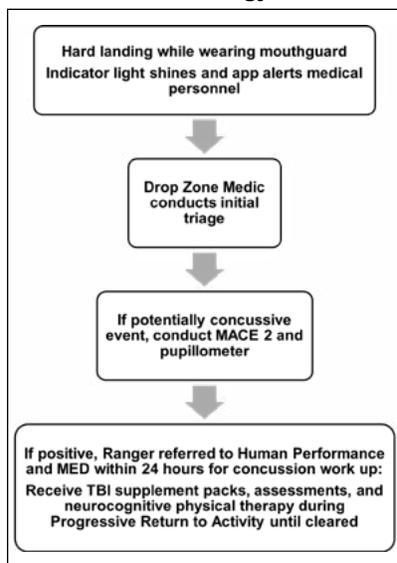
<sup>2</sup> National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022, HR 4350, 117th Cong. (2021-2022), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/9532/text>; Department of Defense, “Actions to Mitigate and Address Blast-Related Overpressure Exposure,” Memorandum for Senior

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<sup>3</sup> Michael J. Young, John Tramazzo, Isabella McKinney et al., “Sharing Clinically Relevant Research Results with Active-duty Special Operations Forces Personnel: Toward an Ethical Framework for Responsible Disclosure,” PsyArXiv, 13 October 2024, <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/v6tbz>.

<sup>4</sup> GEN Raymond T. Odierno, “The Force of Tomorrow,” *ARMY* 62/10

**Figure 3 — BPTF Concussion Algorithm including Emerging Technology**



(October 2012): 18-24.

<sup>5</sup> Jiarui Zhang, Zhibo Du, Xinghao Wang et al., "Analyzing the Contribution of Helmet Components to Underwash Effect Under Blast Load," *Acta Mechanica Sinica* 40, 124011 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10409-024-24011-x>.

<sup>6</sup> Sariah Elanna D'Empaire-Salomon, Janette Meyer, Eric Spivey et al., "Measurement of Force Changes along Visual Pathway in a Biofidelic Instrumented Headform (BIH) during Exposure to Blasts," *Investigative Ophthalmology & Visual Science* 65/7 (June 2024): 92.

<sup>7</sup> Paul H. Eliason, "Prevention Strategies and Modifiable Risk Factors for Sport-Related Concussions and Head Impacts: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis," *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 57/12 (2023): 749-761, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37316182/>; Dirk A. Chisholm, Amanda Marie Black, Luz Palacios-Derflingher et al., "Mouthguard Use in Youth Ice Hockey and the Risk of Concussion: Nested Case-control Study of 315 Cases," *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 54/14 (July 2020): 866-870,

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31937578/>.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph J. Knapik, Ryan Steelman, Kyle Hoedebecke et al., "Injury Incidence with T-10 and T-11 Parachutes in Military Airborne Operations," *Aviation, Space, and Environmental Medicine* 85/12 (December 2014): 1159-69, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25479257/>.

<sup>9</sup> Hesam Sarvghad-Moghaddam, Asghar Rezaei, Mariusz Ziejewski, and Ghodrat Karami, "CFD Modeling of the Underwash Effect of Military Helmets as a Possible Mechanism for Blast-induced Traumatic Brain Injury," *Computer Methods in Biomechanics and Biomedical Engineering* 20/1 (2017): 16-26, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27269066/>; Xiancheng Yu and Mazdak Ghajari, "Protective Performance of Helmets and Goggles in Mitigating Brain Biomechanical Response to Primary Blast Exposure," *Annals of Biomedical Engineering* 50/11 (November 2022): 1579-1595, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35296943/>.

<sup>10</sup> GEN John A. Wickham Jr. "CSA Vision for the Ranger Regiment of the 21st Century," Memorandum, Department of the Army, 1986.

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**Members of the 75th Ranger Regiment (Team 10) compete in the 2025 Best Mortar Competition at Fort Benning, GA, on 9 April 2025. (Photo by SPC Samuel Dreher)**

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# THE SUAS MASTER TRAINER COURSE: *FORGING THE FUTURE OF GROUND WARFARE*

SFC DERRICK GUYTON

**A**cross the training areas of Fort Benning, GA, the future of warfare is taking shape. The Small Unmanned Aircraft System Master Trainer (SUAS-MT) Course is no longer just about flying drones — it is about transforming how the U.S. Army fights. By merging tactics with cutting-edge technology, the course ensures that systems like the RQ-28A, RQ-28B, and Purpose-Built Attributable Systems (PBAS) become decisive enablers in combat operations.

## From Operators to Experts

Launched in the early 2010s as a three-week academic program, the SUAS-MT Course has graduated hundreds of master trainers. These Soldiers are more than operators — they are the Army's subject matter experts for training, sustainment, and requalification. Selected by brigade commanders and already possessing Basic UAS Qualification (BUQ-1), graduates return to their units ready to build and manage SUAS training programs, advise commanders on tactical employment, and integrate drones into the fight.

The course now incorporates contested-environment simulations inspired by lessons from Ukraine and the Middle East, where inexpensive, agile drones have reshaped battlefields. What began as platform-centric instruction has evolved into a leadership course that produces trainers capable of driving innovation across formations.

## Innovation in Action

Integration with elite units such as the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment has accelerated progress, emphasizing tactical operations and counter-UAS resilience. The cadre are pioneering 3D printing for custom payloads and repairs, while advanced simulations allow training without the constraints of airspace or land.

In Fiscal Year 2026, the SUAS-MT cadre launched the first post-One Station Unit Training (OSUT) SUAS Operator Course at Fort Benning. This seven-day program equips new Soldiers to operate short-range reconnaissance (SRR) and Soldier Borne Sensor (SBS) systems before they arrive at their first unit. Combined with a new dedicated facility and the rapid conversion of Malone Range 2 into a full-time SUAS training area, throughput and flight hours have surged.

## The Road Ahead

The Maneuver Center of Excellence is preparing to expand the SUAS-MT into a four-week program, encompassing both ground and air unmanned systems. Future master trainers will teach autonomous swarm programming, real-time adap-



*Students in the Small Unmanned Aircraft System Master Trainer Course conduct training on 16 July 2025. (Photo by CPT Stephanie Snyder)*

tation to electronic jamming, and lethal employment of SUAS. Malone Range 2 is already being adapted into a premier unmanned systems training area, where precision-guided strikes will be certified across multiple lanes simultaneously.

This is not incremental progress — it is force modernization. In an era where peer adversaries field thousands of drones, the SUAS-MT Course ensures the U.S. Army remains ahead by leveraging low-cost, expendable systems to dominate the close fight.

## Answering the Nation's Call

As Secretary of War Pete Hegseth declared in his 10 July 2025 directive, "Drones are the biggest battlefield innovation in a generation." His mandate to deliver thousands of attributable systems to combat units by 2026 and equip every squad has created unprecedented demand for qualified operators and master trainers.

The SUAS-MT cadre are already meeting that demand. New facilities, ranges, lessons, and partnerships are in place or underway. The course is not simply responding to the Secretary Hegseth's directive — it is leading the way. Every master trainer produced is a force multiplier, ensuring the Army dominates tomorrow's drone fight.

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**SFC Derrick Guyton** currently serves as senior instructor for the Small Unmanned Aircraft System (SUAS) Master Trainer Course – Echo Company, 1st Battalion, 29th Infantry Regiment, 316th Cavalry Brigade, Fort Benning, GA.

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# Lessons from a Stryker Company Executing a Dismounted KCTC Rotation

CPT MATTHEW COLVARD

During training rotations at the Korea Combat Training Center (KCTC), much like those at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) and National Training Center (NTC), participants experience heightened pressure and stress that simulates a large-scale combat operations (LSCO) battlefield. The valuable lessons gained, whether through failures or successes, have lasting effects throughout an Army career and show the importance of the large collective training objective. KCTC stands out because its training environment combines aspects of both JRTC and NTC, featuring a compact area that restricts mounted maneuvers akin to JRTC but also offers significant terrain changes reminiscent of Death Valley at NTC. Through the recons executed before the rotation, similar to the Leader Training Program, leaders are allowed to see KCTC's terrain firsthand and make connections with their Republic of Korea Army (ROK-A) counterparts that will be invaluable when executing the training rotation. The more leaders invest into the KCTC recons, the better prepared they will enter the box with a knowledge base on how ROK-A operates and how to realistically plan tactical operations on the ground at KCTC.

Stryker troops, or companies, often grapple with balancing mounted and dismounted training without one compromising the other. KCTC highlights the necessity for dismounted operations as a critical component for brigade and battalion success. The dismounted training units accomplish at the team, squad, and platoon levels during their training progression in Korea before their KCTC rotation is very important to establishing a baseline of proficiencies. Reflecting on the preparation for KCTC 24-06, the most valuable training involved rigorous and realistic exercises in similar terrain, weekly ruck marches under heavy loads, and leadership professional development

*1SG Jeffery Hlatko and CPT Matthew Colvard, the command team of Eagle Troop, 2nd Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, confer during training.*  
(Photo courtesy of 2nd Infantry Division Public Affairs Office)

(LPD)/leader's time training (LTT) sessions focused on tactical leader development. In this article, I will highlight lessons learned from maneuvering a dismounted troop at KCTC.

During the rotation, the troop deployed to a squadron assembly area and completed two days of reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI). This duration was significantly shorter than what is typical at U.S. training centers, emphasizing the need for swift execution of essential implementation tasks. Registering and zeroing the Korean Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System gear, performing troop and platoon operational briefs, and conducting pre-combat checks (PCCs) and pre-combat inspections (PCIs) were the troop's primary focuses. Typical KCTC rotations consist of two to three days of defensive operations, followed by a brief pause lasting 12-18 hours, after which offensive operations commence. During exercise preparation and execution, it was clear that ROK-A prioritizes defensive operations and allocates substantial resources accordingly. Our dismounted troop was assigned a 2-kilometer screen line along a ridgeline in a secondary battle position within the ROK-A brigade's main defensive setup. Though movement from assembly areas to training release points spanned only a couple of miles, the challenging terrain and



elevation made it slow and laborious. During our defensive operations, the troop encountered minimal action due to our positioning and the difficulty of traversing the ridgelines. We were probed twice by opposing force (OPFOR) scout teams but successfully neutralized their efforts.

While the troop faced limited action during the defensive phase, the shift to offensive operations saw U.S. forces receiving greater emphasis in both scheme and tasking. After a brief operational pause, we moved dismounted to our release point for offensive operations and established a troop objective rally point (ORP) for briefings and additional PCCs and PCIs. After eight hours of dismounted movement in offensive operations, it became clear that our troop was progressing faster and farther than other units. This advantage stemmed from effective route planning that used severely restricted terrain to our advantage to minimize enemy contact. Fundamentals learned during the Ranger Course and training at JRTC — such as avoiding danger areas and ensuring proper linear and open danger area crossings — also aided in troop efforts to maneuver undetected. Upon reaching the attack positions, the troop was well-positioned to establish a robust support by fire onto the first objective.

Leaders in the troop utilized common sense in understanding that the enemy OPFOR would not freely relinquish key terrain, specifically the location designated for the support by fire. They understood that seizing this terrain would require a determined effort. The troop employed flexibility by organizing a small tactical unit of two infantry squads with a machine-gun team and ready-to-deploy fire teams to reinforce success in reserve. This strategy paid off; within a short period, they successfully seized the support-by-fire position, which was crucial for the squadron's tactical success. The OPFOR positioned on this newly acquired terrain included recon elements and observers capable of providing early warning and targeting support for enemy indirect fire missions. Not only did the troop manage to limit friendly casualties during the capture of the key terrain, but we also confiscated an operational OPFOR radio utilized by forward observers. This radio, part of the OPFOR fires net, was invaluable; it allowed the ROK-A fire support team to intercept and translate information about enemy fire missions, giving friendly forces critical early warnings of incoming indirect fire and higher headquarters details about the enemy's field artillery placements.

However, hours after multiple suppression efforts using both indirect and direct fires, it became clear that the assaulting force, comprised of two sister troops, suffered significant losses and had to retreat to the previous squadron's forward line of own troops. Reports indicated that the enemy remained entrenched within a fortified bunker system that provided excellent fields of fire towards the east and south. These positions were out of reach of the support by fire and protected by anti-tank systems and mechanized infantry. At 0100, the troop received a change of mission: leave a small force behind for ongoing suppression while maneuvering towards the first objective via a different route. Thanks to the troop's rapid troop leading procedures, by 0230 we were

***The lessons learned in KCTC will stick with Soldiers through their Korea rotation and be the fundamental training blocks toward their successes in other large collective training events.***

postured to execute the long-dismounted patrol. The new route, attacking from the north rather than the south of the objective, was unexpected and challenged the troop with heavily forested areas, a draw, and crossing of a river system running just west of the objective.

Throughout the patrol, the troop fought to maintain communications with the squadron, allowing indirect fire support to suppress the objective as we advanced. By around 0400, the lead element reported spotting OPFOR observation post locations. Fortunately, due to the patrol's stealth, the formation remained undetected, allowing a small team led by an NCO to take out the sleeping OPFOR soldiers. As the troop proceeded towards the objective, we encountered contact from OPFOR along the perimeter of the objective. Lead elements quickly overpowered this weaker defense before reinforcement could arrive. Minutes later, two squads entered and cleared the bunker system, delivering a significant blow to OPFOR morale. In response, the enemy deployed tanks to retake the position. With the remaining members of the troop in the bunker system, troop leadership called indirect fire support from the ROK-A field artillery battalion, aiming to suppress the advancing tanks to move anti-tank (AT) teams into position to destroy the enemy tanks. After successfully mitigating the tank threat, the AT teams identified dismounted OPFOR infantry reinforcements approaching. Despite being reduced to a 12-man fighting unit, the troop held the bunker system for more than an hour, ultimately seizing the objective and facilitating the passage of friendly ROK-A armor to the next target.

Throughout our KCTC rotation, the troop saw our share of successes and failures and learned immensely through both. The lessons learned in KCTC will stick with Soldiers through their Korea rotation and be the fundamental training blocks toward their successes in other large collective training events. KCTC was an invaluable training opportunity for my troop, and with proper planning and execution would foster the same results for any Stryker or infantry brigade combat team rifle company. Pack light, make sure your Soldiers are drinking water, and plan plenty of alternate logistics release points locations for resupply of ammunition and food.

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**CPT Matthew Colvard** currently commands Eagle Troop, 2nd Squadron (Sabre), 3rd Cavalry Regiment, Fort Hood, TX. His previous assignments include serving as a platoon leader in 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, NC; and executive officer in 1st Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment, 198th Infantry Brigade, Fort Benning, GA. CPT Colvard earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Abilene Christian University.

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# AN OFT-MISSED OPPORTUNITY:

## *Providing Command and Control with Geronimo at JRTC*

LTC TRAVIS J. STELLFOX

When tasked to provide opposing force (OPFOR) augmentation at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), the 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), 4th Infantry Division, elected to deploy our battalion tactical command post (TAC) to augment command and control (C2) capabilities. In partnership with the 1st Battalion, 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) and the Commander, Operations Group (COG), 2-12 IN was able to integrate into staff processes and receive live repetitions at providing command and control (C2) against a thinking peer force. This training provided significant benefits to the 2-12 IN battalion staff, Geronimo's ability to replicate a realistic enemy, and the rotational force. Given the relatively low cost of this additional effort compared to the gains the battalion staff alone received, we recommend all battalions tasked with providing OPFOR augmentation to JRTC elect to include their battalion TAC for future rotations.

2-12 IN provided augmentation for the 1st SBCT, 4th Infantry Division's JRTC Rotation 25-02. This augmentation consisted of two infantry companies as OPFOR attached to 1-509 PIR "Geronimo," one infantry company as foreign security forces attached to the Special Operations Training Detachment (SOTD), and our Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), which primarily provided

various administrative support. OPFOR augmentation also included Alpha Troop, 2nd Battalion, 77th Field Artillery Regiment, and a platoon from the 4th Engineer Battalion. 2/4 SBCT was additionally tasked with providing observer-controller/trainer (OC/T) augmentation to the various OC/T task forces across JRTC. The following article seeks to describe the benefits of having augmenting forces provide a battalion TAC and makes recommendations for maximizing the success of future iterations through lessons learned.

During each JRTC rotation, 1-509 PIR provides battalion-level C2 for five organic companies plus three augmentee companies while replicating a brigade-sized element with a battalion (+) sized staff. Normally, much of the responsibility for C2 of augmentee units falls to a "partner" Geronimo company because 1-509 PIR staff is consumed by replicating a brigade staff and meeting the rotational training unit's (RTU) training objectives.

Standard JRTC rotations are 14 days "in the box" with continuous tactical operations after initial entry. The rotational unit must defend against a counterattack and then transition to the offense to seize a major objective. While OPFOR presence is low on initial entry thanks to divisional-shaping operations, those remnant forces are quickly reinforced by a fresh brigade detachment (BDET) which mass to rapidly conduct the counterattack before transitioning to the defense centered on one of JRTC's major objectives. This creates two primary "fight nights" for the OPFOR: the counterattack and the defense.

### **An Offer We Could Not Refuse**

In discussions with the COG and the 1-509 battalion commander, the opportunity to deploy a TAC and provide C2 to a portion of the OPFOR became apparent. For JRTC 25-02, this opportunity came to fruition through the coordination of our two battalions and the dedi-

*Soldiers serving as the opposing force prepare to engage the rotational training unit at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, LA. (Photo by PFC Luciano Alcalá)*



cation of extremely talented captains and majors on both staffs.

### How We Did It

Day-to-day operations are run by the Geronimo tactical operations center (TOC) and generally involve one platoon per company forward in “the Box” maintaining contact with the RTU. During these days, 2-12 IN established our TAC inside of the 1-509 PIR’s “G-Base” adjacent to their TOC. 2-12 IN tied its battle staff into the Geronimo staff and executed shadow-tracking of the battle, thus allowing 2-12 IN to refine products and execute TAC rehearsals including the battle handover drill.

During the two “fight nights” (counterattack and defense), Geronimo 6 normally deploys his TAC forward with 100 percent of all assigned and augmenting companies. This places a strain on the span of control specifically during the counterattack, where companies in the north are unable to communicate with companies in the south.

Working with Geronimo 6 and his staff, plans were simply divided into two battalion areas of operation (AOs), which allowed 2-12 IN to capitalize on this opportunity to deploy its TAC and conduct C2. Each fight allowed the 2-12 IN TAC to control one Geronimo company and one organic company.

In doing so, 2-12 IN corrected the span of control challenge and allowed the Geronimo TOC to replicate a brigade with the battalion executive officer (XO) serving as “brigade commander,” thereby presenting a more realistic replication of a BDET to the RTU.

**The Counterattack** — For the first “fight night,” the 2-12 IN TAC integrated with Geronimo Main to coordinate the northern axis of advance. 2-12 IN was given two companies — one organic Stryker company fighting as dismounted infantry and one mechanized company — with attached mortar, engineer, and air defense assets. The main effort in the south was led by Geronimo 6 in his TAC and consisted of our other organic Stryker company, also fighting as dismounted infantry, and the remainder of Geronimo’s organic forces. The two-TAC approach proved useful when the main effort was disrupted by a combination of weather and 1/4 SBCT in the south. 2-12 IN rapidly adjusted to a branch plan, allowing its TAC to control the exploitation force after achieving an initial penetration in the north.

**The Defense** — The second “fight night” saw similar advantages in having both TACs forward controlling two battalion fights. For the defense, 2-12 IN was task-organized in the south, again fighting as dismounted infantry but augmented by a platoon of armor. Geronimo Main held an armor reserve, and a mechanized company was tasked to support whichever AO saw the RTU’s main effort — this ended up being our defense in the south. The greater ability to C2 separate fights allowed Geronimo 6 in the north to better assess the situation and deploy a mobile counterattack force into the RTU rear while our TAC in the south blocked the main advance.

***Given the relatively low cost of this additional effort compared to the gains the battalion staff alone received, we recommend all battalions tasked with providing OPFOR augmentation to JRTC elect to include their battalion TAC for future rotations.***

### Benefits to Augmenting Units

Taking advantage of the opportunity to train the command post (CP), 2-12 IN received exposure to the experimentation that Geronimo does and the lessons it learns from conducting 10 repetitions a year on these missions and observing RTU actions.

The most significant benefit was the opportunity for the 2-12 IN headquarters and TAC personnel had to execute two realistic repetitions at live C2 in multidomain operations (MDO) against a thinking enemy with all the support that a rotational unit has — minus OC/Ts. This is an unmatched opportunity to test and learn. The hard reset in-between “fight nights” allows time for an after actions review, with the resources and opportunity to fix the problems identified as opposed to having to fight through it in the box for 14 days straight.

Additionally, the staff-to-staff professional development that takes place as battalion TAC personnel observe the planning and targeting process conducted by Geronimo was incredibly beneficial. Not only did the 2-12 IN staff observe and participate in planning, but its TAC personnel conducted daily repetitions to “shadow track” the fight from just outside the Geronimo TOC. Both opportunities were a huge jump start and will be critical for our developing staff given current experience levels and our progression through staff tables. Finally, having the 2-12 IN battalion headquarters on the ground increases opportunities to conduct additional training on the front and back end of the augmentation timeline.

### Benefits to 1-509 PIR and the RTU

Possibly the most significant advantage this combined operation allows is for the OPFOR to be much closer to what it should replicate — a challenging near-peer enemy. Geronimo replicates a BDET, and augmentation with a battalion HQ allows the Geronimo TOC to act as the brigade while fielding two O-5 commanders forward controlling battalion-sized elements and better aligning with the replicated OPFOR force package. This more closely matches what the National Training Center (NTC) provides as OPFOR with Blackhorse fielding two battalions.

The second CP also enables Geronimo company commanders to focus on their company fight. Managing augmentee companies administratively and tactically traditionally falls to a counterpart Geronimo company commander. 2-12 IN’s headquarters relieved much of that strain, but the



The 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment provided augmentation for Joint Readiness Training Center Rotation 25-02. (Photo courtesy of author)

most significant impact was during the two “fight nights.” Normally, the Geronimo TAC controls both the northern and southern maneuver corridors, requiring a company commander in each to act as ground force commander (GFC) in their AO controlling a partnered augmentation company. The 2-12 IN TAC assumed that role and enabled Geronimo’s TAC to do the same, thereby allowing the companies to focus on their fight.

Finally, the staff-to-staff professional development goes both ways as the 2-12 IN staff provided an inquisitive outside look at Geronimo’s planning and targeting process. This increases the capabilities of both staff elements, effectively improving the outcome for each rotation.

**Recommendations**

I would highly encourage battalions tasked to provide two or more companies as augmentation to OPFOR at JRTC to deploy and fight their TAC. While staff-to-staff learning is a great opportunity, I recommend against deploying the full battalion staff and attempting to conduct MDMP; Geronimo

planning integrates not only the enemy picture but also friendly intent. This critically shapes the accomplishment of training objectives for the RTU. For simplicity’s sake, I recommend against bringing additional home-station equipment and instead relying on the highly available prepositioned (PREPO) fleet. Light units should consider bringing their actual TAC vehicles/equipment; however, a Stryker formation’s organic C2 equipment would have been disruptive and confused the RTU. 2-12 IN brought the equipment and established the TAC between a Light Medium Tactical Vehicle (LMTV) and Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV); heavy units should take the opportunity to fight light. Ideally this is the start of a relationship that feeds through to a future JRTC rotation and allows training objectives to be more mature.

**LTC Travis J. Stellfox** served as commander of 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, at Fort Carson, CO. He currently serves as a task force senior and senior observer-controller/trainer at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany. LTC Stellfox has served primarily in airborne infantry and Stryker formations throughout his 20 years of service.

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# ARMOR-INFANTRY INTEGRATION LESSONS LEARNED

LTC DAN KRUEGER

**Editor's Note:** *During the events highlighted within the article, the M10 Booker — formerly known as Mobile Protected Firepower (MPF) — was being tested for the U.S. Army as a program of record. Since then, the M10 Booker program was canceled. Regardless, the tactics, techniques, and procedures of infantry-armor integration discussed within can be adapted to any armored platform.*

Throughout the latter stages of 2024 and early 2025, 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment had a unique opportunity to train and fight an opposing force (OPFOR) alongside the Booker Test Detachment, an armor company of tanks known as Charlie Company, 73rd Armor Regiment. Though the M10 Booker program was ultimately canceled, the training and testing period of over six months enabled a rare, sustained relationship between a light infantry battalion and an armored force. While it is common to have a similar task organization at a combat training center (one that incorporates non-organic armored platforms), we found that integration did not come easily. Indeed, such partnerships must be cultivated and sustained for effective combined arms maneuver.

This article briefly highlights 10 areas worthy of leaders' attention moving forward.

**Increased protection and speed led to opportunity when leveraged appropriately.** We continually referred to the Booker by its original name "mobile protected firepower;" these three important words gave the necessary symbiotic relationship between any mounted and dismounted force. The "mobility" came in the form of a fast-moving asset that could gain an advantageous position

*Soldiers assigned to 3rd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment breach a razor wire barrier on 20 March 2024 during a Joint Readiness Training Center rotation at Fort Polk, LA. (Photo by PFC Luciano Alcala)*

or exploit opportunity in a fraction of the time of our light Infantrymen. While our battalion typically used the M10 in a support role, we experimented with using it to quickly assault objectives and open routes. Moreover, we found that we could rapidly reinforce areas where our forces were more or less successful in making gains against a free-thinking OPFOR. The "protected" element enabled these gains, often moving through fire that would have otherwise limited a light element. Finally, the "firepower" inherent to an armored force was effective at detecting and destroying enemy forces at an extended range beyond that which is organic to light infantry units. From the optics on a main gun to the simple elevation beyond human height, these platforms enable more than many might appreciate. Moreover, powerful, non-guided rounds pass through much more than the dismounted anti-tank systems.

**Rehearsing actions on contact were critical to ensuring the only casualties were those inflicted on the enemy.** The process of working through standard operating procedures for marking/visual indicators, communications, how to move in vicinity of tanks and dismounts, and where each element should be cannot be understated. Units should start with a full force walk-through of drills. Ideally, these are done with armor crews in their vehicles and infantry personnel moving in an open area. These efforts help everyone understand positioning and work through friction before having to deal with the enemy at the same time.

**Light infantry rarely deals with high-caliber rounds and their impact on surface danger zones.** Initial integration training must include a discussion between tank crews and dismounted infantry personnel about the risk associated with being around the tank when certain rounds, particularly sabot, are fired from a main gun. Consequently, dismounts learned to stay low and maintain an appropriate distance from their tanks. Alternatively, tank crews put thought into which rounds were in their ready rack given proximity to those dismounted forces.

**Dismounted routes vs mounted routes and concealment.** Leaders quickly learned that there are differences in how infantry and armor leaders view terrain. Armor crews preferred to fight in open terrain that dismounts could not wait to get away from. Because the idea behind the Booker was to support dismounted infantry, the unit primarily moved off-road. In doing this, armor crews realized they would have trouble taking the same routes; therefore, the unit developed a practice of having infantry visually clear routes while they moved so the tanks could quickly move into place when needed.

Due to noise concerns, armor elements would remain 1-2 kilometers away, but infantry elements quickly realized just how fast these elements could move up to support. Many times, the very road the armor elements were traveling on was designated as a phase line or restrictive fire line, given its clearly identifiable nature. These designations helped simplify communication between two forces coming together, typically while in contact.

Still, armor elements regularly moved into the woods even if it meant taking down some vegetation in the process. Roads are important terrain for both sides, and sometimes moving just a little bit off the road makes a huge difference. This seemed uncomfortable at times for armor crews, but

***Like any enabler element, the earlier leaders integrate into planning the better the plan will be. Armor platoon leaders were constantly reminded of the importance of being in the hip pocket of company commanders during planning so the commander understood employment considerations.***

they gained confidence in their capabilities and a better understanding of their limitations. Armor elements also had to learn they needed to move into vegetation immediately every time they stopped.

**Early planning better enables integration.** Like any enabler element, the earlier leaders integrate into planning the better the plan will be. Armor platoon leaders were constantly reminded of the importance of being in the hip pocket of company commanders during planning so the commander understood employment considerations. Many times, as is likely to happen in an actual scenario, the armor elements were pulled away during troop leading procedures (TLPs) (for us it was often testing related, but in combat it could be for maintenance), but when they were part of the planning process early, the platoon leader would still be able to properly prepare their elements.

**Communications remain key.** Though the Bookers were equipped with Integrated Tactical Network (ITN) capabilities, armor crews are very used to using Joint Battle Command-Platform (JBC-P) while most of the 82nd Airborne is working with the Android Tactical Assault Kit (ATAK). Rifle companies ended up loaning a few ATAK systems to their Booker counterparts, and it was incredibly valuable for battle tracking. Whatever primary, alternate, contingency, emergency (PACE) plan the supported unit is using, it's worth going through several communications exercises and ensuring supporting leaders understand what nets they need to be on. In addition to anticipated comms challenges using new vehicles, it took some time to get everyone on the same systems and nets. When all is lost, old fashioned hand-and-arm signals are crucial.

**Armor-Infantry "wingman" pairing.** Booker armor crews were very uncomfortable being out of sight with their wingman, which initially resulted in them being right next to each other in the dense vegetation. As we dug in more, we came to understand the



*Paratroopers in the 82nd Airborne Division maneuver as a firing squad during a live-fire exercise at Fort Bragg, NC, on 27 July 2025. (Photo by SPC Aiden O'Marra)*

anxiety about potentially being destroyed and explained to them that dismounted infantry could report on their status and request assistance in the event the tank was destroyed. In these instances, small units still had an armored wingman that could quickly move in to support, but that wingman might be slightly offset watching down another avenue of approach. Combined with the dismounts, the two vehicles were still mutually supporting.

**Command and control (C2) relationships are an important start.** We had to make clear that platoons or sections were being attached to an infantry company or platoon and that they needed to talk directly to those commanders. This seems obvious, but with the platoon and company leadership also on the battlefield, there was a tendency to revert to organic chain of command, and C2 waters became muddled. Armor assets were the most frequently re-tasked assets on the battlefield so their ability to change radio nets and understand the broader C2 structure was pivotal.

**Rehearsals, over and over.** The importance of spending time training alongside each other, seeing what the other sees, and rehearsing together cannot be understated. Rehearsals were a pivotal reason we were able to increase our pace, build lethality, and suffer fewer casualties as we continued to launch attacks against a similar-sized enemy with the benefit of being in the defense.

**Call the experts early.** Our combined training approach started with classroom sessions focused on capabilities, best practices, and historical vignettes. They were followed closely by an informal “petting zoo” to get leaders side-by-side around the vehicles with time to go through the finer points of these large pieces of equipment. As we moved into operations, we kept experts closely tied into battalion-level planning processes to make sure we accounted for every-



*Leaders with the 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment and C Company, 3rd Battalion, 73rd Armor Regiment, conduct a rehearsal during a training exercise at Fort Bragg, NC. (Photo courtesy of author)*

thing from sustainment to protection. This significantly mitigated challenges we otherwise would have faced.

The lessons learned throughout this experience were not groundbreaking, but they did highlight a gap in experience that many infantry leaders have in how to best integrate and fight alongside an armor force. Regardless of what the platform may be, maneuver leaders should seek every opportunity to conduct combined arms training with armor and infantry forces side-by-side to increase understanding and reinforce fundamental principles of warfighting.

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*M1A2 Abrams Main Battle Tank crews assigned to the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division move into an area occupied by simulated enemy forces during a JRTC rotation at Fort Polk on 18 March 2024. (Photo by PFC Luciano Alcalá)*

# REDEFINING LETHALITY:

## *Building Overmatch in the Mobile Brigade Combat Team*

MAJ AUSTIN HULTMAN

In today's Army, "lethality" is everywhere — it's the centerpiece of speeches, strategy papers, and training guidance. But ask 10 leaders what lethality means, and you'll get 10 different answers. Most will say it's about building lethal teams — teams that shoot, move, and communicate with precision. Yet the real question is simpler and more important: How do we create overmatch? Overmatch is the condition in which a force can impose its will on an adversary faster, more accurately, and with less risk to itself, producing decisive effects at the time and place of the commander's choosing. Creating overmatch requires building lethal teams, mastering the fundamentals, and relentlessly institutionalizing integration and redundancy so formations can seize and sustain the initiative under stress. For the mobile brigade combat team (MBCT), true lethality is about integration — the ability to sense, decide, and strike faster than any adversary, even under degraded or denied conditions. This discussion explores how the Army can redefine lethality for the MBCT, drawing on lessons from recent operations and training to make it measurable, practical, and real.

Look past the buzzwords and you see an urgent operational problem: Modern battlefields punish single-point failures. During recent Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) rotations and forward deployments, units that lost a single sensor or suffered a communications blackout immediately lost initiative, exposed themselves to fratricide risk, or saw sustainment timelines collapse. Lessons from Operation Atlantic Resolve and the war in Ukraine underscore this reality — small unmanned aerial systems (UAS), resilient sustainment, decentralized command, and simple redundancy have a decisive impact on the battlefield. Senior leaders may speak of "making teams lethal," but the test is whether those teams can create overmatch when fragmentation, electronic warfare (EW), and attrition are the norm rather than the exception.

This article seeks to accomplish three key objectives: to refine the MBCT's operational definition of lethality into a measurable concept of overmatch; highlight where current practices fall short by drawing on real-world training and

*Soldiers assigned to 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Mobile Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), shift fire during a live-fire exercise at Novo Selo Training Area, Bulgaria, on 10 August 2025. (Photo by SPC Breanna Bradford)*

combat lessons; and present a single, actionable path forward — the Integrated Lethality Resilience Package (ILRP). These will show us how concrete changes in metrics, equipment mixes, doctrine, and training — not slogans — will let commanders turn the abstract promise of “lethality” into a reliable advantage on tomorrow’s battlefields.

### A New Definition of Lethality

The following is the recommended new definition for lethality for the MBCT: “Lethality in the MBCT is the measurable ability to achieve and sustain overmatch by integrating sensors, decision-making, and effects across all domains — combining resiliency, tempo, and adaptability to remain decisive under the strain of disruption.”

This definition focuses on adaptability and synchronization, shifting the conversation from “more fire” to “better integration.” Lethality becomes less about weapons and more about the systems and leaders that enable precision and survivability.

It must be solidified and institutionalized within the MBCT because, without a common understanding, “lethality” risks becoming just another hollow term in the Army’s lexicon. The MBCT is built for agility — bridging the gap between heavy and light formations — and that agility demands a shared framework that measures how healthy units sense, decide, and strike, not just how hard they can hit. A clear, measurable definition of lethality aligns every warfighting function toward a single purpose: achieving and sustaining overmatch. When leaders understand what “lethal” truly means in the MBCT context, they can align training, resource allocation, and modernization to improve the systems and human decisions that deliver combat advantage.

Moreover, codifying this definition in doctrine and training will drive consistency across echelons. At the platoon and company levels, it will shape how Soldiers train and rehearse under degraded conditions; at the battalion and brigade levels, it will guide commanders in assessing readiness and prioritizing modernization. The enemy will not measure lethality by how many rounds we fire but by how quickly we regain initiative after disruption. The MBCT must therefore define and own lethality as its operational currency — the ability to stay synchronized, adaptive, and lethal even when friction, fog, and chaos dominate the battlefield.

### Lessons from the Field

The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment’s performance

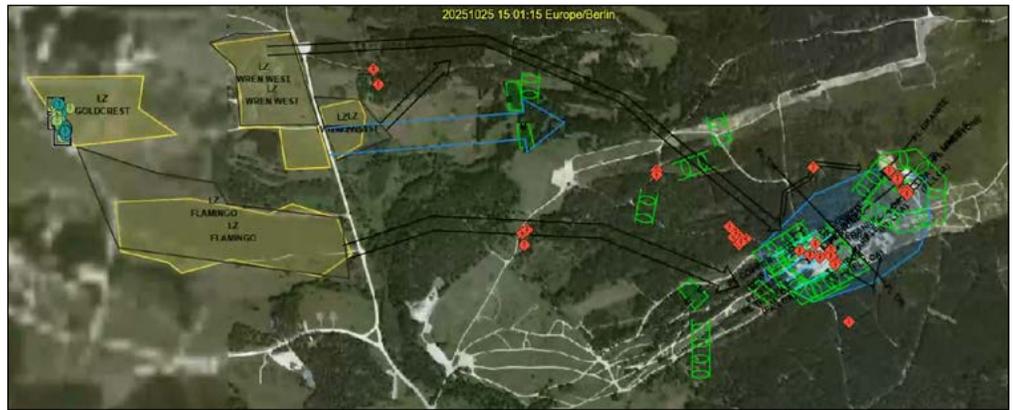


Figure 1 — Friendly and Enemy Initial Set During the Out-of-Sector Mission

Direct Fire Lethality —Total				
	Friendly	A/1-26 IN	C/1-26 IN	Total
1	Friendly Killed	75	63	138
2	Friendly Available	105	99	204
3	% of Friendly Killed	71.4%	63.6%	67.6%
Enemy				
1	Enemy Killed	31	23	54
2	Enemy Available	54	54	54
3	% of Enemy Killed	59.2%	44.4%	100%

Figure 2 — Direct fire lethality accounted for the successful seizure of the OOS mission during JMRC Combined Resolve 26-01.

during the out-of-sector (OOS) mission and across JMRC Combined Resolve 26-01 clearly demonstrates that lethality in the MBCT is not about massed firepower — it is about integration, adaptability, and tempo. During the OOS assault (see Figure 1), two companies each cleared fortified objectives while sustaining significant attrition — 54 enemy killed, with 136 friendly casualties, an average engagement range of 85.6 meters, and the longest confirmed kill at 470 meters (see Figure 2). Historically, assaults on this objective have either failed or left units culminating under heavy losses, but 1-26 IN broke that trend — seizing the objective despite significant attrition and sustainment challenges. This success, though costly, provided critical data proving that integration, adaptability, and resilience enable true lethality and will shape future MBCT tactics and ILRP development.

Additionally, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) denial (due to weather, no UAS employment) necessitated reliance on line-of-sight reconnaissance and indirect fire, highlighting the degradation in tempo and situational awareness resulting from the absence of layered sensing. Six fratricide incidents and movement delays averaging 6 to 8 hours further proved that when fires, sensors, and logistics operate independently, combat effectiveness erodes.

This data matters because it provides tangible proof that lethality is more than the sum of fires and effects — it is the

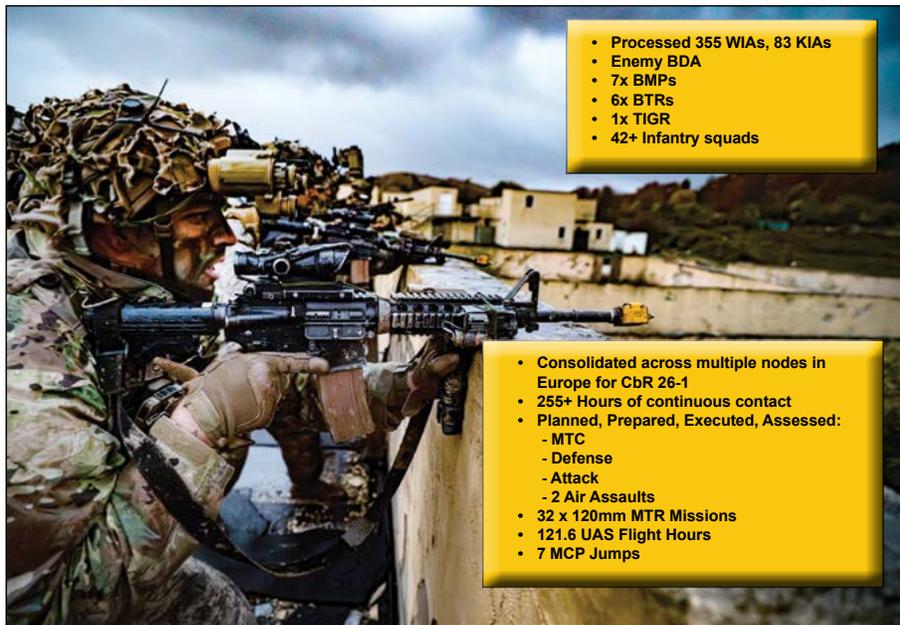


Figure 3 — 1-26 IN Lethality Data from JMRC Combined Resolve 26-01

ability to sustain integration under pressure (see Figure 3). The rotation's metrics show that the MBCT's combat power depends on its ability to integrate ISR, fires, and sustainment to maintain decision speed and tempo over time. The sustained ISR coverage, high volume of mortar fire, and continuous command post mobility enabled the battalion to adapt faster than the enemy, recover from friction, and maintain overmatch despite prolonged contact (see Figures 4 and 5). These results directly reinforce the new definition of lethality as the measurable ability to generate overmatch through the integration of sensors, decision-making, and effects across all domains, proving that resilience and synchronization — not just firepower — are what make the MBCT truly lethal in modern warfare.

These outcomes validate the new definition of lethality as the measurable ability to generate overmatch through integration under stress — redundancy, disciplined fire control, and agile sustainment — not simply more munitions, which produced tempo and survivability at JMRC. The data from 1-26 IN's OOS mission shows integration is measurable, repeatable, and scalable, so we must codify it across MBCTs. To do that, I recommend

the ILRP — a compact, fieldable toolkit of layered ISR, digital fire-deconfliction/identification friendly or foe (IFF) guardrails, EW-resilient fallback communications, and sustainment analytics for forward nodes — all piloted, measured, and then scaled to make lethality a consistent, provable advantage.

### The Integrated Lethality Resilience Package

Modern battlefields no longer reward the strongest force — they reward the most resilient one. The days of equating lethality solely with firepower are over; success now depends on a unit's ability to adapt, integrate, and fight through disruption. The ILRP provides the MBCT with a means to achieve exactly that. It's not a new weapon system or a fleeting initiative; it's a proven, data-driven approach born from field experience at JMRC and designed to keep the MBCT lethal when everything else is contested. In short, the ILRP turns the idea of "lethality" from a buzzword into a battlefield advantage you can measure, refine, and trust.

ILRP is designed to transform lethality from a concept into a measurable, repeatable capability for the MBCT. Rather than focusing on simply increasing firepower, the ILRP strengthens the MBCT's ability to fight and win when conditions are contested. When ISR is denied, communications are degraded, and sustainment is under pressure. The ILRP integrates doctrine, technology, and training into a single, scalable data-driven framework built around five key components: redundant ISR layers for continuous overwatch; digital fires deconfliction and identification, including IFF

Figure 4 — 1-26 IN Mortar Missions during Combined Resolve 26-01  
(X11 does not account for 60mm mortar missions in support of OOS mission)

Mortar Missions													
	D4	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	X9	X10	X11	X12
# of Missions		4	6	1	4	3	5	2	1	2		4	
# of Rounds		80	160	20	150	74	82	55	10	50		40	
Tanks													
BMPs													
BTRs					1								
Dismounts										1			
FRAT		0			3			2		5			

Figure 5 — UAS Flight Data (SRR Data is Based on OC/T Reporting)

UAS TRACKER X12 DATA ROLL UP																			
	A CO			B CO			C CO			MPC			HHC			Rollup			
SYSTEM	OH	# FLIGHTS	# MINS	OH	# FLIGHTS	# MINS	OH	# FLIGHTS	# MINS	OH	# FLIGHTS	# MINS	OH	# FLIGHTS	# MINS	# FLIGHTS	# MINS	# ENGAGEMENTS	BDA
PARROT	6			3			3												
GHOST X										4									
SKYDIO	4			2/3			6			11			2						
C-100										4									
TOTAL LAST 24														0	0				
TOTAL EXERCISE				7	122		10	141		170	7035		0	0					

systems to prevent fratricide; resilient mesh communications for EW-contested environments; and real-time sustainment analytics to maintain tempo. Together, these elements institutionalize redundancy and resilience as fundamental components of combat power, turning lethality into something a commander can assess, improve, and sustain.

To capture and validate this data, observer-coach/trainers (OC/Ts) at combat training centers (CTCs) such as JMRC and JRTC will play a central role in executing ILRP assessments. They will gather quantitative metrics — such as ISR coverage rates, sensor-to-shooter times, resupply delays, and fratricide incidents — using standardized data collection tools embedded within unit training evaluations. This data will then be compiled into post-rotation lethality assessment reports (LARs), presented in dashboard format to commanders at all echelons. These visual, data-driven feedback products will enable leaders to identify trends, compare results to previous rotations, and prioritize resource investments where lethality gaps are most significant.

To implement the ILRP across the MBCT, a phased approach should begin with a pilot at battalion levels, such as 1-26 IN, which recently validated the lethality definition at JMRC. The pilot phase would integrate new ISR platforms, fallback communications, and sustainment dashboards while aligning training events around degraded-network and EW-denied conditions. Data collection on ISR availability, sensor-to-shooter time, fratricide rates, and sustainment delays would allow leaders to quantify results and compare them with baseline rotations. Success should be measured in outcomes, not rhetoric: a 75-percent reduction in fratricide, a 30-percent decrease in sensor-to-shooter time, and a sustainment delay window reduced to less than two hours. Once validated through training and rotation data, the ILRP could be scaled to brigade and division levels through standard operating procedure (SOP) annexes, leader development programs, and targeted modernization investments.

The way forward is easy but essential: Codify the ILRP as an MBCT standard and make lethality a measurable command responsibility. Doing so will ensure every formation trains and fights to the same definition of overmatch — one based on integration, not just firepower. The JMRC lessons demonstrated that when ISR, fires, and sustainment work as a synchronized system, lethality multiplies even under degraded conditions. By institutionalizing the ILRP, the Army can equip MBCT commanders with the tools to quantify, enhance, and sustain lethality across future operations. In this sense, the ILRP is more than a concept — it's a blueprint for building resilient, data-informed formations capable of dominating on the complex, multi-domain battlefields of tomorrow.

### **Implementing the Definition**

We must make the definition real with a short, practical plan that commanders and staffs can execute. First, publish the MBCT lethality definition as official guidance and require every brigade and battalion training plan to refer-

***True lethality isn't more ordnance; it's smarter formations that keep fighting when systems break, move faster than the enemy can respond, and sustain the fight until victory is decisive.***

ence it. Require units to capture a handful of clear, routine performance measures — such as ISR availability, sensor-to-shooter time, fratricide occurrences, and sustainment/resupply timelines — during exercises, so leaders can see trends, not impressions. Utilize upcoming CTC rotations to pilot the ILRP, collecting both before-and-after data during realistic stressors (such as weather, EW, and degraded communications) to assess its operational impact.

When the pilot proves that the ILRP delivers measurable gains, codify what works by writing ILRP elements into brigade/battalion SOPs, adding degraded-network lanes, and prioritizing procurement for the small, high-impact capabilities validated by the pilot. The goal is straightforward — shift lethality from a mantra to an accountable standard so MBCT formations can demonstrate and sustain overmatch through repeatable training, significant results, and doctrine-backed practice.

### **Closing Comments**

Lethality is not a slogan — it's a promise to achieve overmatch the moment the fight begins. For the MBCT, that promise rests on three key elements: the ruthless integration of sensors and shooters, built-in redundancy to prevent a single failure from collapsing the kill chain, and decision speed that converts information into instant, accurate effects. Adopting the ILRP and measuring performance — not platitudes — lets commanders turn that promise into practice. This is urgent: Our peer competitors are already testing our networks, sustainment, and tempo. True lethality isn't more ordnance; it's smarter formations that keep fighting when systems break, move faster than the enemy can respond, and sustain the fight until victory is decisive. Implement the ILRP now, and the MBCT will not only survive the future fight — it will dominate it.

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# THE MODERN OBSERVER: See, Sense, Strike – Smarter

MAJ LACIE HUTCHINS  
MAJ NICHOLAS BOWERS  
CPT COLLEEN A. GARGIULO  
SFC CHRISTIAN K. KASTRINAKIS

The company had arrayed its forces throughout the jungle, recon assets out with forward observers (FOs) and binoculars in hand. Infantry lightfighters and their fire supporters combed the dense jungle anxiously scanning to see the next terrain feature. The company commander knew they had to find the enemy's forward reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition (RSTA) elements. Squad leaders reported no joy. Forward observers unsuccessfully scanned their sectors with their direct line of sight assets. Local patrols yielded the same.

Frustrated, the company commander turned to the fire support officer (FSO) and exclaimed, "I need you to figure this out; we must see past the next ridgeline!" The FSO knew the answer: They had to find a higher vantage point. "Sir," the FSO replied, "we need to send up a drone to see over the next terrain feature; that is how we will see and sense the enemy without risking a patrol." The company commander knew the FSO was right and responded, "Execute."

This is not fiction. It is a vignette grounded in the evolving elements of how we must fight. From Indo-Pacific jungles to the rolling terrain of Eastern Europe, we must empower our forward observers (FOs) to see, sense, and strike in a faster, lighter, and more survivable way. The argument is simple: Integrating company-level drones with fire support

personnel provides beyond line of sight (BLOS) sensing, keeps Infantrymen engaging the enemy in the close fight, and reduces fire support personnel requirements in the aggregate.

\*\* An aside: this article champions getting small unmanned aerial systems (sUAS) into the hands of FOs, but it does not argue they do not have a role in 11-series Soldiers for the purpose of reconnaissance. Reconnaissance elements and other maneuver formations require access to this technology to enhance battlefield awareness, survivability, and responsiveness. UAS employment must be synchronized with mission command; enabling this integration starts with clear guidance from mobile brigade (MBDE)-level commanders, who align tactical employment with operational fires priorities.\*\*

## Do Your Job

Today's modern battlefield is full of new technology. First-person view (FPV) sensors, short- and medium-range reconnaissance (SRR/MRR) assets, localized signals intelligence (SIGINT) assets, and common operating pictures (COPs) are more and more common — at echelon — every day. Experimentation continues, but the core functions remain intact: Army Soldiers must be able to see, sense, and strike the enemy with mass... enter the forward observer.

Through change, we must be vigilant to retain our core competencies. The 13F FO is the fire support representative for the maneuver platoon. The FO's primary duty is to accurately locate targets, then call for and adjust fire support.<sup>1</sup> The infantry company commander — through their company FSO — puts the intent for fires into action. The supported element — the 11B Infantryman — is the decisive maneuver element for the Army's close combat operations. The Infantryman's primary duty is to close with and destroy the enemy through fire and movement, or to repel their assault through fire and close combat.<sup>2</sup> The infantry platoon leader — through their squad leaders and team leaders — translates the company commander's intent into tactical action on the

*A Soldier in the 3rd Mobile Brigade, 25th Infantry Division launches a small unmanned aerial vehicle. (Photo courtesy of the 25th Infantry Division)*

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ground. Integrating enablers like sUAS, robotic platforms, or mounted firepower allows infantry squads to extend their reach, improve survivability, and maintain overmatch in the close fight.

Keeping the sensing and striking in the hands of the 13F maintains the responsibility to locate and strike targets in the right hands. By providing 13-series personnel with BLOS UAS and drone feeds instead of walking hills with binos and radios, we return manpower to the line and still maintain fire support effectiveness. This does not eliminate the need for “all-weather” core competencies. We still require observers who can call a fire mission in degraded conditions, but we also need FOs who can do that and build a COP with their own drone footage. One drone, paired with a joint fire support team (JFST) and Precision Fires-Dismounted (PF-D), becomes a mobile, self-contained BLOS sensor-strike package — no separate radio-telephone operator (RTO), no external support. One warfighter, all the tools. That’s tactical efficiency. That is lethality. This is not an either/or solution — it is an evolution.

### **The Proven Result: Training and Doctrine**

Recent 25th Infantry Division training events provides salient lessons learned for both training and doctrine. Combined arms live-fire exercises (CALFEXs) utilizing several FPV and SRR assets yielded positive results. Through training we saw the most effective commanders put the responsibility of the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) from drones in the hands of observers, ultimately simplifying their sensor calculus. The results provide lessons learned by the fire support community.

As we experienced in a recent CALFEX, infantry company commanders can get overstimulated managing their formation and the many tools at their disposal. The least successful commanders tried to fight their organizations from their Android Tactical Awareness Kits (ATAKs) and were unable to adapt to the situation on the ground. They felt that by employing their sUAS (specifically SRR) systems to look at what was right in front of them they would be able to anticipate the enemy’s actions. This was not the case. The lag between drones, operators, and the commander for decision delayed the process, and the situation evolved beyond their ability to direct (They were reacting by seeing a filtered feed and mistaking it for reality).

The most successful companies remained grounded in the basics while exploiting new technology. Commanders established themselves in a position to physically see and direct their units, enabling drone operators and FSOs to leverage fires to shape the next fight. By giving their FSOs or FSNCOs intent and guidance, it was on the fires element to identify and employ the right sensor to get rounds on target through whatever means was available. The fire support team (FiST) operated with autonomy, collaborating directly with drone operators and maneuver elements. They were updating the doctrine and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) in real time.

Recent training shows immediate room for improvement in fire support doctrine. Three areas in Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-09.30, *Observed Fires*, are prime for updates. The first is observation post (OP) planning considerations. ATP 3-09.30 discusses two primary considerations for OP planning: forward and reverse slope.<sup>3</sup> Recent experiences show these methods are relevant but not all inclusive: The new OP may be in the palm of our hands. For example, what if that “location” comes from a drone on an offset hide site? What if we no longer need two 13Fs on every hilltop because one is flying, seeing, and lasing — all from cover? Or even further into the future — what if the observer can sense and strike with the same asset? OP selection is now different, and while we begin to train that way, we can quickly cover ground on doctrine updates.

A second example is observer control options. There are currently three observer control options: decentralized, designated, and centralized.<sup>4</sup> We need to develop more competent observers through training and the fundamentals found in doctrine. As highlighted in the article “The Meaning of Drone-Enabled Infantry Striking Beyond Line of Sight,” Ukrainian drone operators work in tight conjunction with indirect fire teams to coordinate effective fires and strike targets.<sup>5</sup> These lessons demand that 13F training be updated to include UAS integration, decentralized decision-making, and rapid fire control — pushing doctrine into the modern fight. Modern technological innovations like launched effects and armed FPVs lend credence to a fourth type of control: independent. The fundamental difference with the independent control option is the ability to see, sense, and strike organic to the observer. The argument for independent control option is simple: It is effective.

Finally, ATP 3-09.30’s guidance on OP planning is still grounded in physical observation — stating selection depends on visibility, comms, and survivability — but does not yet reflect digital or aerial observation platforms.<sup>6</sup> The implementation and utilization of hide sites was proven successful during CALFEX and other recent training, both within and outside of 25th ID. Hide sites are no longer mentioned in doctrine but offer solutions for utilization of sUAS from relative sanctuary. As we develop and innovate, we continue to learn and iterate more quickly; it is imperative our ability to update doctrine and TTPs keep pace.

### **Doing More with Less**

As Napoleon once said, “One cannot expect to make an omelet without breaking eggs,” yet our modern approach shows we can break fewer eggs by placing empowered observers at decisive points. Fewer tools. Better effects. Tactical efficiency.

As 25th Division Artillery transitions from Transformation in Contact (TiC) 1.0 to 2.0, we confirmed we can be more efficient across our formations to see, sense, and strike.<sup>7</sup> We moved FOs into multi-purpose companies (MPCs) and the mobile brigade-level reconnaissance element, taking them off the hips of their platoon leaders and putting them back in the

fight. Figure 1 displays a prototype FiST task organization.

The talent exists in our formations already, and if we task-organize and equip our fire support personnel properly, we are more lethal and ready. The technology exists. We must now provide it to our FOs and train them to solve the problem. Seeing past the ridgeline should not require a battalion S-2. It should be solved at the company level by an FO with a drone in the air, PF-D in hand, and fires queued in seconds.

**Conclusion**

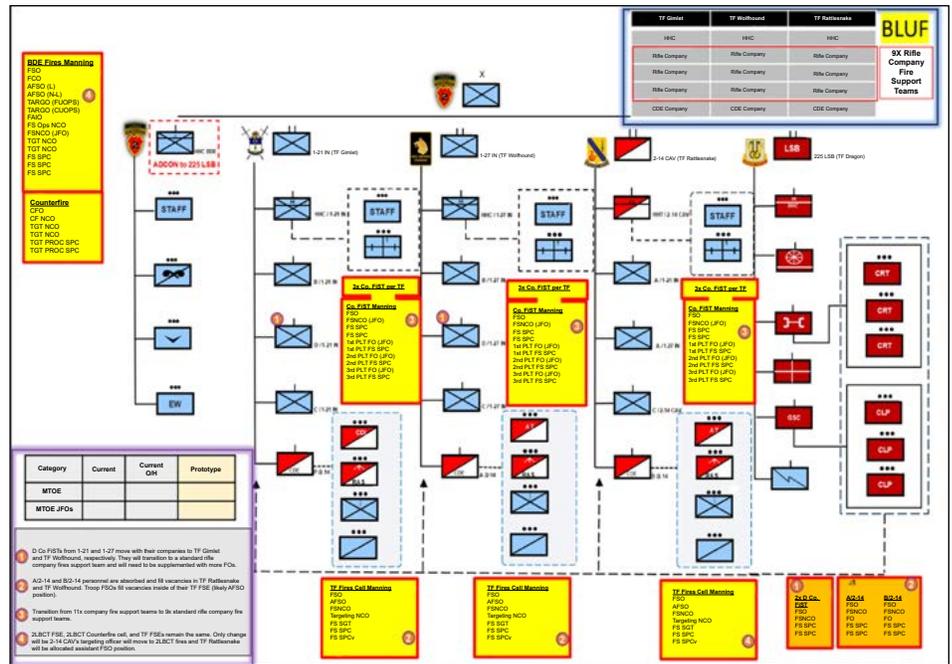
Recent training across 25th ID and lessons observed in Ukraine make one point unmistakably clear: Our fire support teams must evolve now. Observers are no longer just a voice on the net — they are a multidomain sensor and strike enabler. As formations integrate small drones and digital mission tools at the lowest levels, doctrine must adapt to reflect this shift. Observer control options should expand to include independent control, and OP planning must account for standoff sensing platforms.

We proved this in training: Rapid, lethal, and survivable kill chains are possible when commanders empower their FOs and FSNCOs to own the sensor-to-shooter process. But this shift is not exclusive to the 13F. Reconnaissance teams, scouts, and other maneuver elements require access to UAS technology to enhance battlefield awareness and survivability. This evolution must be guided by MBDE commanders' intent for fires, ensuring synchronization of effects across formations. Maneuver commanders and FSOs alike need to keep in mind that while all the new technology can streamline their task, nothing will replace remaining grounded in the basics and seeing the problem firsthand.

While UAS enables maneuver providing real-time battlefield awareness, route security, and early warning to shape the close fight; it is vital to fires and our ability to support maneuver and allow the infantry to prosecute the close fight. The technology exists, and the culture shift is underway. Manning, equipping, and doctrine must keep pace. Empower the observer — and the fires will land where and when they matter most.

**Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-09.30, *Observed Fires*, September 2017, 2-5.
- <sup>2</sup> Field Manual 3-21.8, *The Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*, 2023.
- <sup>3</sup> ATP 3-09.30, 2-12.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-8.
- <sup>5</sup> Antonio Salinas, Mark Askew, and Jason Levay, "The Meaning of Drone-Enabled Infantry: Striking Beyond Line of Sight," *War on the Rocks*,



**Figure 1 — Prototype FiST Task Organization for 2/25 MBDE**

23 June 2025, <https://warontherocks.com/2025/06/the-meaning-of-drone-enabled-infantry-striking-beyond-line-of-sight/>.

<sup>6</sup> ATP 3-09.30, 2-13.

<sup>7</sup> CPT Colleen Gargiulo, MAJ Jack Wilson, CPT Michael Wilson, "Manning and Equipping to Win: Reorganizing the Fire Support Enterprise for Multi Domain Operations," *Field Artillery Professional Bulletin*, 3 September 2025, <https://www.dvidshub.net/publication/issues/75168>.

**MAJ Lacie Hutchins** currently serves as the executive assistant to the Chief of Staff, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. She previously served as the mobile brigade fire support officer for 3rd Mobile Brigade (MBDE), 25th Infantry Division Mobile Brigade – 3rd Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Regiment (FAR), 25th Division Artillery (DIVARTY). MAJ Hutchins has served in numerous fires enterprise positions, notably as the lethal fires officer for 25th DIVARTY and battalion fire support officer for 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division.

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**SFC Christian K. Kastrinakis** currently serves as the fire support NCO for 3/25 MBDE. He previously served as the battalion fire support NCO for 2-35 IN, where he significantly contributed to efforts in integrating sUAS with forward observers, scouts, mortars, and AH-64s. Formerly, he has served as a battalion fire support NCO with 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade, a company fire support NCO, and a platoon forward observer with 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment.



Virginia National Guard Soldiers from the 116th Mobile Brigade Combat Team conduct Infantry Squad Vehicle operator new equipment training on 14 November 2025 at Fort Pickett, VA. (Photo by Cotton Puryear)

# ARMY TRANSFORMATION: *One Weekend a Month*

MAJ KYLE BENNETT  
MAJ JEFFREY EDGAR

The brigade commander pointed at his boot. “The infantry moves on its feet,” he said. I had just been denied an insertion platform for my scout platoon. We simply did not have the vehicles available. By the time our scouts completed their infiltration and were “eyes on,” we would need to resupply and risk compromising our position. Even to a lieutenant beginning his first combat training center (CTC) rotation, the limitations of the dismounted infantry brigade seemed absurd. It took several days to move the brigade, even with external support. This was not the formation to win a large-scale combat operation (LSCO) fight. With the Army Transformation Initiative and the formation of the mobile brigade combat team (MBCT), infantry formations will now be lighter, more mobile, and more lethal.<sup>1</sup>

In an August 2024 *Military Review* article, GEN James E. Rainey stated, “This Army must conduct current operations, generate ready forces, and transform simultaneously.”<sup>2</sup> This problem set presents a wicked challenge for all components of the U.S. Army, especially for its part-time forces. The National Guard is nominally funded for barely more than one month each year of training time, and the increased funding that comes from a large-scale exercise, CTC rotation, or

mobilization does not necessarily guarantee the participation of Soldiers whose primary job is not in the military. After action reviews and lessons-learned white papers from active-duty units routinely discuss the fast pace of this transformation, a problem that is only amplified by the 39 statutory training days of Component (COMPO) 2 units.

Over the next two years, the U.S. Army will undergo a significant transformation as 25 infantry brigades convert into MBCTs.<sup>3</sup> Several active-duty units completed this conversion in the last 18 months. Two National Guard infantry brigade combat teams (IBCTs) have also converted: the 76th MBCT in Indiana and the 116th MBCT in Virginia.<sup>4</sup>

The remaining National Guard IBCTs face a unique challenge. They must harness their limited training time and resources to learn to fight as an MBCT before receiving MBCT equipment. National Guard IBCTs transforming to an “M” can take immediate action to prepare; they should initiate movement for gradual changes and must work with what they have.

## Where Units Can Start Now

The first change in the transition to an MBCT is a cultural

shift. The MBCT concept is very different from the global war on terrorism paradigm of bloated organization and static, uncontested command and control (C2). The mobile brigade concept is summarized by light, rapid maneuver; unprecedented visibility of the operational environment and of the formation of the enemy; and a need for constant unit-level innovation. MG (P) Brett Sylvia, former commander of the 101st Airborne Division and the first unit to go through transformation in contact (TiC), said, “We are not an innovation [formation]. We are a warfighting formation that must innovate.”<sup>5</sup>

**Elevate experts and innovators.** The strength of the National Guard lies in its Citizen-Soldiers’ expertise across every industry and their real-world practical knowledge. MBCT conversion is an opportunity for commanders and staff to socialize their capability gaps to the rest of the unit, identify who has experience or interest in solving those gaps, and designate those individuals to innovate and train the rest of the force. Examples could include Soldiers with experience in 3D printing, machining or carpentry, or drone hobbyists. Successful innovation teams could expand into internal mobile training teams (MTTs) that could travel within a state or set up a centralized training location to cross-train multiple units in each line of effort.

**Every Infantryman a Driver.** The culture change to an MBCT should begin with drivers’ training. Infantry companies must adjust from three or four drivers in the company to every Soldier in the formation. Every infantry company needs to maintain a robust driver training program, with a violent emphasis on safety. This is common practice in Stryker and armored brigade combat teams, but for converting IBCTs, this will be an invasion of an already packed training calendar. Units should first focus on general licensing for all forms of high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs) and trailers. They will then be well-postured to receive the Infantry Squad Vehicle (ISV) fielding. Furthermore, the “National Guard-ification” of the MBCT conversion will see young Soldiers driving open-door vehicles at high speeds on open highways.

**Every Infantryman a Mechanic.** During Warfighter Exercise (WfX) 25-05, the 76th Infantry Brigade learned that the MBCT is highly mobile — until it isn’t. Damaged and destroyed ISVs proved difficult to repair and replace at scale in a simulated environment. MBCTs must foster a culture of maintenance at the lowest level. Every infantry squad will need to become self-sufficient in routine and emergency vehicle maintenance, as well as self-recovery. The current wreckers at the new light support battalions are insufficient and oversized for ISVs. Commanders should be creative in fostering this culture change, which could include competitive maintenance inspections, maintenance task “stakes” like Ranger or Expert Infantryman Badge challenges, or permissive personalization of squad vehicles like the armor community.

**Every Infantryman a Scout.** The MBCT must still conduct reconnaissance and security tasks without a cavalry squad-

***The mobile brigade concept is summarized by light, rapid maneuver; unprecedented visibility of the operational environment and of the formation of the enemy; and a need for constant unit-level innovation.***

ron. Infantry battalions must be prepared to perform these tasks and should build training plans accordingly. Scouts are the only all-weather reconnaissance capability in an MBCT. The large influx of drones to the formation is only as effective as the skies above it. Commanders should harness the reconnaissance knowledge of now-former cavalry scouts as they integrate into infantry platoons.

The largest potential short-term win for the MBCT is to drive cultural change toward flexibility in planning and experimentation toward a singular purpose. As GEN Rainey said, “Think big. Start small. Go fast.”<sup>6</sup> MBCT leaders must lean into new technologies, merge the hungry motivation of young Soldiers with seasoned leaders, and squeeze every minute of a drill weekend or annual training to become more mobile and more lethal.

### **Where to Initiate Movement While Maintaining Tactical Patience**

The transition period will be one of great confusion and uncertainty. There are dozens of entities with a stake in the successful conversion. It will be highly disruptive to a typical training year cycle. These disruptions include armory moves, unit divestments and activations, turn-in and reallocation of equipment, shifting personnel with military occupational specialty (MOS) changes, receiving and training with new equipment, and developing new standard operating procedures (SOPs). A deliberate plan and open transparency to the most junior Soldiers are paramount to minimizing disruption and enabling future retention.

The pace of the MBCT transformation is rapid, but the industry cannot field everything to everyone, everywhere, all at once. Units will likely begin their MBCT conversion before receiving the equipment and personnel they need to deploy and fight. Further, the change to MBCT will outpace the time available to a National Guard unit to train. Commanders must prioritize the capabilities for which they want to allocate training time and resources. There are some areas where units need to exercise tactical patience for industry and doctrine to catch up.

**Vehicle replication.** It may take several years for units to get their full allocation of ISVs. This means that anything with wheels and an engine could be used to replicate the ISV for unit training. Infantry battalions and companies can begin converting high-back HMMWVs into troop carriers and have units conduct training using vehicles. The ISV is a movement and sustainment system, not a fighting platform. Soldiers

must begin training with a “mobile mindset.” Squads can decide what they carry into the fight, what stays in the garage point or patrol base, and what they simply can do without.

**Communication System Replication.** The MBCT’s C2 systems will be very different from those of the IBCT, and likely quite different between MBCTs. Cross-communication between brigades and division remains a challenge. Satellite-enabled internet and Soldier-born cellular devices are the way of the future. These systems are improving so rapidly that the Army is hesitant to field any one system prior to it reaching the next level of development. This means that many National Guard units are stuck with legacy systems several generations behind the current authorized equipment, let alone the next-generation MBCT C2 package.

National Guard IBCTs could consider two approaches as they prepare to talk and fight as an MBCT. First, they could acquire commercially available systems, such as Cradlepoint routers or individual mobile devices with the Team Awareness Kit (TAK) or similar software, to replicate the projected capabilities. Alternatively, the transparent battlefield and threat of electromagnetic sensors mean that command posts (CPs) with the most advanced systems must be prepared to go dark at any moment. MBCTs could build “black-out” communications into their training, limiting correspondence to runners or field telephones with spooled wire and switchboards. Many units may be surprised to find these systems still in their supply rooms collecting dust.



*A Soldier with 1st Battalion, 151st Infantry Regiment conducts unmanned aerial system training at Camp Atterbury, IN, in June 2025. (Photo courtesy of the 76th Mobile Brigade Combat Team)*

There is no one-size-fits-all communications plan for an MBCT. TAK has proven very successful in the 76th MBCT. It is easily adopted by younger Soldiers and seasoned leaders alike. A combination of Android government devices running TAK, generic laptops running Windows TAK (WINTAK), and Mounted Mission Command-Software can create a primary communication and intelligence plan for digital communications from brigade down to the individual Soldier. Of note, battery management is important, as TAK rapidly drains device batteries due to continuously active-location services.

**Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Training Package.** The MBCT will field UAS at every echelon. Some of the projected capabilities may still take years to develop, let alone field to units. COMPO 2 units know they are typically the last in line to receive these systems. MBCTs must then take initiative to acquire systems to replicate a UAS capability prior to anticipated fielding. Where these systems come from is inconsequential. Possible examples include unfunded requests, borrowed systems from other organizations, or permissive policies to allow use of personally-owned systems in training. Units must get systems into the hands of as many Soldiers as possible to begin training at echelon and to integrate UAS into maneuver training.

**Mobile Command Posts.** Every drill weekend is an opportunity to operationalize mission command and test mobile CP configurations at echelon. Units can do this during home station or spread across ranges and field training. Units should focus first on building current operations pictures using highly mobile CPs to track drill weekend tasks, convoys, and close-out requirements. They should then expand into other capabilities such as plans, intelligence, and administration and logistics. Units should aggressively test ways to make each CP progressively smaller and more mobile.

**Laboratory Workshop and Knowledge Management.** The conversion to an MBCT is not quite starting from a blank page, but it is a rare opportunity to take a holistic look at unit SOPs and consider how to fight in this new construct. Use every drill weekend to bring together staff, key leaders, and enablers to wargame concepts such as CP layouts, airspace management, and the targeting cycle. Knowledge management often seems like an oxymoron, but it is important to establish a repository early on for lessons learned from other units and to write your own. Every whiteboard workshop should be digitized and stored for future reference. This will prove useful during SOP revisions.

**Innovation Centers.** For years, active-duty units have leveraged their centrality to create innovation centers focused on additive manufacturing and a centralized repository for unit-level improvements. This is difficult for National Guard units to replicate because of their mission to spread out across the community. Furthermore, most brigades span multiple states. Despite these challenges, states with MBCTs need to establish innovation centers. Units should solicit their states to budget for unfunded purchases such as 3D printers and electronic components to build Blue List-authorized drones. Since most COMPO 2 infantry companies



*Soldiers in Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 151st Infantry Regiment, conduct annual training at the Muscatatuk Urban Training Center in Indiana. (Photo courtesy of the 2-151 IN Facebook page)*

are generally dispersed, brigades and battalions are best postured to create miniature “innovation centers” to build UAS, manufacture replacement parts, and receive grass-roots suggestions for innovation. The XVIII Airborne Corps’ Dragon’s Lair innovation competition — a “Shark Tank”-style event for submitting improvements to the force — is a great example to emulate in National Guard brigades.

**Recruit into Low-Density MOS.** States with MBCTs should begin to incentivize recruiting electronic warfare (EW) enlisted Soldiers and commissioned officers. These low-density MOSs take a long time to get through schools. In the meantime, use other states’ existing EW companies and staff to team up during your annual training to gain staff experience in brigade and battalion planning.

Further, it is important to look within a state at existing personnel hiding in “pure” branch units. With the conversion to an MBCT, now is the time for the state’s aviation and cyber communities to view slots in an MBCT as broadening opportunities rather than dead-end assignments.

**Learning to fight as an MBCT.** The Maneuver Center of Excellence is currently developing the MBCT doctrine. For now, the best resources to learn how to fight an MBCT are the MBCTs that have come before. Active-duty and NG MBCTs have compiled numerous lessons learned that inform the current modified tables of organization and equipment (MTOE) and developed useful tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs).

**Techniques that worked well.** Commanders and staff of new MBCTs need to educate themselves on MBCT capabilities and limitations. They must then engage in the delicate task of educating legacy infantry divisions on how to best

employ the MBCT. An MBCT moves at the speed of Strykers but fights at the speed of an IBCT. Similar to the three-to-five-second rush individual movement technique, MBCT formations should fight with the mindset of dispersing, converging, and dispersing again. In the offense, the MBCT can be used to secure key terrain rapidly, employ maximum dispersion for deception or disruption, or follow a combined arms breach as an exploitation or pursuit force. In defense, the MBCT can serve as a screen with maximum frontage and depth or can respond rapidly as a division reserve.

The MBCT is highly mobile — until it isn’t. MBCT mobility extends only to the capability to be sustained, maintained, and replaced. During WfX 25-05, we experienced challenges in replacing destroyed ISVs, resulting in a line of dismounted Infantrymen straggling behind the formation. The MBCT must

have a primary, alternate, contingency, emergency (PACE) plan to sustain, maintain, and replace ISVs.

**Unit Mission-Essential Tasks (METs).** It is unlikely that a BCT’s mission or METs will change significantly between the “I” and the “M.” While the METs may not change dramatically, how the MBCT achieves these METs in LSCO will look very different from the IBCT maneuvers of recent decades. As previously discussed, battalions should focus on reconnaissance tasks traditionally performed by cavalry squadrons. For most COMPO 2 brigades, planning for a battalion air assault may shift to a company-size operation due to increased sling-load requirements. Testing during WfX 25-05 did not reveal a significant advantage between air assaulting a legacy IBCT infantry battalion versus the ground movement of a mobile rifle battalion to the same location. Both arrived in full at an objective 100 kilometers away at roughly the same time. The MBCT battalion arrived with all of its heavy weaponry and an ability to maneuver on wheels.

**SOPs and TTPs.** Units at echelon must review their SOPs and TTPs through the lens of an MBCT in LSCO. Some examples include:

- The arrival of UAS at echelon means shortened kill-chains managed at the lowest level.
- A large increase in Javelin missiles, combined with mobility, allows for anti-armor defense in depth but forces new discussions about the rate of consumption.
- The introduction of launched effects brings a new long-range shaping capability to the battalion and company level. At the squad and platoon level, this means discussions on load plans, dismount drills, garage points, and patrol base operations.

- Companies and battalions must reevaluate how they conduct refuel, resupply, and recovery to provide as much dispersion and redundancy as possible. While the Army continues to prototype and develop counter-UAS systems, the best defense for the MBCT is dispersion and masking.

Battalion and brigade staffs should train through tabletop exercises leading to staff exercise (STAFFEX) and CP exercise (CPX) planning, using the MBCT task organization and capabilities. The 76th MBCT had the opportunity to fight as an MBCT during a division Warfighter CPX as well as the subsequent warfighter exercise. The 116th MBCT conducted numerous table-top exercises leading to and during their eXportable Combat Training Capability 25-04 rotation. These “sets and reps” prove critical to visualizing and understanding the MBCT in the battlespace. While professional articles, capability briefs, and MTOE reviews are part of the learning process, MBCT leaders and staff must plan and fight with the MBCT to appreciate its capabilities and limitations.

### Where to Fight with What You Have

No Army component knows more about what it means to “fight tonight” than National Guard units constantly postured to respond to natural disasters, domestic crises, or deploy with active-duty units to win our nation’s wars overseas.

**Fight Now.** GEN Rainey’s article highlights the importance in getting even a fraction of technology into a formation, enhancing the options it gives a commander to accomplish the mission. “There are technologies that would be useful in our formations right now but are not yet fielded because we are waiting until they can do even more.”<sup>7</sup> Units must recognize that their legacy systems will continue to be part of their formation throughout the transformation. Units will still have targetable communications networks, older equipment, and capability gaps while awaiting the fielding of new equipment.

**Beg, borrow, and network.** Find existing government contracts to fulfill capability gaps and leverage the people in your state who know leaders of organizations with technology that can be put in Soldiers’ hands. Network through symposiums, forums, professional publications, and the Center for Army Lessons Learned products and podcasts to find the latest best practices. Reach out to other states and offer opportunities for other units to send Soldiers and equipment for mutually beneficial training.

**Lessons Learned.** Heed lessons learned but be wary of learning the wrong lessons. There is much written and said on the wars in Ukraine, the Middle East, and potential conflict in the Pacific. It is important to distinguish between lessons that apply universally and those that apply only to specific theaters or circumstances. As an example, the ultra-wide dispersion of infantry in Ukraine started partly due to manpower shortages, and the rise of attack drones in Ukraine was due to a distinct shortage of artillery ammunition.<sup>8</sup> These traits may look substantially different in the confined terrain of a Pacific island or between two conventional forces in an urban environment.

Ultimately, units can never go wrong focusing on the basics: mastering individual warfighter skills, improving

physical fitness, training lethal squads and platoons, and developing adaptive leaders. These elements are critical for unit success regardless of MTOE, assigned mission, or position in the Regionally Aligned Readiness and Modernization Model cycle. There is no “right way,” no silver bullet, and certainly no shortcuts. Leaders at all echelons will continue to devote personal time to make their units better and ensure that unit training time provides maximum value. The “get it done” spirit of our junior Citizen-Soldiers will create endless opportunities for innovation and problem-solving.

National Guard commanders and staffs that take immediate action, prepare for future capability, and work with what they have will be better able to wield the lighter, more mobile, and lethal formation that is the MBCT. The infantry may still fight on its feet, but it can get to that fight faster and stay in the fight longer as an MBCT.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Honorable Dan Driscoll and GEN Randy A. George, “Letter to the Force: Army Transformation Initiative,” 1 May 2025, [https://www.army.mil/article-285100/letter\\_to\\_the\\_force\\_army\\_transformation\\_initiative](https://www.army.mil/article-285100/letter_to_the_force_army_transformation_initiative).

<sup>2</sup> GEN James E. Rainey, “Continuous Transformation,” *Military Review* (September-October 2024), <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/SO-24/SO-24-Continuous-Transformation/>.

<sup>3</sup> Todd South, “Infantry Brigades Shift to Mobile Brigades in Army Transformation,” *Army Times*, 16 October 2025, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2025/10/16/infantry-brigades-shift-to-mobile-brigades-in-army-transformation/>.

<sup>4</sup> Cotton Puryear, “116th IBCT Officially Converted to Mobile Brigade Combat Team,” *Virginia National Guard News*, 17 October 2025, <https://va.ng.mil/News/Article/4326630/116th-ibct-officially-converted-to-mobile-brigade-combat-team/>; 76th Mobile Brigade Combat Team, “Indiana National Guard website, accessed 22 November 2025, <https://www.in.gov/indiana-national-guard/indiana-army-national-guard/38th-infantry-division/76th-mobile-brigade-combat-team/>.

<sup>5</sup> “Transformation in Contact & the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault),” *Breaking Doctrine* podcast (No. 98), 1 December 2025, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/breaking-doctrine/id1522992251>.

<sup>6</sup> GEN Rainey, “Continuous Transformation.”

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Michael Kofman and Rob Lee, “Not Built for Purpose: The Russian Military’s Ill-Fated Force Design,” *War on the Rocks*, June 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/06/not-built-for-purpose-the-russian-militarys-ill-fated-force-design/>; Stacie L. Pettyjohn, “Drones are Transforming the Battlefield in Ukraine But in an Evolutionary,” *War on the Rocks*, March 2024, <https://warontherocks.com/2024/03/drones-are-transforming-the-battlefield-in-ukraine-but-in-an-evolutionary-fashion/>.

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**MAJ Jeffrey Edgar** currently serves as the brigade S-2 for the 76th MBCT. His previous assignments include serving as chief of the brigade intelligence support element for the 76th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, battalion S-2 for 2nd Battalion, 151st Infantry Regiment in South Bend, IN, and ACE chief, 38th Infantry Division in Indianapolis. MAJ Edgar is a graduate of the Military Intelligence (MI) Basic Officer Leaders Course, MI Captains Career Course, and I Corps’ and III Corps’ Brigade S-2 Course. He earned a bachelor’s degree in history from Ball State University.



At left, National Guard Soldiers conduct training as part of Defender 24 on 14 May 2024 in the Czech Republic. (Photo by SSG Jeff Clements) Center, National Guard Soldiers train for civil disturbance operations training in Los Alamitos, CA, on 11 June 2025. (Photo by SGT Chase Murray) At right, a Louisiana National Guard Soldier cuts debris from Hurricane Milton in Manatee, FL, on 16 October 2024. (Photo by SSG Noshoba Davis)

# A Training Framework for the Three-Block War:

## Preparing Army National Guard Units for Diverse Missions

MAJ COLIN S. DAVIS

The Army National Guard (ARNG) faces unique challenges, balancing wartime mission-essential tasks (METs) with additional roles in civil disturbance (CD) and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HADR). These diverse missions align with the “three-block war” concept, introduced by U.S. Marine Corps Gen Charles C. Krulak in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> This article outlines a training framework to prepare National Guard units for these simultaneous demands, given a drill weekend to integrate attack and defense, civil disturbance, and HADR training. By leveraging doctrinal resources, urban training centers, and experiential learning, units can develop the agility to transition more seamlessly between mission sets.

### Three-Block War: A Persistent Framework

The three-block war — where in urban environments, Soldiers may conduct high-intensity combat on one block, stability operations like counterinsurgency on another, and HADR on a third — remains relevant, as demonstrated in recent operations.<sup>2</sup> For example, in U.S. Central Command’s area of responsibility (AOR), Soldiers hunt ISIS in one country, train with allies in another, and provide humanitarian aid to refugees in the same region.<sup>3</sup> Urbanization amplifies the need for proficiency in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Specifically, National Guard units are often called upon for these domestic and overseas missions and must train to execute these tasks with precision and adaptability.

### Training Framework Overview

This framework uses a three-day Army National Guard

drill weekend to train these three mission sets: attack and defense, civil disturbance, and HADR. Key considerations regarding operational environment (OE) variables include using urban training centers, specialized equipment (like civil disturbance kits, moulage kits, non-lethal munitions, role players, Close Combat Mission Capability Kits [CCMCK] “sim rounds”), and support from 1st Army observer-controller/trainers (OC/Ts). While the Army is currently transforming to the mobile brigade combat team (MBCT) force structure, this framework was developed for current modified infantry brigade combat team (IBCT) table of organization and equipment maneuver battalions.

### Proposed Training Structure Methods

Units can organize training in several ways:

**Post-Mobilization Training:** Conduct this focused training only after activation for a specific mission.

**Leader-Level Exercises:** Use only tabletop exercises (TTXs), map exercises (MAPEXs), or tactical exercises without troops (TEWTs) for leaders to plan and rehearse while the rest of the formation continues to focus on large-scale combat operations (LSCO) METs.

**Dedicated Drill Days:** Allocate one day for CD and another for HADR during annual training to balance the finite training time available.

**Decentralized Approach:** Task companies to develop creative training plans independently, with battalion oversight to allocate resources and inactive duty training (IDT) slots.

**Integrated Round-Robin:** Conduct situational training exercises (STXs) as a battalion, rotating units through lanes for each mission set.

This article explores the integrated round-robin method.

**Overall Concept**

This method uses an urban training area with four lanes/ areas: a battalion command post (CP) assembly area, attack and defense lane, civil disturbance/area security lane, and a HADR lane. Units spend mornings on planning, preparation, and blocks of instruction, with afternoon iterations followed by after action reviews (AARs). Night iterations leverage limited visibility conditions to enhance realism and proficiency. The framework task-organizes a maneuver battalion across three days, as shown in Figure 1. Each company rotates through the lanes, supported by the battalion CP for mutual coordination and to conduct battalion enemy prisoner of war (EPW) collection point and casualty collection point (CCP) tasks.

**Civil Disturbance Training**

CD missions require measured restraint, protection of rights, and de-escalation. Recent National Guard continental United States (CONUS) mobilization to support operations in cities like Minneapolis, Kenosha, and Portland highlight the need for disciplined responses to riots and civil unrest.<sup>4</sup> Overseas, units like the Indiana Army National Guard’s 76th Infantry Brigade Combat Team demonstrated restraint under fire in Kosovo, achieving positive outcomes.<sup>5</sup> CD training structure involves (see Figure 2):

**Morning:** NCOs train individuals and small teams on tasks like escalation-of-force procedures using a teach-show-do methodology, along with familiarization ranges to introduce application of non-lethal munitions.<sup>6</sup> Officers conduct collective-level leader training via TTX, TEWT, and/or MAPEXs.

**Afternoon/Evening:** The company splits into platoon versus platoon, or squad vs squad, to conduct STX scenarios. Equipment includes riot shields, combatives gear, and “non fragmentary-producing” training grenades.

Doctrinal references include Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-28.1, *Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA)*, and ATP 3-39.33, *Crowd Control*. Sustainment requires Class 2 (riot gear), Class 5 (non-lethal munitions), and Class 8 (mouflage kits).

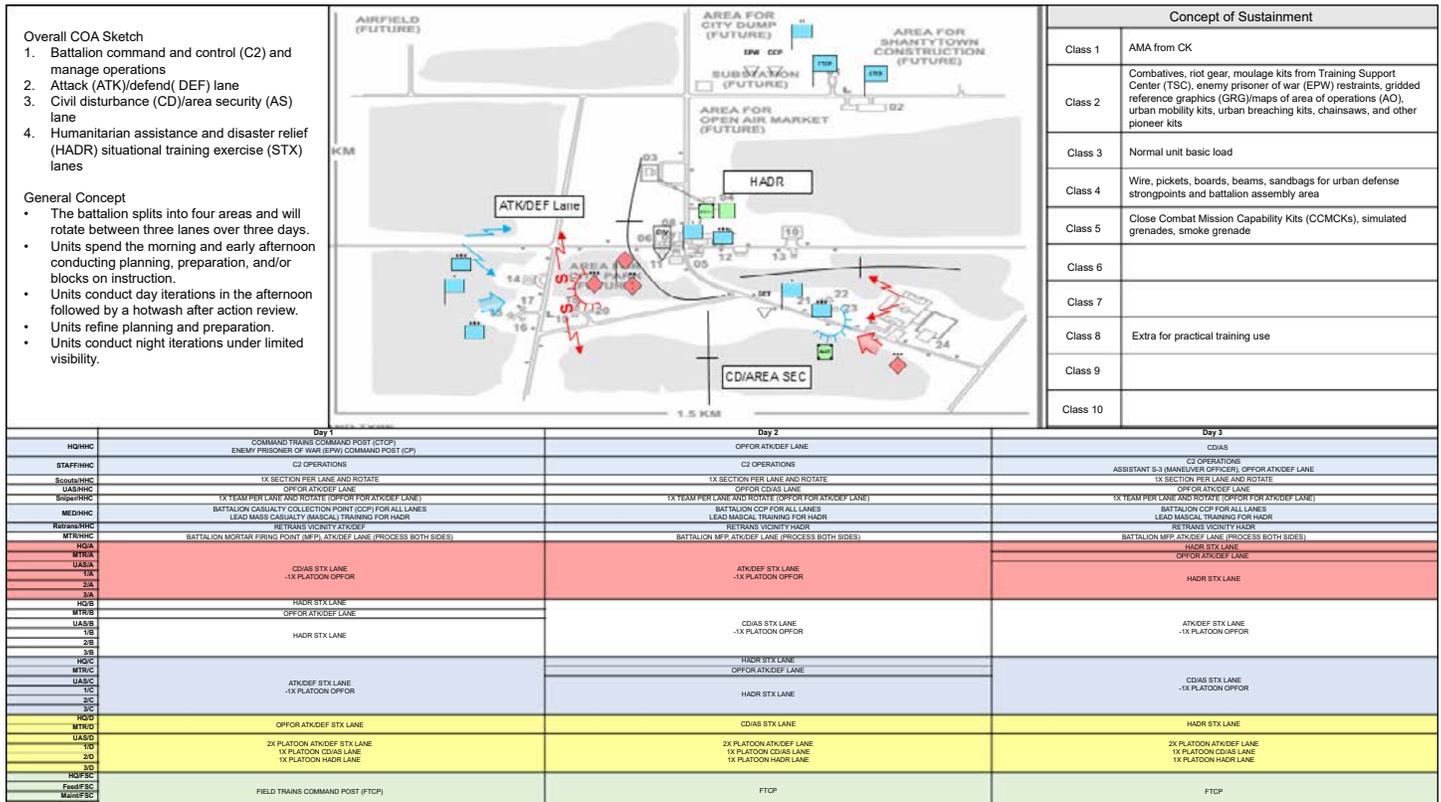
**Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief**

HADR missions respond to natural disasters like floods, wildfires, or hurricanes, as seen in recent Texas flash floods.<sup>7</sup> Training focuses on search and rescue, breaching, and medical response (see Figure 3):

**Morning:** NCOs again train individuals and small teams on tasks like breaching and casualty extraction, led by the battalion medical platoon. Officers prepare via deployment readiness exercise (DRE) TEWTs, TTXs, and MAPEXs in order to better coordinate with state joint operations centers.

**Afternoon/Evening:** Units practice STX for survivor extraction and coordination with local first responders. Equipment includes chainsaws, bolt cutters, ropes, and medical kits.

Figure 1 — Example Framework



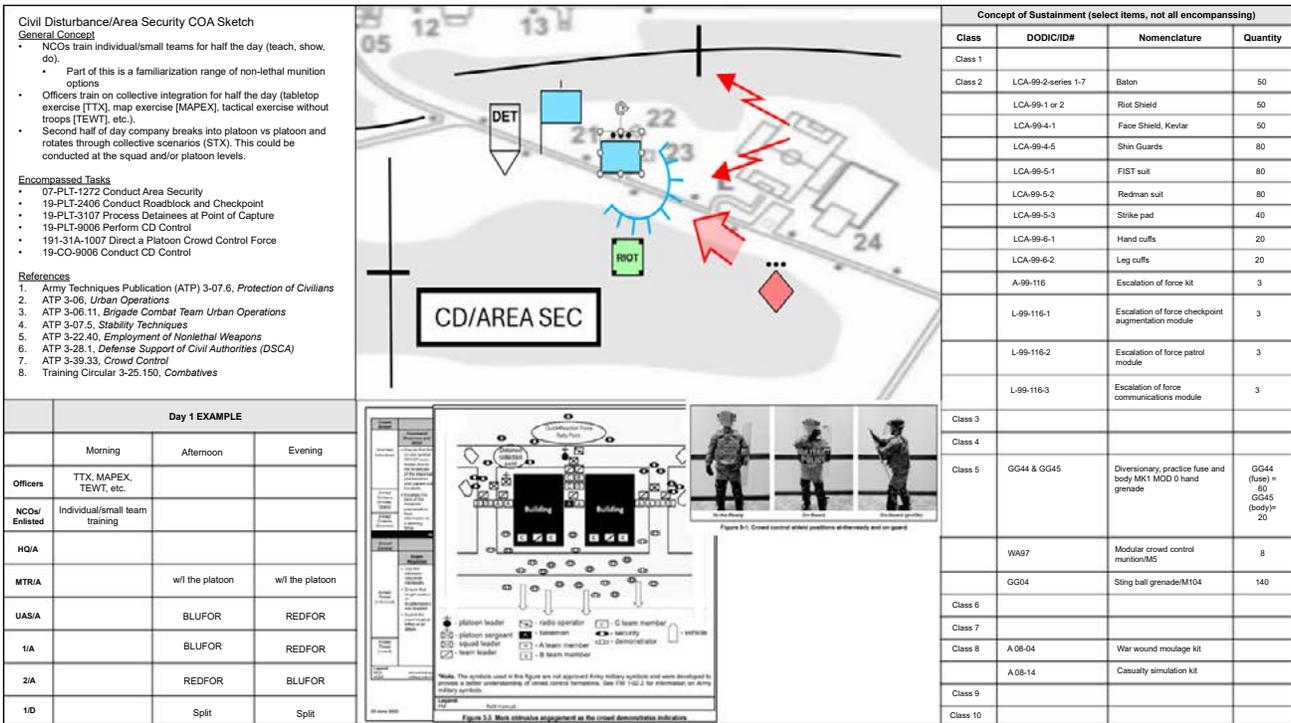


Figure 2 — Example Civil Disturbance Training Structure

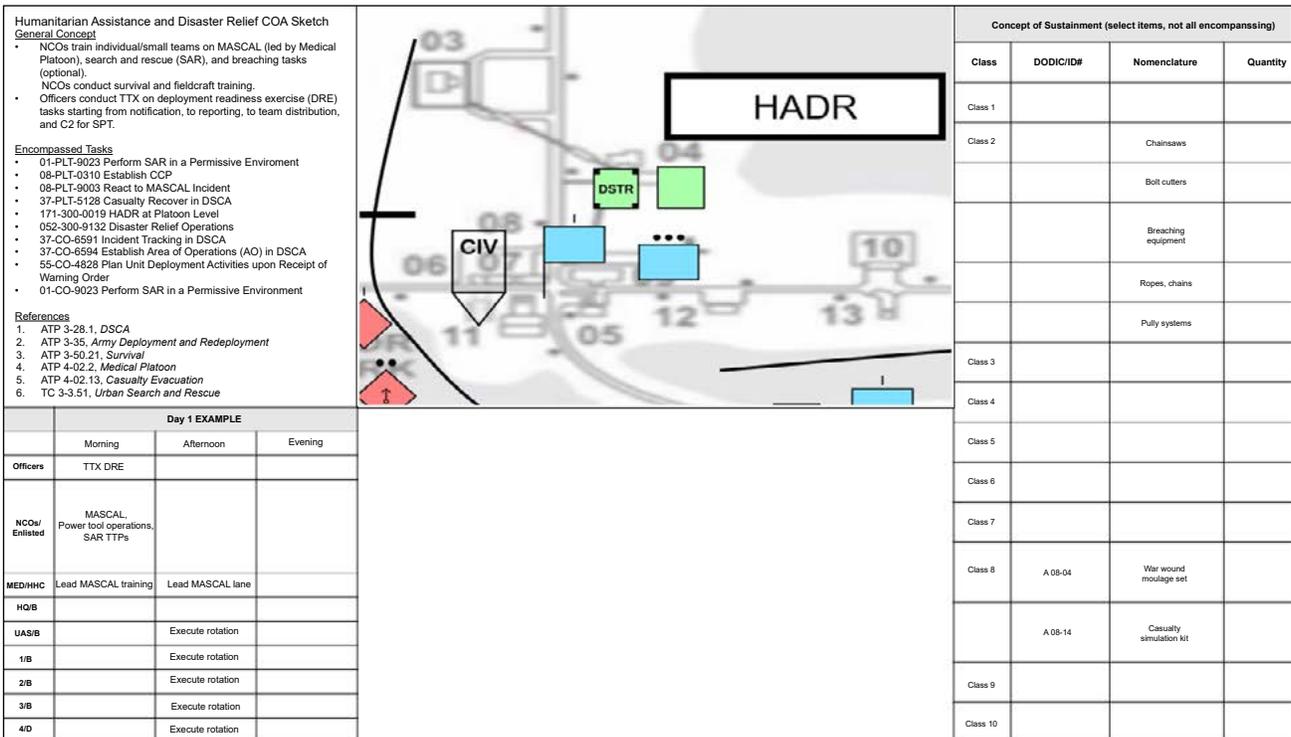


Figure 3 — Example Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Training Structure

References include ATP 3-28.1 and Training Circular (TC) 3-37.51, *Urban Search and Rescue*. Sustainment resources involve Class 2 (breaching tools) and Class 8 (medical equipment).

**Attack and Defense**

Urban combat, as seen in the retaking of Mosul from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or recent Ukraine oper-

ations, requires unique considerations: mobility challenges (vertical, subterranean), higher force ratios (5-7 or even 9-15:1 attacker-to defender), and significantly higher Class 5 consumption rates.<sup>8</sup> Training organization includes (see Figure 4):

**Morning:** Blue forces conduct troop leading procedures and area reconnaissance while opposing forces (OPFOR)

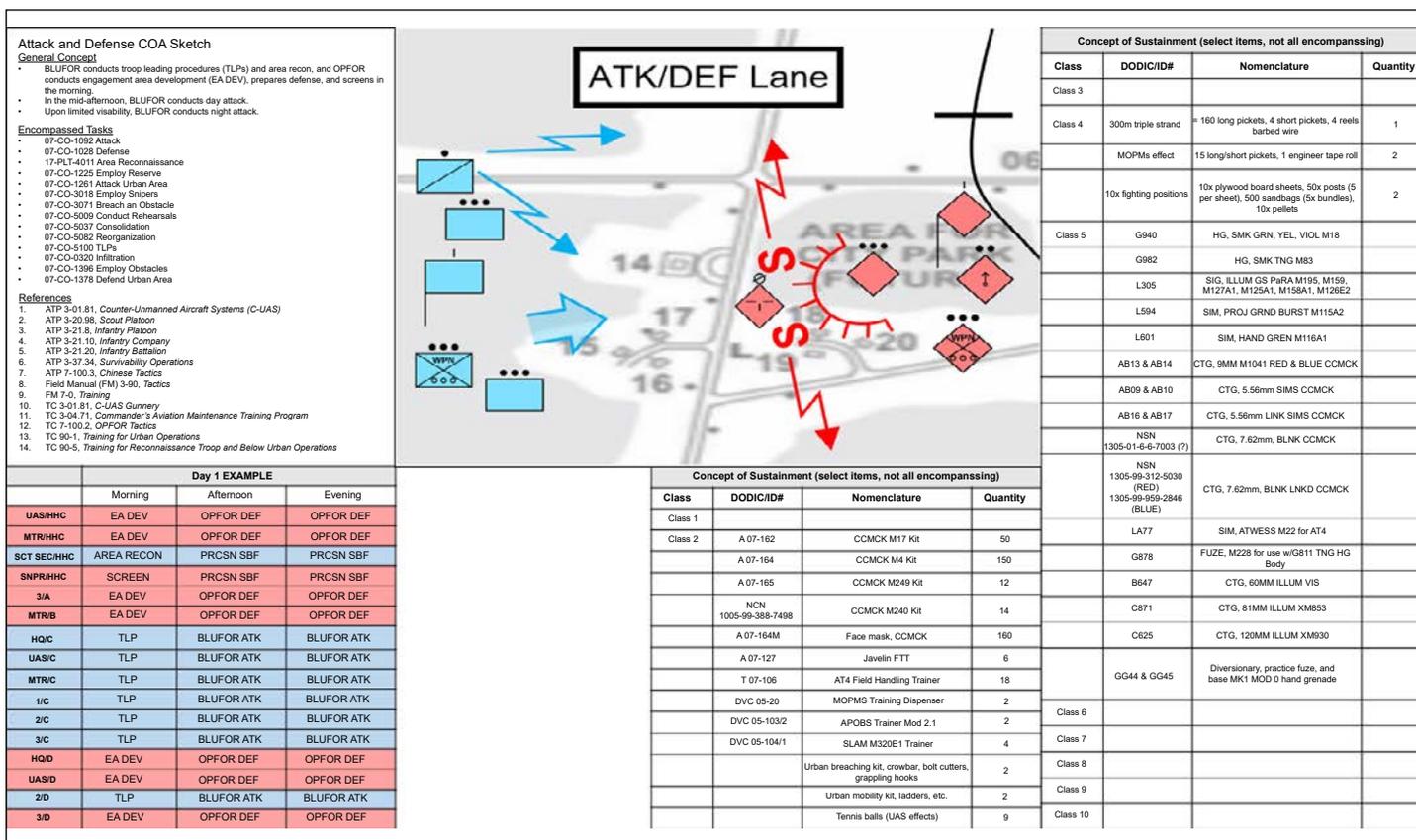


Figure 4 — Example Attack and Defense Training Structure

prepare defenses/screens and conduct counter-reconnaissance. Equipment includes CCMCKs and breaching tools.

**Afternoon/Night:** Blue forces execute attack iterations, followed by AARs and night operations. Additional assets (scouts, mortars, motorized platoons) enhance realism.

References include ATP 3-21.8, *Infantry Platoon and Squad*, and Field Manual (FM) 3-90-1, *Offense and Defense*. Sustainment requires Class 2 (mobility kits), Class 4 (sandbags, wire), and Class 5 (CCMCK, smoke, and illumination mortar rounds). A gap exists in replicating indirect fire; parachute illumination rounds are recommended to simulate effects.

### Conclusion

The three-block war framework prepares National Guard units for the dynamic demands of modern operations. By integrating attack and defense, CD, and HADR into a three-day drill weekend, units develop the agility to transition between missions. Experiential learning, supported by doctrinal resources and sustainment, ensures Soldiers are ready to protect life — whether American citizens, allies, or global populations.

### Authors Note

This article has an accompanying video presentation accessible at <https://youtu.be/bhehEsapWyo> along with the presentation slides (3 Block War Training Framework Presentation Slides JUL2025.pdf).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gen Charles C. Krulak, U.S. Marine Corps, "Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War," *Leatherneck* 82/1 (January 1999), <https://www.mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/1999-Jan-The-strategic-corporal-Leadership-in-the-three-block-war.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Central Command, n.d.

<sup>4</sup> SFC Jon Soucy, "Guard Members in 23 States, D.C. Called Up in Response to Civil Unrest," 31 May 2020, <https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article/2202946/guard-members-in-23-states-dc-called-up-in-response-to-civil-unrest/>.

<sup>5</sup> MSG Jeff Lowry, "More than 300 Indiana National Guard Soldiers Awarded Combat Patch for Kosovo Force Mission," 25 June 2025, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/501603/more-than-300-indiana-national-guard-soldiers-awarded-combat-patch-kosovo-force-mission>.

<sup>6</sup> Field Manual 7-0, *Training*, June 2021, 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Rose L. Thayer, "Guard Joins Rescue Efforts in Texas after Devastating Floods," *Stars and Stripes*, 7 July 2025, <https://www.stripes.com/theaters/us/2025-07-07/national-coast-guard-texas-floods-18364338.html>.

<sup>8</sup> *Mosul Study Group: What the Battle for Mosul Teaches the Force* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Army University Press, 2017), [https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/Primer-on-Urban-Operation/Documents/Mosul%20\(Public%20Release\).pdf](https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/Primer-on-Urban-Operation/Documents/Mosul%20(Public%20Release).pdf); ATP 3-06, *Urban Operations*, July 2022.

**MAJ Colin Davis** recently served in the G-37 Training and Exercise section of the 38th Infantry Division during Operation Spartan Shield as Task Force Spartan worked with partner nations. He spent the previous four years as an observer-coach trainer (OC/T) with Operations Group Wolf/Warrior Training Brigade/National Guard Bureau and 1st Army East coaching and evaluating Army National Guard maneuver platoons, companies, and battalions. He commanded D Company (Heavy Weapons), 1st Battalion, 151st Infantry Regiment, 76th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, in 2018-2019.

# Standards, Discipline, and Training:

## *A Look Across Deployments and Positions*

CSM ABRAHAM LEWIS  
1SG JACOB MORASH  
1SG CHRISTOPHER STONE

Fort Drum, NY — home of the 10th Mountain Division — is a unique location that allows senior NCOs to develop and enhance their leadership skills in a deployed environment. It is a blessing for those of us who serve as first sergeants (1SGs), providing opportunities to sharpen our leadership knives against the steel of a high operating tempo (OPTEMPO) that is well known across the Army. There are fewer still who get to apply those skills again as a command sergeant major (CSM) within the same battalion. This article attempts to capture the experiences of two 1SGs and a CSM serving in the same battalion a few years apart. These lessons are not just for the operations that are outside of large-scale combat operations (LSCO); they are just as important and pertinent during LSCO as they are a guard against inefficiencies, neglect, and loss of critical skills within the force. These lessons can be applied to any location, theater, or operation within or outside of the continental United States. Our hope is that other 1SGs and CSMs can learn from our collective successes and failures.

### **Two Deployments for Comparison**

Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, deployed to Djibouti, Africa, in September 2017. Our mission was to operate as the quick reaction force (QRF) in support of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and the U.S. embassies. During this deployment, the company would operate away from the battalion for six months and again for another month in Ghana. The battalion deployed seven years later in support of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) in November 2024. The Soldiers and leaders of the Chosin Battalion were separated into multiple task forces in various locations in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Kuwait. This led to similar necessary conversations amongst the leadership as companies operated away from the battalion. These two different deployments opened the eyes of senior NCOs as to what units can accomplish



*An Infantryman in the 10th Mountain Division briefs his Soldiers prior to training Syrian Free Army soldiers at a combat outpost in Syria on 7 February 2025. (Photo by SSG Fred Brown)*

when they approach any mission with three priorities in mind: standards, discipline, and training the force.

### **Djibouti, Africa**

During the 2017 AFRICOM mission, the Bravo Company command team discussed with battalion leaders how to operate as a company team separated from battalion. The leaders realized the most dangerous part of every mission is not the mission itself but complacency — complacency stems from Soldiers who are idle (as the old saying goes, “idleness is the devil’s playground”).<sup>1</sup> To combat complacency within the company, the command team discussed issues the previous unit had faced during its deployment such as legal matters, alcohol abuse, depression, and sexual assaults. Company leaders knew they had to develop some controls so they would not have the same issues. That discussion led to the development of a company policy memorandum that established standards every Soldier would uphold while conducting operations in country. It covered timelines, uniform standards, expectations during the deployment, and training guidelines. The command published this early in the deployment to assist the platoon leadership in the counseling process.

Another way to reinforce standards and discipline is through training the force. To keep Soldiers actively engaged, the command focused on a training progression that allowed

the company to complete team through platoon field training exercises and live fires. According to Army doctrine, if Soldiers do not continue to “achieve or sustain proficiency on every task,” they will lose competence in these skills and become ineffective.<sup>2</sup> To prevent this, leaders must prioritize training by assessing training proficiencies, planning short-range through long-range training, executing the training, and then once again assessing Soldiers’ proficiency.<sup>3</sup> Developing a training progression accomplished three things. First, the company remained focused and ready for the QRF mission. Second, the company returned to the battalion fully mission ready, and finally, it allowed the platoon leadership to provide input into the training plan and develop it to meet the commander’s intent. Every platoon-level leader provided a thorough training plan, completing each step of the 8-Step Training Model. Having to rely on nothing but company-level leadership allowed the command team time to sit down with every platoon sergeant (PSG) and platoon leader (PL) without any outside distractions to develop and mentor them on training to standard. This built rapport between these leaders and showed the platoon leadership how well-planned training can impact their Soldiers. The second focus was on building opportunities for Soldiers to earn skill badges and to complete college courses.

The company resourced and executed the Expert Infantryman Badge (EIB), the German Armed Forces Proficiency Badge, and the Desert Commando Course. Leaders also encouraged Soldiers to take college courses by setting aside time for them to attend and looked at other opportunities available to the unit, allowing us to provide better trained and more knowledgeable Soldiers to the

operating force with far more experience than you would typically get while in garrison. During our deployment, 24 Soldiers qualified for the EIB, 17 Soldiers earned the German Armed Forces Proficiency Badge, and 14 earned the Desert Commando Badge. In addition, 25 Soldiers completed courses in the pursuit of their college degrees or received certificates. As a result of the company’s hard work, we earned a Superior Unit Award and recognition from the joint task force commander.

### **Operation Inherent Resolve**

Seven years later, 1-32 IN deployed in support of OIR. The battalion headquarters with Attack Company (rifle company), Havoc Company (headquarters and headquarters company), and Ice Company (forward support company [FSC]) deployed to Al-Tanf Garrison (ATG) in Syria. Battle Company (rifle company) deployed as the aerial response force stationed out of Erbil, Iraq, along with Dog Company (anti-tank company). Finally, Combat Company (rifle company) resided at Northern Landing Zone, Syria, with a mechanized platoon as part of its force as security in and around the area. Before the deployment, the battalion command incorporated lessons learned from the 2017 AFRICOM mission and focused again on standards, discipline, and training.

### **A 1SG’s Perspective**

Soldiers understand their daily job expectations. The experience of basic training and the desire to impress the members and leaders of their unit typically drive them to be aware of military bearing and adherence to standards and regulations. Problems often begin with the relaxing of standards by the direct leadership — the NCOs within the formation. NCOs sometimes fail to understand that character, talked about in the Army Values, requires them to pay

*Soldiers with Battle Company, 1-32 Infantry, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, conduct a series of team stress shoots and support-by-fire exercises in Djibouti on 22 November 2017. (Photo by SrA Erin Piazza, U.S. Air Force)*



attention to the mundane details. When they do, this leads to a unit's success as much as or more than the organization's key tasks.<sup>4</sup> As NCOs develop during their careers, they become further removed from the eagerness to impress their leaders and rely more on experiences and what they perceive as their reputation. When NCOs relax their personal standards and discipline, their subordinates will do the same. Senior NCOs, such as 1SGs and PSGs, must groom younger NCOs to remember that it is their responsibility to pass on the knowledge of the repercussions of indiscipline in combat. It is the responsibility of senior NCOs to quickly identify when standards are slipping and to correct it before it cascades into massive problems and infractions that could lead to harming Soldiers or the unit.

Good order and discipline within a unit starts with senior NCOs having presence in their formations and interacting with their junior and mid-grade NCOs on a personal level to identify strengths and weaknesses. A leader professional development (LPD) program will assist junior NCOs and Soldiers in developing their core attributes and competencies. George Washington stated, "Nothing can be more hurtful to the service, than the neglect of discipline; for that discipline, more than numbers, gives one army the superiority over another."<sup>5</sup> Dealing with life's problems and providing situational training are the best ways to build experience to gain superiority over our adversaries. Prior to deployment, 1-32 IN used the LPD program to focus on Soldier care that solved issues before they became a mission distraction. The mentorship of new NCOs included methods to motivate others, leader interaction techniques, the definition of emotional intelligence and how to use it, and the importance of integrity. These lessons focused on the professional role as NCOs and their responsibility to enforce standards, regulations, and discipline.

In addition to LSCO-related training conducted during a Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) rotation, the battalion also developed their NCOs during multiple situational training exercises (STX) meant to stress the NCOs, preparing them for the upcoming deployment. This training was vastly different from the LSCO training for a light infantry battalion, focusing on vehicle patrols to account for the formation's limited resident knowledge of vehicle gunnery and tactics. The gunneries and field training exercises built confidence and competence in junior and mid-grade NCOs and instilled discipline through vehicle layouts, tiedowns, and patrol briefs.

Despite the training, there were multiple challenges with enforcing standards and discipline that were outside of the battalion's control. Various units and enablers — active, National Guard, and Reserve — coexisted on ATG, all of which brought various perspectives on standards and discipline. The in-brief given upon arrival to ATG attempted to diminish the effects, but multiple personnel outside of the battalion began to lose military bearing and discipline through relaxing uniform and other military standards. These different standards on the combat outpost created confusion among the Soldiers working within close proximity of each other. To

***Good order and discipline within a unit starts with senior NCOs having presence in their formations and interacting with their junior and mid-grade NCOs on a personal level to identify strengths and weaknesses.***

overcome this, Attack Company, Havoc Company, and Ice Company held a squad/section leader and PSG town hall to address issues and ensure NCOs were enforcing standards with the General Military Authority (GMA) they possess, regardless of unit. The intent was to bring cohesion to ATG through discipline. As three of these units enforced the proper standards, members of the other tenant units noticed their example and improved their standards to match the battalion.

Simple things like creating manning cycles also assisted in reinforcing discipline. Setting a battle rhythm for patrol, QRF, and security force (SECFOR) cycles created predictability and a shared understanding within the rifle company. Some disciplinary issues occurred during guard shifts in regards to improper pre-combat checks (PCCs) and pre-combat inspections (PCIs), but the leaders fixed this by implementing a proper guard mount, checking for guard requirements and serviceability of equipment. The 1SG and PSGs also spot checked the guard daily to keep Soldiers vigilant, correct shortcomings, and prevent complacency. Through these spot checks, the senior NCOs could also gain Soldiers' unique perspectives on ways to make their guard position better, ensure Soldiers were aware of current operations within their area of operations, and identify other personal and professional issues.

The company leadership used spot checks during different platoon patrols to maintain their presence. They went out weekly with a platoon to validate that Soldiers were gathering the correct priority intelligence requirements (PIRs) and ensure the patrols were operating within the commander's intent. It also allowed the command to check on Soldier discipline by monitoring simple things such as seatbelt, gunner restraint, and electronic defeat system usage. The command emphasized that Soldiers must understand that discipline is a constant regardless of mission or location. Other small measures, such as ensuring all personnel wore full personal protective equipment (PPE) during ramp briefs, PCCs, and PCIs, ensured that they were focusing on the mission.

Finally, developing a unit training plan for the company helped give the company more purpose than just doing the daily grind of patrol, QRF, and SECFOR. The PLs and PSGs achieved buy-in through providing input on training, and the command would influence their plans by adding to the training guidance. The company command directed NCOs to instruct quality training utilizing the 8-Step Training Model. They captured the training model in concept of operations (CONOP) sketches, placed them in the short-range training

calendar in Outlook, and then pushed them to the Soldiers. This gave Soldiers a by-the-hour schedule for each day that included training and operational tasks, helping ensure the company utilized its time effectively. This training not only sharpened the Soldiers but kept them gainfully employed, preventing acts of indiscipline along the way.

### A CSM's Perspective

Having served as a 1SG and a CSM within the same battalion during deployments provided a contrast between each position and the responsibilities held. It helped compare what proved successful in one position and to test if that translated to the next position. The battalion command team worried about keeping Soldiers focused on the mission. There were multiple candid conversations on discipline and if the battalion was ready for the mission due to the large number of Soldiers and leaders without combat experience. The commander provided his guidance about focusing on standards, discipline, and training. Senior NCOs within the battalion were tasked to continuously stress attention to detail in the small things so that the battalion didn't have to worry about the big things. Having a conversation with your commander prior to the deployment on expectations instead of trying to figure it out in the heat of the moment was a critical lesson learned as a 1SG during the Djibouti deployment.

Part of preparing for the position of CSM is to learn from those who are wiser and have been in your shoes. Colin Powell once stated, "If you are going to achieve excellence in big things, you develop the habit in little matters."<sup>6</sup> The easiest place to begin that habit is to rely on what has been well known since the creation of the U.S. Army: Standards and discipline save lives. Exercising standards and discipline as a CSM is impossible without first convincing your 1SGs why it is important to maintain that discipline even when they feel like they are pushing a boulder uphill with all their Soldiers

pushing against it. It is important to begin this conversation early and often as they will find themselves lonely at the top. Encouraging them to cross-talk with other companies will also help them see common threads and gain support from their fellow leaders in the battalion.

Our battalion command started noticing slips in discipline early in the deployment. The first small win was to have an LPD on standards and discipline and the roles of NCOs in the execution of those standards. The class centered around the "History of the NCO" manual published by the Sergeant's Major Academy. The LPD followed the Socratic method (what is more commonly known today as the adult learning model), where the command asked NCOs a series of questions on why NCOs exist and how the U.S. Army is unique from other military forces in the world. At the end of the LPD, senior leaders gave vignettes of times when standards and discipline contributed to success and others where leaders let them slip and had to deal with the consequences of those actions. These vignettes helped NCOs see why the senior NCO Corps held them to a certain standard and why it was important for them to hold themselves to the same standard. This had not been done during the first deployment, and the battalion found great success among the junior enlisted by employing this method.

The next small win began when the battalion required the companies to add skill level 10 task training into the company training schedules to prepare for expert badge testing: EIB, Expert Soldier Badge (ESB), and Expert Field Medical Badge (EFMB) — E3B. This had two separate functions: force Soldiers to pay attention to detail of E3B tasks and therefore continue their development, and second, prepare Soldiers for the E3B that was to occur after the deployment. The first function was the main reason as the command wanted to remind junior and mid-grade NCOs to pay attention to the small details of tasks in the hopes that it would reinforce the same attention to detail in their missions and on their guard shifts. Having PSGs plan and prepare the training schedule with their platoon leader allowed them to focus on the tasks that were most important to them and to their mission that week. It also reduced the amount of time that Soldiers were inactive, which provided behavioral health benefits.

Finally, giving Soldiers the opportunity to obtain foreign awards provided motivation, rewarded excellence, and encouraged Soldiers to go above and beyond. This was a lesson learned from the Djibouti deployment that paid dividends during our OIR mission. The task force afforded Soldiers the opportunity to compete in multiple events such as the Norwegian Foot March and the Schützenschnur. By working with our enablers who felt like part of the team, the battalion was able to execute these events and reward Soldiers for their efforts, which brought a sense of esprit de corps to

*Soldiers assigned to 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment set up a mortar weapon system during a patrol in Al-Tanf, Syria, on 23 December 2024. (Photo by SSG Fred Brown)*





A Soldier from 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment and a Syrian Free Army soldier talk after a patch exchange during a patrol in Al-Tanf, Syria, on 28 December 2024. (Photo by SGT Trenton Pallone)

the task force and to the battalion. It may seem like a small thing, but most Soldiers appreciate getting the proverbial pat on the back or something to add to their uniform. We also used an easy tool, the battalion coin, to assist with creating cohesion with those both inside and outside of our immediate formation. This allowed us to reward Soldiers in the moment and recognize them for their hard work.

One area our battalion could have improved on was paying more attention to platoon and company-level leadership. We focused so much on Soldiers that it created a blind spot in leader actions within the battalion. Keeping a mindful vigilance on rumors and squashing them before they become cancerous are also extremely important, especially in an environment where quarters are tight and tempers can run high. It is important to set strict boundaries and to counsel those who are putting their toes over those lines. The battalion failed to publish a policy memorandum that would have provided those boundaries and set clear communication on the expectations of all Soldiers and leaders. Most of the time miscommunication arose between leaders for inexplicable reasons. We could have fixed this by sitting them in the same room and having them work out their issues to clear up the misunderstanding. Either way, had we paid more attention and caught it earlier, we could have counseled the platoon-level and company-level leaders and prevented these issues from becoming distractions to the mission and loss of key personnel.

### Lessons to Take Forward

For those who are in a similar position, our best advice is to listen to the successes and mistakes of others. Not every lesson learned from the first deployment in Battle Company, 1-32 IN led to success as the CSM of 1-32 IN. Some forms of the lessons did translate from one position to the other. Lessons learned included:

- Combat idleness by any means at your disposal, such

as, looking outside of your organization for opportunities that you may or may not have at home station. It is necessary to keep Soldiers busy to fight against complacency.

- Develop and adhere to strict guidelines prior to deployment and consistently message through LPDs and discussion. It is through a consistent message that Soldiers will understand the intent and follow it.

- Develop a training regimen through training calendars that keeps Soldiers occupied. Units must maintain training schedules and PT schedules while deployed. About 90 percent of a deployment is uneventful, and we must use the down time to prepare our Soldiers for that other 10 percent by refreshing and sharpening their knowledge on their Level 10 skills. Loosely speaking, it is through standards, discipline, and training that any senior leader can be successful. When we forget to apply it to all personnel, Soldiers and leaders alike, we will find ourselves struggling to fight off the distractions that keep the formation from being the most successful it could be. We hope that other 1SGs and CSMs can learn from the successes and failures of our battalion and apply them to their formation.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Field Manual 7-0, *Train the Force*, June 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Combined Arms Center-Training, *Platoon Level Training Management*, 20 March 2023, <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2023/04/18/790194cd/platoon-level-training-management-20-mar2023.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, *Army Leadership and the Profession*, July 2019.

<sup>5</sup> J.C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings Of George Washington: March 1, 1778-May 31, 1778, from The Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799, Vol. 8, 1933, 359.*

<sup>6</sup> Oren Harari, *The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2002).

**CSM Abraham (Abe) Lewis** is currently serving as the command sergeant major of 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division. While deployed to Al-Tanf Garrison, Syria, he served as a task force command sergeant major. He has deployed once in support of Joint Task Force Bravo, three times in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, once in support of Operation New Dawn, once in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel, and once in support of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). CSM Lewis' military education includes all NCO Education System (NCOES) courses up to the Sergeants Major Class 72. He has an associate degree from Central Texas College, a Certificate of Leadership Workforce Development from the Sergeants Major Academy, a bachelor's degree in liberal arts from Excelsior College, and a master's degree from Trident University International in leadership.

**1SG Christopher Stone** serves as the first sergeant for Attack Company, 1-32 IN. He has deployed twice as part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and twice as part of OIR. 1SG Stone's military education includes all NCOES up to the Senior Leader Course as well as Airborne and Air Assault courses. He is currently pursuing a bachelor's in management studies from the University of Maryland Global Campus.

**1SG Jake Morash** is currently serving as the first sergeant for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-32 IN. He has deployed three times in support of OEF and once in support of OIR. 1SG Morash's military education includes all NCOES up to the Master Leaders Course. He has an associate's degree from the American Military University.

# INFANTRY WARFIGHTING FORUM WRAP-UP

The following are key points discussed during the 16 October 2025 Infantry Warfighting Forum (IWF), hosted by LTG Greg Anderson, commanding general of the XVIII Airborne Corps and mobile brigade combat team (MBCT) senior mentor. This IWF focused on how to drive excellence in small unit fundamentals. LTG Anderson emphasized that leaders must expect excellence, demand it, evaluate/measure against it, and determine if units have the level of proficiency needed to win the fight at the company-level and below. Leaders must stay focused on the fundamentals and create excellence in warfighting at the tactical level.



## Company and Below Proficiency

BG Matt Hardman, 1st Infantry Division Deputy Commanding General-Support, discussed his training observations from 38 Combat Training Center (CTC) rotations as a task force senior split between the National Training Center and Chief of Operations Group (COG) at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC). Poor proficiency in individual and small-unit tasks at the company level and below has been identified as one potential problem. He discussed several contributing factors and provided background on potential causes. At the CTCs, units tend to lose big and fast at the company level, resulting in unsolvable problems at the battalion and brigade level. Units need to arrive for a CTC rotation with companies at a high state of readiness. He prefaced the discussion with a quote from GEN James Rainey: "The real impact of technology is that it will increase punishment of unskilled commanders and untrained formations."

## Key points from this discussion include:

- **Fundamentals are the foundation:** Technology should not hamper our formations, and it should not replace fundamentals. Technology should accelerate, enhance, and make them more lethal. You can't pile technology on a foundation that is not strong and expect results.
- **Training progression:** Units should not rush to higher echelon training. Don't move to platoon-level exercises until Soldiers are proficient at the squad level; the same goes for progressing from platoon to company-level training. Training is progressive and linear.
- **Mastering the fundamentals** is not something that can just occur during a few weeks of training at a CTC rotation. Leaders must continually reinforce battle drills, marksmanship, and training at home station — this is how you get to excellence.
- **Training prioritization:** Brigades and higher must help unburden company commanders and first sergeants when it comes to training prioritization. Commander-to-commander dialogue will help leaders determine a unit's focus areas and how to prioritize training time.

## Training Management

COL Chris Brawley, commander of 1st MBCT, 11th Airborne Division, discussed his BCT's approach to rectifying some of the issues regarding fundamentals that were previously mentioned. The two major concepts they worked through are the Two-Year Training Path and the Triple Loop Training Methodology. At the onset, they noticed that big training events looked good at the macro-level, but when they zoomed in to the squad/team level, they discovered issues. Units were moving from one major training event to the next with no time to train on small unit fundamentals. COL Brawley referenced LTG (Retired) Arthur Collins' book *Common Sense Training* to highlight the approach they used with their training calendar events: "The key to all successful training lies in raising the quality of individual and small unit skills. Other things being equal, the army with the best trained small units will prevail." Key points from the discussion below:

- **Training Meeting Trends:** Some company-level training meetings are not happening (prevalent in headquarters and headquarters companies/forward support companies). The actual format of some training meetings looks more like a long-range training calendar. When this happens, the company is not getting into the requisite amount of detail and can skip through weeks of training without talking about how the training is getting resourced, how they are training and certifying leaders, etc.
- **NCO Development:** CSM Jeremiah Waggoner, CSM for 1/11 MBCT, discussed how the Triple Loop approach has placed NCOs in charge of training. Many events had been top-down driven with many NCOs, especially junior NCOs, waiting to be told what to do by the higher headquarters. This approach holds NCOs accountable to plan, resource, and execute their training.
- **8-Step Training Model:** CSM Chris Donaldson, then-CSM of the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, stated that NCOs must own the 8-Step Training Model. Commanders must take things off the calendar to enable NCOs to own the training and the time. At company/battalion training meetings, NCOs should be briefing where they are in the 8-step model. LTG Anderson agreed and stated there is a tension between company commanders trying to get all the various tasks done and NCOs trying to own training. Ultimately, dialogue between the NCOs and company leadership creates the communication needed to fight in combat; it's all interconnected.
- **U.S. Army Infantry School Updates:** The Advanced Leader Course (ALC) has made revisions to focus on implementation of unit training management at the squad level to help NCOs understand their role and how they participate

in the training management process. Additionally, NCOs attending ALC will also soon attend the follow-on Infantry Master Trainer Course. LTG Anderson stated between better training management for both NCO and officer professional military education and the introduction of TE&Os as you evaluate units/planned training you see complementary efforts. Use T&EOs to plan training and you will start getting the standard and steps you need directly.

### LTG Anderson's Closing Comments

We are what we design ourselves to be. We design ourselves through training management, our use of time, our prioritization, how we see risk, and where we put our resources. Don't be afraid to slow things down and do it right — to give more time to a subordinate and let them struggle with something but with the understanding that they will own it and move it forward, if coached, evaluated, and assessed. See also "Close Fighting Fundamentals" (<https://www.army.mil/article/289567>), which may help leaders visualize the types of skills we need to develop at the tactical level as part of the hedge against uncertainty. Commanders should think through this on their own terms; it's not a task list but describes what right looks like. Lastly, T&EOs are coming back, and smart officers are going to own and train against them; you will be evaluated and assessed against T&EOs at CTCs. Continue to command on the offense, ruthlessly prioritize, accept risk on things that are no longer necessary or important. Do not have an untrained formation.

*The purpose of the Infantry Warfighting Forum is to enhance infantry/mobile brigade combat team leaders, leader teams, unit training, and operations. This forum helps provide feedback for identification/resolution of problems through senior leader channels and provides a venue for shaping Infantry initiatives to make our Infantry more relevant for today's environment.*

# INFANTRY BRANCH UPDATE

## Welcome From the Infantry Branch Chief

Fellow Infantrymen,

We salute you and your formations for your tireless commitment to excellence! Congratulations to the Infantry NCOs promoted to sergeant first class (SFC) and to those entrusted with battalion command — your leadership drives our legacy forward. In this special edition, we unveil the forward-leaning vision of the U.S. Army Human Resources Command (HRC) Infantry Branch and spotlight the dynamic trends defining how our Infantry force is built, led, and employed on today's ever-evolving battlefield.



The Infantry Branch stands resolute in educating our force about assignment opportunities, mentoring every Infantryman to reach new heights and communicating the cutting-edge trends reshaping our profession. Our mission is to deliver honest, transparent, and actionable information that fortifies readiness across the Army. As always, we strive to synchronize individual Soldier aspirations with Active Component Manning Guidance (ACMG), ensuring the right leaders are in the right place at the decisive moment.

### Enlisted Infantry Update

**Enlisted Market Cycles (EMC).** The EMC remains the cornerstone for strategically aligning Infantry Soldiers to the Army's evolving operational demands. Each Soldier is purposefully matched to a six-week EMC window, determined by their Year-Month Available to Move (YMAV), ensuring our formations remain agile and mission-ready.

EMC Cycle	Market Opens	Market Closes	Report Months
EMC 27-02	29 APR 2026	02 JUN 2026	JAN–MAR 2027

**NCO Career Progression.** Advancement to SFC and master sergeant (MSG) is anchored in the time-tested Professional Development Model (PDM) for MOS 11B, 11C, and 11Z, as established in Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600-25, *U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officer Professional Guide*. Leaders are charged with actively guiding Soldiers to understand and achieve the key milestones that define competitiveness for promotion and assignment to positions of greater responsibility.

**EMC Preparation is Critical.** EMC preparation is a team effort, demanding proactive engagement from both Soldiers and leaders. Infantry leaders must champion education on EMC procedures, set clear expectations, and proactively address common pitfalls identified by career managers.

**1. Recognizing Critical Development (CD) requirements before entering the market is essential.** CD stabilization ensures SSGs and SFCs meet minimum career model requirements in accordance with DA PAM 600-25. NCOs who enter the EMC without meeting CD requirements should preference operational assignments that allow them to complete these milestones and remain competitive.

**2. Stabilization timeline.** For SGT(P) through MSGs, requests for individual, organizational, or nonroutine stabilization must be submitted to HRC no

later than 45 days before the market opens. NCOs receive notification 30 days prior to market opening to confirm their availability. Soldiers who believe their YMAV is incorrect should contact their Enlisted Career Manager immediately.

**NCO Promotion Trends.** The path to promotion continues to spotlight the Expert Infantryman Badge (EIB) and the coveted Ranger Tab as hallmarks of excellence. While advanced education and credentials enhance professional development, they supplement — never replace — the foundational standards expected of exceptional Infantry Soldiers. High-level skills and certifications distinguish NCOs from their peers, but first and foremost, every Soldier must embody the core attributes that define the most qualified (MQ) among us.

### Infantry Officer Update

Officer assignment cycles remain aligned with the Army Talent Alignment Process (ATAP).

ATAP Cycle	Market Opens	Market Closes	Report Months
ATAP 27-01	15 APR 2026	14 MAY 2026	OCT 2026–MAR 2027
ATAP 27-02	23 SEP 2026	04 NOV 2026	APR–SEP 2027
ATAP 28-01	14 APR 2027	13 MAY 2027	OCT 2027–MAR 2028

**ATAP 26-02 Lessons Learned.** Timeless principles endure — officers who launch their preparation early, thoroughly research prospective units, update their YMAV, and sharpen their marketability, consistently command success in the assignment process. Professional communication is non-negotiable; officers should reach out to units within the first 48 hours, deliver compelling, tailored messages, and follow up promptly. Those who balance ambition with realism, and seek mentorship from branch managers and senior leaders, consistently outpace their peers.

**Market Approach.** Successful engagement demands a compelling narrative that showcases an officer’s unique strengths, aspirations, and anticipated impact. Thoughtful, informed questions signal genuine interest and a high degree of professionalism. Officers who maintain organization and seize every opportunity stand out as the most reliable and mission-ready candidates.

**Infantry Captain Broadening Insight.** Choosing the optimal post-key development (KD) assignment is pivotal for career trajectory. Captains tracking toward their goals should seek challenging assignments that expand their expertise, position them for field-grade KD, and sharpen their edge for Major (MAJ) KD opportunities. These career-shaping decisions are best made in partnership with mentors, branch managers, and trusted senior leaders.

Several assignments distinguish themselves as premier developmental opportunities for aspiring field grade Infantry

officers. Notably, headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) command, small group leader (SGL) roles at the Maneuver Captains Career Course (MCCC), and observer-coach/trainer (OC/T) assignments prepare officers for the challenges and responsibilities of higher command.

### MAJ Promotion Selection Board (PSB) Reflections (December 2025)

1. The MAJ PSB achieved a 74 percent selection rate for Infantry officers in the primary zone (PZ), compared to the Army-wide average of 83 percent.

2. Officers who secure three MQ ratings in their last five officer evaluation reports (OERs) — with at least one in KD command — continue to dominate as the most competitive candidates.

3. The board consistently favors officers who excel in both command and staff roles, as evidenced by senior rater (SR) MQ block checks.

**FY27 Command Select List (CSL) Reflections (January 2026).** The FY27 CSL outcomes underscore the high stakes and competitive nature of command selection in today’s Army.

1. The principal selection rate reached 42.5 percent (54 of 127), a decrease from CSL 26 and the preceding three-year average, reflecting increasing standards and selectivity.

2. Excellence in field grade KD positions remains the decisive factor; every principal selected earned MQ ratings in both KD evaluations.

3. Nearly 89 percent of principals secured MQ blocks on all five of their most recent OERs — an impressive rise from previous years, underscoring the caliber of today’s Infantry leaders.

### Closing Comments from the Infantry Branch Chief

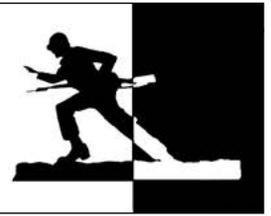
It is our honor to champion this storied branch and every Infantryman within it. Together, we forge an unbreakable force and advance a legacy built on valor, discipline, and unwavering service. Since 1775, Infantrymen have relentlessly closed the “Last Hundred Yards” for our nation — and with every step forward, we reaffirm that sacred mission. Follow Me.

— LTC Garrett P. Turley  
Infantry Branch Chief 51

**HRC Infantry Branch Points of Contact and Videos:**  
<https://www.hrc.army.mil/content/Infantry%20Branch%20POCs>



# Book Reviews



## ***Becoming Eisenhower: How Ike Rose from Obscurity to Supreme Allied Commander***

By Michael Lee Lanning

Essex, CT: Stackpole Books, 263 pages, 2024

Reviewed by LTC (Retired)  
Tom Vance



Sometimes you read a great book with a unique angle and cannot believe that someone else hadn't already written it. *Becoming Eisenhower* is one of those books. It is not a typical biography as it doesn't cover all of Dwight D. Eisenhower's life. We follow him from his time at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point (Class of 1915) to the start of World War II. Author Michael Lee Lanning writes, "In virtual obscurity, he was a man who had spent more than three decades preparing — mostly in inglorious ways, in his and others' views — for his destiny."

The best place to begin is at the end of this story. Ike was a recently minted brigadier general when WWII began, serving as chief of staff of Third Army at Fort Sam Houston, TX. He then became chief of operations at the War Department, but he was disappointed, hoping for a division command. Then, two surprises. Army Chief of Staff GEN George Marshall quickly promoted him to major general over 162 more senior brigadiers. And then, three months later, Ike tells his wife, Mamie, that he's off to London, saying, "I'm to be in command over there." She asked, "In command of what?" Ike replied, "Of the whole shebang."

Ike would serve as the commanding general of the European theater of operations, along with a third star, and then Supreme Allied Commander. There was no question that he excelled in his two battalion commands and service as chief of staff at multiple levels of command. But how do we explain this extraordinary rise? Lanning masterfully answers that question.

The recurring theme throughout this work is how Ike always sought duty with troops; however, being "the consummate staff officer," he repeatedly received desk jobs. He was stateside during World War I, leading tank training for which he received the Distinguished Service Medal. His interest in the evolution of armor did not win him friends within the Infantry Branch. When it was time to attend the Command and General Staff College, his branch manager would not send him, so Ike obtained a temporary appointment in the Adjutant General Corps and got his slot at Leavenworth, graduating first in his class. During the interwar years, promotions came slowly, and he spent 16 years as a major. From being a tank corps observer for the First Transcontinental Motor Convoy

(1919) to one of the architects of the Louisiana Maneuvers (1941), Ike participated in long-term war planning and finally wartime mobilization.

Not only does Lanning discuss Ike's assignments, but he also covers those he desperately wanted and did not get as well as those he turned down (like the opportunity to be an ROTC instructor — too bad for those cadets). Ike was often disappointed, but he always did his best with each job and sought professional development. Lanning describes Ike's relationships with peers (such as George Patton, also the subject of another of his books) and the many mentors that helped Ike along the way. And we meet his bosses, including Generals John Pershing, George Marshall, and Douglas MacArthur and learn how Ike navigated (or survived) their leadership styles.

Lanning draws primarily from Ike's two books, his memoir *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends* (1967) and his account of WWII *Crusade in Europe* (1948), as well as *The Eisenhower Diaries* edited by Robert H. Ferrell (1981) and numerous biographies, especially the earliest, *Soldier of Democracy* by Kenneth S. Davis (1946). Lanning comments when his account varies with Ike's writings and that of other biographers. For example, Lanning devotes five pages to Ike's time at the Army War College versus the one paragraph in *At Ease*. Lanning's research is solid, but his writing makes for pleasurable reading, not scholarly study. The book includes 20 photos, sources, and an index. The only improvement would be the addition of a timeline to help with the progression of Ike's numerous assignments.

Sadly, Lanning died shortly after completing this work. A retired Army lieutenant colonel, the Airborne Ranger fought in Vietnam as an infantry platoon leader, reconnaissance platoon leader, and company commander, receiving the Bronze Star with 'V' device with two oak leaf clusters. He wrote 29 books, nine of them about the Vietnam War. He also wrote *The Revolutionary War 100: The Stories Behind the Most Influential Battles, People, and Events of the American Revolution*, which is especially relevant as last year we celebrated the 250th anniversary of the birth of the Army and start of the Revolutionary War.

With D-Day (Operation Overlord) behind him, the rest of his story is not too surprising: receiving a promotion to General of the Army with five stars, replacing Marshall as Army chief of staff, becoming president of Columbia University, getting recalled to active duty to run NATO, and finally becoming president of the United States. The postwar years require only a final seven-page chapter, and this seems sufficient thanks to Lanning's you-feel-like-you're-there storytelling of Ike's "becoming Eisenhower."

For those in uniform, this book will be inspiring. For those of

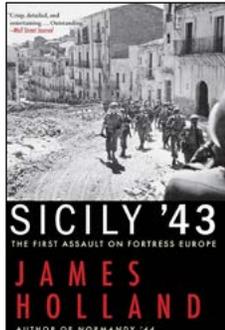
us who are veterans, it offers reflection, and for students of military history and biography, it connects personal experiences to historic events. This book should be considered the introduction for anyone studying Ike's military life.

## ***Sicily '43: The First Assault on Fortress Europe***

**By James Holland**

**New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 640 pages, 2021**

Reviewed by COL (Retired)  
Chris R. Willis



The 80th anniversary of the end of World War Two (WWII) (2 September 1945) and the 85th anniversary of the U.S. Army's first official parachute jump (16 August 1940) provide a unique opportunity to highlight a book about one of the largest air, land, and sea campaigns of WWII. James Holland's *Sicily '43* deftly describes the actions of the combined American, British, and Canadian airborne and seaborne armies, navies, and air forces during the 38-day campaign to liberate Sicily, known as Operation Husky.

Holland is an English historian, prolific author, broadcaster, and podcaster (*We Have Ways of Making You Talk*). *Sicily '43* is the first of Holland's three books about the Allied Italian Campaign. His accompanying books are *The Savage Storm: The Battle for Italy 1943* (2023) and *Cassino '44: The Brutal Battle for Rome* (2024). Although a hefty 640 pages, *Sicily '43* provides the modern military leader some timeless lessons about the complexity of combined and joint operations, the value and fragility of special operations and airborne troops, and the requirement for air superiority and conditions setting during joint forcible entry operations (JFEO).

On 10 July 1943, 160,000 Allied troops assaulted Sicily by air and sea during Operation Husky. Following Operation Torch, the first U.S./UK combined campaign that defeated the Germans and Italians in North Africa, Operation Husky was the first Allied campaign onto the European continent since the fall of France in 1940. Holland argues that this was the largest amphibious assault of WWII due to the number of troops that landed on the first day of the invasion. The airborne and amphibious assaults were supported by more than 2,500 ships and 3,500 Allied aircraft. Holland's style, like that of Stephen Ambrose, combines a rich patchwork of first-person accounts by American, British, Canadian, Italian, and German flag officers, junior officers, NCOs, and troops alike. He complements these accounts with those of local Sicilians and his expert understanding of the force composition, weapons, and tactics of both the Allied and Axis forces. Holland's books lie on a bedrock of primary source research and physical battlefield studies.

JFEOs may be the most complex of all military operations, and Holland captures those complexities well — most importantly, the need for both air and naval superiority. The success of Operation Torch allowed the Allies to base fighters and bombers in North Africa, thus facilitating air superiority in the southern Mediterranean. This air superiority was then conducive to the establishment of naval superiority between North Africa and Sicily. Without both air and naval superiority, the airborne and amphibious assaults on Sicily would not have been possible. However, the range limitations of the fighter aircraft (U.S. P-38s Lightning and UK Spitfires) forced the Allies to attack in the most obvious location, Sicily. Bypassing the island and landing on the Italian peninsula itself could have achieved both operational and tactical surprise. Holland does an excellent job of highlighting the high-level tensions between the U.S. and UK flag officers that were caused by the constraints and limitations of air and naval assets. He also highlights the famous rivalry between Patton and Montgomery that allowed 40,000 German troops to escape to mainland Italy.

Holland does an excellent job of portraying the difficulties of conducting airborne operations. He uses the knowledge of U.S. and UK parachute and glider operations gained while writing his book *Normandy '44: D-Day and the Battle for France* (2019) to describe the technical, tactical, and personal human challenges inherent in airborne operations. These challenges became evident when only 12 of 137 British gliders hit their landing zone (many ditched in the sea) and when the 82nd Airborne Division's 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment landed far and wide of their drop zone. Holland does a good job linking lessons learned from airborne operations in Sicily to more successful, although not perfect, glider and parachute drops in Normandy on D-Day.

In summary, James Holland's *Sicily '43* is a fresh look at the Allies' first campaign to attack the "soft underbelly" of the Axis powers. His expertise in WWII history, detailed first-person narratives, and engaging narrative style make for an excellent book that memorializes a true turning point in the European theater of operations of WWII. This book also provides pertinent lessons for the modern student of JFEO.

## **Book Reviewers Needed**

***Infantry* is in need of book reviewers! Have you read a book lately that you think would be of interest to the Infantry community and want to submit a review? We have books on hand that we can mail to interested individuals to review.**

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[usarmy.benning.cac.mbx.infantry-magazine@army.mil](mailto:usarmy.benning.cac.mbx.infantry-magazine@army.mil)  
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