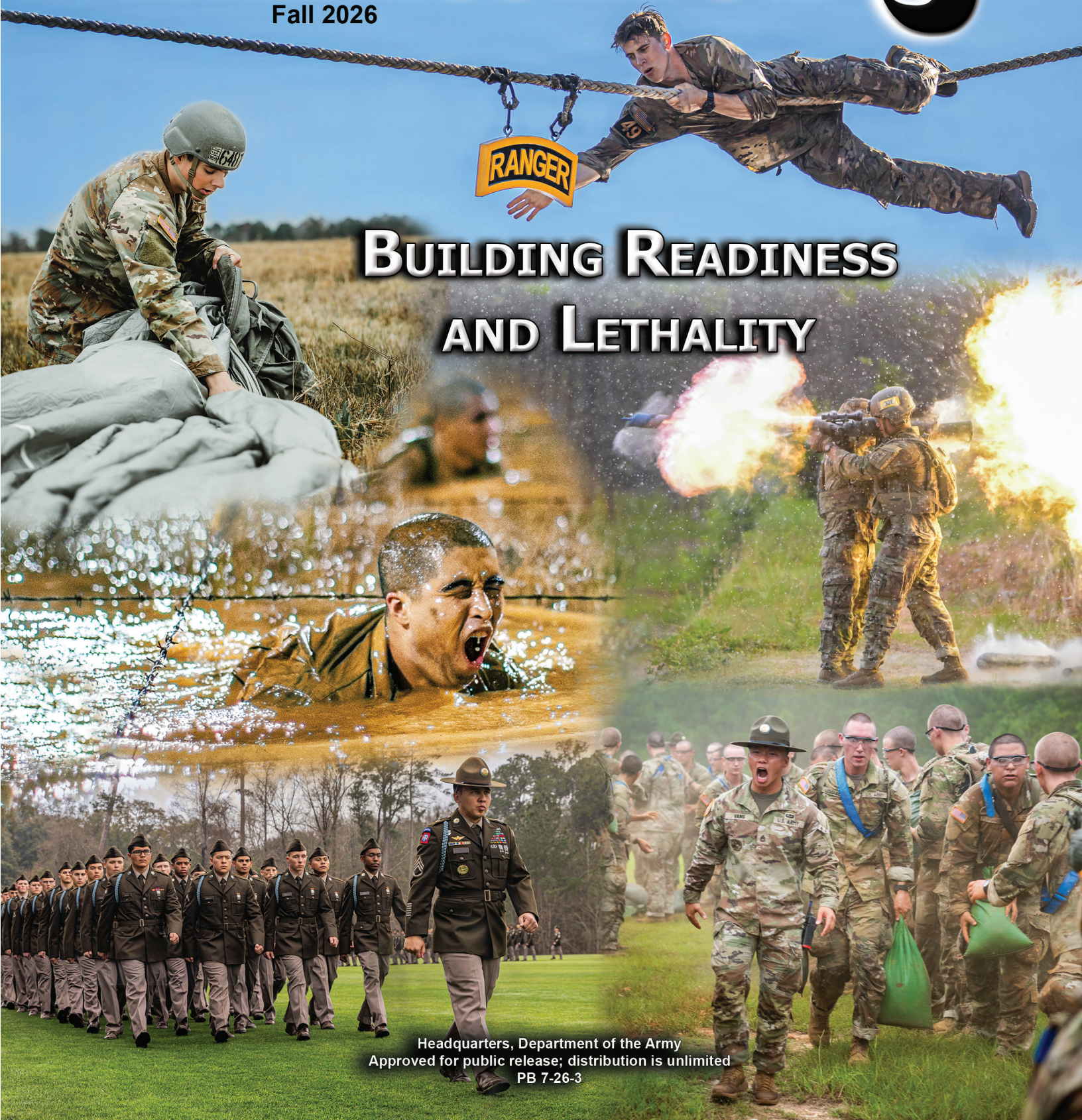


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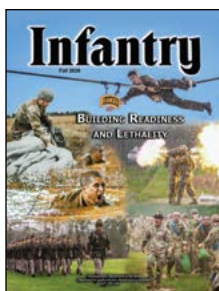
**BUILDING READINESS
AND LETHALITY**

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FRONT COVER:

Photos from across some of the U.S. Army Infantry School's programs of instruction and competitions. (Photos by Patrick A. Albright, CPT Stephanie Snyder, and Daniel Marble)

BACK COVER:

A Soldier assigned to 2nd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 3rd Mobile Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, engages targets while qualifying with the M7 rifle at Schofield Barracks, HI, on 5 February 2026. (Photo by SGT Austin Paredes)



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Commandant's Note

BG JD KEIRSEY



Success in modern warfare demands proficient Infantry Soldiers able to close with and destroy the enemy within the last 100 yards with or, if denied, without drone support. These Soldiers must be led by leaders who place them in positions of advantage by seizing the initiative and mastering the fundamentals. Our adversaries are studying us and strive to create capabilities to counter our strengths. We must continue developing a force that is more lethal, more ready, and more capable than our potential enemies.

This issue of *Infantry* highlights recent changes to some of our programs of instruction to ensure we continue forging the strongest, most proficient warfighters possible who will dominate the future fight.

I highly recommend you read and circulate the article "From the COF to the Field." MSG Wallace gives a pragmatic approach to including emerging drones and autonomous capability into Battle Drills. He has practical, on-the-ground experience from observing ongoing conflicts. He has merged what he has seen into how we operate as a force to provide a commonsense approach to certifying small units on several drone drills.

A subsequent article provides an update on the development of the Infantry Master Trainer Strategy. As a follow-up to an article that appeared in our Fall 2025 issue, "Beyond Technical Expertise" explains the evolution of three new courses: the Weapons Squad Master Trainer, Stryker Master Trainer, and Rifle Squad Master Trainer Courses. While the legacy Marksmanship Master Trainer, Heavy Weapons Leader, and Stryker Master Gunner Courses developed technical experts, this new strategy acknowledges that these leaders first need to be training experts. Step 2 of the 8-Step Training Model is to train and certify leaders; our new strategy is only useful if it does just that. Graduates should be able to plan, prepare, execute, and assess direct-fire training within their units.

We are also updating Infantry NCO Professional Development System courses, and two articles in this issue address the Infantry Advanced Leader and Senior Leader Courses. By eliminating virtual learning portions and lower-level tasks, the courses immerse NCOs in a curriculum focused on mastering the appropriate skill-level competencies to enable Infantry squad leaders and platoon sergeants to exceed expectations.

We welcome your feedback on any of the topics in this issue. We are in a period of tension between retaining fundamentals and transforming. Striking the right balance requires professional discourse at all levels. I encourage interested Infantry Soldiers to submit articles about lessons learned or challenges they have overcome.

Thank you.

I am the Infantry! Follow me!



The 72-Hour Advantage:

Building Tactical Repeatability in Infantry OSUT

MAJ MICHAEL D. SHEAHEN
ROBERT J. PETERSON III
CHAPLAIN (CPT) CHARLES L. HINDBAUGH
CPT RAFAEL R. MAS

As the first fingers of dawn pierce the humid haze hanging over the fourth morning of Infantry One Station Unit Training (OSUT), Drill Sergeant Smith looks across at his platoon of aspiring Soldiers in formation before him. Only a few weeks ago, these trainees were civilians, comfortably asleep in their own beds. Now, bleary eyed and with droplets of sweat already forming on their skin in the Georgia heat, they await Drill Sergeant Smith's orders.

In years past, he would have spent the next several weeks learning — through observation, injuries, and repeated fitness tests — which of these trainees would struggle and which would excel. This morning is different. In his hand, Drill Sergeant Smith holds a ranked roster: every trainee sorted into predicted ability groups, generated by a machine-learning model from two simple measurements taken during the first three days of training. Long before the first formal Army Fitness Test (AFT) of the cycle, Drill Sergeant Smith knows exactly where to focus his attention. The tailored workouts to bring his fittest trainees like Private Carter, and the targeted intervention for his lowest performers, such as Private Reyes who cannot complete a single chin-up, will begin today, not

in three weeks. Over the course of the cycle, Drill Sergeant Smith's platoon will not only learn to fight but will develop every aspect of their physical, mental, and spiritual readiness through a fully integrated and data-driven Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) plan. Every workout, meal, chaplain visit, and night's sleep has been placed so that at graduation, each one of these trainees will be an Infantryman ready to fight and win, again and again.

This is not a vision of the future. Nor is it some idealized version of how things ought to be. This is how we build readiness and lethality in Infantry OSUT right now.

The Goal

To get here, we began with a conviction and a question. We knew fitness was essential to infantry lethality, and H2F is the framework to build it deliberately. The question was: What is fitness for an Infantryman? What aspects of fitness specifically make an Infantry Soldier effective on the objective, and how do we develop it across a formation of thousands?

Drill sergeants from Alpha Company, 3rd Battalion, 47th Infantry Regiment, 197th Infantry Brigade, meet trainees on the first day of Infantry One Station Unit Training on 27 June 2025 at Fort Benning, GA. (Photo by Patrick A. Albright)



Rather than assume, we tested. We ran a pilot of a fully integrated H2F program across two OSUT classes and collected as much data as we could manage. We deliberately sampled both our highest and lowest performers. Every trainee already completes four AFTs, a Combat Field Test (CFT), and multiple long foot marches throughout a cycle, which provide a valuable set of data. To deepen the data pool, we add a 1-2-1 assessment (1 minute of chin-ups, 2 minutes of push-ups, and a 1-mile run) and an Occupational Physical Assessment Test (OPAT) beep test. We also recorded height and weight data and included surveys to gain qualitative feedback from the trainees at regular intervals throughout the cycle. At first, we did not know which inputs would prove important; the entire point of the pilot was to find out what was, so we collected whatever we could. By the time both companies graduated, we had a mountain of data to analyze.

The first and most important discovery was about the goal itself. The performance data and the trainee feedback pointed in the same direction: The way we had traditionally framed fitness, peaking for a single event, did not map to what makes an Infantryman lethal. The AFT is an excellent predictor of raw aerobic and anaerobic capacity but does not measure a Soldier's capacity for combat. Our surveys reinforced this. Trainees did not correlate fitness scores with being a better warfighter but instead favored tactical, maximal-effort work. The events that truly made an Infantryman were not single maximal lifts or individual fast runs; they were load-bearing, near-maximal tasks performed again and again while fatigued.

Out of that finding we defined the true objective of our program. We call it "tactical repeatability:" sustained, near-maximal work capacity across an operational timeline, with as little performance decay as possible. It is the difference between a trainee who can complete a single squad battle drill and an Infantryman who can complete 10, under load and under stress, with enough left in the tank to win the fight that comes next. Tactical repeatability, not peak performance on test day, became the standard against which we measure everything else.

The pilot produced two further findings that shaped the program. First, the integrated H2F approach was sound. Even though the pilot classes were amongst the first to condense Infantry OSUT from 22 to 18 weeks, they saw no degradation in AFT scores; in fact, 2-mile run and sprint-drag-carry results improved by roughly 5 percent. Second, our trainees were hungry for more than we were asking with between 62 and 80 percent reporting doing extra strength and mobility work on their own time. This showed that many trainees can handle more than the baseline physical readiness training (PRT).

Targeted Training at Scale

Knowing the goal is not the same as knowing how to reach it efficiently across thousands of trainees. One of the pilot's most consequential lessons involved testing and time. We discovered that by using a machine-learning model trained



Trainees with Alpha Company, 3rd Battalion, 47th Infantry Regiment, 197th Infantry Brigade, conduct the "First 100 Yards" event on 27 June 2025 at Fort Benning. (Photo by Patrick A. Albright)

on our own pilot data, we could predict a trainee's performance ability group within the first 72 hours of training from just two simple measurements — a chin-up test and an OPAT beep test — rather than waiting for the first AFT. That single capability does two things. It allows us to address trainee strengths and weaknesses roughly 10 days sooner without the need for additional testing, and it dramatically increases the scale at which we can implement individualized physical readiness programs.

This classification model is built to serve drill sergeants at the point of impact like Drill Sergeant Smith, not to second-guess them. It returns a predicted ability group and a confidence score; high-confidence predictions let Drill Sergeant Smith act immediately, while low-confidence cases are flagged for him to decide, drawing on what he sees from the trainee every day. It does not replace his judgment, it focuses it. With trainees sorted early, we build physical training around activities geared toward tactical repeatability, and we tie each ability group to a targeted intervention so low performers receive remediation early while high performers are untethered from the large-group median and allowed to strive for their potential.

This is still a work in progress. The pilot revealed three things: a goal, a way to measure it, and a method to train it. We continue to refine all three with every cycle. What it produced is the fully integrated, data- and technology-driven

plan we run today: the one waiting for Drill Sergeant Smith and his platoon on that fourth morning.

H2F Integrated from Day 0

It would be easy to describe our H2F program as five lines of effort tied to the five H2F domains: physical, nutritional, mental, sleep, and spiritual readiness. However, the five domains are interdependent: A deficit in one degrades the others, and a Soldier who is sleep-deprived, underfed, or without purpose cannot express the physical capacity he has built. In our current program, the domains are woven into a single, unified plan, which is synchronized with the training itself.

That synchronization begins with setting the training schedule and resources. Sixteen weeks before the start of a new class, company commanders lock in the 18-week program of instruction (POI) at the installation training resource meeting, or “Freeze,” and training events become fixed. Everything else is then built around this course schedule. The PT plan, nutrition plan, sleep plan, mental readiness schedule, and Chaplain’s program are developed together against the same training calendar by an H2F team that includes the strength and conditioning coach (SCC), athletic trainer (AT), drill sergeants serving as H2F integrators, registered dietitian (RD), sleep readiness director, cognitive performance specialists, and the unit ministry team. The result is one plan with five mutually reinforcing dimensions, not five plans competing for the same calendar.

The integration first manifests in the initial 72 hours of OSUT. Drill Sergeant Smith’s trainees receive foundational movement instruction and record their chin-ups and beep test. They learn to fuel themselves like tactical athletes in austere conditions and start receiving daily Performance Readiness Bars, each providing 2,000 IU of Vitamin D3 and 1,000 mg of calcium, to aggressively mitigate bone-stress injuries before their training load ramps up. They are taught to “control the controllables,” framing sleep not as a luxury but as an active

By leveraging machine learning, incorporating a tightly integrated H2F team, and empowering drill sergeants with the tools they need, we are redefining what physical dominance and lethality mean in Infantry OSUT.

performance behavior on par with marksmanship. They learn to distinguish productive stress that drives adaptation from excessive stress that degrades decision-making. Finally, they meet the unit ministry team which begins the spiritual readiness program through courses such as ACE (Ask, Care, and Escort) and Basic Connections. All five domains are synchronized in the first days of training.

Training begins at moderate intensity. Volume increases after roughly eight weeks once trainees have physiologically adapted and again in week 15, after which intensity builds toward the culminating field training exercise (FTX). All trainees complete the core PRT program throughout the cycle, and a weekly targeted workout attacks each ability group’s specific weakness. In this way we are able to not only improve performance of our weak performers, but data-driven ability group PRT also elevates the top performers above any plateau they may otherwise struggle to escape.

Where the unified plan matters most is at the most challenging events. When Drill Sergeant Smith brings Privates Reyes and Carter to the Forge FTX in week 10, they are not supported by the physical domain alone. In the three days prior, the sleep readiness director has programmed in opportunities to bank sleep to maximize performance; the RD has already identified the rigorous field time as authorized for additional fuel with Modular Operational Ration Enhancement (MORE) rations that add roughly 1,000 calories and 20-30 grams of protein; and the mental readiness team has equipped trainees with relaxation and recovery techniques to use when they are most stressed.

When Drill Sergeant Smith’s platoon stumbles out of the gas chamber, grinds through the night infiltration course, or steps off on the 10-mile ruck, the chaplain is there. His presence at the hardest events is deliberately planned for when the trainees are the most miserable. He meets trainees not only in the chapel but in the mud, at the precise points where exhaustion and stress threaten to break a Soldier’s will, to develop the heart of spiritual readiness: the trainee’s “why.” A Soldier who knows why

***A trainee in the 197th Infantry Brigade completes a portion of the “First 100 Yards” event on 20 March 2026 at Fort Benning, GA.
(Photo by Joey Rhodes II)***





Soldiers with Delta Company, 3rd Battalion, 54th Infantry Regiment, 197th Infantry Brigade, graduate from Infantry One Station Unit Training in a ceremony on 9 October 2025 at Inouye Field in Columbus, GA. (Photo by Joey Rhodes II)

he fights endures when others cannot. That endurance is itself a form of tactical repeatability: The will to perform the demanding task a tenth time is as necessary as the legs that carry the load.

By integrating H2F professionals into the process on the first day of planning, H2F can form the connective tissue of the training itself. Every workout, meal, night's sleep, recovery technique, and visit from the chaplain can support the same objective.

Building Repeatability Across the Cycle

That objective is tactical repeatability, and the proof of the concept is not in the first, or even fourth, AFT — it is in the final FTX. For multiple days, Drill Sergeant Smith's platoon will move, fight, and sustain themselves under load with little sleep and less comfort. In extreme heat and humidity, they will perform repeated squad battle drills, long movements with heavy rucks, and relentless all-night attacks, demanded over and over as the days wear on. This is tactical repeatability made real: not a single maximal effort, but the capacity to deliver near-maximal effort on the fifth day of the FTX as reliably as on the first.

It is here that the work of the previous weeks shows itself. The trainee the classification model flagged on day three, Private Reyes, who arrived unable to manage a single chin-up, is no longer the straggler. The targeted interventions Drill Sergeant Smith began in week one pay off during the final FTX when he carries his share of the load all the way to "Honor Hill" where he earns his Crossed Rifles, the insignia of the Infantry. Private Carter, who arrived near the top of the roster, was never held to the platoon median to wait for the others; he pushed toward his ceiling throughout the cycle, setting the pace during the final FTX and earning the title of "Iron Soldier," the fittest Infantryman in his class. The platoon does not fall off as the FTX grinds on, because it was never

trained to peak for a single mission. It was trained to fight hard, recover, and fight again.

By leveraging machine learning, incorporating a tightly integrated H2F team, and empowering drill sergeants with the tools they need, we are redefining what physical dominance and lethality mean in Infantry OSUT. When Drill Sergeant Smith's trainees graduate, they will not have simply met the course standards. They will be Infantry Soldiers who can fight, win, and then do it all again, which is the only standard the modern battlefield will accept.

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BEYOND TECHNICAL EXPERTISE:

The Evolution of the Infantry Master Trainer

SFC LEIGHTON MONCADA

In the Fall 2025 Issue of *Infantry*, an article by MAJ Richard Chandler announced the unveiling of the Infantry Master Trainer Strategy (IMTS). This strategy was developed to ensure the institutional knowledge required to effectively manage the direct-fire training process, from planning through assessment.¹ This need was addressed by modernizing three programs of instruction (POIs) under the U.S. Army Infantry School (USAIS): the Marksmanship Master Trainer Course (MMTC), the Heavy Weapons Leader Course (HWLC), and the Stryker Master Gunner Course (SMG).

This article examines the evolution of HWLC from the Rifle Platoon Master Trainer Course (RPMTC) to its current iteration as the **Weapons Squad Master Trainer Course (WSMTC)**; the transition of the Stryker Master Gunner Course into the **Stryker Master Trainer Course (SMTTC)**; and the evolution of the Marksmanship Master Trainer Course into the **Rifle Squad Master Trainer Course (RSMTC)**. It explains where

these courses were, where they are today, and the Infantry's vision for their future. Significantly, it explores how USAIS transitioned its leader development approach from producing technical experts on individual weapons systems to producing master trainers equipped to plan, prepare, execute, and assess direct-fire training at their units. By exploring the historical foundations, current forms, and envisioning futures of WSMTC, SMTTC, and RSMTC, this article will demonstrate how these courses support the IMTS's vision for providing the Infantry with NCOs who increase organizational lethality through institutional expertise.

The Need for Change

The impetus for modernizing HWLC, SMG, and MMTC was not driven by a failure on the part of the courses themselves. For more than a decade, these courses served as USAIS's premier institutions for developing leaders who were able to train, employ, and advise commanders on the Army's small arms, heavy weapons, anti-armor systems, and Stryker platforms. These legacy courses were consistent

*A 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) Soldier fires the M250 rifle during training at Fort Campbell, KY, on 15 April 2024.
(Photo by Jason Amadi)*



throughout their several iterations in emphasizing technical proficiency, tactical employment, and leader development up to the company echelon.² Students who graduated from HWLC gained expertise on systems organic to heavy weapons companies, such as the M2 .50 caliber machine gun and ITAS. Similarly, SMG produced technical experts capable of diagnosing complex malfunctions on Stryker variants and their specific fire control systems. Meanwhile, MMTC produced experts in primary weapon systems, optics, and ballistics, capable of diagnosing individual shooter errors and improving small arms lethality. This resulted in all three courses earning a reputation for producing highly competent subject matter experts who could support unit training and employment requirements.³

The attempt to implement a master trainer model was present in these legacy courses well before the establishment of the IMTS, despite an overwhelming emphasis on technical and tactical competencies in earlier iterations. Later revisions to the courses increasingly incorporated concepts associated with training management, commander advisement, and the application of the Integrated Weapons Training Strategy (IWTS).⁴ In their final legacy iterations, graduates were expected to be competent in planning and conducting training as well as advising commanders on employment considerations, thereby establishing the emergence of an institutional foundation for a master trainer concept.

Despite the emergence of a master trainer concept, USAIS still recognized the gap between technical expertise and the institutional competencies associated with managing direct-fire training in infantry units. While developing IMTS, USAIS planners concluded that although HWLC, SMG, and MMTC graduates had an expert understanding of weapon capabilities and employment, they lacked the required skills to systematically approach the design and execution of training at echelon.⁵ Although the courses continued to produce a large quantity of technically proficient graduates, the Army was not consistently providing the Infantry with company and below level expertise required to develop and sustain organizational proficiency across all formations.

USAIS established the IMTS to deal with this challenge by reconceptualizing the desired course outcome. Instead of producing leaders who added value primarily through technical expertise, the strategy sought to develop leaders who could assist commanders in managing the entire direct-fire training process. Technical competence was no longer the end state but ideally the means to a larger objective. Focus was shifted towards developing leaders capable of integrating training management, resource planning, unit proficiency assessment, and IWTS principles towards improving organizational performance and combat readiness in preparation for large-scale combat operations (LSCO).⁶

The RPMTTC, SMTC, and RSMTTC emerged as the solutions. They focused on unit training plan (UTP) development, training management, resource integration, and the deliberate application of IWTS principles across individual, crew-

The RPMTTC and the initial iterations of SMTC and RSMTTC were more than just new programs of instruction... They sought to develop master trainers capable of systematically approaching the design, execution, and oversight of direct-fire training.

served, specialty systems, and collective formations. The courses did this while maintaining the technical foundations established by their predecessors. It was a demonstration of an institutional shift from producing weapons expert leaders to producing master trainer leaders.

Building the Master Trainer: Lessons from Implementation

Establishing a Culture of Candor

The RPMTTC and the initial iterations of SMTC and RSMTTC were more than just new programs of instruction. Rather, they represented a refined approach to developing Infantry leaders. They sought to develop master trainers capable of systematically approaching the design, execution, and oversight of direct-fire training. This novel approach to leader development required a continuous evaluation to determine whether it was achieving its intended purpose.

Cadre facilitated this process by collecting end-of-course critiques following each iteration. These critiques provided insight into the students' expectations and allowed instructors to both validate successful portions of the curriculum as well as identify areas that required refinement. Instead of treating the collection of these data points as an administrative requirement, cadre used them as a means for continuous improvement. This became an important avenue for cadre to manage the courses' development.

The disconnect between student expectations and course objectives quickly presented itself as being the most consistent theme to emerge from the critiques. Many students arrived at the courses unaware of the new approach, expecting instead a traditional HWLC, SMG, or MMTC experience focused heavily on turning wrenches, pure range time, and tactical employment. One student summarized this expectation by writing, "I thought I was signing up for HWLC." Similarly, Stryker students expected to focus purely on the Common Remotely Operated Weapons Station – Javelin (CROWS-J) or the 30mm XM813, while RSMTTC candidates anticipated weeks of uninterrupted trigger time on the firing line. Another theme was astonishment at the amount of time — such as the 80 academic hours dedicated in SMTC — spent on UTPs, resource forecasting, and training management. These themes highlighted the monumental challenge facing the cadre: They were redefining what a weapons expert should



Students prepare to conduct live-fire training as part of the legacy Stryker Master Gunner Course on 1 October 2025. (Photo by Joey Rhodes II)

be. Instead of producing leaders who solely understood individual weapons systems, the objective now was to develop leaders capable of helping their commanders manage the direct-fire training process across their organizations.

What Worked

Despite students arriving with expectations disconnected from the realities of the desired course outcomes, the data collected from the critiques consistently validated several core concepts. For example, students repeatedly identified understanding surface danger zones (SDZs) as being one of the most valuable skills they gained. The feedback suggested that students recognized the value in being able to independently plan and manage training events, as well as possessing the capability to communicate effectively with external subject matter experts (e.g., range control).

Another concept identified by the students as being valuable was training management. While many students initially balked at the emphasis placed on UTPs, end-of-course critiques reflected a strong desire for additional instruction on the topic. One point of feedback advised that future classes should provide “a more in-depth look on how to build a UTP.” Another student strengthened this feedback by requesting additional guidance and examples. The consensus seemed to be that students finished the courses respecting the importance of training management, and they wanted more opportunities to develop a deeper level of proficiency.

The students also provided positive feedback for resource planning and training integration, particularly regarding collective simulations and live-fire exercises (LFXs). The consensus was that the concepts taught during this portion of the course expanded understanding beyond individual weapon systems. Furthermore, the concepts encouraged the students to view direct-fire training as a deliberate organizational process. This perspective demonstrated the new strategy’s ability to achieve one of its primary goals.

Perhaps the most important piece of feedback was the consistent positive response to practical application. The hands-on events allowed the students to apply concepts rather than just discuss them. The critiques uniformly agreed that producing tangible products and solving realistic problems — such as master trainer troubleshooting during a collective LFX — allowed the students to more effectively retain the information. These data points provided a valuable lesson that master trainers are developed through application rather than information transfer alone.

What Did Not Work

End-of-course critiques were not uniformly positive; some revealed several areas that needed improvement. For example, the density of the curriculum received the largest amount of criticism. SMTTC, for instance, encompasses nearly 359 academic hours packed into a 39-day window. Several students indicated that the courses were information-heavy and felt overwhelmed by the volume provided. While there was a broad range of subjects covered, feedback suggested

that some of the concepts could benefit from additional reinforcement to help students feel more confident applying them back at their units.

In addition to requests for clearer standards and more deliberate guidance, students also expressed frustration with the lack of outlines and study guides. Furthermore, uncertainty regarding major assignments and evaluation criteria was a common theme. While some ambiguity was placed in the course by design, excessive uncertainty might distract from the learning objective.

A final point of criticism was that some students wanted to increase weapon system instruction (such as more time on the 30mm Medium Caliber Weapon System [MCWS], Javelin employment, or individual marksmanship drills) and deemphasize training management topics. This critique was valuable not because it challenged the validity of the courses' design and foundational strategy, but because it ultimately reinforced the rationale behind their creation. Mechanisms for developing technical experts on individual weapon systems already existed in the Army. RSMTC, RPMTTC, and SMTC were created to develop leaders who could build and sustain organizational proficiency through effective training management. The overall value of the criticism was that it demonstrated the magnitude of the cultural shift required to fully implement the IMTS.

Key Lessons Learned

The early iterations of the courses provided several important lessons. First, repetition matters. Greater understanding was achieved by students when concepts were repeatedly reinforced through multiple methods of instruction. Second, application matters. The portions of the curriculum that received the highest praise were those that required students to create a product that solved problems in a realistic scenario. Third, standards must be explicit. Clear expectations and evaluation criteria improved student performance and confidence.

The most important lesson learned is that the critiques seemed to have validated the central premise of the IMTS. Technical proficiency is important, but it does not create organizational lethality alone. Master trainers can translate technical proficiency into organizational capability through a systematic approach to training. This deliberate approach acts as a critical link between institutional competence and combat effectiveness.

These lessons learned informed later refinements to the curriculum. Ultimately, this led to the development of their current forms: the Weapons Squad Master Trainer Course, Rifle Squad Master Trainer Course, and the refined Stryker Master Trainer Course.

The Evolution to WSMTC, RSMTC, and SMTC

The central premise of IMTS is that technical expertise alone is insufficient to building and sustaining organizational proficiency, and initial implementations of these courses validated this premise. End-of-course critiques consistently

demonstrated the value of resource planning, UTP development, and practical application. However, feedback also provided opportunities to improve how those concepts were taught.

Because of lessons learned in early iterations, WSMTC, RSMTC, and SMTC place a greater emphasis on practical application, repetition, and organizational context. Developers deliberately designed the courses to allow students to learn through performance rather than expecting mastery through limited exposure.

The adoption of the squad lens is one of the most significant changes. For WSMTC, the course revolves around the weapons squad leader to preserve the technical heritage of HWLC while retaining the training management focus. For RSMTC, the course aligns with the rifle squad leader, shifting the focus from individual shooter mechanics to squad-level marksmanship training management and collective lethality. For SMTC, the focus shifts to standardizing education for NCOs who will serve as subject matter experts on the operational employment of Stryker vehicles, bridging the gap between vehicle commanders, drivers, and unit leaders in preparation for LSCO.

Utilizing the weapons squad leader, rifle squad leader, and the Stryker master trainer in these capacities acts as a bridge between crew/squad-level execution and platoon/company-level training management. These leaders occupy unique positions, responsible for ensuring weapons proficiency, integrating capabilities like the MCWS or support-by-fire elements, and supporting collective training requirements. Therefore, these positions naturally align with the objective of developing leaders who can influence organizational performance beyond their individual weapon systems.

This philosophy reflects the learning environment. In WSMTC and RSMTC, students are organized to reflect a weapons or rifle squad. In SMTC, the curriculum demands 103 hours of collective and live-fire execution, mirroring the organizational relationships they will eventually encounter in an operational unit. This facilitates an environment where the students are not passive recipients of information but members of a training organization.

The primary means through which learning occurs in these courses is practical exercises. Students are frequently given realistic scenarios — such as conduct operator-level diagnostics on a Stryker fire control system, develop a heavy weapons UTP, or forecast ammunition for a rifle company — to expose gaps in their existing knowledge. Following an initial attempt, instructors provide instruction over the doctrinal foundations (like the IWTS), processes, and tools required to solve the problem. The students must then use the information covered to solve additional practical exercises to reinforce learning and build their confidence. This approach aligns with the concept that institutional competence is best developed through application rather than memorization.

The increased emphasis on practical exercises reflects a broader understanding of how organizations develop

proficiency. An organization becomes more proficient when its leaders can apply doctrine to a systematic approach to training rather than simply being able to recite doctrine. For this reason, these courses place a greater emphasis on a student's performance rather than their presentation. Not only are students expected to understand concepts such as IWTS and training management, but they must also be able to employ the concepts learned in a realistic context.

The role of the master trainer is only expected to increase as the Infantry continues to modernize. Evolving operational requirements and technological advancements will continue to place demands on small-unit leaders. The challenge ahead is no longer the mere development of technical experts, but rather, the development of leaders capable of integrating new systems into effective organizational training programs that can both sustain readiness while also generating combat power.

WSMTC, RSMTC, and SMTC represent USAIS's answers to that challenge. These courses seek to develop leaders capable of translating institutional competence into organizational lethality. By basing the instruction on the realities facing infantry squads and Stryker brigade combat teams, graduates will return to their units as master trainers capable of advising their commanders on the development, sustainment, and improvement of the proficiency of their formations.

Conclusion

The transformation from HWLC, MMTC, and SMG to WSMTC, RSMTC, and SMTC is more than a series of curriculum changes. Instead, it shows a fundamental shift in how the Infantry approaches the development of its leaders responsible for direct-fire training. While legacy courses focused on developing technical mastery, the IMTS recognizes that leaders also need to be capable of translating technical subject matter expertise into deliberate training

programs that build readiness across entire formations.

The enduring lesson of this process of transformation is that institutional competence is a combat multiplier. Organizational lethality is achieved when technical expertise is matched with a systematic approach to training management in a way that transforms individual proficiency into collective capability. Master trainers developed through WSMTC, RSMTC, and SMTC serve as the link between doctrine and execution. They help commanders build formations that are not only technically proficient but also capable of sustaining and regularly improving combat effectiveness. These leaders will play a critical role in ensuring that training remains the foundation of battlefield success as the Infantry prepares for the demands of future conflicts.

Notes

¹ MAJ Richard Chandler, "The Infantry Master Trainer Strategy: Transforming Marksmen into Master Trainers," *Infantry* (Fall 2025), <https://www.lineofdeparture.army.mil/Journals/Infantry/Infantry-Archive/Infantry-Fall-2025/The-Infantry-Master-Trainer-Strategy/>.

² "Heavy Weapons Leaders Course Scope (Course No. 2E-F206/010ASIB8)," Army Training Requirements and Resources System (ATTRS) website.

³ Noelle Wiehe, "Lethality Battalion Trains Masters of Heavy Weapons and Small Arms," Army News Service, 23 June 2015, https://www.army.mil/article/151041/lethality_battalion_trains_masters_of_heavy_weapons_small_arms.

⁴ "Heavy Weapons Leaders Course Scope," ATTRS.

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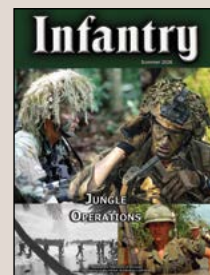
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Modernizing Infantry Leadership:

Rebuilding the 11B and 11C ALCs for Skill Level 3 Excellence

1SG DENNIS GEARY

The modern multidomain battlefield requires infantry squad leaders and mortar section leaders to possess unprecedented tactical acumen, exceptional quick-decision capabilities, and superior training management skills. To meet these demands, the U.S. Army Infantry School has executed a synchronized, comprehensive overhaul of both the Infantryman (11B) and Indirect Fire Infantryman (11C) Advanced Leader Courses (ALC).



and 2 tasks. The updated 11B and 11C courses eliminate these redundant assessments. The underlying training philosophy is straightforward: An NCO attending ALC has already proven proficiency in 10- and 20-level tasks through promotion, operational deployments, and home-station training.

As mandated by TRADOC Regulation 350-70, institutional military education must be progressive and sequential. Freeing up these instructional hours allows both courses to dedicate valuable time to provide “reps and sets” at planning, application of tactical knowledge, and training management.

Rebuilding Tactical Application and Planning

The tactical phases of both courses have been re-engineered to emphasize planning reps and sets rather than basic execution.

11B: Mastering the Troop Leading Procedures (TLPs) through Operation Order (OPORD) Briefs

For the Infantryman ALC, the traditional field training exercise (FTX) has been removed. In the past, it often devolved

These updates shift the educational paradigm of the NCO Professional Development System. By stripping away redundant basic warrior tasks and focusing entirely on institutional Skill Level 3 competencies, the revamped courses maximize classroom and field efficiency. The foundation of training management developed in the courses provides for the progression into the master trainer courses to build expertise. Graduates return to their home stations not just with greater tactical comprehension, but as competent trainers and planners prepared to build lethality from the ground up.

Streamlining the Timeline: Resident Immersion

The most immediate structural change to both the 11B and 11C ALC curricula is the complete elimination of Phase 1 (virtual distance learning). Historically, distributed leader training competed directly with a Soldier’s daily operational and garrison duties, leading to fragmented learning and decreased knowledge retention.

To resolve this, the Infantry School has consolidated all instruction into an intense, continuous resident format:

- **Duration:** 26 academic days
- **Calendar:** 6-day work week schedule
- **Impact:** This distraction-free environment ensures complete immersion. Furthermore, the compressed resident timeline minimizes the overall time NCOs spend away from their formations, returning critical small-unit leaders to their commanders faster and better prepared.

Stripping Away Redundancy: The Shift to Skill Level 3

Historically, ALC instructional hours were occupied by validating basic Skill Level 1



A squad leader in the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division operates a radio while his Soldiers wait for instructions during a squad live-fire exercise in Poland on 13 July 2022. (Photo by SGT Tara Fajardo Arteaga)

Course	Removed Skill Level 1 & 2 Tasks	Target Skill Level 3 Focus
11B (Infantryman)	Land navigation and forward observer	Squad/platoon-level tactical employment, troop leading procedures (TLPs), and training management
11C (Indirect Fire Infantryman)	Land navigation, forward observer, basic and advanced plotting board, Mortar Fire Control System (MFCS) basics, and Lightweight Handheld Mortar Ballistic Computer (LHMBC) basic operations	Section/platoon-level mortar tactics, Fire Direction Center (FDC) supervision, and training management

Figure 1 — Changes to 11B and 11C Advanced Leader Courses

into an execution-heavy event where physical squad drills overshadowed the cognitive planning process.

The updated course replaces the FTX with an intensive series of OPOD briefs. This change focuses directly on the Skill Level 3 Individual Critical Task: “Conduct the TLPs.”

- Students repeatedly analyze scenarios, develop tactical plans, and brief formal OPODs.

- This repetitive cycle builds the “reps and sets” necessary for NCOs to quickly translate a platoon-level order into clear, actionable, and tactically sound squad instructions under pressure.

11C: Tactical Realism and Fire Direction Center (FDC) Mastery

Conversely, the Indirect Fire Infantryman ALC has rebuilt and preserved its FTX to target FDC procedures and section coordination.

- **Tactical Mortar Lessons:** The classroom phase has been overhauled to mirror current doctrine, ensuring lessons align precisely with Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-21.90, *Tactical Employment of Mortars*.

- **Rebuilt FTX:** The field phase evaluates the specific Skill Level 3 critical tasks of supervising and performing duties as an FDC and executing tactical displacement.

- **Evaluation:** NCOs must manage an FDC under austere conditions, calculate complex data rapidly, and execute hasty occupations and survivability displacements to keep pace with dynamic maneuver elements.

Reforming Training Management and Marksmanship

A primary role of any Skill Level 3 NCO is to act as the unit’s primary trainer. Both courses now emphasize the systems, networks, and management tools required to plan and resource collective training.

11B: The Training Management Capstone

The Infantryman ALC features a new capstone event that requires students to apply the 8-Step Training Model to build a comprehensive squad training plan.

- Students navigate the Army Training Network (ATN) and the Central Army Registry (CAR) to locate applicable Training and Evaluation Outlines (T&EOs) and doctrine.

- NCOs must draft a realistic plan to prepare their squad for four distinct collective events.

- This capstone bridges the gap between a platoon leader’s training guidance and the literal task-level execution at the squad level.

11B and 11C: Transitioning Marksmanship from “Shooter” to “Trainer”

Marksmanship instruction has shifted from basic shooting mechanics to advanced marksmanship training management. Rather than grading students on their personal shooting performance, the curriculum focuses on training management:

- Planning, resourcing, and executing safe, effective ranges.

- Utilizing the 8-Step Training Model to plan objective focused training.

- This management-centric focus serves as a direct, logical progression into the Rifle Squad Master Trainer Course (for 11Bs) and the Mortar Master Trainer Course (for 11Cs).

Conclusion

The parallel restructuring of the 11B and 11C ALCs represents a massive leap forward for the Infantry Branch. By eliminating virtual distributed phases, standardizing a continuous 29-day resident footprint, and cutting out elementary tasks, the Infantry School has focused its energy on developing true Skill Level 3 mastery.

Whether leading a rifle squad through complex troop leading procedures or managing a mortar section’s ballistic computations and survivability displacements, the Infantryman ALC graduate is prepared. These NCOs return to the operational force as professional tactical planners and well-prepared trainers ready to win on the modern battlefield.

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Forging the Backbone of the Platoon: *Modernizing the Infantry Senior Leader Course*

1SG CHARLES CHAMPION
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The transition from a squad leader to a platoon sergeant represents the most critical doctrinal shift in an Infantryman's career. For the multi-domain battlefield, particularly large-scale combat operations (LSCO), platoon sergeants need to build lethal teams, ensure mission readiness, and serve as the foundational strength of today's infantry platoon. To meet the demands of the modern fight, the U.S. Army Infantry School has executed a comprehensive overhaul of the Infantry Senior Leader Course (I-SLC) for both 11B and 11C NCOs.

These updates reflect the maturation of the NCO Professional Development System. By stripping away redundant Skill Level 1, 2, and 3 tasks, which are now effectively mastered at the organizational level, Basic Leader Course (BLC), and Advanced Leader Courses (ALCs), I-SLC focuses entirely on institutional Skill Level 4 Infantryman and Mortarman competencies. The revamped curriculum shifts the students' focus from purely tactical execution to platoon-level sustainment, complex training management, and acting as the senior enlisted advisor to the platoon leader. Graduates return to their home stations not simply as senior tacticians, but as comprehensive organizational leaders prepared to build lethality, sustain the fight, and manage readiness at scale.

Streamlining the Timeline: Maximizing Resident Immersion

Similar to the structural changes made to ALC, the Infantry School recognized that the Maneuver Senior Leader Course (M-SLC) virtual learning phases for senior NCOs often suffered from competing home-station priorities and constant technological issues. Platoon sergeants are heavily burdened with operational duties, making virtual learning fragmented and largely ineffective for complex planning tasks such as Individual Weapon Training Strategy (IWTS), the largest and longest virtual learning class. To resolve this, all I-SLC instruction has been consolidated into an intensive, continuous resident format designed to test the mental agility and stamina required of a platoon sergeant:

- **Duration:** 26 academic days of resident training
- **Calendar:** 6-day work week schedule
- **Impact:** The compressed resident timeline minimizes the overall time these critical senior NCOs spend away from their formations, returning them to their commanders and Soldiers

faster while maximizing institutional learning. The quicker they return to their home station with these critical skills the better.



Elevating the Standard: Transitioning to Skill Level 4 Mastery

In the past, the M-SLC curriculum often dedicated valuable time to re-evaluating tasks that NCOs had already mastered at ALC such as squad-level troop leading procedures and basic weapons proficiency. The modernized I-SLC strips away these repetitive assessments entirely. The guiding training philosophy is straightforward: NCOs arriving at ISLC have already demonstrated exceptional competence in 30-level tasks during their operational time as successful squad or section leaders.

Aligning strictly with TRADOC Regulation 350-70, which mandates sequential and progressive learning, this updated curriculum guarantees that I-SLC is laser-focused on the specific and complex duties of a platoon sergeant.

By eliminating lower-level tasks, the course reclaims critical instructional hours, allowing instructors to facilitate high-repetition exercises in platoon-level tactics, logistical planning, and dynamic problem-solving. This fundamental shift forces NCOs out of the Virtual Battlespace Simulation 3 (VBS3) for tactical evaluation and into a terrain model operation order (OPORD) environment for their culminating assessment. Ultimately, these newly reclaimed and refocused hours are exactly what will bridge the gap between the ambiguity of a combat simulator and into a more tactical decision-making exercise, bringing more realism to planning and executing at the platoon level.

Reforming Course Management and Administration: The Shift from M-SLC to I-SLC

Under the legacy M-SLC, training management and administration were often delivered through a daily "teach, test" class model. While this constant cycle of daily evaluations ensured short-term information recall, it frequently failed to replicate the complex long-term planning required of a platoon sergeant. Leaders in the operational force do not manage unit readiness in 24-hour vacuums; they must synchronize multiple systems over a prolonged training cycle.

The modernized I-SLC completely abandons this daily testing grind in favor of holistic learning. The new curriculum

Course	Maneuver Senior Leader Course	Infantry Senior Leaders Course
Skill Level 1-3 Tasks Removed	Land navigation assessment, Virtual Battlespace 3 simulator, and vehicle identification	
Skill Level 4 Tasked Added		Plan qualification of Mortar Platoon, prepare an operation order (OPORD), issue an OPORD at the platoon level and coordinate for close air support

Figure 1 — Changes from the Maneuver Senior Leader Course to Infantry Senior Leader Course

has been meticulously restructured into a cohesive five-module organization that logically groups related administrative, logistical, tactical, and training concepts. This extended instructional runway allows NCOs to deeply immerse themselves in advanced enterprise tools like Army Training Information System (ATIS) without the constant distraction of immediate, next-day exams.

To measure true operational and tactical comprehension, instruction from these five modules culminates in four comprehensive tests. By consolidating the assessments, the I-SLC model forces NCOs to synthesize information across different blocks of instruction rather than simply regurgitating yesterday's slide deck. This marks a deliberate evolution from testing rote memorization to validating a senior leader's ability to solve multi-faceted readiness problems. Platoon sergeants must now prove they can weave maintenance protocols, property accountability, and training doctrine into a single, actionable plan.

The transition from the legacy M-SLC to the modernized I-SLC is far more than a simple curriculum update; it is a fundamental paradigm shift in how the Infantry develops its senior enlisted leaders. By abandoning fragmented virtual learning for a rigorous 26-day resident immersion and aggressively stripping away from redundant lower-level tasks, the Infantry School has deliberately engineered a course that treats NCOs like the platoon sergeants they are meant to be. This restructuring eliminates the distractions of rote memorization and basic soldiering validation, reclaiming critical hours to immerse students in the true complexities of Skill Level 4 mastery.

Ultimately, this holistic approach ensures that graduates return to their formations not just as experienced tacticians but as comprehensive organizational leaders. Armed with a deep understanding of enterprise-level training management and the tactical acumen to plan and execute platoon-level operations in a LSCO environment, these NCOs are fully equipped to advise their platoon leaders and sustain the fight. The modernized I-SLC guarantees that commanders across

the operational force are receiving platoon sergeants who are ready to build lethality, manage readiness at scale, and serve as the unbreakable backbone of the modern infantry platoon.

Proposed Modules

Alpha – In-processing and course administrative
 Bravo – NCO Common Core Competencies (C3s)
 Charlie – Tactics
 Delta – Operations
 Echo – Culminating Course Assessment

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A platoon sergeant with the 173rd Airborne Brigade guides his Paratroopers as they capture an airfield. (Photo by LTC John Hall)

Enhancing Airborne Unit Capability through Standardized DZST Training

SSG JOHN-ANTHONY TORBORG
1SG GUSTAVO QUINTERO
CPT ANDREW KEHRBERG

Airborne units represent a cornerstone of modern military strategy, valued for their ability to project combat power rapidly and decisively across great distances. The success of these complex operations hinges on the precise and safe delivery of personnel and equipment into austere environments. Central to this capability are the drop zone support teams (DZSTs), specialized groups responsible for establishing and operating the drop zones that make these missions possible. An existing Army training framework, the DZST Training Support Package (TSP), offers a mechanism for units to develop this crucial skill internally. However, the TSP's full potential remains unrealized due to a lack of awareness, leading to significant operational challenges.

The Indispensable Role of the DZST

For appropriate airborne training to succeed, the process on the ground must be as meticulously planned and executed as the flight itself. DZSTs provide this ground-level expertise to ensure a successful airborne operation. Their primary function is to establish and operate two main types of drop zones: the Visually Initiated Release System (VIRS) and the Ground Marked Release System (GMRS). This involves detailed technical work including calculating wind drift, establishing accurate release points, and communicating directly with aircraft to ensure paratroopers and supplies land safely and accurately within the designated area. The proficiency of the DZST is directly linked to the safety of the jumpers and the overall effectiveness of the mission.

A Dual Structure for Qualification: Pathfinders and the DZST TSP

Historically, the responsibility for these critical tasks has fallen almost exclusively to Soldiers holding the prestigious Pathfinder qualification. Pathfinders are the Army's foremost subject matter experts in advanced aerial delivery, having completed a rigorous course that covers a wide range of specialized insertion techniques. Their

expertise is invaluable, particularly in complex, non-standard scenarios. However, the operational tempo of the modern Army creates a consistent demand for basic DZST support that often exceeds the number of available Pathfinder-qualified personnel. This creates an "expertise bottleneck," where a limited number of experts must cover a wide array of missions.

To address this challenge, the Army developed the DZST TSP. This official program provides a standardized curriculum designed to be executed at a unit's home station. The TSP empowers units to qualify their own Jumpmasters to perform the essential duties of a DZST. This approach creates a sustainable, in-house solution for meeting routine DZST requirements, thereby freeing up Pathfinders to focus on the advanced missions for which they are uniquely trained. It is important to note that the TSP is designed to supplement, not replace, Pathfinder qualification, which remains the Army's premier credential for advanced drop zone operations.

The Challenge of Underutilization

Despite the availability of this well-designed program, a significant challenge persists: a widespread lack of aware-



Best Jumpmaster Competition teams complete the Drop Zone Support Team Leader Operations event on 9 April 2026 at Fryar Drop Zone on Fort Benning, GA. (Photos by Daniel Marble)

ness. Many leaders across airborne formations, from commanders and operations staff to the air officers and NCOs who manage airborne training schedules, are not familiar with the DZST TSP.

This knowledge gap fosters a misconception that the formal Pathfinder School is the only pathway to generate DZST capability. Consequently, units expend time and resources competing for a limited number of school allocations while a readily available home-station training solution is entirely overlooked. The TSP is consequently underutilized, and units continue to face a shortage of qualified personnel to conduct DZST duties.

The Operational Impact on Readiness and Standardization

This underutilization has direct and tangible consequences for airborne formations.

- **Degraded Unit Readiness:** By relying solely on a small population of Pathfinders, units create critical single points of failure. The departure of a single Pathfinder-qualified Soldier — due to a permanent change of station (PCS), separation from the service, or other reasons — can create challenges and restrict training flexibility within the organization. This personnel churn reduces the flexibility of commanders and diminishes the unit's overall operational effectiveness.

- **Inconsistent Procedural Execution:** Without a common training framework that is consistently reinforced, units may develop their own local techniques and procedures. While often well-intentioned, these can diverge from the standardized methods prescribed in Army doctrine. Observations from the 2026 Best Jumpmaster Competition highlighted an opportunity for greater standardization, as variations in localized terminology and procedures were observed among competitors. This points to a need for more consistent, force-wide reinforcement of standardized practices, which the DZST TSP is designed to provide.

The Path Forward: Recommendations for Improvement

To bridge these gaps, a concerted effort to increase awareness of the DZST TSP is recommended. The U.S. Army Infantry School (USAIS), as the official proponent for the program, is positioned to lead this initiative. The proposed strategy includes:

1. **A Deliberate Communication Campaign:** Proactively distributing guidance and information about the DZST TSP directly to the airborne community, targeting division and brigade air sections, which are responsible for coordinating airborne training for their subordinate units.

2. **Integration into Existing Training:** Incorporating familiarization with the DZST TSP within the curriculum of the Jumpmaster Course and subsequent sustainment training, ensuring that key personnel are aware of this resource.



Teams competing in the 2026 Best Jumpmaster Competition direct an aircraft during the Drop Zone Support Team Leader Operations event.

3. **Reestablishing a Professional Forum:** Reviving the Static Line Symposium, a recurring forum for the airborne community, would provide a centralized venue. At this event, the proponent could communicate updates to doctrine and training packages directly to the force while leaders from airborne units could provide valuable feedback on implementation.

By increasing awareness and utilization of the DZST TSP, the Army can empower airborne units to build internal capability, improve training readiness, and reinforce the standardized execution of drop zone operations across the force. These efforts would expand operational flexibility while preserving the vital role of the Pathfinder as the Army's premier expert in advanced aerial delivery.

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From the COF to the Field:

An NCO's Guide to Training Short-Range Reconnaissance and Lethal Drone Warfare

MSG MORGAN WALLACE

The modern battlefield has become dangerously transparent. The proliferation of inexpensive, highly capable drones means that the sky is no longer a sanctuary reserved for aviation assets; it is now the domain of the infantry squad. For NCOs, this is not a future concept — it is a present reality that demands immediate attention. This article provides a practical, NCO-focused framework for developing and executing a comprehensive training plan for two key drone capabilities: short-range reconnaissance (SRR) unmanned aerial systems (UAS) and Purpose-Built Attributable Systems (PBAS), more commonly known as lethal first-person view (FPV) drones. The aim is to move beyond basic qualification and equip our squads and platoons with the tactical and technical mastery needed to dominate in the complexities of modern drone warfare. To achieve this, we will follow a crawl-walk-run methodology, beginning with foundational skills in the company operating facility (COF),

progressing to complex crew drills, and culminating in live-flight integration during collective field training.

Doctrinal Foundations and Systems Overview

Before a single drone is flown, NCOs must ground their training program in a solid understanding of the systems and the doctrinal context in which they operate. An SRR system like the Skydio RQ-28A is a platoon-level reconnaissance asset designed to provide immediate, real-time intelligence. Its primary advantage is enhancing situational awareness and survivability, allowing a platoon leader to see over the next hill, into a danger area, or around a corner without risking a Soldier. However, leaders must also train its limitations: finite battery life, vulnerability to electronic warfare, and a limited operational range that requires the operator to remain relatively close to the forward line of troops.

In contrast, PBAS represent a fundamental shift in offensive capability at the small-unit level. These are not intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets with a secondary strike capability; they are low-cost, expendable, and purpose-built munitions. The tactical implication is profound: Squads and platoons now possess their

Snipers assigned to the 81st Stryker Brigade Combat Team's Long Range Surveillance Section launch a drone during an exercise at Yakima Training Center, WA, on 20 July 2025. (Photo by SSG Adeline Witherspoon)



own organic, precision-strike capability. This allows small units to engage fortified positions, light armored vehicles, and command-and-control nodes without relying on higher-echelon fire support, which may be unavailable or slow to respond.

This training must be anchored in our guiding principles. While specific UAS platform doctrine is still emerging, the core tenets of reconnaissance, security, and mission command found in publications like Army Doctrine Publication 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*, are directly applicable. Furthermore, NCOs must be intimately familiar with Army Techniques Publication 3-01.81, *Counter-Unmanned Aircraft Systems*, not only to protect our forces but so we understand the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) the enemy will use against our own systems. The NCO's role, as it has always been, is to bridge the gap between doctrine and execution, leading small unit training and building the institutional knowledge required to turn new equipment into a genuine combat advantage.

The Crawl Phase — Foundational Skills in the COF

Mastery begins in the classroom and with simulators. The goal of the crawl phase is to build a strong base of knowledge and essential operator skills without the cost and risk of live flight. This phase should be rigorous and standardized for all potential operators.

Event 1: UAS Familiarization and Maintenance: This is the foundation. Soldiers must learn the system inside and out through hands-on classroom instruction. Using technical manuals and training aids, NCOs should ensure operators can properly assemble, disassemble, conduct function checks, and perform operator-level preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS) on the drones and their ground control stations. Understanding the “why” behind each component builds a better, more intuitive operator.

Event 2: Simulator Proficiency: Before ever touching a live drone, operators should log significant time in a simulator. Programs that replicate the physics and interface of FPV flight are invaluable for building the fine motor skills required to fly effectively, especially in degraded conditions. The goal should be a baseline of 20-25 hours of “stick time” per Soldier. This virtual environment allows operators to crash without consequence, learning from errors that would be costly in the real world.



Trainees with 2nd Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment conduct small unmanned aerial system simulator training on 30 January 2026 at Fort Benning, GA. (Photo by Joey Rhodes II)

Event 3: Tactical Decision Games: With a grasp of the system and basic flight, NCOs must shift focus to tactical employment. Using sand tables, whiteboards, or even crude sketches, leaders present tactical problems to their Soldiers. Example: “The platoon is held up by a suspected machine-gun nest in this building. You are the UAS operator. Talk me through how you would employ your SRR drone.” These exercises force Soldiers to think through flight paths, battery life, enemy threats, and how they will communicate what they see to their leader, transforming them from simple pilots into tactical thinkers.

The Walk Phase — Mastering Crew Drills

Goal: To move beyond theoretical knowledge and build instinctive crew coordination and procedural muscle memory in a controlled, non-live flight environment. These drills are the UAS equivalent of a machine-gun crew practicing immediate action or a mortar squad conducting dry-fire lay drills. They do not require a single minute of flight time but are arguably the most critical step in creating an effective and survivable UAS team. They should be rehearsed relentlessly until each member can perform their role flawlessly under induced stress.

Location: These drills are ideal for the area immediately outside the COF, such as a motor pool, a quiet parking lot, or an unused training area. They require enough space for a fire team to move tactically but no active flight, making them easy to resource and execute daily.

Drill 1: “Displace!” — Rapid System Stow and Movement

Purpose: An operator who is “head down” and focused

on a controller is a vulnerable target. This drill trains the entire UAS team to react instantly to a direct or indirect threat, packing the sensitive and expensive system correctly while maintaining local security, and moving to a new position to continue the mission. It ingrains the principle that the UAS launch and recovery site is a temporary position, not a permanent headquarters.

Execution:

1. **Setup:** The UAS team (operator and security) sets up the system as they would for a real mission. The drone is assembled, the ground station is on, and the operator is simulating flight.

2. **Initiation:** The NCO, acting as the small unit leader, unexpectedly yells a command such as “Contact Front!” or “Incoming, Incoming, Incoming!”

3. **Operator Action:** The operator’s first action is to safe the system controls. They then immediately begin stowing the equipment in the correct packing sequence. Speed is important, but correctness is paramount to prevent damaging antennas, gimbals, or cables.

4. **Security Action:** The security member does not help pack. Their role is to immediately face the designated threat direction, get on a knee, and provide notional security, verbally announcing their sector (e.g., “Covering north!”).

5. **Movement:** Once the system is packed, the operator announces “Up!” and the team moves 300-500 meters to a pre-designated alternate rally point using proper tactical movement techniques.

NCO Focus: Use a stopwatch. Time the drill from the command to when the team is set at the alternate position. Enforce a standard — for example, “from command to packed in under 60 seconds.” After the drill, inspect the packed equipment. Was it stowed correctly, or was it jammed

into the pack in a way that could cause damage? Coach the security element on maintaining situational awareness instead of watching the operator pack. Increase difficulty by having the team wear full kit or by initiating the drill in the middle of another task.

Why It Matters: In a real engagement, the electromagnetic signature from a UAS controller can be targeted. The sound of the drone itself can give away a team’s position. The ability to cease operations, pack up, and move in seconds is a critical survivability skill.

Drill 2: “Blind Talk-On” — Target Handoff and Communication

Purpose: This drill perfects the crucial, high-stress communication required to guide an operator onto a target when the operator cannot see the target with their own eyes. This simulates the most likely tactical scenario: The operator is concealed in a basement or covered position while a leader or spotter with eyes on the objective is directing the drone’s sensors.

Execution:

1. **Setup:** The operator is positioned where they cannot see the target area (e.g., behind a vehicle, facing a wall). The NCO and the “spotter” (a second Soldier) are 25 meters away, with a clear view of the “target” (e.g., a specific vehicle in the motor pool, a window on a building). Both the operator and spotter are equipped with a radio. The operator uses the controller to look through the drone’s camera (using pre-recorded footage is an option if a live feed is not possible).

2. **Initiation:** The spotter begins guiding the operator with clear, concise verbal commands. The goal is to “talk” the camera onto the target.

3. **Commands:** Vague commands like “over there” are forbidden. Use cardinal directions (“Pan west”), clock directions (“Target is at your 3 o’clock”), and distinct reference points (“See the red connex? Move your camera right...”). The exchange should sound like: “Pan left... a little more... stop. Now tilt your camera down. You see the white pickup truck? Your target is the driver’s side door.”

4. **Confirmation:** The operator confirms they have the correct target in their sights by reading back a unique feature: “Confirm, I see the white pickup, driver’s side door with the unit crest on it.”

NCO Focus: Enforce strict communication discipline. Brevity and clarity are key. Make the spotter and operator practice until their dialogue is fluid and efficient. Introduce battlefield noise or time constraints to add stress. The NCO should act as the final check, confirming the operator’s screen to ensure the talk-on was successful.

Why It Matters: A lethal drone is useless if



A Soldier conducts small unmanned aerial system initial qualification training at Fort Benning on 16 September 2025. (Photo by Joey Rhodes II)

it cannot be put on the right target. This drill builds the trust and procedural efficiency that allows a disaggregated team to execute a precision strike in seconds.

Drill 3: “Jamming!” — React to Electronic Attack

Purpose: To build an automatic, immediate-action response to a lost link or jammed signal. In a contested environment, enemy electronic warfare (EW) is not a possibility; it is a certainty. This drill trains the operator to vocalize what is happening, giving the unit leader instant awareness of the threat and the status of their ISR asset.

Execution:

1. **Setup:** The operator is simulating flight. All ground control station hardware is setup. The team has pre-briefed their lost-link procedures as part of their mission plan.

2. **Initiation:** At any point, the NCO yells, “Jamming, Jamming, Jamming!”

3. **Operator Action:** Without hesitation, the operator must look up from the controller and loudly announce the situation and the drone’s automated response. The report must be clear and concise: “Lost link! Drone’s last known position grid 18S YD 1234 5678, altitude 200 feet, heading north.”

Executing Lost Link Procedure: Return to Home at Rally Point Alpha.”

4. **Team Action:** Upon hearing the “jamming” call, the rest of the team must immediately execute the following actions, as an EW attack on the drone’s frequency often precedes

indirect fire (IDF) or a kinetic assault on the operator’s emissions footprint:

- Designated personnel (e.g., assistant operator) immediately collapse and stow ancillary equipment, including external antennas, masts, and secondary monitors.
- Team leader immediately determines the route to the pre-planned rally point or utilizes a Black and Gold plan and communicates required actions to the team.
- Team leader or designated radio-telephone operator (RTO) prepares and reports an EW/contact report to higher headquarters.
- Upon the leader’s command, the entire element breaks from the position and tactically displaces.

NCO Focus: This is a reaction drill. Grade the operator on speed and clarity. Did they hesitate? Was the report loud and clear? Did it contain all the essential elements (last location, heading, and lost-link plan)? Coach the operator to make this report automatic, like a paratrooper yelling their jump commands. This vocalization is not for the operator’s benefit; it is for the leader who just lost their eyes on the objective.

Why It Matters: When a drone link is severed, the leader is instantly blind and the unit’s position has likely been triangulated by enemy signals intelligence (SIGINT). The operator’s immediate, clear report fills that information gap, but it is the rapid, synchronized physical reaction of the team that ensures survival. The operator’s words directly enable

Soldiers assigned to 3rd Mobile Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) operate an unmanned aerial system during a Joint Readiness Training Center rotation at Fort Polk, LA, on 20 April 2026. (Photo by SPC Sandy Vera Vazquez)



the leader to make a decision: Do we push forward without ISR? Do we fall back? Is the EW attack a precursor to an assault on our position? The operator's words directly enable the leader's next move.

Drill 4: "Map to Screen" — Terrain and Digital Association

Purpose: To accelerate the operator's ability to quickly and accurately correlate the 2D information on a map or digital display with the 3D, real-time video feed on their controller. An operator who cannot quickly find targets or report locations based on a map is providing pictures, not intelligence.

Execution:

1. **Setup:** The operator has their controller, and the NCO has a physical map or tablet with a map display of the immediate training area. Using pre-recorded footage of the area is a highly effective method.

2. **Drill 1 (Map to Screen):** The NCO points to a specific intersection, building, or terrain feature on the map and says, "Find this on your screen." The operator must then manipulate their simulated drone camera to find the feature and place the center of their screen on it.

3. **Drill 2 (Screen to Map):** The NCO reverses the process. The operator places their camera on a random object, and the NCO says, "Give me the eight-digit grid for what you're looking at." The operator must then find that object on their map and provide an accurate grid.

NCO Focus: Time the operator. This is a cognitive task where speed and accuracy can be measured and improved. Start with large, obvious features and progressively shrink the targets to individual vehicles, doorways, or windows. Use this drill to teach rapid grid estimation and terrain association. This is a critical skill for calling for fire or guiding adjacent units.

Why It Matters: Actionable intelligence requires a location. The ability to instantly translate what the drone sees into a grid coordinate on a map is the skill that turns a UAS from a simple observation tool into a lethal sensor that can be integrated into the unit's fire and maneuver plan.

The Run Phase — Live Flight in the Field

The run phase integrates these hard-earned skills into collective training in a live field environment. Here, the UAS is no longer a training event in itself; it is a critical asset to be employed during platoon and company situational training exercise (STX) lanes.

Event 1: Platoon STX Integration: During a movement to contact, the SRR drone should be the platoon's primary reconnaissance tool, scouting ahead of the lead element to identify potential ambush sites or confirm the disposition of the enemy. In an attack, the PBAS team can be tasked with striking a specific high-payoff target, like a command-and-control vehicle or a crew-served weapon, immediately prior to the assault. The key is full integration into the platoon's scheme of maneuver.

Mastering small UAS is no longer an optional skill; it is a vital competency for the modern Infantry Soldier... The NCOs who take the initiative to implement this training will provide their platoons with a decisive advantage.

Event 2: Combined Arms Rehearsal: The drone is a sensor that can shape the entire battlefield. During fire support planning, the UAS operator should be present at rehearsals, just like a forward observer. Practice using the drone's video feed to talk observers onto a target, adjust indirect fires, or provide real-time battle damage assessments. This ensures the platoon can leverage its ISR capability to enhance the effects of mortars, artillery, and close air support.

Event 3: Force-on-Force Drone Engagements: The ultimate test is to operate against a thinking enemy who is also using drones. During force-on-force training, both sides should be equipped with UAS. This forces leaders to make difficult decisions: When do we risk flying our drone if we know the enemy is looking for it? How do we use our PBAS to hunt and destroy the enemy's UAS operator? This environment is the final crucible for validating the unit's TTPs and building true confidence in their abilities.

Conclusion

Mastering small UAS is no longer an optional skill; it is a vital competency for the modern Infantry Soldier. The NCO is the central figure in ensuring this competency is built and sustained. By adopting a structured crawl-walk-run approach, leaders can move beyond simple operator qualification and forge crews that are technically and tactically expert. This begins with doctrinal understanding in the COF, is honed through repetitive crew drills, and is finally validated in the complexity of collective field training. The NCOs who take the initiative to implement this training will provide their platoons with a decisive advantage. They will ensure that our Soldiers own the skies and, by doing so, dominate the fight on the ground.

Lead from the front, adapt at the edge, and let the drones make first contact.

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Maxing C2 Systems' Warfighting Capabilities: The Tactical Leader's Focus

LTC REED MARKHAM

Though the next major battle of the U.S. Army is unknown, one constant remains: Lethality is vital to defeating our adversaries. That lethality comes through empowered tactical leaders taking initiative to close with and destroy the enemy by massing the effects of combined arms. This spirit underpins our warfighting philosophy — mission command.

This type of fighting is in the Army's DNA. Throughout its history, the U.S. Army has excelled at leveraging technology and equipment — made available by our productive society — to offset numerical disadvantage or breach formidable defenses. C2 systems are one such critical technology enabling how we fight.

The Army has aggressively pursued C2 modernization through institutional efforts and Transformation in Contact (TiC) initiatives led by the 18th Airborne Corps and other formations. These efforts continue as 4th Infantry Division integrates the Next Generation Command and Control (NGC2). Equally important, leaders across the profession have accelerated learning by sharing lessons in journals and after action reviews (AARs) while industry and defense media contribute insight into emerging technologies.¹

This article complements those efforts by equipping tactical level leaders with a framework for integrating current and future C2 systems. Specifically, it

addresses the question: *What are tactical leaders' responsibilities when integrating new C2 systems?* Historical vignettes ground the argument. Though some technical language is unavoidable, fighting our enemies until they are destroyed — or quit — remains at the heart of this piece. To maximize current and future C2 capabilities, warfighters **must understand how these systems increase the lethality of mission command, accept the technical knowledge required to employ them, and integrate them habitually until their use becomes routine.**

Before proceeding, context for the Army's C2 modernization effort warrants brief discussion.

Integrated Tactical Network (ITN) — Game Changer

I will admit initial skepticism when I realized the radio I carried as a major was the same one I carried as a second lieutenant platoon leader. That cynicism ended when I assumed command of an infantry battalion in the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), an ITN-equipped unit.

A Soldier assigned to the Multi-Functional Reconnaissance Company, 3rd Mobile Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), develops a route plan using the Android Tactical Assault Kit during a Joint Readiness Training Center rotation at Fort Polk, LA, on 8 April 2026. (Photo by SPC Sandy Vera Vazquez)



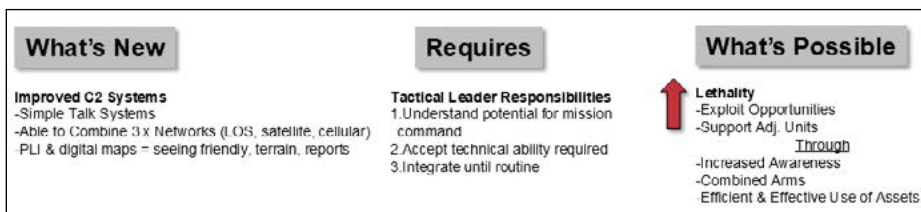


Figure 1 — Argument's Logic Map

The capability was impressive: warfighting smartphones with digital maps, mesh-enabled radios, portable servers, and significantly improved satellite communications (SATCOM). Together, these eliminated most excuses for failing to communicate up and down the chain. No piece of kit is perfect, and the Army's new C2 suite is no exception. Still, its potential to increase lethality was immediately apparent.

That capability, however, comes with a cost — time. These systems demand intentional training and leader investment. While the technology has advanced rapidly towards operational needs, understanding how to best employ it has lagged. The primary challenge is no longer equipment — it is education.

Keeping in mind GEN George Patton's guidance, "never tell people how to do things, tell them what to do and let them surprise you with their results," this article offers a framework rather than prescriptive tactics. The technical detail included is intended to enable practical application, not constrain initiative.²

Mission Command — Connecting Technology to Combined Arms Lethality

C2 systems **enhance awareness, communication, and decision-making speed**, allowing units to move to the sound of the guns to support friendly forces and destroy the enemy. Our decisive advantage remains the initiative and will of our people — free citizens serving as Soldiers. Tactical leaders instinctively want to get into the fight; doctrine and culture demand it.³

So what prevents units with the will and capability to mutually support one another from doing so? It is not a lack of orders. More often, it is **insufficient awareness** and **limited ability to communicate** effectively with adjacent and supporting elements.

This is not a new problem. Prior to the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, Horatio Nelson captured the principle of mutual support when he told his captains, "No captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of an enemy."⁴ Andrew Gordon's *The Rules of the Game* describes how improvements in signaling technology paradoxically stifled subordinate initiative in the Royal Navy during World War I. As communication improved, centralized control increased — often at the expense of understanding and freedom of action. Technology enabled leaders to talk more but not necessarily understand more.⁵

The lesson holds today. Modern C2 systems must be used not to generate more communication, but to build shared

understanding that empowers initiative rather than micromanagement.

Units that populate position location information (PLI) and view the locations of adjacent and supporting elements gain awareness that enables mutual support. A key advantage of ITN is the ability for leaders to display their locations and

call signs on a shared digital map. Combined with intuitive communications and mesh networking, this allows units to see one another and coordinate action. The Tactical Assault Kit (TAK) further enhances this capability by enabling rapid planning and dissemination of simple, executable orders.

This shared awareness — enabled by ITN's tactical scalable mobile ad hoc networking (TS MANET [TSM]) — allows units to "see" one another and communicate, breaking through awareness barriers that otherwise limit initiative.⁶

C2 and Combined Arms — Speeding Lethality

The Army's C2 systems enable more lethal combined arms employment. Reconnaissance, fires, maneuver, and sustainment — when synchronized — produce effects far greater than their individual contributions (i.e., $1 + 1 + 1 = 5$).⁷

The Army's combined arms heritage runs deep. Michael Doubler's *Closing with the Enemy* documents how infantry, artillery, engineers, and armor were integrated during World War II to defeat German forces. These combinations allowed U.S. units to break through the Bocage, fight through the Ardennes, and defend while surrounded at Bastogne.⁸ Critical to this integration was the widespread fielding and innovative use of radios, whether mounted in tanks or carried by forward observers.

Today, the Army again holds a C2 technological advantage. Drone feeds, scout reports, contact reports, route analysis, firing unit locations, and sustainment movements — when networked and understood — enable decentralized coordination. Numerous lower level decisions, aligned by shared purpose and commander's intent, are more effective than slow, centralized direction. Cutting the kill chain from observer to shooter through modern C2 systems, combined with mission command, is a lethal advantage.⁹ Observations from portions of the war in Ukraine — where centralized fires and slow coordination have proven costly — underscore the value of decentralized, network-enabled action.¹⁰

Acceptance of the Tech Knowledge Required for Tactical Gains

It has never been acceptable to abdicate responsibility for understanding warfighting technology. That does not mean every team leader or already busy company commander must know how to configure a network or build a TSM plan. However, a baseline understanding of how C2 systems function — and how they enable mission command — is essential.

A simplified mental model helps. Despite variations in

equipment, most tactical networks derive from three sources: **line-of-sight (LOS) radio-derived networks**, **satellite-derived services**, and **cellular-derived services**.

LOS Radio-Derived Networks

The backbone of a tactical unit's C2 system remains LOS radios. These radios transmit signals limited by the physics of line of sight and varying degrees of power projection, and most are now mesh capable. Mesh networking allows users to reach beyond individual radio range by "repeating" transmissions through other radios in the network.

Critical to these radio-enabled networks is proper configuration to maximize mesh expansion while balancing the risk of overloading channels and causing interference. Leaders working with their technical experts — and deliberately experimenting during field problems — are essential to configuring radio-derived networks that allow the right units to see and rapidly communicate with one another.

Satellite-Derived Services Networks

The next network is built through SATCOM, employed in two primary ways. First, units use military or commercial terminals to "pull services" from satellites. These services, often integrated through the Tactical Radio Integration Kit (TRIK) in ITN-equipped units, provide common operating picture (COP), chat, orders, and data-sharing applications.

Second, radios themselves can connect to satellites to pass voice and data. Systems such as the Mobile User Objective System (MUOS) represent a significant advancement in tactical satellite communications, particularly when communicators are proficient at transitioning between omnidirectional and directional antennas based on terrain and operational conditions.

Cellular-Derived Services Networks

A third method of establishing a network is through cellular infrastructure, typically using a Mobile Broadband Kit (MBK) or similar device to connect to local cell towers. Like satellite-derived services, cellular services can be integrated through TRIK to provide network access for tactical applications.

When satellite- and cellular-derived services are integrated through the same network device, they provide redundancy and resilience. If one source of service is lost while another remains available, the network can transition rapidly — preserving connectivity and increasing survivability.

The mental model argued here visualizes ITN enabling the creation of three networks: a) LOS radio-derived b) Satellite-derived services c) Cellular-derived services.

Combining Networks to Maximize C2

The true power of modern C2 systems lies in integrating these networks. Bridging LOS radio networks into satellite or cellular-derived networks through TRIK enables Radio over Internet Protocol (RoIP).¹¹ This allows voice and data from the tactical edge to be shared across the force and recorded for replay and analysis, creating a usable radio log across multiple applications and devices.

The process also works in reverse. Leaders can transmit communications digitally that, through TRIK's connection to a physical radio, are broadcast over LOS frequencies receivable by tactical radios. Though technically demanding, this integration is achievable by disciplined units and fundamentally changes how tactical formations share awareness and coordinate action.

Vignette — Connecting Tactical Mesh "Bubbles" to Exploit Opportunities

During a division field exercise, our infantry battalion was divided and separated by roughly five kilometers — outside LOS range. Both the main and tactical command posts were configured to bridge LOS communications into the broader network. This configuration allowed **visibility of the entire battalion** despite out-of-LOS distance separation, **revealed a surprising tactical success**, and **enabled rapid exploitation of an emerging enemy vulnerability**.

While similar information could have been transmitted through detailed voice reports via SATCOM, developing and conveying that level of shared understanding through

Figure 2 — (Left to right) A fire supporter uses a Tactical Assault Kit (TAK) to overlay effects rings over targets while seeing units' locations. Commanders discuss a mission order over TAK for rapid understanding and action. Position location information allows battlefield geometry understanding and mutual support.



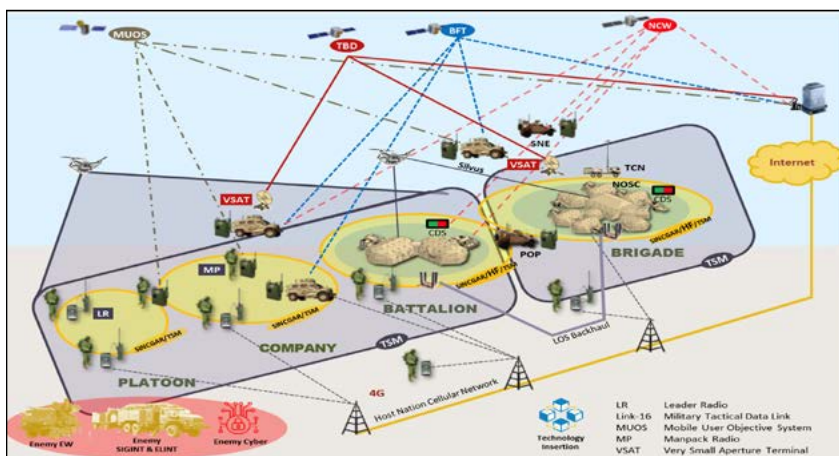


Figure 3 — Network Overview from ITN Information Brief

The mental model argued here visualizes ITN enabling the creation of three networks: LOS radio-derived networks, satellite-derived services, and cellular-derived services.

voice alone is difficult — particularly in the heat of the fight, when leaders are actively engaged in combat.

Echeloned Roles & Responsibilities

Once tactical leaders understand the capabilities of modern C2 systems, clear roles and responsibilities by echelon naturally follow. At the brigade level, headquarters bear responsibility for building TSM channel configurations and network parameters derived from division guidance to ensure cross-brigade connectivity. Battalions, in turn, ensure their tactical units' voice and data requirements are met within that C2 plan.

Based on their placement in the fight, battalion main and tactical command posts should have **both the ability and responsibility** to connect LOS radio transmissions into the larger network through TRIK — or comparable devices — using RoIP. Companies and below naturally expand the mesh network through their tactical array and **must populate sufficient PLI** to share locations with adjacent and higher units, while otherwise remaining customers of the network.¹²

The skeptic may raise concerns about the risk of micromanagement. This concern is often rooted in counterinsurgency experiences, where multiple headquarters viewed the same feed from a single company-level operation. My counter is that the Army is preparing for large-scale combat against a near-peer enemy. In such a fight, headquarters at every echelon will be too consumed to micromanage. Effective C2 connectivity instead enables adjacent, higher, and subordinate elements to **improve awareness, seize opportunities, and mitigate risk** — causing concerns over micromanagement to wither in this context.

Internalize C2 Competence — Make Habitual Through Routine Use

More equipment can sometimes equal more problems but not with the Army's current C2 systems. New equipment does, however, **demand new learning**. While program fielding and new equipment training are essential, they are

insufficient on their own. A training gap remains that tactical-level leaders must deliberately fill. The central question is: *How can leaders move from fielding new C2 equipment to fighting effectively with it?*

Leader-focused training remains a timeless and effective method for integrating new capability — whether guns, drones, vehicles, or warfighting smartphones. Such training ensures leaders understand **why C2 systems matter to mission-command lethality, how they function at a logical level, and what responsibilities exist by echelon**. Reinforcing principles such as mandatory PLI population, disciplined use of data and communications, and sound battery management requires time and intentionality. Approached this way, C2 training allows leaders to lead from

the front — no different than expert badge preparation, leader live fires, or the turkey bowl.

LTG Hal Moore and Joseph Galloway's *We Were Soldiers Once.... And Young* illustrates the importance of this deliberate leader-focused preparation. Before deploying to Vietnam, then-LTC Moore instituted an intensive "get-rich-quick" program to prepare his battalion to fight as an airmobile formation and integrate helicopters, new weapons, and radios. During exercises, he routinely declared leaders casualties, forcing subordinates to assume greater responsibility and understand how their roles contributed to the larger fight.¹³

At the individual level, 1LT Rick Rescorla, a platoon leader in Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry, demonstrated the value of **sustained self-development**. Before joining the U.S. Army, Rescorla served in the British Army and the Northern Rhodesia Police, experiences that developed his **physical fitness, fieldcraft, ability to read terrain, and proficiency with weapons**.¹⁴ During the defense of Landing Zone (LZ) X-Ray, he applied that preparation by improving defensive positions through his presence and tactical acumen, bravery during contact, and personally engaging the enemy — when necessary to inspire his Soldiers to action. After the ambush near LZ Albany, Bravo Company returned to reinforce the battered battalion. There, Rescorla helped reorganize and strengthen the perimeter, encouraged exhausted Soldiers, and personally wielded an M79 grenade launcher.¹⁵

Moore and Rescorla demonstrate that the expert combat leadership demanded of us rests on preparation at two levels: **intentional unit-level programs and individual-level dedication**.

Just as important as was mastering the latest radios, weapons, and helicopter tactics were to the airmobile units in Vietnam, to truly internalize modern C2 systems — **ATAKs or otherwise** — their use must become as **familiar as a personal smartphone**. That level of familiarity is difficult to achieve through field use alone. An average smartphone user requires roughly two weeks of daily use — about 20

hours — to become proficient. Applying a similar mindset to C2 systems helps overcome initial barriers. Using these systems for routine activities such as maintenance, equipment draws, Soldier Readiness Program events, and unit mobility operations builds familiarity, reinforces naming conventions, and exposes both capabilities and limitations. This approach mirrors how units master the Military Decision-Making Process — not through occasional execution, but through routine use.

Conclusions — What's Next... C2

Serving in the Army has always been — and remains — exciting. Observations from Ukraine, Gaza, and Nagorno-Karabakh are forcing learning without active ground combat, accelerating preparation for the next war. The Army and industry have responded by developing and fielding capable C2 systems. Tactical leaders of all branches must now meet this opportunity with deliberate approaches to maximize their units' ability to fight. Understanding how C2 systems **enhance mission-command lethality**, maintaining realistic expectations of **required technical competence**, and **investing in leader training** provide a sound framework for approaching this challenge.

Summary of Recommendations

- C2 leader training by echelon (brigade focused on company-level leaders, battalion on platoon-level leaders, and companies on squad-level leaders, etc.) focused on: a) understanding how the C2 systems enable mission-command and combined arms fighting; b) basic logic of networks; c) responsibilities by echelon; and d) leader-level classes on how to operate the systems assigned to their echelon.
- Monthly communicator-focused training, standardized and overseen by the brigade to ensure trained operators and shared understanding for the proper configuration of the TSM channel plan and network devices and software (TRIKs, ICE, COP, etc.).
- Brigade's build TSM channel plans and network program parameters from division-derived standards to ensure federation across the division.
- Battalion main and tactical command posts build the ability to transmit their unit's LOS frequencies into the larger network through employing RoIP into their TRIK systems.
- Every command post (platoon through division) employs ready-made and low-tech decoys (fake antennas, expendable vehicles, etc.), in addition to a battalion or brigade-level held plan to incorporate electronically magnetic spectrum-emitting decoy devices.
- All command post vehicles configure C2 systems to run primarily from vehicle-borne inverters with augmentation, as needed, from generators.
- Leaders, all of them, use their warfighting smartphones and other C2 system devices routinely until similar habitual use is attained as a personal phone or computer.

The future of C2 is bright. Though outside the scope of this article, C2 systems will remain vital to the **effective integration of drones**, their feeds, and **artificial intelligence** for more effective and faster planning and decision-making. There are also exciting new advances in **software-defined radios**, where antenna attachments turn the warfighting smartphones and computers we already carry into radios — significantly reducing weight and battery use.

Mastering our current systems will help **build the skills** and awareness necessary to **rapidly integrate additional new technology** as it becomes viable and fielded.

Notes

¹ U.S. Army, "Adaptive C2: Modernizing Army Command and Control," Army News Service, 20 June 2024, https://www.army.mil/article/286205/adaptive_c2_modernizing_army_command_and_control; U.S. Army, "The C2 Fix Initiative: What It Means for Sustainment Forces," Army News Service, 1 March 2023, https://www.army.mil/article/282485/the_c2_fix_initiative_what_it_means_for_sustainment_forces; and LTC Jonathan Nielsen and MAJ Eric Cannon, "Utilizing the Integrated Tactical Network in Mobile Command Posts," *Infantry* (Winter 2024-2025), https://www.lineofdeparture.army.mil/Portals/144/PDF/Journals/Infantry/Infantry-Winter-2024-2025/Nielsen-Cannon_MCP-UA2.pdf.

² George S. Patton, quoted in Martin Blumenson, *The Patton Papers: 1940-1945* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 756.

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¹⁰ Institute for the Study of War, "Russia Has Failed to Break Ukraine," 24 February 2025, <https://www.understandingwar.org/research/russia-ukraine/russia-has-failed-to-break-ukraine-2>.

¹¹ This concept of transitioning radio transmission into internet protocol is employable with various software. Instant connect enterprise (ICE) is usable with TAK systems and the one I am most familiar, but key is the bridging aspect that is not dependent on any particular software.

¹² An exception is specialized reconnaissance assets, such as a multi-functional reconnaissance company or another similar element. When these elements are forward, it is potentially advantageous to flatten the information they collect by rapidly integrating line-of-site radio, or recon drone, signals into the network using a TRIK or similar system.

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¹⁴ James B. Stewart, *Heart of a Soldier: A Story of Love, Heroism, and September 11th* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002). Stewart's book focuses holistically on the life of Rick Rescorla, which is an incredible story of service in the British Army, fighting in Northern Rhodesia, joining the U.S. Army, and heroic actions after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center during 9/11. Rescorla, who served as the head of security of Morgan Stanley, gave his life in the South Tower while saving countless others.

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Why Conduct a Multidomain Live Fire?

COL AARON W. CHILDERS

The enemy T-90s advanced across a cold landscape, preparing for a meeting engagement with a U.S. light infantry division. Given the enemy formation's capabilities, this would be an easy fight for them to win. The lead enemy tank commander begins transmitting orders when their drones first encounter a U.S. counter-unmanned aerial system (C-UAS). Just then, both the enemy commander's frequency modulation (FM) radios and tactical satellite communications are jammed. Unknown to them, coverage from both their electronic warfare systems and their air defense systems goes offline. Enemy drones are shot down as U.S. AH-64s carefully maneuver through tightly managed airspace to attack their formation in coordination with U.S. Air Force A-10s, all observed overhead by an MQ-1 drone. The last thing the enemy commander observes is the trails of U.S. rockets destroying his division's assets many miles to the rear.

This training may seem like something only possible in a constructive or simulated environment. However, the tank hulls, the FM emissions, and the jamming are real. Everything, even down to the drone swarm engagement, is real... and it all occurs in the training area at Fort Drum, NY, as part of a recurring 10th Mountain Division multidomain operations (MDO) live-fire exercise (LFX) — Operation Summit Strike. This event, which employs these assets in concert with a traditional LFX, focuses on the integration of fires and multidomain assets at the division level. For the Army, MDO live-fire events at home station are resource intensive and require months of planning, but they pay dividends for a division's warfighting capability.

While at home station, units at all levels build readiness through challenging, rigorous training, including live-fire training gates. According to FM 3-0, *Operations*, "The division is the Army's principal tactical warfighting formation during large-scale combat operations... [and] typically, the lowest tactical echelon that integrates capabilities from multiple domains to achieve convergence during large-scale combat

An A-10C Thunderbolt II engages a target on Fort Drum, NY, on 20 November 2024 as part of Operation Summit Strike, a division-level multidomain live-fire exercise. (Photo by PVT Abigail Stewart)

operations."¹ However, the division, the most capable tactical echelon, rarely conducts LFXs. Currently, the most common way to train division and above staff is in a constructive environment, where computer simulations provide the most realistic training. Although the constructive environment replicates the effects of MDO assets in the simulation, it does not physically replicate aviation, fires, space, electronic warfare (EW), or cyber assets across domains. MDO LFXs, such as Operation Summit Strike, build confidence in MDO capabilities, educate leaders in multidomain operations, and test traditional capabilities. Still, they are rarely executed at the division level. Although costly, MDO live fires should be an essential element of staff training.

Operation Summit Strike

Operation Summit Strike in November 2024 included assets across the air (U.S. Air Force A-10s, AH-64s, MQ-9s), ground (multiple launch rocket system [MLRS], 155 mm, Indirect Fire Protection Capability [IFPC] Air Defense Systems), space (U.S. Space and Missile Defense Command [SMDC]), cyber (11th Army Cyber), and EW domains. The exercise focused on synchronizing MDO assets within a kill chain.

To generate the kill chain, FM emitters placed inside the impact area, between day and night iterations, replicated the electronic signatures and radio traffic of adversary vehicles and radar systems. Using live data from collection assets, target information was passed to the division targeting cell, then to the division Joint Air-Ground Integration Cell (JAGIC), and finally to lethal assets, completing the kill chain.

To conduct the event, the 10th Mountain Division staff required a specific proficiency level, and the assets had to be secured months in advance. First and foremost, the focus was on training the staff and the enablers taking part in the

MDO LFX. As stated by MG Scott Naumann, commanding general of the 10th Mountain Division, “Through this multi-domain training exercise, we are able to learn, refine requirements, and develop innovative solutions to fight a near-peer enemy with successive iterations of live, multi-domain training.”² The exercise was a successful training event because it nested into the division training progression for a warfighter exercise. The 10th Mountain had just finished a command post exercise (CPX) III in which it served as the adjacent unit to 1st Armored Division’s warfighter exercise. CPX III allowed the staff to become familiar with both fires planning and MDO assets. For assets outside the division, coordination began several months before and was codified at the semi-annual Army Synchronization and Resourcing Conference (ASRC). Additionally, the 18th Airborne Corps provided units within the corps, such as High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) and UAS assets, for the exercise. Finally, permissions and deconfliction for drone engagements and use of assets on the electromagnetic spectrum required coordination with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) months before the event.

MDO Live Fires Build Confidence and Lethality

First and foremost, the MDO LFX is a multi-echelon readiness-building event that builds confidence in systems and weapons, much like live fires do at the brigade level and below. During the exercise, the JAGIC reduced its processing time for dynamic targets, yielding tangible results and allowing participants to see the effects of cyber and EW capabilities.

During the event, the JAGIC was evaluated on its ability to prosecute targets from detection by EW assets, and on live rounds fired by the Division Artillery (DIVARTY) brigade. Before Operation Summit Strike, the JAGIC was assessed through a constructive simulation, but this process lacked the friction of passing targets down to a gun line and the time to target. Evaluators expected times to increase significantly due to target processing; however, as the exercise progressed and all members of the kill chain became confident in their equipment, times began to drop. Processing times were collected from observer/controllers (OCs) from inside DIVARTY and used to evaluate the JAGIC, HIMARS, and 155 crews. Identifying OCs in advance allowed for evaluation across all echelons and were critical in after action reviews (AARs). After three days, all times improved to well below the simulation times, with the fastest times recorded being four minutes from target detection and only two minutes to clear the airspace. Even with the environmental challenges of sending the fire missions to a gun line several miles away, times continued to decrease throughout the exercise, building confidence and lethality.



A 155mm crew from 2nd Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment fires on targets during Operation Summit Strike. Over the course of the exercise, both the JAGIC and the gun crews continued to process targets at a faster rate. (Photo by PFC Kade Bowers)

For the Division Cyber Electromagnetic Activities (CEMA) cell and space planners, the MDO LFX offers a rare chance to see the impacts of their system in the field. The division CEMA cell was able to build low-cost FM emitters specifically for the event and then place them inside the impact area on targets. These emitters replicated enemy FM transmissions, which were detected by Soldiers using both ground-based electromagnetic sensors and systems placed in remote configurations and on airborne systems. Additionally, members of the G39 observed the impacts of SMDC assets brought to the exercise when simulated enemy traffic was degraded during the employment of MDO assets. For the Soldiers in the exercise, seeing MDO assets block transmissions while lethal fires are employed brings an element of realism that cannot be replicated in a constructive environment.

An MDO LFX builds confidence and enhances the division’s effectiveness as a warfighting entity. In the same way that a squad live fire makes that squad more lethal, the same is true at the division level and underscores the importance of LFX events.

We Need to Train Leaders in MDO

In addition to building confidence at echelon, MDO LFXs allow for both leader development and innovation at lower levels.

We need to normalize MDO assets and operations within the Army to introduce these types of operations to lower-level leaders, particularly mid-level leaders on division staffs such as captains and majors. *The U.S. Army Multi-Domain Operations Range Guide for Company Grade through Field Grade Leaders* notes, “Quarterly Combat Training Center (CTC) observations regularly identify that EW and Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) formations are not integrated in the

Brigade Combat Team (BCT) scheme of maneuver during rotations. This is primarily due to a lack of understanding of how to incorporate these enablers into individual and collective training at home station.”³ MDO capabilities need to be exercised at division-level exercises to build familiarity. In the same way that an infantry platoon leader is taught the echelonment of fires as an essential element of their combined arms development, so too should a major on the division staff learn about the assets that can be employed at the division level as a key part of their career development. By introducing these capabilities before an officer serves at a higher level, they will be more comfortable and competent at using these assets later in their career. During Summit Strike, many of the officers, even at the lieutenant colonel level, had never seen these assets employed. This takes a significant investment, but the Army must build leaders who understand MDO as well as they do combined arms maneuver.

The more these assets are used at the tactical level, the more opportunity for innovation with these technologies. During Summit Strike, units from 10th Mountain and SMDC determined a new way to observe the effects of satellite disruption using a division’s organic equipment. Previously, SMDC used specialized personnel and equipment to observe these effects, but discovering the capabilities of standard equipment may save SMDC on the personnel and equipment needed to support exercises. Also during Summit Strike, the division obtained additional BEAST+ systems and mounted them to an aerostat, giving the system additional range. This gave the division team a chance to experiment with ways to increase the range of Army EW systems; again, not a regular use of equipment, but effective. When these systems are pushed to lower echelons, Soldiers will develop new techniques and tactics to use these technologies.

We must normalize MDO assets at the tactical level if we expect our Soldiers to remain competitive in the next conflict. As illustrated in January 2026 during Operation Midnight Hammer in Venezuela, “layering different effects provided by SpaceCom, CyberCom, and other members of the inter-agency,” is now the standard in warfighting.⁴ Conducting an MDO LFX is as much about informing the next generation of Army leaders as it is about building the proficiency of the staff. If you give these assets to our Soldiers, they will find innovative and creative ways to make our Army more competitive.

MDO Live-Fire Exercise Basic Systems

MDO LFXs enable the division to employ traditional operations beyond what is possible in a constructive environment. This is especially critical as recent changes in force structure, especially with the DIVARTY, military intelligence units, and aviation units, must reintegrate with the division headquarters.

The DIVARTY, acting as the Force Field Artillery Headquarters, is the most lethal arm of a division and receives the biggest workout during an MDO LFX. In addition to the firing units, which were recently reintroduced under the DIVARTY, MDO LFXs bring additional assets, such as HIMARS, which may be allocated to a division during large-scale combat operations. MDO LFXs work every facet of the DIVARTY, from planning when to fire during a convergence window, to processing firing missions with the division fires cell, to sending actual fire missions down to a gun. Additionally, division radars are an essential asset to the DIVARTY but are rarely exercised in concert with the rest of the division. Additional opportunities exist when fully employing a DIVARTY, such

*A Soldier from the 19th Special Forces Group prepares to launch a Hero-120 Loitering Munition during exercise Summit Strike at Fort Drum on 20 November 2024.
(Photo by PVT Abigail Stewart)*



as conducting gun survivability drills, radar survivability, and using these artillery assets at depth. As DIVARTYs across the Army are again encumbered by firing battalions, field exercises are essential to getting back to basics.

The combat aviation brigade (CAB) receives unique training opportunities during an MDO LFX that would not occur during a unit's individual progression. Participating in an MDO LFX allows CABs to practice atrophied skills, such as coordination with DIVARTY to fly under active gun target lines and in a congested air environment. It is possible to simulate this in a constructive atmosphere, but it cannot replicate the proficiency required in a live environment, especially at night. The MDO LFX allows the CAB to work on traditional requirements such as resupply, target handoff with UAS, and Forward Arming and Refueling (FARP) emplacement and displacement. One aspect of CAB planning rehearsed during Operation Summit Strike was the use of the Mobile Low, Slow Unmanned Aircraft Integrated Defense System (M-LIDS) to engage incoming drone swarms with both EW and kinetic systems while aircraft were in flight. More than any other task, the ability to defend against one-way attack drones, even while conducting offensive operations, will be one of the most difficult challenges in the coming years. Practicing the defense against drones, especially flying while friendly units are engaging, is critical to practice at home station before a unit is required to exercise downrange.

The MDO LFX is not just about using specialized assets; it is an opportunity to test and evaluate other units on traditional but not-so-often-exercised tasks. This is essential for a unit to conduct fire and maneuver in large-scale combat operations.

Counterpoint and Conclusion

Some may argue that an MDO LFX adds yet another event to a division's already busy schedule and requires scarce resources. However, an MDO LFX is not an event in isolation; it must be part of a staff's broader training path, with the culmination being a warfighter exercise. Currently, there is no published standard of what a CPX level I, II, or III consists of, but conducting an MDO LFX in conjunction with a later CPX is a method to increase the return on a training event without exhausting the staff. Concerning scarce resources, cyber, space, and EW units are eager to train at different installations. Due to federal restrictions on these assets, especially in the EW spectrum, it is hard for these specialized units to get time and space for training.⁵ Because a division has the resources and staff to plan an MDO LFX, it can host niche units and capabilities.

Constructive simulations, like those used in warfighter exercises, are a good base for training divisions, but they are not enough — nothing builds proficiency like live-fire events. For 10th Mountain, even after conducting multiple constructive exercises in a simulation, Operation Summit Strike improved the firing and processing time of the JAGIC and the supporting artillery units. MDO LFXs normalize MDO operations, making these weapons and their effects something our forces are comfortable planning and employing.

We know we will see these assets on future battlefields and that the next generation of Army leaders will be comfortable with MDO. The exercises prove that the division level is the most lethal echelon on the battlefield and that it offers greater benefits for both DIVARTY and the CAB. Most importantly, these events have tangible results, reducing the time it takes to engage targets with indirect fire and exercising facets of the division that are now commonly utilized.

Conducting exercises like Summit Strike is achievable across multiple installations. Although Summit Strike is a recent example of an MDO LFX, 4th Infantry Division and other divisions have also conducted similar exercises, all with beneficial impacts to staff proficiency and overall readiness. Through the ASRC, there is already a mechanism to synchronize these assets across Army divisions. Additionally, publications such as the previously mentioned MDO Range Guide provide tactics, techniques, and procedures for employing these assets at home station. The more these exercises occur in the Army, the easier they will be to conduct.

The MDO LFX is not a Zenith or a pinnacle event. These events complement warfighter training progressions and CPX events. Further work must be done to enable these events at all continental U.S. locations, but we must see our divisions as warfighting units that require a unique training progression, one that requires a rigorous MDO LFX. There should be a standard staff training progression to track a staff member's development during their train-up to a culminating event, such as a warfighter exercise. The Army has a training methodology for squads through brigades, with units certified through a live-fire progression. If we expect divisions to act as the most lethal tactical-level organization, we should apply the same scrutiny to the division training progression.

Notes

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Informing the Next Fight:

Ground Reconnaissance in the Multi-Purpose Company

1LT DOUGLAS WATTERSON

The 2nd Mobile Brigade Combat Team (MBCT), 101st Airborne Division's deployment to Eastern Europe in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve provided a unique opportunity to test and refine the effectiveness of ground reconnaissance teams in the Army's newest formations, the MBCT and the Multi-Purpose Company (MPC). The culminating event, Combined Resolve 26-01, at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) revealed both strengths and weaknesses of the current MPC and its ability to lead the ground reconnaissance fight in large-scale combat operations (LSCO). The effectiveness of the MPC and its ground reconnaissance platoon depends on addressing five key functional areas: command and control, communication, movement, survivability, and leadership.

Command and Control

The MPC structure places a unique opportunity on the command team to employ and sustain three distinct platoons: indirect fires, medium- and short-range unmanned aerial systems (UAS) reconnaissance, and ground reconnaissance. To add to the complexity, these platoons also operate in geographically disparate areas on the battlefield. Historically, specialty platoons fall under the headquarters and headquarters company and maintain a direct line of communication to the battalion staff. The new MPC construct should reinforce this direct line of communication, not replace it.

A Soldier in the 2nd Mobile Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) retrieves a drone during a live-fire exercise at Novo Selo Training Area, Bulgaria, on 7 August 2025. (Photo by SPC Breanna Bradford)



Point to Point

Direct communication with battalion staff is especially important during the planning phase of the operation. The reconnaissance platoon leader (PL), the subject matter expert on ground reconnaissance, must engage directly with the battalion's intelligence officer, operations officer, and the fire support officer to gain an understanding of what they want to accomplish, deconflict their priorities, and act as an advocate for the platoon's effective employment. Even with a thorough grasp on the limitations of ground reconnaissance, operational tempo and attrition significantly impact what the platoon can accomplish at any given time. It is the responsibility of the PL to provide this bottom-up refinement and seek further guidance to align the battalion's priorities with the platoon's current capability.

The unpredictable nature of combat often leads to the dynamic retasking of ground reconnaissance teams to better inform the ensuing fight. While often necessary, this should be done through a deliberate decision-making process that includes the PL. Reacting to a significant change of mission is extremely difficult for the reconnaissance teams on the ground and can introduce unacceptable risk of compromise. Retasking of these teams by higher headquarters must be informed by the PL, done with sufficient lead time, and take into consideration the risk to the team's survivability that the change introduces.

Planning for Success

When planning for ground reconnaissance teams, it is important that battalion staff and MPC commanders understand the four pieces of information the platoon requires, at minimum, to successfully execute its mission. First, a named area of interest (NAI) or grid coordinate provides the team with the information necessary to begin route planning and select tentative surveillance and hide sites. Second is a no later than time to be in position and ready to observe. This communicates how much time the teams have to plan and resource their mission before stepping off. Third, the latest time information of value (LTIOV) indicates the duration of the observation and facilitates more informed planning of the mission's sustainment requirements. Finally, a purpose for observing the reconnaissance objective provides the platoon with the understanding it needs to adjust its plan to meet the overall intent of the mission. Doctrinally, commanders communicate this through their priority intelligence requirements. Limited resources, especially when planning occurs simultaneously with the execution of current operations, stress the battalion's ability to provide this complete picture to its reconnaissance assets. The responsibility falls on the PL to continue to push higher for more guidance and, in the absence of that guidance, use their best judgment and the information available to create it for their teams.

Communication

Clear, concise, and timely communication is the cornerstone of effective reconnaissance operations. Additionally,

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the speed and intensity that the MBCT strives to operate at requires constant communication with its ground reconnaissance assets. This presents a problem for reconnaissance teams who have traditionally operated using communication windows. Communication windows reduce battery usage, minimize electronic signature, and allow teams to move without the constant burden of monitoring voice communications. However, the demand to feed higher headquarters as they quickly work to gather information about the operational environment and clear ground for fire missions makes being out of contact for any meaningful amount of time unacceptable.

Modern Technology for the Modern Battlefield

Tools, such as long-term evolution (LTE) and satellite communication (SATCOM)-enabled End User Devices (EUDs), can bridge the gap in speed and efficiency that currently exists in the reconnaissance platoon's communications. The Army's current solutions, the Android Team Awareness Kit (ATAK) and MiFi Hotspot, are outdated, unreliable, and lack the ease of use that devices like commercial cell phones have already mastered. LTE and SATCOM-enabled EUDs provide three distinct advantages: relatively low power requirements and, when combined with messaging apps, silence and speed. For example, a modern commercial cell phone can remain in continuous operation for days when supported by a single conformal battery. Instant messaging capability also increases the capacity of the PL to receive, refine, and share reports with higher headquarters. During high-volume periods of messaging, they can prioritize the most important transmissions and delay their response to others. Similarly, a message can be sent to a team and remain unread until the conditions on ground allow for it.

Wickr, the U.S. Army's current messaging app of choice, is undoubtedly a valuable tool for the reconnaissance platoon, but it sacrifices significant functionality for security. In comparison, messaging apps such as Signal allow the unrestricted ability to screenshot, download to device, copy/paste, and forward to other users. It also consolidates all photos and files in an easily searchable format, capabilities that Wickr does not have. The balance of security versus accessibility needs to be reevaluated to ensure that the limitations put in place are justified by security requirements.

The reconnaissance platoon also offers significant opportunity for the employment of artificial intelligence to aid operations. The primary function of the PL in the intelligence-

gathering process is the quick consolidation and refinement of reports sent from the teams conducting reconnaissance. The use of standardized formats such as SALT, Angus, Boris, and Eagle reports makes a well-trained large language model a promising tool in aiding, or even replacing, the PL in the reporting of information to higher.

Making the COP Common

MBCTs' use of the Maven Smart System to track subordinate units and build a common operating picture (COP) provides unique challenges for battalions and platoons still utilizing the ATAK server. Software limitations make the transferring of graphics from Maven to ATAK an inefficient and slow process. It is critical that Maven is accessible on the EUDs that are fielded at the reconnaissance platoon and team level to build an understanding of adjacent units and the enemy situation in a timely manner. Maven's wide array of functions should also be limited at lower echelons to increase ease of use for users likely to experience the fatigue and overstimulation inherent to combat operations.

Movement

Reconnaissance teams are only as effective as their ability to move undetected to the reconnaissance objective. The proliferation of UAS supplements but, at this stage, does not eliminate the need for ground reconnaissance assets that can go anywhere in any weather. The relatively new Infantry Squad Vehicle (ISV) fielded by MBCTs also provides distinct advantages when employed under the right conditions. Even with these capabilities, it is important for higher headquarters to understand that effective and survivable movement is often unpredictable, slower than desired, and contingent upon numerous factors influenced by the enemy force.

Tempering Expectations

Ideally, ground reconnaissance teams push deep into the area of operations (AO) to inform not only the battalion's current fight but also the subsequent engagements in the operation. Mounted movement by ISV can succeed in this mission and often provides the only option to meet tight timelines, but it is unrealistic in areas occupied by enemy forces. Leaders should plan for teams to move largely dismounted beginning, at minimum, 48 to 72 hours in advance of the main body, especially when entering an AO that is highly contested.

The decentralized nature of reconnaissance operations also presents unique challenges to retaining ISV capability. The platoon will likely lose mounted capability due to enemy action on the vehicles, a lack of operators from attrition, or an inability to keep the vehicles within a recoverable distance as the battalion advances. Teams on mission and the small headquarters element lack the ability to readily recover and move vehicles. The reconnaissance platoon

requires support from the MPC to keep vehicles in the fight. The PL must coordinate for this assistance and be prepared to operate with a severely degraded mounted capability.

Survivability

It is crucial that ground reconnaissance platoons remain focused on the time-tested fundamentals that make them effective. The elimination of cavalry squadrons places the burden of providing security and reconnaissance primarily on the brigade's multi-functional reconnaissance company (MFRC) and the battalions' MPCs. Losing the relatively superior firepower of the cavalry squadrons also increases the expectation that ground reconnaissance assets increase their lethality. While bolstering the reconnaissance team's ability to kill targets of opportunity is tempting, it is often not worth their potential compromise or loss. The preservation of combat power becomes paramount when high-operational tempo and the need for flexibility are fully realized. This supports a more traditional approach to ground reconnaissance that prioritizes observation and information collection over generating kinetic effects on the enemy force.

Targeting Opportunities

Traditionally, indirect fires from mortars and artillery give small and lightly equipped reconnaissance teams the most feasible way to kill moving or stationary targets of opportunity ahead of the main effort while retaining their ability to continue the reconnaissance mission. This is still largely true but highly dependent on the terrain in the AO. Dense vegetation and hills, while beneficial for concealed movement, also severely limit the team's ability to observe indirect fire missions. Fire support officers and MPC commanders should anticipate this need for unobserved fire missions and be prepared to quickly commit additional assets, such as medium-range



Soldiers with the 2nd Mobile Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division conduct operations using Infantry Squad Vehicles at Hohenfels Training Area, Germany, on 19 October 2025. (Photo by MAJ Brian Sutherland)



A Soldier assigned to the 101st Airborne Division's Strike Brigade utilizes an Android Tactical Assault Kit to monitor battlefield positions during Combined Resolve 26-1 at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center on 16 October 2025. (Photo by PFC Lilah Windle)

UAS, to refine target locations and collect battle damage assessments (BDAs).

One tool that effectively reduces the impact of terrain on observation is precision strike loitering munitions. Platforms like the Switchblade 600 prove to be highly lethal. The precision of the system allows reconnaissance teams to collect accurate BDAs as close as 50 to 100 meters from the target, but brigade and the MFRC currently reserve these systems for their own use. Leaders should consider fielding precision strike loitering munitions to the MPC to deliver ground reconnaissance teams a decisive advantage in the battalion's intermediate fight.

Leadership

As technological advances continue to drive significant changes to the character of reconnaissance operations, the unique requirement for elevated levels of trust placed in the NCOs who lead ground reconnaissance teams remains unchanged. Team leaders must act decisively in uncertainty, find creative ways to accomplish their mission, and motivate their teams to push through adverse conditions, all with little

As technological advances continue to drive significant changes to the character of reconnaissance operations, the unique requirement for elevated levels of trust placed in the NCOs who lead ground reconnaissance teams remains unchanged.

oversight. Team leaders' recommendations carry elevated weight as they are the ones on the ground and in the fight while their chain of command remains largely removed from the action. For teams operating beyond the forward line of own troops (FLOT), there is no good answer for immediate support beyond what the team can organically provide. This underscores the need for special considerations when selecting leaders to man these teams.

Selecting reconnaissance Soldiers based on their physical fitness alone is shortsighted. Of equal, if not greater, importance is an above average level of maturity. Tryouts are a valuable tool to identify Soldiers in the formation with a genuine desire to serve in ground reconnaissance, but they should be structured in a way that addresses more than just the physical prowess of candidates. Interviews and academic tests can be strong indicators of maturity and intelligence and should be leveraged to identify the right fit.

Conclusion

2/101 MBCT's Operation Atlantic Resolve deployment and Combined Resolve 26-01 rotation solidified the fact that ground reconnaissance remains an indispensable, high-value tool for the multi-purpose company — but only if the functions that make it effective are properly preserved and resourced. MPCs must maintain a direct line of communication from their reconnaissance platoons to battalion staff, field modern communications equipment and software, make common operating pictures available down to the team level, and train operating with degraded vehicle capacity in all phases of operation. The integration of precision loitering munitions is crucial to maximizing the lethal effects and survivability of reconnaissance teams and should be considered for fielding at the battalion level through the MPCs. Most importantly, success in the ground reconnaissance fight requires a concerted effort to man the platoon with highly motivated and mature leaders who can operate with little guidance in adverse conditions. These efforts are critical to ensure that the MPC and its ground reconnaissance teams win the next first fight.

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No Better Cover:

Rediscovering the Art of Trench Warfare

SFC JOHN R. DAVENPORT

World War I marked a shift in how warfare was fought, transitioning from linear formations of files and columns to a static stalemate in eastern France. This shift was the consequence of technical innovations such as machine guns and precision artillery making mobility on the battlefield suicide. Life for Infantrymen during the war was characterized by constant hardship and danger. Soldiers lived for months at a time in narrow, muddy trenches infested with rats and surrounded by the smell of stagnant water and decaying bodies. To break the stalemate, the introduction of tank warfare was used to shift the battlefield, and although largely unreliable, the concepts proved pivotal in combined arms tactics 21 years later during the outbreak of World War II in Europe. Mobility became the new means of survival, and the lessons learned by Infantrymen in trenches were left behind, preserved in history but forgotten in doctrine. After more than 100 years of mobility, the Ukraine-Russian conflict has found soldiers once again fighting in static positions in a war of attrition and endurance that defined World War I, requiring modern Infantrymen to relearn static warfare.

The Modern Battlefield: Precision Fire and Persistent Surveillance

Mobility on the battlefield throughout the 20th century defined survival. The technology that evolved during the interwar period between World Wars I and II gave access for large armies to move rapidly across battlefields. So how did modern technology circle warfare back to the same style that was fought more than a century ago? As technology has continued to improve, precision artillery and drones have bogged down Ukrainian and Russian forces, forcing soldiers to once again dig in. In this modern style of warfare, every maneuver is now visible and targetable within minutes, and units on both sides face devastating indirect fire before they can advance on opposing positions. According to a 2024 article by the Council on Foreign Relations, 80 percent of casualties from both sides on the Russo-Ukrainian conflict have been caused by artillery.¹ Additionally, the primary means to counter armored threats is through air support, and with Russian and Ukrainian air power relatively matched, neither side has had the opportunity to gain air superiority, halting any

hopes of rapid advances across the open plains of eastern Ukraine. Throughout the last three years of conflict, a new type of warfare has emerged as well: armed drones. Although it's difficult to confirm casualty numbers, the frequency of drone warfare seen across all media has increased dramatically, suggesting that drones are now emerging as one of the most consequential weapons on the modern battlefield. Drones also offer a new type of battlefield advantage by committing cheap equipment for constant surveillance of the new "no-man's land," providing early warning of potential attacks and positions for accurate artillery fire. The lack of air superiority, coupled with the emergence of drone warfare and precision artillery, has forced a return to static, defensive positions, demanding a shift in training for the next generation of Infantrymen.

Digging In for Survival

All Infantry Soldiers have trained on defensive techniques, whether it be area and mobile defensive concepts outlined in Field Manual 3-90-1, *Offense and Defense*, patrol-base operations, or limits of advance (LOA) in preparation for a potential counterattack. Formations like patrol bases are still



Soldiers from the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division conduct operations in a flooded trench during an exercise at Novo Selo Training Area, Bulgaria, on 12 May 2025. (Photo by SPC Nathan Arellano Tlaczani)



Soldiers conduct trench warfare training at Camp Dix, NJ. (National Archives photo)

relevant in today's fight, but after witnessing the last three years of stalemate in Ukraine and transitioning from counter-insurgency operations (COIN) to peer-to-peer or near-peer operations, the modern infantry community needs a shift in training based on the lessons being learned in eastern Europe. Like any major conflict the United States has been involved in, wars and battles unfold with often unpredictable conditions, and all have their own unique challenges for innovative leaders and Soldiers to overcome. However, after watching what's been occurring during the war in Ukraine, the U.S. military has an opportunity to get ahead and begin training for what we could face in future conflicts and remain decisive in any environment through not only movement and assault but also digging in, concealing, and commanding under degraded conditions. If conditions such as the inability to gain air superiority are the deciding factors on the style of warfare that will be fought, then the modern Infantryman needs to be prepared for any and all possible challenges, especially in a peer-to-peer fight where the most reliable assets are the Soldiers to your left and right. The similarities in challenges that soldiers in Ukraine are facing are comparable to the ones Infantrymen experienced during the First World War: constant bombardment, infections, rats, logistical constraints, and extended periods on the frontline, sometimes stretching over a month, in a shallow, water-filled trench. Although these conditions may undermine the maneuver warfare that U.S. Infantrymen have trained for, battles must still be fought while delivering decisive results.

New Dog, Old Tricks: Combining Trench Warfare with Mobility and Modern Tech

Although trench warfare today may be similar to how it was conducted a century ago, there are some stark differences due to technological innovations. During WWI, thousands of men fought and died for a few meters over the course of four deadly years. Waves of men were sent across "no-man's land" under the cover of creeping barrages of artillery, cost-

ing the lives of more than 8 million men in combat alone.² Where those massed assaults relied on volume, today even small movements are exposed by constant drone surveillance and targeted by precision fires. With drones and modern artillery, however, Infantrymen must now practice decentralized fighting in small units rather than thousands of men attacking vague targets across a battlefield. This decentralized fighting often means squads will need to operate independently under persistent surveillance while coordinating through pre-planned control measures or small windows of communication rather than constant guidance. Where the last two decades of warfare displayed how operations could be conducted by platoon-sized elements, this new style of trench warfare will still require the strength of a platoon but with their squads operating separately and simultaneously on one or more objectives. Micro-maneuvers will now define survivability and involve short, low signature

shifts between trench lines. While platoon and company operations can still be conducted, these large elements can no longer maneuver together on a battlefield which places more trust in NCOs. The initiative of the Infantry NCO will become a critical factor in the next fight when keeping squads dispersed and able to move when a higher headquarters cannot control every action on the ground will be what keeps them alive. Where Infantrymen's survival in 1918 relied on concealment, endurance, and engineering innovations, we must now carry that forward to implement and master drone operations, electronic warfare, decentralized command and control (C2), and, most importantly, micro-maneuver. Failing to incorporate modern concepts and those lessons written in mud more than a century ago will risk repeating history in blood rather than in doctrine.

Offensive Operations in a Trench

History has taught us that conducting offensive operations while in a static fight is no easy task, and this will be especially true on today's battlefield. When large-scale breakthroughs are unachievable, smaller units — either platoon-minus or squad-sized elements — can optimize offensive tempo through precision raids designed to disrupt enemy operations and supplies, capture intelligence, or destroy systems rather than capture terrain. During the Ukrainian offensive in the summer of 2023, Ukraine saw many failures; perhaps most concerning was how 12 armored and mechanized brigades failed to achieve a breakthrough against six Russian defensive regiments across a 30-kilometer front.³ Ukraine used the same successful shock action it employed in Kharkiv in 2022 after strong defensive lines had been created throughout the eastern regions of Ukraine. Without tempo and concentration, the initial Ukrainian attacks failed, bogging down their forces.⁴ Constant drone coverage and precision fires created a cycle of detection and destruction that halted Ukrainian momentum before enough friendly forces could mass on decisive points. Ukraine attempted to replicate the same

tactics that had achieved success earlier on, but conditions on the battlefield had fundamentally changed with the Russians constructing layered defenses, minefields, and anti-tank ditches. Under constant drone observation, these defenses absorbed and canalized Ukrainian assaults under constant pressure. Every attempt by the Ukrainians to maneuver on the battlefield triggered an immediate artillery response, turning offensive action into a stalled assault. The result and the lesson learned became tempo at large scale becomes impossible when all movement is observed and every route is mined. This environment forced a shift toward small unit infiltration and deliberate breaches to erode enemy positions sector by sector as opposed to rapid territorial gains.

Large formations lose freedom of maneuver, but small units are capable of inflicting just as much damage. When battalion-sized elements cannot punch through, squads and platoons must dismantle the enemy positions piece by piece. For platoon operations, offensive planning often continues to center on task-organized squads that operate independently across the frontline but are synchronized through mission command. Squads need to learn and employ armed drones with one serving as a drone reconnaissance element — not just as an enabler but as organic combat power. In practice, this would mean that one squad dedicates Soldiers to controlling reconnaissance and loitering munitions while simultaneously identifying enemy fighting positions and locations of enemy soldiers moving throughout the battlefield. These small units can map enemy trench systems and identify strong and weak points as well as anti-personnel obstacles. One squad would continue to operate as a support element while another is tasked as the decisive operation or assault element. Just like a century ago, squads benefit from being covered under creeping fire as they make their way across no-man's land, demanding further coordination between brigade-level assets down to the lowest level. Integration between engineer assets is another force multiplier that adds paths towards any objective. In the ongoing Ukrainian conflict, engineers and infantrymen integrate at the squad level, clearing paths through minefields and enemy fortifications. Another squad or platoon may also have to learn the art of deception to draw attention from an attack. These decentralized assaults demand a cultural shift for the infantry by implementing more drone training and trusting NCOs to operate with little to no guidance once an assault begins. Success increasingly depends on junior leaders making rapid and autonomous decisions while managing drones, fires, and movement under degraded conditions. The overall objective is no longer territorial gains or even population control but the consistent erosion of enemy combat power.

Defensive Operations in a Trench

For the next fight, defensive operations in a trench will demand a combination of traditional fieldcraft and modern technological integration. Successful defenses will not only be characterized by depth and fortification but by adaptation under constant surveillance, decentralized C2, and deliberate efforts to disrupt enemy offensive capabilities. Once

By combining endurance-focused defensive tactics with modern technology provided by drone and modern vehicle platforms, the Infantry will be prepared to survive and prevail in static battlefield situations.

again, this means multi-layer trench networks, each designed with overhead cover and signature reduction measures to counter constant enemy observation. Unlike in 1918, units must now incorporate the ability to have mobile assets such as Strykers and tanks integrated into a trench system as a larger defensive ecosystem as well. The role of vehicles will extend beyond static firepower, acting as rapid counterattack elements, points of resistance deeper inside friendly lines, and mobile fire platforms that are able to exploit brief windows of opportunity during an enemy attack.

To prepare the force for defensive operations, platoons and companies must shift from short-term defensive postures to long-term, sustained defensive positions. These tactics would shift from general patrol base operations to full defensive belts with primary, alternate, and supplementary positions and rehearse continuous rotations of squads, trench maintenance, and rapid displacement under drone and artillery fire. Across multiple Ukrainian and Russian sectors, long durations of defensive occupation have required Soldiers to maintain fighting positions for weeks at a time while enduring constant indirect fires and armed drone attacks. Leaders must incorporate intelligence and reconnaissance pressure to maximize their concealment, deception, and most importantly electromagnetic discipline. Integrating preplanned drone strikes, indirect fires, and obstacles to shape enemy avenues of approach is essential to sustaining a long-term static fight. Destroying enemy drones, masking signatures, and disrupting enemy offensive capabilities often determine how long a friendly position can survive under enemy observation. Most importantly, leaders need to train with decentralized authorities, enabling leaders to make rapid and autonomous adjustments when their lines are breached or their squads are isolated. Vehicles also need to be concealed and able to rapidly deploy to forward positions to reinforce the frontlines. Their value will come from being able to counterattack enemy assaults and deliver fires at decisive points. Vehicles must still retain the ability to be mobile and function as unpredictable assets that enable the defending forces to regain the initiative in a defensive fight. By combining endurance-focused defensive tactics with modern technology provided by drone and modern vehicle platforms, the Infantry will be prepared to survive and prevail in static battlefield situations.

Sustainment and Use of Mobility in a Stalemated Conflict

Sustainment operations in a stalemated conflict are

another area that the Infantry must train for in preparation for the next conflict. The Army has traditionally run its supply hubs from centralized locations such as forward operating bases and resupplied units with predictable maneuver patterns. Sustainment elements will encounter the same type of constant observation and threats while trying to stay mobile to support the frontline. In Ukraine, small logistics movements have been detected by drones and struck within minutes, requiring their forces to adapt by using dispersed caches and irregular routing towards the frontlines. If warfare has taught the Infantryman anything, it is that supply lines and sustainment operations are your lifeline. Teams in Ukraine often rely on lightweight vehicles, camouflage nets, and route variation to reduce detection, functioning similarly to reconnaissance teams rather than large logistic convoys. An article published in February 2024 defines the contested logistics environment (CLE) and recognizes that future adversaries will disrupt sustainment operations at every level, requiring small, mobile, and survivable logistics teams capable of resupplying the frontlines under constant observation and attack.⁵ The CLE framework highlights the need to think of it as a competition: Whoever adapts faster, moves quieter,

and avoids detection maintains overall operational momentum. Sustainment operations must once again evolve from large convoys to small, decentralized teams with organized loads that are able to resupply the frontlines with Soldiers, ammunition, and equipment. Concealment, speed, and mission-specific provisions will allow the frontlines to remain supplied even when movement is limited. In the modern attritional fight, the force that is able to sustain faster and more effectively, move smarter, and adapt to enemy surveillance will hold the initiative when fighting slows to a static crawl.

Conclusion: Future Infantryman as the New Trench Fighter

With the return of static warfare — even in an era of precision artillery, constant surveillance, and drone warfare — the truth of combat remains unchanged in that it is a measure of endurance, adaptation, and wits. Based on the footage coming out of the conflict taking place throughout eastern Ukraine, today's Infantryman needs to once again train how to live and fight from the dirt while blending lessons our great-grandfathers learned with today's modern technology. Infantrymen must once again master the art of fighting in trenches, a concept that was forgotten long ago, and continue to practice digging in, endure hardships, and fight from fortified positions while integrating technological advancements from the 21st century. Today's constant drone presence and enemy precision artillery explain why movement is dangerous and concealment and timing matter just as much as firepower. The resilience and discipline of an American Doughboy from 1918 must now merge with the technological proficiency and flexibility of a modern Infantryman to prevail in any environment the U.S. Army may find itself in. Every part of the modern battlefield reflects a shift in small squads and junior NCOs making their own decisions to determine outcomes in a fight that once were decided by entire armies. These modern Infantrymen need to train not only to maneuver but to survive, sustain, and strike effectively when movement on the battlefield halts.

Notes

¹ Max Boot, "Weapons of War: The Race Between Russia and Ukraine," Council on Foreign Relations, 24 April 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/weapons-war-race-between-russia-and-ukraine>.

² John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000).

³ Jack Watling, "Preliminary Lessons from Ukraine's Offensive Operations, 2022-2023," Royal United Services Institute, 18 July 2024, <https://static.rusi.org/lessons-learned-ukraine-offensive-2022-23>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ MG Mark T. Simerly, COL Marchant Callis, and MAJ Ryan J. Legault, "Transforming Army Sustainment to Contend with a Contested Logistics Environment," Army News Service, 1 February 2024, <https://www.army.mil/article/272932>.

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Infantrymen assigned to 2nd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment clear a trench during Project Flytrap at Pabradė Training Area, Lithuania, on 4 May 2026. (Photo by SGT Max Elliott)

COMPLICATED BEFORE COMPLEX: *Sequencing Live-Fire and Force-on-Force Training for Lethality*

COL DAIJIRO “DON” KANASE

Too many infantry units run their training in the wrong order. They push into force-on-force (FoF) before their formations have mastered the basics under live fire, or they hold the live fire last and treat it as the final exam. Both habits invert the sequence that builds a lethal unit. Live fire builds the fundamentals. FoF tests whether a unit can apply them against an enemy who thinks. Build first, then test.

The progression follows the complexity of the problem. Shooting pop-up targets on a static range is simple. Live-fire maneuver is complicated. FoF against a thinking enemy is complex. A unit has to master the complicated before it can survive the complex, because a formation that has not validated its standard operating procedures (SOPs) under live fire has nothing to fall back on when a thinking enemy breaks the plan. Run the progression in one direction: static ranges, then live-fire maneuver, then FoF.

I watched what a missing step costs from the far side of the fight. I commanded a battalion task force that served as an opposing force (OPFOR) to a brigade task force. Prior to the big fight but after our own platoon and company live-fire events, our battalion trained hard by conducting our own FoF that lasted a few days. The rotational

brigade prepared by conducting almost entirely through live fires. Within hours, the difference showed. Those Soldiers never applied their battle drills and SOPs against an enemy who studied them, hid, deceived, and hit back. They moved on predictable routes and stalled during transitions. The rotational unit assumed they would accomplish their mission if they just went through the motions.

That shortfall punishes a unit faster today than it did a few years ago. The war in Ukraine has put a cheap drone over nearly every formation and a sensor on nearly every movement. Massing in the open, running the same route twice, or establishing a command post (CP) for an afternoon now draws a first-person-view (FPV) drone or a loitering munition within minutes. A scripted live fire cannot reproduce that enemy. Only FoF can — and only after a unit has earned the fundamentals that keep it alive long enough to adapt.

*Soldiers assigned to 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment engage targets during a platoon live-fire exercise as part of Exercise Salaknib 2026 in the Philippines on 28 May 2026.
(Photo by SGT Nathan Arellano Tlaczani)*



Simple, Complicated, Complex

A complicated problem has many moving parts and a knowable, repeatable solution. A live-fire lane is complicated. It demands detailed planning, control measures, surface danger zones (SDZs), rehearsals, safety certification, weapons proficiency, and disciplined execution. But the targets appear where the control plan places them, the tempo follows the range design, and the enemy does only what the lane requires. Even an advanced unit running a cold iteration without the usual dry-blank-live buildup still follows a script. We build live fires to be complicated on purpose.

A complex problem adapts. It has no fixed solution because a thinking opponent changes the problem every time you act. FoF — Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System (MILES) gear, observer-controllers (O/Cs), a live OPFOR, and blank ammunition — is complex because the enemy is alive. He studies your patterns, shifts positions, exploits gaps, attacks exposed command nodes, targets sustainment and casualty collection points, hides in dead space, and punishes leaders who cannot mission command. He turns small shortcuts into casualties and forces decisions under pressure with incomplete information.

The distinction turns on one thing: whether the problem reacts to you. Master the complicated first, because the fundamentals a unit locks in under live fire become the only thing it has to fall back on when a thinking enemy breaks the plan. That is the whole reason FoF comes last and never first. Throw a unit into FoF before it has drilled its SOPs and the event teaches chaos, not adaptation; the formation has no baseline to adapt from.

Many units invert this. They run static ranges, jump straight to FoF, then save a live fire for the grand finale because it looks like the culminating event: ammunition, range control, medics, senior-leader attention, risk, and visible lethality. Importance and sequence are different things. Put the most controlled event last, after the unit has already met a thinking enemy, and you have run the progression backwards and taught the wrong lesson about readiness.

Live Fire Builds the Fundamentals

Live fire gives a unit the foundation it needs before it faces a thinking enemy. It builds competence in the fundamentals: movement techniques, breaching, direct- and indirect-fire synchronization, fire distribution, reporting, casualty evacuation (CASEVAC), and transitions. And it validates a unit's SOPs

against its battle drills. By the time a platoon runs a platoon live fire, Soldiers should know how they signal to shift and lift fires during Battle Drill 2 (Conduct a Platoon Assault), and squads should be fluent in the details of Battle Drill 6 (Enter and Clear a Room). Leaders should understand the risk, enforce the standards, and rehearse actions on the objective until the choreography runs without thought.

That choreography keeps Soldiers alive, and live fire is where it becomes automatic. A company attack follows a deliberate sequence: assembly in the tactical assembly area; troop movement to the line of departure, through an attack position when the distance demands one; tactical movement to the probable line of deployment; deployment into assault formation; the assault and actions on the objective; then consolidation and reorganization while preparing for counter-attack and follow-on missions. CASEVAC, sustainment, and reporting run throughout. Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-21.10, *Infantry Rifle Company*, lays out this sequence in detail. Live fire teaches Soldiers what right looks like at each step, lets leaders refine SOPs, and forges the reflexes and mutual trust that hold a formation together when the plan comes apart.

But live fire does not test whether a unit can fight. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 7-0, *Training*, and Field Manual (FM) 7-0, *Training*, set out three distinct elements of unit training proficiency: mission-essential task (MET) proficiency, weapons qualification, and collective live-fire task proficiency. Live fire certifies the collective live-fire element and supports the MET. It is not, by itself, the MET assessment. FM 7-0 defines MET proficiency as performing the task to standard in a complex, dynamic operational environment, under external evaluation, while accomplishing the Soldier, leader, and unit



Soldiers assigned to 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment conduct a combined arms live-fire exercise on 18 December 2025. (Photo by SGT Fabrice Bodjona)

tasks in the training and evaluation outline (T&EO), rated trained, practiced, or untrained (T/P/U).

A live-fire exercise does not provide a complex, dynamic, externally evaluated environment, and we design it that way on purpose. To assess a MET such as Conduct an Attack, start with the current T&EO in the Combined Arms Training Strategy (for example, 07-CO-1092, Conduct an Attack – Rifle Company). From that MET, crosswalk the subordinate battle tasks, such as 07-PLT-3000, Conduct Support by Fire. ATP 3-21.10 and ATP 3-21.20, *Infantry Battalion*, carry the echelon-specific techniques, and FM 3-90, *Tactics*, carries the broader offensive doctrine. The sequence is straight-forward: Identify the MET, crosswalk the battle tasks, train the fundamentals, evaluate the unit externally against the T&EO's conditions and standards, record GO/NO-GO on the critical and leader measures, and then rate the MET T/P/U from what you watched the unit do.

Live fire proves a unit can employ its weapons safely and lethally. FoF training, whether one calls it a situational training exercise (STX) or field training exercise (FTX), proves the unit can fight. A lethal formation needs both in that order: live-fire maneuver first, the fight second.

Force-on-Force Tests Them

FoF shows the difference between a unit that knows a drill and a unit that can run it under pressure. A platoon rehearses react-to-contact flawlessly on a lane, then freezes when the enemy opens up from an unexpected flank. A company briefs a clean support-by-fire (SBF) plan, then cannot suppress because the support element never identifies the real enemy position. A battalion publishes a solid order, then overloads the net because leaders demand constant updates instead of disciplined reporting. FoF surfaces those failures while they are still cheap to fix.

It answers questions live fire cannot. Can the unit find the enemy before it commits the main effort? Can it hold security when Soldiers are tired, wet, and hungry? Can it hide and protect its command-and-control node and its sustainment? Can it keep tempo after the first plan fails? A thinking OPFOR brings this out.

A thinking OPFOR punishes a unit trying to take shortcuts. Every unit has them. Some come from time pressure, some from habit, some from leaders who assume Soldiers understand a standard no one ever enforced. The unit casual about dispersion learns the cost when a single loitering munition catches it bunched on the objective. The unit that treats CASEVAC as an afterthought learns the cost when simulated casualties pile up and the assault loses combat power. The unit that does not carefully select the location of its CP learns the cost when the opposing force locates it and removes it from the fight. These lessons sting, and they should. Training must carry consequences, and a unit learns faster when the opposing force makes it pay for every shortcut.

The transparent battlefield raises the price of every one of those shortcuts. Cheap reconnaissance drones and

Live fire proves a unit can employ its weapons safely and lethally. FoF training, whether one calls it a situational training exercise (STX) or field training exercise (FTX), proves the unit can fight. A lethal formation needs both, in that order: live-fire maneuver first, the fight second.

persistent sensors now watch movement that used to pass unseen, and FPV drones and loitering munitions strike what they find within minutes. The Army is fielding small drones down to the squad and counter-drone systems alongside them, and a unit that has not fought under that threat in training will meet it for the first time in combat. FoF is the only place to build the habits that keep a unit alive against it: dispersion, signature discipline, hard counter-reconnaissance, and CPs that displace before the enemy can range them. A live fire cannot replicate a drone hunting your formation. A thinking OPFOR with drones can.

We run these events to fix problems, and the opposing force must find them first. The best leaders build conditions where a formation can look ugly in private, exposed early, while it can still walk the ground, repair SOPs, retrain leaders, adjust load plans, and rebuild the plan. Pride wrecks training when leaders guard the appearance of readiness instead of hunting for problems to fix. Every formation will learn these lessons eventually. The only question is whether it learns them during training or in war.

Sequence It, Scale It, Tie It to the Mission-Essential Task List (METL)

A sound progression moves from fundamentals to application, then from application to adaptation.

First, build the SOPs. Define how the unit fights: reporting, movement techniques, actions on contact, CASEVAC, resupply, marking, CP displacement, fires clearance, unmanned aerial system (UAS) and counter-UAS employment, communications (primary, alternate, contingency, emergency — PACE) plans, and priorities of work. Vague SOPs are worthless under pressure.

Second, rehearse. Use terrain models, walk-throughs, battle drills, blank iterations, simulations, and low-cost repetitions. Wring out the friction before adding the risk and complexity of live ammunition.

Third, run live fire to validate control and fundamentals. Confirm that Soldiers execute under stress while leaders control fires, maneuver, and risk. This is where a unit earns the confidence, discipline, and shared understanding it will fight on.

Fourth, run FoF to test adaptation. Turn the OPFOR

loose to think, move, hide, deceive, counterattack, and exploit gaps. Arm them with the reconnaissance and strike drones a real enemy will bring. Design the OPFOR to attack the unit's most likely weaknesses and test the unit's METL.

Fifth, retrain with purpose. Let the after action review (AAR) drive immediate retraining. Skip the long lists of observations that never change behavior. Find the few failures that bled lethality and train them again. This is what gives live fire the respect it earns and FoF the role it needs.

This applies at every echelon, and the higher you go, the more a thinking enemy finds. At squad level, live fire builds weapons handling, fire control, movement, and casualty response; FoF tests whether the squad can hold security, react to unexpected contact, report clearly, and keep moving after it loses key personnel.

At platoon level, live fire builds SBF, assault, breach, and consolidation; FoF tests whether the platoon can find the enemy, avoid walking into disadvantage, use terrain, protect flanks, and keep tempo after first contact. At company level, live fire builds synchronization across platoons and control of transitions; FoF tests reconnaissance, preservation of combat power, protection of command nodes, and exploita-

tion of success. At battalion level, live fire can validate combined-arms synchronization and leader confidence, but only FoF tests the whole system: intelligence, fires, maneuver, sustainment, protection, and mission command working together while the enemy hits the seams and the battalion loses systems, leaders, and routes it assumed it would keep.

None of this works if FoF turns into a random tactical game. It has to test the unit against its METs, and those tasks nest from the top down. The brigade sets the prioritized METs and the proficiency level to reach; the battalion nests its MET under the brigade's, and the company nests under the battalion's. Build the event backward from that MET. A rifle company preparing to attack should face an enemy that forces reconnaissance, suppression, breach, CASEVAC, consolidation, and defense against counterattack. A battalion preparing for an area defense should face an enemy that probes, deceives, masses, bypasses, and targets command nodes and sustainment.

Before the event, leaders must define the training question. Can the company find the enemy before it commits the assault? Can the platoon hold fire control after it loses a squad leader? Can the battalion displace its command posts before the enemy ranges them? Can the trains survive and keep supporting? A good FoF answers those questions with evidence, not vibes, and lets leaders judge readiness honestly.

Build a Thinking Enemy and Own the Culture

All of this depends on an OPFOR that wants to win. The most valuable training aid in the Army is an enemy trying to beat you. A good OPFOR studies the unit, learns its habits, watches its routes, tracks its command nodes, hammers weak security, exploits predictable movement, and uses deception to make the training unit earn every step. Give it reconnaissance and strike drones and the electronic warfare to find and jam, because a real enemy will bring all three. Give it a real mission and the freedom to accomplish it: clear capabilities, limitations, and rules of engagement, but never so scripted that it goes soft.

Disciplined adjudication holds the event together. Set clear rules for direct fire, indirect fire, obstacles, drone detection and strikes, electronic attack, casualties, and sustainment effects. Sloppy adjudication kills trust in the event. Honest adjudication creates consequences that leaders and Soldiers accept.

Leaders must tell the formation, before the field problem, that exposure serves readiness: We want the enemy to find our weak spots here while we can fix them; we want to learn where our SOPs break and where leaders need more repetitions. Leaders have to reward the ones who surface problems early and resist the urge to protect the unit from embarrassment while still demanding the standard and never punishing honest reporting.

After the event, leaders drive correction. An AAR has to name the specific behavior that changed the fight, not offer



A Soldier assigned to 1st Battalion, 41st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, carries a Javelin during an exercise on 16 May 2026. (Photo by SPC Kristen Cruz)



Soldiers from the 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division pull security during exercise Ivy Mass at Piñon Canyon Maneuver Site, CO, on 16 May 2026. (Photo by SPC Kristen Cruz)

a vague comment like “communication needs improvement.” Name it: The platoon lost contact because the lead squad failed to report enemy indicators; the company lacked initiative and failed to achieve surprise by waiting too long in its assault position; or the battalion lost tempo because the CP emitted too long before it displaced. Then retrain.

A formation needs two things, and it draws them from two different events. A live fire gives a unit confidence — in its weapons, its leaders, its SOPs, and its teammates. FoF gives a unit humility by showing what still fails under enemy pressure. Confidence without humility builds hubris in units that look sharp on a scripted lane and come apart when the enemy behaves differently than expected. Humility without confidence builds hesitant units that know their problems but lack the repetitions to fight aggressively. The right progression builds both. We exist to close with and destroy the enemy, and that mission leaves no room for hubris.

Build First, Then Test

Most units get the order backwards. They jump into FoF before a unit can shoot, move, and communicate on a live-fire

range, or they treat a clean live fire as the culminating event and never find out what falls apart once the enemy gets a vote. Live fire develops the basics that keep units disciplined, lethal, and alive. FoF puts those basics under pressure from an enemy who wants to win. A unit that can fight through FoF has shown it can adapt. The battlefield will demand both, in order: master the complicated, then prove it against the complex.

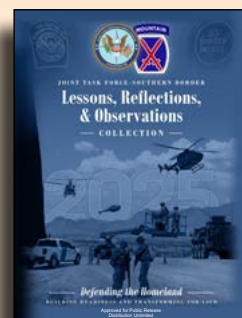
Build the progression right and a formation finds its weaknesses in training, on its own terms, while it can still fix them, instead of finding them under fire. That is how we forge lethal infantry formations, and that is what we owe our Soldiers and our nation.

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New from the Transformation and Lessons Learned Manager-Army

Joint Task Force-Southern Border — Lessons, Reflections, Observations

In January of 2025, U.S. Army Forces Command ordered the 10th Mountain Division to deploy to the U.S. Southern Border and form a joint task force to bring unity of effort to one of our nation's most complex and dynamic missions. Our focus throughout the mission remained clear: to assist in controlling the border to protect the territorial integrity of the United States. We accomplished this through the employment of unique military capabilities-persistent surveillance, engineering, logistics, intelligence, targeting, and employment of all-domain operations against a determined and adaptive adversary. This collection of lessons, reflections, and observations represents the breadth of experience acquired by the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Guardians, Sentinels, and civilians who served within Joint Task Force-Southern Border. This document is not merely a record of actions taken, but a reflection of the trust, competence, and reliability that underpin successful joint operations.



<https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2026/06/10/4cfc126b/no-26-1125-10-mtn-div-jtfsb-june-26.pdf>

THE FRAGILITY OF COMPLEXITY:

Why Overreliance on Technology Risks Defeat in Large-Scale Combat Operations

MAJ JONATHAN BUCKLAND

Prologue

In the 1990s, a few Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha (ODA) teams were trained to ride and perform basic care of horses as part of counter-narcotics missions under Joint Task Force (JTF) 6, which was later renamed JTF North. The ODAs conducted reconnaissance missions along the southern border near New Mexico and Texas to help law enforcement interdict drug traffickers as they crossed the border into the United States.¹ As part of that mission, a Special Forces officer who was part of JTF-6, LTC Eric Buckland, incorporated ODA training into mounted missions with law enforcement in the area. Reports of this training made their way to civilian leaders in the Pentagon who couldn't understand why, on the verge of the 21st century, the Army was training Soldiers to ride horses, and the training was abruptly discontinued. Fast forward to late 2001, when ODA 595, comprising some of the first U.S. Soldiers into Afghanistan after 9/11, rode horses and fought against the Taliban with Northern Alliance forces.²

Introduction

More than a century ago, French military theorist Charles Ardant Du Picq argued that in warfare, “the moral and psychological factors of combat ultimately outweigh the material.”³ He stated that the will to fight, the cohesion of a unit, and the psychological state of the soldier are the true arbiters of victory. As the U.S. military prepares for potential large-scale combat operations (LSCO), Du Picq’s focus on the human element offers a stark warning. The rapid evolution of U.S. military technology has yielded weapon systems of unprecedented lethality and complexity. However, this progress has created a dangerous disparity between the sophistication of our equipment and the individual Soldier’s capacity to effectively operate, maintain, and adapt to it under the immense pressures of combat. By prioritizing technological sophistication over simplicity, reliability, and usability, I believe the Army risks creating a force that is formidable on paper but fragile in practice.

This fragility stems from three core issues:

The Incentive for Complexity: A defense industrial base incentivized to produce “exquisite,” high-cost systems over simple, mass-producible ones.

The Maintenance Burden: An overreliance on contractors and a long logistical tail to maintain equipment that is too complex for field-level repair.

Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Mobile Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, set up a FGM-148 Javelin missile during a live-fire exercise as part of Exercise Balikatan 25 in the Philippines on 3 May 2025. (Photo by SSG Brenden Delgado)

The Cognitive Load: A failure to account for the immense cognitive and training burden placed on the modern Soldier who must master these systems to be effective.

These technological advancements promise to increase operational efficiency and provide tactical advantages in combat. However, despite the clear benefits, these innovations have created an emerging challenge: During LSCO, the Army will need to integrate and train new Soldiers forced to quickly learn and effectively utilize increasingly complex technologies if the systems are to be effectively lethal and capable weapons.

Historical Precedent: The Sherman vs. the Panther/Tiger

The fallacy that superior technology guarantees victory was debunked in the hedgerows of Europe during World War II. The German Panther and Tiger tanks were technologically superior to the American M4 Sherman, boasting thicker armor and more powerful optics. However, they were over-engineered and mechanically temperamental. When they broke down, they required factory-level repairs.

The M4 Sherman tank was notable for its high degree of mechanical reliability and maintainability. These characteristics proved to be a decisive logistical advantage for a military force engaged in a global conflict across multiple theaters. The design philosophy underpinning the Sherman emphasized the interchangeability of components and the accessibility of critical systems for in-the-field repairs — prioritizing maintainability and ease of production over sophistication. This approach was instrumental in achieving a high operational readiness rate.

The Sherman's superior maintainability was found in its transmission system. The transmission could be accessed and replaced through the removal of a frontal bolt-on plate, a procedure that could be executed under field conditions without the need to remove the vehicle's turret. This stands in stark contrast to the significantly more complex and time-consuming procedures required for contemporary German armored vehicles. Furthermore, the vast industrial capacity of the United States ensured a consistent and robust supply chain for spare parts, which further enhanced the Sherman's operational availability.⁴

In contrast, the German Tiger I and Panther tanks, while formidable weapon systems in terms of firepower and armor, were characterized by significant unreliability and presented considerable logistical challenges. These vehicles were mechanically complex, arguably over-engineered, and prone to a wide array of systemic failures.

From its initial deployment, the Tiger I was plagued by design and manufacturing deficiencies. Prevalent issues included engine overheating, recurrent failures of the transmission and final drive systems, and defects within the suspension. The vehicle's significant mass of approximately 57 metric tons placed excessive strain on its mechanical components. The replacement of the Tiger's transmission was



A Sherman tank from the 3rd Infantry Division stands in front of a shelled and fire-gutted building in Brouvelieures, France, in October 1944. (Photo courtesy of National Archives)

a laborious undertaking, mandating the complete removal of the turret — a procedure that was both labor-intensive and time-consuming. The high attrition rate due to mechanical failure was so pronounced that British intelligence reports from the Italian campaign noted a conclusion that the tank effectively “killed himself.”⁵

Similarly, the Panther tank, developed in response to the Soviet T-34, exhibited significant reliability problems, particularly in its initial production variants. These included persistent engine overheating, fuel system leaks that posed a significant fire hazard, and chronic failures of the transmission and final drive.⁶⁻⁷ The Panther's design incorporated an interleaved road wheel system, which, while providing superior weight distribution and a smoother ride, proved to be a major liability for maintenance crews. It was particularly susceptible to becoming clogged with mud, rocks, and ice, especially in the adverse environmental conditions of the Eastern Front, making field repairs exceptionally difficult. Like the Tiger I, the replacement of the Panther's transmission was a complex operation that required either the removal of the turret or substantial disassembly of the crew compartment interior.⁸

While the German Panther and Tiger tanks were, on paper, technologically superior to the American M4 Sherman with their thicker armor and more powerful optics, they were over-engineered and mechanically temperamental. Their complexity led to frequent breakdowns, requiring factory-level repairs (such as the complete removal of the turret to replace a transmission), which were impractical on the frontlines. This resulted in a high rate of non-combat attrition.

Conversely, the M4 Sherman was a testament to a different design philosophy, one that prioritized mechanical reliability, maintainability, and mass production. Its design, which allowed for critical components like the transmission to be replaced in the field with relative ease, coupled with the robust logistical support from America's vast industrial base, ensured a consistently high operational readiness rate. Ultimately, the Sherman's greatest asset was its availability.

While a single Panther or Tiger may have been a more formidable opponent, the Sherman's ability to be fielded in large numbers and kept running proved to be a more decisive factor in the attritional warfare of the European theater. The conflict demonstrated that the ability to maintain and deploy a fighting force consistently is just as crucial, if not more so, than the technological sophistication of its individual weapon systems. The U.S. achieved victory not through technological parity, but through operational availability and volume. Reliability and numbers defeated technological superiority — a lesson that modern acquisition seems to have forgotten.

The Military-Industrial Complex (MIC) — An Incentive for Complexity

The incentive structure of the MIC has created a challenge for our military forces. The defense industrial base is incentivized to produce “exquisite,” high-cost systems to maximize profit margins, often at the expense of battlefield practicality.

A primary example of this “over-engineering” is the transition from the WWII-era Jeep to the modern Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV). The Jeep was a masterpiece of simplicity — mass-producible, easily repaired in the mud by a private with a wrench, and effectively “disposable” in high-intensity conflict. In contrast, the JLTV, which absolutely brings enhanced survivability and protection, is an overly complex platform that requires diagnostic software and a massive logistical footprint to remain mission capable. From the concept of “building a Jeep in a box,” the Army traded rugged simplicity for a high-maintenance asset that cannot be sustained without a secure, tech-heavy supply chain.

The term “Jeep in a box” refers to the method by which Willys-Overland and Ford shipped the iconic WWII Jeep (the Willys MB and Ford GPW) to combat theaters around the globe. To maximize shipping space and protect the vehicles during transit, Jeeps were partially disassembled and packed

into standardized wooden crates. This was not a “kit” in the hobbyist sense. It was a mostly assembled vehicle, methodically broken down to its most compact form, ready for rapid final assembly by Soldiers in the field. The decision to crate Jeeps was driven by the brutal realities of global logistics during World War II:

- **Shipping Efficiency:** Uncrated vehicles wasted enormous amounts of space in the cargo holds of ships. By crating them, more Jeeps could be packed into a single vessel, maximizing the efficiency of the vital and often perilous transatlantic and transpacific supply convoys.

- **Protection:** Crating protected the Jeeps from the corrosive effects of saltwater as well as from damage during loading and unloading.

- **Standardized Handling:** A standard-sized crate could be handled by cranes, forklifts, and nets at any port in the world, from the docks of New York to the hastily constructed piers on a Pacific island.

The genius of the “Jeep in a box” lay in its process, which was designed around the assumption that the end user would be a regular Soldier with basic tools. At the factory, a completed and tested Jeep would be partially disassembled. Key components, such as the wheels, axles, windshield, and steering wheel, were removed and securely packed in the crate. Fluids were drained. The chassis, with the engine block intact, was bolted to the crate's floor. All the other parts were methodically packed around it, along with a small box of tools required for reassembly. Upon arrival in the theater, a team of Soldiers would uncrate the Jeep. Using the tools provided and simple instructions, they could assemble the vehicle and have it ready for service in as little as four hours. The original Willys MB Jeep of World War II was a masterpiece of simplicity. It was designed to be repaired in the field with basic tools by the Soldiers who operated it. The design significantly enhanced operational resilience and tempo.

In contrast, today's JLTV, while immensely more capable and survivable than the Jeep of WWII, requires diagnostic equipment and contractor support for many repairs. This creates a significant logistical tail and a critical point of failure. The JLTV is just one of many platforms where the Army relies on contractor support for services and higher-level care.⁹

In a contested LSCO environment where supply lines will be disrupted or completely cut and contractor support is unavailable, “dead-lined” JLTVs will be nothing more than unproductive hulks on the battlefield. In contrast, the philosophy behind the Jeep — simplicity and user-maintainability — would keep the force moving.

The Maintenance Burden and Contractor Dependency

While advanced technology can offer advan-



Mechanics overhaul a Jeep in Panama. (Photo courtesy of the National Archives)

tages, it is ultimately the human operator who must engage with and apply those systems under stress. In LSCO, where rapid decision-making and adaptability are critical, a Soldier's lack of access to new technologies can lead to significant operational setbacks. Modern LSCO doctrine assumes a level of maintenance "reach back" that is unlikely to survive a peer conflict. Currently, the Army is overreliant on civilian contractors to repair primary weapon systems.

In a contested environment where long-range fires and cyber-attacks disrupt logistical lines, the expectation of contractor coverage is a fantasy. A prime example of that is the Command Launch Unit (CLU) of the FGM-148 Javelin (JAV) compared to the simple Light Anti-Tank Weapon (LAW). The Javelin is highly lethal but comes with a staggering cost-to-field and a CLU that requires sophisticated maintenance and battery management. The LAW is cheap, disposable, and requires zero maintenance.

The "Silver Bullet" vs. "Massed Firepower" is a perfect illustration of the difference between the FGM-148 Javelin and the M72 LAW (or its modern successor, the NLAW). The Javelin is an exquisite "silver bullet." Its reusable CLU costs hundreds of thousands of dollars, and each missile costs more than \$200,000.¹⁰ The CLU requires careful handling and specialized maintenance. If it is damaged, the unit loses its premier anti-tank capability.

Conversely, the LAW-type system is a "good enough" weapon for the masses. At a fraction of the cost, it is a disposable, single-use system that requires only hours of training. It has no maintenance tail; if it fails or is used, the Soldier discards the tube and acquires another. In LSCO, a platoon may have only one or two Javelin teams, but a doctrine based on LAW-type systems could equip every fire team with an anti-armor weapon, creating a distributed, resilient, and overwhelming threat to an armored opponent taking "keyhole" shots at close distance, where the far superior range of the Javelin is not a factor within urban or restrictive terrain. The Javelin's technological superiority is irrelevant if it is not available at the decisive point, while the sheer volume of LAWs could prove decisive.

The Cognitive Load: The Human Dimension

The accelerating pace of technological innovation has outstripped the human ability to acquire and apply skills under duress. Modern equipment places an immense cognitive and training burden on the Soldier. In LSCO, where



A Soldier from the 101st Airborne Division fires an M72 Light Anti-tank Weapon during the Best Ranger Competition on 10 April 2022 at Fort Benning, GA. (Photo by SPC Kelvin Johnson Jr.)

casualties will be high and replacement Soldiers will have to be integrated quickly, systems that require months of specialized schooling become liabilities.

When a Soldier is overwhelmed by augmented reality interfaces, artificial intelligence (AI)-powered decision tools, and complex sensor displays, their "moral and psychological" focus is diverted from the enemy to the interface. That will create operational inefficiencies and a "paralysis by analysis" that Du Picq warned would destroy unit cohesion and the will to fight.

There are several strategies which can be used to bridge the gap between technological advancements and Soldier capabilities. The Army needs to provide more immersive, adaptive, and continuous training programs that can keep pace with the evolving technological landscape. The integration of virtual reality (VR), AI, and machine learning into training simulations can enhance the realism and efficiency of training programs, enabling Soldiers to interact with technology that mirrors real combat scenarios. To mitigate these risks, the military must shift its focus from purely technological solutions to a more balanced approach that prioritizes the human factor. This requires concrete changes to acquisition, doctrine, and training:

Acquisition Reform: The "ease of maintenance" and "reduced training time" need to be key performance parameters in the acquisition process, on par with lethality and survivability. The goal should be to procure systems that are not just effective but also robust and simple enough for an 18-year-old Soldier to use and maintain under the stress and duress of LSCO.

Doctrine: The Army needs to continue to focus on a doctrinal shift that re-emphasizes decentralized mainte-

nance and battlefield expediency. Empower NCOs and junior Soldiers to make repairs and adapt equipment, rather than relying on a long logistical chain back to rear-echelon support and contractors.

Training: NCOs and junior Soldiers should be trained and equipped to diagnose problems, conduct repairs, and cannibalize parts on the battlefield, fostering a culture of innovation and self-sufficiency. It will ensure that combat formations are resourced with properly trained individuals who are able to repair essential pieces of equipment and keep the unit in the fight.

While training for LSCO, the Army should also focus on degraded-operations training. That is, train Soldiers to operate their equipment when advanced features fail (specifically, if their GPS is jammed, the network is down, or their digital sights are broken). Once again, focus should be on training the fundamentals of each Soldier.

Irregular Warfare as the Adversary's Deliberate Counter to U.S. Technological Superiority

LSCO against a peer or near-peer adversary will not remain purely conventional; these future conflicts will rapidly expand into hybrid struggles in which adversaries employ irregular warfare to offset U.S. technological advantages. History has repeatedly shown adversaries facing superior forces avoiding equal engagements by pursuing disruption, attrition, and exhaustion by targeting the systems and assumptions that enable conventional dominance.

Irregular warfare is well-suited to exploiting the challenges created by technologically complex militaries. Contractor-supported maintenance, centralized logistics, networked command-and-control, and digitally dependent platforms present targets of opportunity for decentralized attack. Rear areas will no longer be the sanctuaries they were during the global war on terrorism (GWOT) era. Contested terrain will focus on supply lines, and sustainment assets will hold a greater tactical importance. As military systems grow more complex and specialized, they will become increasingly fragile under persistent disruption. Irregular warfare does not merely degrade combat power; it targets the conditions that enable superior forces to operate.

This future reality undermines key assumptions in U.S. doctrine — that the enterprise can sustain advanced systems through reach-back maintenance, uninterrupted connectivity, and protected support at multiple echelons. With an irregular warfare environment embedded within LSCO, these assumptions collapse. Civilian contractors cannot have the freedom of maneuver to operate under threat, and platforms requiring proprietary tools or external expertise will quickly shift from force multipliers to liabilities. In such conditions, simplicity and reliability will be decisive. Equipment Soldiers can understand, repair, and adapt at the point of need preserves initiative, cohesion, and will.

Conclusion

The U.S. military is currently building a force that is formi-

In my opinion, the Army must pivot away from the “exquisite” demands of the research and development and acquisitions process and refocus on systems that are rugged, mass-producible, and maintainable by the individual Soldier at the tactical level.

dable on paper but may be fragile in the crucible of large-scale combat. By prioritizing technological sophistication over reliability and simplicity, have we created a “glass jaw” military? To win the next war, the Army must remember Du Picq’s central tenet: The Soldier is the primary instrument of combat, and equipment is merely a tool.

In my opinion, the Army must pivot away from the “exquisite” demands of the research, development, and acquisitions process and refocus on systems that are rugged, mass-producible, and maintainable by the individual Soldier at the tactical level. If we continue to favor the machine over the man, we will find ourselves with the most advanced equipment in history — but not be able to keep it in the fight when the first shots are fired. We must simplify, or we will lose.

Notes

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Air Assault Operations in Large-Scale Combat: Imperatives for Modernization

MAJ EDGAR BURGOS

Above, pilots from 2nd Battalion (Assault), 2nd Aviation Regiment and 3rd General Support Aviation Battalion conduct an air assault operation on 13 March 2014. (Photo by Christopher Bodin)

Air assault (AASLT) operations began shaping the battlefield with speed and precision after demonstrating their combat effectiveness in the Vietnam War. Fifty years later, they remain an option for commanders at echelon to rapidly project combat power by converging vertical lift platforms with maneuver forces. As a decisive joint forcible entry (JFE) option, AASLT operations enable penetration into contested environments to secure lodgments and set conditions for follow-on operations, achieving strategic effects at scale.¹ Simultaneously, AASLT retains its tactical utility of providing rapid operational reach to gain the initiative, seize a lodgment, and capitalize on mobility to surprise the enemy.²

In modern warfare, peer adversaries employ integrated air defense systems (IADS), long-range precision fires, and advanced intelligence networks that challenge the execution of AASLT operations. To preserve its operational relevance, AASLT planning and execution must adapt. Typically, commanders employ AASLTs during the initial phases of combat operations to seize critical terrain before enemy IADS and precision fires are fully operational to preempt the enemy's ability to mass layered defenses.³ AASLTs exploit the speed, reach, and flexibility inherent in rotary-wing formations to not only achieve operational surprise but also force adversaries to commit forces and serve as a potent deception tool.⁴ Success in this contested, multidomain battlespace

requires scale, meticulous synchronization, and seamless integration of higher echelon and joint enablers, conditions far more demanding than the permissive global war on terrorism (GWOT) environments we saw in Iraq and Afghanistan.

However, the Army's current approach to AASLT operations — centered on maneuver formations tasked to execute but not fully equipped, adequately resourced, or rigorously trained for large-scale combat operations (LSCO) demands — is misaligned with these modern realities. For example, under the current force structure and associated mission-essential task list (METL), infantry battalions within infantry, mobile, and Stryker brigade combat teams (BCTs) are tasked to conduct air assault operations. However, these formations are often not adequately resourced, lacking sufficient organic lift capability and airmobile equipment to execute AASLT missions to standard. Units typically only demonstrate proficiency at the staff planning level, as defined by the evaluation criteria in existing training and evaluation outlines (T&EOs).⁵ The existing approach reflects two decades of limited-objective raids and tactical insertions of company-sized or smaller elements, rather than preparing for the division-led, corps-enabled operations that LSCO will require. Combat observations from the Russia-Ukraine conflict highlight the perils of underesti-

mating the difficulty of planning, resourcing, and executing AASLT operations in heavily contested environments and underline the urgency for institutional change from a doctrinal, organizational, and training standpoint to make AASLT a decisive joint force capability in future wars.

Division as the Principal Tactical Formation

Division-level AASLT operations must become a doctrinal focal point for the U.S. Army. Current doctrinal language and planning models should be systematically revised to reflect the brigade as the ground tactical command (GTC) element and the division as the air assault task force command in LSCO. This is not simply a matter of changing terminology but of reframing training cycles, support architectures, and operational concepts to account for the realities of high-intensity conflict. During GWOT, AASLT operations were a division resource; the battalion served as the AASLT task force command and the company was the GTC. This resulted in the application of AASLT operations at much smaller scales. Helicopters inserted platoon- or company-sized elements to conduct raids, reconnaissance-in-force, or quick reaction force (QRF) missions. These operations, conducted in environments where the enemy lacked the means to interdict aviation at range, were highly successful. However, LSCO introduces adversaries capable of detecting, tracking, and engaging rotary- and fixed-wing aircraft in depth. Small-scale insertions may be quickly neutralized or rendered irrelevant.

The insertion of a full BCT, planned and resourced at the division level and supported by corps and joint assets, becomes essential to generate meaningful operational effects against a peer adversary in a LSCO fight. Only at that scale can the joint force leverage an AASLT in a joint forcible entry (JFE) scenario to rapidly project combat power to seize and hold key terrain to achieve strategic effects. Likewise, a division must employ an AASLT at a similar scale to secure, hold, and exploit objectives in their close fight to deliver a

The insertion of a full BCT, planned and resourced at the division level and supported by corps and joint assets, becomes essential to generate meaningful operational effects against a peer adversary in a LSCO fight.

decisive impact within a LSCO battlespace. The Ukrainian counteroffensive in the Bakhmut sector offers a compelling illustration of this requirement. Ukrainian forces committed multiple brigades, including mechanized and AASLT formations, in sustained efforts to fix and degrade Russian combat power concentrated in the region.⁶ While smaller unit actions and localized probes disrupted Russian positions and drew tactical gains, they failed to produce enduring operational breakthroughs. It was only through the employment of larger, synchronized formations — integrating armor, artillery, engineers, and electronic warfare — that Ukrainian forces were able to pressure Russian defenses, liberate key terrain, and prevent the redeployment of elite Russian airborne units to other fronts.⁷ The complexity of coordinating multi-brigade operations under fire, maintaining operational tempo, and sustaining combat power over time highlights the indispensable role of division-level planning augmented with corps-level support. These operations demand a level of integration and synchronization beyond the capacity of battalion and brigade staffs, reinforcing the argument that division-led planning, with corps and joint enabler integration, is essential for success in LSCO.

Enabling and Equipping for Decisive Lift

Effective division-level AASLTs are enabled and equipped with the requisite capabilities and equipment to ensure their success. Enablers must include robust intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), electronic warfare, precision long-range fires, a resilient and redundant communications infrastructure, sustainment, and protection to ensure survivability. Equipment considerations require a detailed review and modification of the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) to ensure that there is a sufficient scale of airmobile equipment to enable the assault force. This equipment must be configured so that it can easily be transported by available lift aircraft,



Soldiers from the 1st Mobile Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) load onto a CH-47 Chinook helicopter on 8 May 2025 as part of a large-scale, long-range air assault operation from Fort Campbell, KY, to Fort Polk, LA. (Photo by SPC Alexander Goff)

whether internally, slung externally, or disassembled for rapid reassembly post-landing.

The imperative that “Lift 1,” the initial assaulting force, must be decisive cannot be overstated. In LSCO, assuming repeated penetration of an enemy’s anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) infrastructure is unrealistic. The Ukrainian conflict illustrates the fleeting nature of windows of opportunity in a contested airspace. This was starkly illustrated during the Battle for Hostomel Airfield in February 2022, when Russian forces attempted a high-risk air assault on the outskirts of Kyiv.⁸ Despite initial missile strikes and electronic warfare aimed at neutralizing Ukrainian defenses, Russian helicopters, including Ka-52s and Mi-28s, were shot down en route by dispersed Ukrainian air defense teams armed with man-portable air defense systems and a ZU 23-2 anti-aircraft gun.⁹ The airfield was briefly seized, but the Russians failed to establish an airbridge due to rapid Ukrainian counterattacks and the inability to suppress reconstituted and repositioned air defense assets.¹⁰ Due to failure to airland additional personnel and supplies to support the ground force, the operation collapsed within 36 hours, and Russia’s airborne forces suffered heavy losses and were forced to retreat.¹¹

This episode underscores the need for planners to ensure that Lift 1 is the only viable opportunity to insert forces by air as subsequent attempts are likely to suffer catastrophic attrition. Ultimately, even with meticulous planning, the presence of mobile air defenses, quick enemy adaptation, and dense sensor networks reduce the window for safe air operations to mere moments, making it critical to capitalize on every second. To succeed in this environment, AASLT planners must apply intelligence preparation of the operational environment rigorously to identify and exploit seams in enemy sensor coverage, air defense posture, and terrain-masking opportunities. Mission analysis must prioritize detailed examination of the enemy and operational environment to support the application of agility, convergence, depth, and endurance to ensure that Lift 1 achieves the desired effects. Only through synchronized, multidomain shaping and precision timing can commanders ensure that the initial insertion force is not only survivable but operationally dominant.

Lift 1 must be decisive, as repeated penetrations into such an environment may be neither feasible nor survivable. Consequently, the first echelon of forces into a contested airspace must be of sufficient scale, combat power, and sustainment to seize critical objectives, establish defensive perimeters, and force the enemy to commit to countermeasures favorable to the assaulting force. Commanders can also employ unmanned systems to lead the initial strike in an AASLT, engaging enemy forces while keeping Soldiers out of the forward-most lines of attack. Every critical component and warfighting function must arrive in that initial wave or be pre-positioned to reinforce immediately. This requires a disciplined approach to airmobile load planning, eliminating non-essential systems, task organizing Lift 1 for combat, and

fighting with lighter, air-transportable equipment. Emerging technologies such as optionally manned aircraft, high-capacity tiltrotors, and heavy-lift unmanned aerial systems (UAS) further enable the “airmobile” force of 2027. However, until such systems are fully integrated and tested, commanders must design AASLT task organizations within the constraints of current lift platforms. This demands both cultural and procedural changes in how units train, equip, and certify for deployment.

Planning Considerations for Large-Scale, Long-Range Air Assault (L2A2)

Modern L2A2 operations are more complex than their Cold War or GWOT predecessors. The planning horizon for a division-led L2A2 is measured in days, not hours. The 101st Airborne’s L2A2 iterations indicate nine days is required to marshal forces, position aviation assets, establish forward arming and refueling points (FARPs), deploy sustainment nodes, and integrate command and control (C2) architecture with joint and coalition partners.¹²

The aviation employment cycle for such operations must be deliberately structured. The 101st’s feedback informs a four-day aviation employment cycle. On Day 1, aviation assets deliver the assault to include troop lift, attack reconnaissance, and heavy-lift support. Days 2 and 3 should account for a 15-percent reduction in the available aviation assets as maintenance requirements and combat attrits the force. Day 4 orients toward reset and recovery, ensuring sustainability over a projected 14-day operational window. Failure to adhere to this cycle risks depleting aviation combat power faster than it can be regenerated.¹³ Next, planners must design FARPs for extended-duration aviation operations using quickly established, relocated, and defended expeditionary configurations.¹⁴ Support personnel must train to construct these facilities under combat conditions, often with limited engineer augmentation.

L2A2 sustainment is a decisive factor that influences tempo, survivability, and operational reach. In LSCO, extended lines of communication (LOCs), and the high probability of non-contiguous and fragmented operational areas, renders traditional ground-based resupply methods increasingly untenable during the initial phases of an AASLT. Moreover, the enemy’s ability to disrupt LOCs through fires, interdiction, and cyberattacks further compounds the challenge, making agile and resilient sustainment solutions imperative. Division and brigade planners must prioritize aerial delivery methods that bypass vulnerable or unsecured ground routes to ensure that AASLT maneuver forces remain supplied and operationally effective. Fixed-wing aircraft employing the Container Delivery System (CDS) offer rapid and scalable means of transporting critical supplies directly into forward areas, while the Joint Precision Airdrop System (JPADS) enables GPS-guided, high-altitude drops with pinpoint accuracy, minimizes exposure to enemy air defenses, and ensures materiel land precisely in designated zones. Once air superiority



Soldiers assigned to the 101st Airborne Division conduct an air assault demonstration on 16 May 2026 at Fort Campbell, KY. (Photo by SGT Brianna Badder)

and access are established, rotary-wing platforms execute low-cost, low-altitude (LCLA) drops to support dispersed units, and leverage UAS to provide flexible, low-signature options for precision resupply in high-risk environments. Sling-load operations remain a viable supplement, particularly when terrain or threat conditions permit rotary-wing maneuver, though their employment must be carefully weighed against the risk to manned aircraft and the potential for enemy engagement. Sustainment planners must consider the employment of pre-positioned caches and modular logistics nodes to extend operational endurance and reduce dependency on contested LOCs.

Medical support during AASLT operations also requires reimagining. LSCO's contested airspace, prevalence of enemy integrated air defenses, volume of long-range fires, and existent active counter-air operations make GWOT'S "golden hour" medical and casualty evacuation (MEDEVAC/CASEVAC) unattainable. The assaulting ground force must employ field-expedient Role 1 and Role 2 teams configured with modular trauma kits, telemedicine-enabled capabilities, and lightweight blow-out surgical setups. This will enable medical personnel to treat, resuscitate, and stabilize urgent casualties under fire for prolonged periods until secure evacuation corridors can be established. Planners should consider that CASEVAC in the opening phases depends on non-standard platforms, such as ground vehicles prepositioned via lift and UAS for medical equipment resupply; each option demands rigorous planning, rehearsal, and validation to maintain continuity of care when dedicated MEDEVAC assets cannot penetrate the battlespace.

The Russian Airborne Forces' (VDV's) failure at Hostomel Airport in February 2022 stands as a cautionary example. Despite initial tactical success in seizing the airfield, the operation faltered due to the inability to reinforce rapidly and to sustain the force under counterattack.¹⁵ Poorly coordinated logistics, inadequate suppression of Ukrainian fires, and a disjointed C2 structure turned what could have been a strategic gain into a costly defeat.¹⁶ U.S. planners must ensure that future AASLT operations do not suffer similar fates.

Command and Control Requirements

Large-scale, division-led, and corps-enabled AASLT operations demand a C2 infrastructure capable of integrating effects across domains and

echelons. The division headquarters — with its robust staff structure, planning expertise, and communications architecture — is the right echelon with the capacity to synchronize and integrate the diverse elements at the scale necessary for a successful L2A2 operation. These elements include not only aviation brigades and their support assets, but also suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) packages, long-range precision fires, space and cyber capabilities, electronic warfare effects, deception operations, and real-time ISR.¹⁷ LSCO's operational tempo and complex threats demand a level of integration and situational awareness that is beyond the capability of smaller tactical headquarters. In practice, this means the division must operate redundant, survivable C2 nodes that can operate in degraded communications environments. Command posts must be mobile, rapidly displaceable, and capable of functioning while on the move to avoid detection and targeting by enemy fires and electronic warfare systems. Secure, high bandwidth communications networks must link the division to corps, joint, and coalition partners to ensure the timely flow of orders and intelligence. During execution, the division commander and staff must maintain continuous situational awareness of both the air and ground tactical fights, adjusting plans dynamically as conditions change.

The Ukrainian conflict offers several relevant lessons in this regard. During the Kharkiv counteroffensive in September 2022, Ukrainian forces executed a rapid and coordinated multi-brigade assault that overwhelmed Russian positions near Balakliya and Izyum.¹⁸ This success was a result of deliberate shaping operations, synchronized fires, and the

integration of mechanized, airborne, and special operations forces under a centralized command.¹⁹ Ukraine's higher echelon headquarters orchestrated effects across domains, including electronic warfare and long-range precision strikes, enabling maneuver units to exploit gaps and collapse Russian defensive coherence.²⁰ The ability to coordinate across multiple geographically dispersed brigades in a contested environment, while maintaining tempo and adapting to battle-field conditions, underscores the critical role of division-level planning and C2 infrastructure in LSCO.

For U.S. forces, ensuring that division-level air assaults are supported by corps- and joint-level enablers is essential. Air corridors cannot be open for the assault force without integrated SEAD to suppress or destroy enemy air defenses. When employing an AASLT in a contested environment, synchronized long-range fires are critical; otherwise, enemy artillery and maneuver forces will quickly threaten the landing zones, compromising the assault force and their objectives. Without electronic warfare and cyber effects, the enemy's ability to sense, decide, and act may remain intact, blunting the assault's impact. Only a division headquarters, nested within a corps-level operational framework, has the reach and authority to coordinate these elements effectively.

Conclusion

Large-scale combat operations demand an evolution in how the U.S. Army conceptualizes and executes AASLT operations. The enduring value of the AASLT remains its ability to rapidly project combat power into decisive terrain; however, the conditions under which it must be conducted have changed. Peer adversaries contest every domain, challenge every movement corridor, and compress decision timelines to the point where only highly trained, well-equipped, and fully integrated formations can succeed. Yet

even the most capable adversary cannot perpetually defend the entirety of their battlespace. AASLT operations must be leveraged to exploit this inherent vulnerability.

To meet this challenge, the Army must shift its doctrinal focus toward division-led, corps-enabled, joint-integrated air assault operations, with the BCT as the primary maneuver unit of employment. Organizational changes must ensure that every piece of equipment in the assault force is airmobile through planning processes that account for extended preparation and sustainment considerations, aviation employment models that preserve combat power across operational windows, and C2 structures capable of integrating multi-domain effects in real time.

The experiences of the Russia-Ukraine war provide both cautionary tales and validation of these imperatives. The Russian VDV's failure to hold Hostomel Airport and Ukraine's own lessons in synchronizing operations under constant surveillance and precision fires threats reveal a battlefield where hesitation and failure to adapt are fatal. Exploiting fleeting opportunities demands more than tactical agility; it requires deliberate, integrated planning across echelons up to and including the joint force. The operational environment is evolving now, and so must we.

Notes

¹ Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, March 2025, 109.

² FM 3-99, *Airborne and Air Assault Operations*, March 2015, 15.

³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵ Army Training Network, <https://atn.army.mil/ATNPortalUI/METL/>.

⁶ Daniel Mealie, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan, "Ukraine's Operations in Bakhmut Have Kept Russian Reserves Away from the South Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment," Institute for the Study of War, 17 September 2023.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Liam Collins, Michael Kofman, and John Spencer, "The Battle of Hostomel Airport: A Key Moment in Russia's Defeat in Kyiv," *War on the Rocks*, 10 August 2023.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² "Division as the Unit of Action: Lessons Learned by the Army's Air Assault Division at JRTC," White Paper.

¹³ Operation Lethal Eagle 24.1 After Action Review Executive Summary.

¹⁴ "Division as the Unit of Action."

¹⁵ Collins et al., "The Battle of Hostomel Airport."

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ FM 3-94, *Armies, Corps, and Division Operations*, July 2021, 115-122.

¹⁸ John Hardie, "Ukraine's Counteroffensives in Kharkiv and Kherson and the Road Ahead," Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 16 September 2022.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*



A Soldier assigned to 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) guides an Infantry Squad Vehicle onto a CH-47 in preparation for a large-scale, long-range air assault on 5 May 2025. (Photo by SGT Kelvin Johnson Jr.)

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Measuring Army Professionals: *How Do We Actually Do It?*

LTC NATHAN A. BRANEN
CHAPLAIN (LTC) JARED L. VINEYARD

How do you measure a Soldier's professionalism? While that may seem like a straightforward question, ask any Army leader and see how they reply. What you're likely to receive is a variety of responses or even some blank stares, but that's not surprising. The Army expects its professionals to demonstrate character, competence, and commitment, but the way Army leaders are supposed to practice and measure that behavior is spread across Army doctrinal publications and regulations. This article will bring doctrinal and regulatory information together in one place to clearly explain how to measure a Soldier's professionalism. It will begin by explaining what is meant by professionalism, then summarize the concepts of the Army profession and Army leadership. Finally, it will synchronize the two concepts for Army leaders to develop a common understanding of how to measure professionalism.

First, it is helpful to review the definition of professionalism. Professionalism is defined as "the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a

professional person."¹ Thus, professionalism — and how you measure it — will be different depending on the profession observed. For example, the conduct, aims, and qualities used to measure a doctor within the medical profession will be different than those of a lawyer within the legal profession. While similarities exist between the two professions, the standards of professionalism will be nuanced due to the different expectations and outcomes society has for doctors or lawyers. The Army is a unique profession and defines itself as "a trusted vocation of Soldiers and Army Civilians whose collective expertise is the ethical design, generation, support, and application of landpower; serving under civilian authority; and entrusted to defend the Constitution and the rights and interests of the American people."² The Army describes and measures professionalism uniquely. This description is found in the first chapter of Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, *Army Leadership and the Profession*. The next section will briefly summarize some of the concepts found in that chapter.

The Concept of the Army Profession

The foundation of the Army as a profession is its legal and moral mandate for existence as well as the Army ethic. Legally, the Constitution of the United States establishes the necessity for the military and outlines the President as the Commander

*A drill sergeant salutes during an Infantry
One Station Unit Training graduation
ceremony for Delta Company, 3rd Battalion,
54th Infantry Regiment, 197th Infantry
Brigade, on 9 October 2025.
(Photo by Joey Rhodes II)*



in Chief while deferring to Congressional authority related to war powers and pay.³ Along with the Constitution, statutes, executive orders, and other national documents form the legal mandate for the Army as a profession. In addition, “the collective rights of the American people to independence and political sovereignty constitute the moral basis for the Army mission.”⁴ These ideals, found in the Declaration of Independence, helped inculcate “the phrase This We’ll Defend, which has been our Army’s motto since 1778.”⁵ These beliefs and principles form the basis for the moral mandate for the Army as a profession. Finally, the Army ethic operationalizes the above mandates for all Army professionals. The Army ethic

is defined as “the set of enduring moral principles, values, beliefs, and laws that guide the Army profession and create the culture of trust essential to Army professionals in the conduct of missions, performance of duty, and all aspects of life.”⁶

Based on this foundation, the Army has defined three roles for all members of the Army profession. These roles inform Army professionals how they are to execute the mandate within framework of the Army ethic for the benefit of the nation. These roles include honorable servants of the nation, Army experts, and stewards of the profession.⁷ The first, honorable servants of the nation, is understood as professionals who “serve honorably — according to the Army ethic — under civilian authority while obeying the laws of the nation and all legal orders.”⁸ Honorable servants act with integrity, “demonstrating character in all aspects of their lives” and recognizing the “intrinsic dignity and worth of all people” who “lead by example and demonstrate courage by doing what is ethical.”⁹ The second role, Army expert, is understood as professionals who “perform their duty, leading and following with discipline, striving for excellence, putting the needs of others above their own, and accomplishing the mission as a team.”¹⁰ They understand that the mission “may demand courageously risking their lives and justly taking the lives of others,” as well as continuously advancing their professional expertise as lifelong learners.¹¹ Finally, the third role, stewards of the profession, is understood as those who “embrace and uphold Army Values and standards of the profession, (and are) always accountable to each other and the American people for their decisions and actions.”¹² They “wisely use their resources... ensuring the Army is well-led and well-prepared, while caring for Soldiers, Army Civilians and families” as they “continuously strengthen the essential characteristics of the Army profession.”¹³

As professionals live out these roles, they build trust among fellow Army professionals, with the American people, and with its partners. While seemingly foundational, trust is

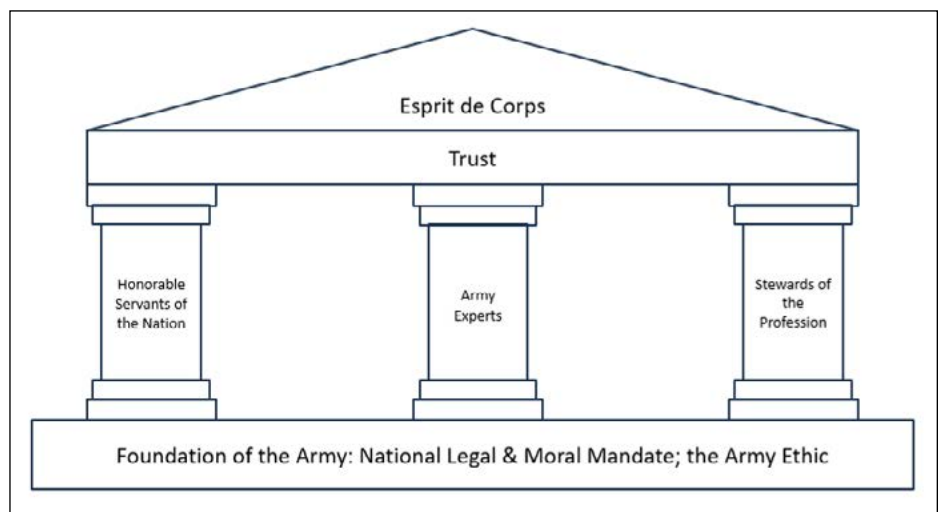


Figure 1 — Visualization of How the Three Roles Support Trust and Esprit de Corps²⁴

a result of the consistent application of the three professional roles. Therefore, based on the national mandate to exist, Army professionals build trust as they serve honorably, show themselves as experts in their craft, and steward the profession. When the nation trusts its Army professionals and Army professionals trust each other, it generates a collective ethos of camaraderie and cohesive teamwork that denotes the Army’s winning spirit, also known as esprit de corps. To visualize the above concept, one can think of a Greek temple with the Army’s legal and moral mandate along with the Army ethic as the foundation. The three roles act as pillars upon which the mantle of trust rests. After this mantle of trust is established, esprit de corps becomes the roof, indicating this is only attained after trust is built (see Figure 1).

While the roles of an Army professional may not be commonly used across the force, many Army professionals have heard of the three Cs: character, competence, and commitment. What is not generally understood is that these words are simply shorthand for expressing the three roles of the Army professional, listed and discussed above. This idea is explicit when doctrine states:

- Honorable Servant of the Nation — Professionals of Character
- Army Experts — Competent Professionals
- Stewards of the Army Profession — Committed Professionals.¹⁴

Therefore, Army professionals demonstrate character by fulfilling the role of honorable servants of the nation, competence by fulfilling the role of Army expert, and commitment by fulfilling the role of a steward of the profession.

The Concept of Army Leadership

It is now proper to turn to the concept of Army leadership, which is defined as “the activity of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.”¹⁵ The Army provides a Leadership Requirements Model (LRM) which “conveys

expectations and establishes the capabilities needed of all Army leaders regardless of rank, grade, uniform, or attire.”¹⁶ The LRM is “grounded in historical experience and determinations of what works best for Army” and “identifies core competencies and attributes applicable to all types and echelons of Army organizations.”¹⁷ Its “components center on what a leader is (attributes — BE and KNOW) and what a leader does (competencies — DO).”¹⁸ The attributes are divided into three categories which include character, presence, and intellect while the competencies are also divided into three categories consisting of leads, develops, and achieves. The “competencies are skills that can be trained and developed while the attributes encompass enduring personal characteristics, which are molded through experience over time.”¹⁹ The current evaluation process is designed to consider the LRM’s attributes and competencies for individual leaders by giving formal quarterly feedback through the counseling process and annual formal assessment with the individual officer or NCO evaluation report (OER/NCOER). Thus, leadership is theoretically taught, modeled, and enforced throughout the annual life cycle of Army professionals.

While the LRM is an in-depth model that Army professionals can use as a leadership tool, it can easily be remembered with its three-fold mantra of BE, KNOW, DO.

Aligning the Concept of the Army Profession and Army Leadership

While it is clear from ADP 6-22 that the concepts of the profession and leadership are important, what is not clear is how these two concepts sync. To answer this, an Army leader will have to leave doctrine and look at Army Regulation (AR) 600-100, *Army Profession and Leadership Policy*, which states:

*Without leadership, there is no profession, only bureaucracy. Likewise, without Army profession, leadership is much less meaningful, much less purposeful, and lacks a sufficient source of inspiration for the combat mission leaders must accomplish. Army Profession and leadership are inextricably linked in purpose and in practice. The consistent demonstration of character, competence, and commitment, with shared understanding and intent, reinforces the mutual trust necessary to prevail in combat.*²⁰

It is here a conceptual linkage occurs, and the ideals of the profession and the concepts of leadership are nested. Leadership exists within the framework of the profession, and the profession guides the tools that leadership offers. Put another way, the Army profession is “the why” while Army leadership is “the how.” While implicit in doctrine, regula-

tion makes clear that these two concepts work together for the good of the other.

This linkage is vital in understanding how one measures a Soldier’s professionalism. While measurement may not be a regulatory or doctrinal term, certification is. AR 600-100 states:

*The Army Profession certifies the character, competence, and commitment of its Soldiers and Army Civilians throughout their service. Certification methods include official promotion and evaluation systems; professional training and education within Army schools, including branch, skill, and functional area qualifications; and centralized selections and assignments for leadership and command positions.*²¹

Thus, a clear expectation is that the Army certifies its personnel in the three Cs we discussed previously: character, competence, and commitment. A key component of certification is evaluation. The Army as a profession expects that its professionals are evaluated to be certified. This evaluation occurs annually through OERs and NCOERs. It may surprise some that these evaluations are intended to be an assessment of professionalism. For instance, for officers, AR 632-3, *Evaluation Reporting System*, states, “Part IV (of the OER) will be an assessment of a rated officer’s professionalism, performance, and adherence to the attributes and core leader competencies of the Army Leadership Requirements Model... focusing on what a leader is (attributes) and what a leader does (competencies) during the rating period.”²² This same language is used for warrant officers as well as NCOs in their respective sections of the regulation.

Therefore, professionals must be certified in character, competence, and commitment through evaluations utilizing the LRM. Therefore, aligning the profession and leadership is necessary and can be done through aligning the three Cs of the profession with the three-fold mantra of the LRM. While not explicit, this alignment is logical. The certification criteria of character, representing the Army role of honorable servant, aligns with BE of the LRM. The certification criteria of competence, representing the Army role of Army expert, aligns with KNOW of the LRM. And the certification criteria of commitment, representing the Army role of stewardship, aligns with DO of the LRM, thus nesting the ideas of the profession and leadership. Therefore, honorable servants are leaders of character who know and live the Army Values and Warrior Ethos, demonstrating empathy, discipline, and humility as well as exhibiting presence in their military bearing, fitness, confidence, and resilience. Army experts have intellect, which includes mental agility, judgment, innovation, interpersonal tact, and expertise. Stewards of

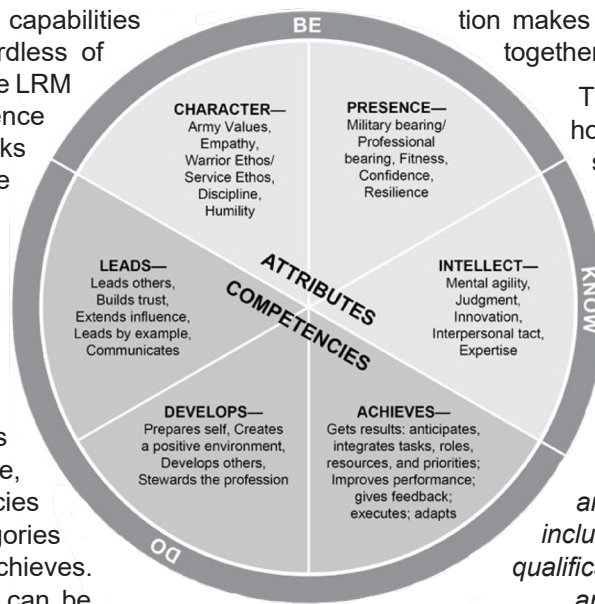


Figure 2 — The Army Leadership Requirements Model²⁵

the profession lead and develop others as well as achieve, with all the numerous sub-competencies under each. The synchronized concepts can be graphically portrayed as seen in Figure 3.

When looking at this figure, begin at the center or bull's eye. The bull's eye represents the Army professional, the "why" of everything we do. Army leaders are Army professionals. The ring surrounding the center represents the three roles of professionals, and the next circle synchronizes the LRM's BE, KNOW, DO with the profession's three Cs. The following circle includes the LRM's attributes and competencies, followed by the final circle which lists the more detailed sub-categories of the LRM. This model nests the concepts of the profession and leadership in a way that complements and reinforces both regulation and doctrine.

Within this model, the Army standard for individual professionalism is now logically understood and aligned with the already rated categories of the LRM. Therefore, in the evaluation process, the character and presence boxes of the rating are assessing the individual's status as an honorable servant; the intellect box of the evaluation is assessing the individual's status as an Army expert; and the leads, develops, and achieves boxes of the evaluation are assessing the individual's status as a steward of the profession. In this way, certification is intentionally occurring with the ratee's character, competence, and commitment in mind.

Understanding that "the Profession and leadership are inextricably linked in purpose and in practice" reminds leaders that the current evaluation system is a true tool to assess an individual as an Army professional.²³ For many Army leaders this concept may be a reimagining of the current OER or NCOER. That is, the evaluation is not simply a document assessing performance and potential but a tool that measures how well that performance and potential align with the professional needs of the Army. Since professional warriors are the Army's asymmetric advantage over the nation's adversaries, they can and should be measured and evaluated using tools that are already at the leader's fingertips in sync with the LRM. Logically linking the profession and leadership helps to better understand both and makes members a more professional force. Thus, how do you measure a Soldier's professionalism? The answer should be obvious with the current evaluation system, nesting the concepts of the Army profession with the requirements of Army leadership.

Notes

¹ "Professionalism," Merriam Webster Online Dictionary,

Understanding that "the Profession and leadership are inextricably linked in purpose and in practice" reminds leaders that the current evaluation system is a true tool to assess an individual as an Army professional.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/professionalism>, accessed on 30 July 2025.

² Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, *Army Leadership and the Profession*, July 2019, 1-2.

³ Sections of the Constitution that focus on the military specifically include Article 1, Section 8 (the Legislative Branch) and Article 2, Section 2 (the Executive Branch).

⁴ ADP 6-22, 1-3.

⁵ Field Manual 1, *The Army: A Primer to Our Profession of Arms*, May 2025, viii.

⁶ ADP 6-22, 1-6.

⁷ For historical context of these three roles, one might confer with Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State*, and his three professional characteristics of an officer which include expertise, responsibility, and corporateness.

⁸ ADP 6-22, 1-10.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 1-11.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 1-12.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1-9.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1-13.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1-15.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Army Regulation (AR) 600-100, *Army Profession and Leadership Policy*, March 2025, 18.

²¹ Ibid., 5.

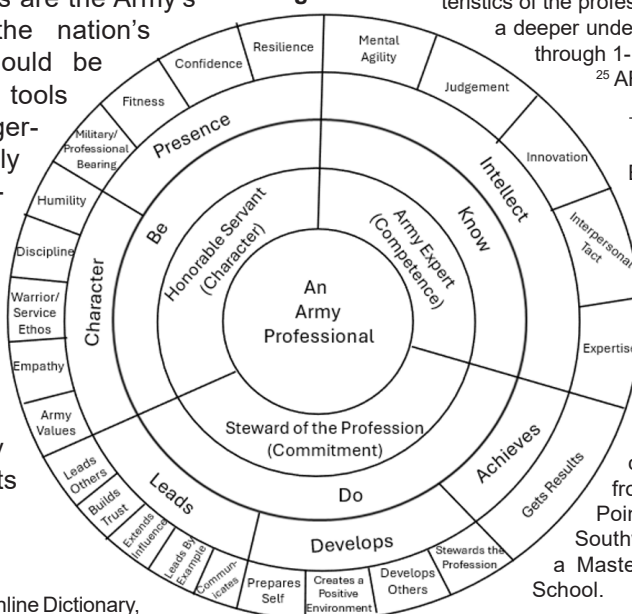
²² AR 623-3, *Evaluation Reporting System*, February 2025, 38. The wording for warrant officers occurs on page 105 and for NCOs on page 41.

²³ AR 600-100, 18.

²⁴ While this graphic is not portrayed in doctrine, it is the belief of the authors that it best portrays the relationship of the five characteristics of the profession in relation to the national mandate. For a deeper understanding of these concepts, see pages 1-2 through 1-12 of ADP 6-22.

²⁵ AR 600-100, 19.

Figure 3



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INFANTRY WARFIGHTING FORUM WRAP-UP

The following are key points discussed during the 25 June 2026 Infantry Warfighting Forum (IWF), hosted by LTG Greg Anderson, commanding general (CG) of the XVIII Airborne Corps and mobile brigade combat team (MBCT) senior mentor. This IWF focused on the new Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-91, *Division Operations*, and how we set MBCT and division operational frameworks with the new Army Structure (ARSTRUC) changes. LTG Anderson stated brigades and divisions are having to relearn how to operate with each other: roles and responsibilities, how to frame the battlefield, how to apply the new structure/enablers, and how to deal with these tensions. The tensions are not always with commanders but with the staff as they work through the friction of solving these problems. We have seen all kinds of methods for establishing a framework, and typically it is very basic level/friendly forces focused. We need to focus on an enemy-centric framework: understanding where to defeat, engage, or get effects on the enemy. Work from the enemy and then back to friendly forces sorting through the division of labor between division and brigade roles and responsibilities. This should be the ultimate logic in what drives your framework.

ATP 3-91, Division Operations

Rich Creed, director of the Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate (CADD), provided an overview of the new draft ATP 3-91 and the major doctrinal changes to division operations under the new ARSTRUC. The ATP was not written to any specific division “type” and focuses on the division’s responsibilities during conventional warfare. Mr. Creed discussed operational framework and the rethinking of space, depth, and range. He also introduced a new diagram for discussing the operational framework in a “noncontiguous” environment. Mr. Creed concluded with a discussion on the MBCT battlefield framework focused on echelon roles, responsibilities, and capabilities. ATP 3-91 is out for Army-wide staffing, and feedback from field commanders will be crucial in making the necessary changes to the final version and refining the doctrine. Key points from the discussion include:

- **Framework in Littorals:** BG Joe Escandon, deputy CG of I Corps, asked — given the variety of capabilities within organizations across the Army — how does CADD see the baseline document and what is the priority input needed from units? Mr. Creed stated their biggest gap in feedback is in the application of the framework in littorals. From staff exercises in the littorals, they are seeing the idea of deep operations set as the priority — instead of doing deep operations to enable close operations, units are conducting close and rear operations to enable deep operations.

- **All-Weather Reconnaissance:** COL Anthony Gore, chief of staff (CoS) for the 10th Mountain Division, refer-



enced the intelligence warfighting function in the ATP and how the brigade fight informs the division fight. He stressed the importance of task-organizing with purpose and training the unit that will cover the persistent all-weather reconnaissance function well in advance of any type of operation. We should ensure there is good synchronization with the all-weather reconnaissance and how it informs the intelligence warfighting function/fires integration with targeting. Limited reconnaissance assets will always be an issue — we must weigh the risk when considering to task down to lower echelon formations for collection requirements.

- **Tasking Lower Echelon Reconnaissance:** LTG Anderson stated intel requirements often exceed capabilities. We are making up for capability shortfalls with some bad practices. In some cases, divisions are tasking brigades to cover intel collection gaps. We are also seeing brigades tasking battalion scout platoons to look at brigade intel requirements. We haven't figured out the correct structure or division of labor to meet the intel requirements. Going down into lower echelons to grab their capabilities is dangerous business in some cases. We are taking subordinate commanders' flexibility and capability for higher echelon purposes; there is risk. Those types of shortfalls in the structure must be captured for refinement as we move forward.

- **Echelon Responsibility:** MG Jason Curl, CG of the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC)/Fort Polk, stated brigades should be responsible for the collection and fires on a certain echelon rather than looking at a specific depth or distance. Divisions focus on the next echelon, and battalions focus on their specific objective. Brigade shapes in front of battalions and division in front of the brigades. The greatest casualty producers at JRTC are mortars, which brigades should be focused on destroying while the division focuses on the counterbattery fight. What JRTC sees too often is brigades that want to extend effects based on capability instead of enemy. Many commanders default to what a division used to do and what a brigade was previously asked to do.

- **Next Generation Command and Control (C2) and Fires:** BG Ed Matthaides, deputy CG-sustainment for the 4th Infantry Division (ID), stated with the introduction of Next Gen C2, 4th ID has been iterating on the fires/targeting problem in a different way. Because Next Gen C2 gives them access to data across echelons, they can pick any or the best shooter for many targets. The tube artillery has less range than some capabilities in the brigades. Their brigades can range and attack targets the division might find for them. They want to be able to use the entirety of the division's assets because they can see and apply them against the fight as needed. To address the risk, 4th ID has been iterating on giving the brigades a controlled supply rate (CSR), some kind of reserve they need to retain, a certain amount of capability for division

targets. COL Rich Satterlund, CoS of XVIII Airborne Corps, stated the corps is seeing similar situations in recent exercises and managing and controlling the CSR has been crucial.

• **Defensive Fire Framework:** LTG Anderson stated the corps is working through the integration of all the new capabilities that are part of or impacting defensive fires across the corps area of operations: counter-unmanned aerial systems assets, different sensors, joint components, logistics, and moving data across unintegrated sensors/tools. How do we make decisions and layer disparate assets in depth across a corps’ battlespace using a defensive fires framework to visualize and solve the associated problems? We can go to industry and try to force things they invent into our current framework, or we can give them a framework and tell them we want their products to be integrated by design and not as an afterthought. Mr. Creed stated they are working on a sustainment product with the U.S. Army Combined Arms Support Command, similar to the MBCT slide and a similar surface-to-surface fires product with the Fires Center of Excellence (FCoE). Additionally, FCoE is working on a surface-to-air fire/air missile defense framework application as well. COL Jayson Morgan, FCoE CoS, stated they have built out the division artillery framework product and are working on the division air defense artillery echelons for the defensive fires framework as discussed. LTG Anderson stated the corps will work with FCoE’s efforts and tie them in with the Joint Innovation Outpost (JIOP). The JIOP at Fort Bragg, NC, can

move from design to testing with industry in days and weeks. There is great potential for speeding up the process at scale.

• **Operational Framework:** MG Brandon Tegtmeier, CG of the 82nd Airborne Division, stated he believes we have created too simple of a problem for ourselves with the standard operational framework. We need to accelerate the “non-contiguous” operational framework concept and make that the standard we train to because it is a much harder problem and more realistic. In the doctrine, we need to build everything in the context of the joint fight. MG Jay Bartholomees, CG of the 25th Infantry Division, and MG John Cogbill, CG of the 11th Airborne Division, both reinforced MG Tegtmeier’s comments on training to the “non-contiguous” operational framework; all the strategic choke points across the world make this a more realistic framework for training and they will provide their feedback.

Closing Comments

Mr. Creed requested anyone with a talent for conceptual sketches/diagrams relevant to the doctrine to go point-to-point with him or his CADD team with the feedback. There is no need to wait for formal events for assistance; CADD is their resource and his team will always pivot to requests for information from the field. LTG Anderson stated the overall doctrinal design and how we do our business is commander business at the brigade and above level — we have more work to do to shape this doctrine.

INFANTRY BRANCH UPDATE

INFANTRY BRANCH UPDATE
From the Infantry Branch Chief
Fellow Infantrymen,

Thank you for your continued tenacity and commitment to professional development across our force. Congratulations to the Infantry majors (MAJs) selected for promotion to lieutenant colonel (LTC). This edition provides key updates on **Officer Talent Alignment** and **Enlisted Broadening Assignments**. We remain steadfast in our mission to place the right Soldier in the right unit at the right time, strengthening Infantry readiness worldwide in accordance with Active Component Manning Guidance (ACMG).

ENLISTED UPDATES

Enlisted Market Cycles (EMC)

Upcoming staff sergeant (SSG) and sergeant first class (SFC) markets remain on track for twice annual execution, aligned with the existing master sergeant (MSG) timeline. Each NCO will be aligned to a six-week EMC window based on their Year/Month Available to Move (YMAV), increasing predictability and supporting overall force readiness.

EMC Cycle	Market Opens	Market Closes	Report Months
EMC2703	30 SEP 2026	10 NOV 2026	APR–SEP 2027
EMC2801	31 MAR 2027	11 MAY 2027	OCT 2027–MAR 2028
EMC2802	29 SEP 2027	09 NOV 2027	APR–SEP 2028

Department of the Army Select Recruiters (DASRs): What the Infantry Force Needs to Know. The DASR mission remains a no-fail Army priority, directly shaping the future force. As the largest contributor to the DASR population, CMF 11 Soldiers fill approximately 30 percent of all DASR authorizations, underscoring the Infantry’s central role in sustaining Army readiness. Physically fit, motivated leaders consistently excel in DASR assignments.

Force Structure and Requirements. The annual CMF 11 DASR requirement is captured in a table of distribution and allowances, which currently maintains a 105-percent fill across the U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC). Meeting this requirement demands consistent, high-quality Infantry talent. DASR eligibility criteria are outlined in Army Regulation (AR) 601-1, *Assignment of Personnel to Army Recruiting Activities*, paragraph 2 5a-d. All candidates must

complete the DA Select Recruiter Packet and DA Form 3822 within 30 days of Army Training Requirements and Resources System (ATRRS) enrollment notification. Screening includes medical readiness and security clearance verification.

Selection and Assignment Process. Infantry Soldiers are screened and nominated by the Infantry Branch, which evaluates suitability and manages volunteer submissions. Soldiers interested in DASR duty should contact their career manager to communicate intent. While the Infantry Branch conducts suitability screening, final approval for deletions or deferments rests with USAREC — not the branch.

Assignment processing is executed by the Recruiting Branch and USAREC:

- **CONUS Soldiers:** Attend the Army Recruiter Course (ARC) in a temporary duty (TDY) and return status. During week three of ARC, USAREC assigns candidates to their gaining recruiting battalion. Report dates are typically around 75 days after graduation.
- **OCONUS Soldiers:** Receive assignment instructions prior to date eligible for return from overseas (DEROS) and report to their recruiting battalion 30-45 days after DEROS. ARC attendance occurs in a TDY and return status from the assigned battalion.

Infantry Branch Considerations

The Infantry Branch prioritizes:

1. SGTs with at least 12 months time in grade (TIG)
2. Career development (CD) complete SSGs
3. Non-CD complete SSGs

Selecting non-CD complete SSGs for DASR duty does not negatively impact promotion timelines. SSGs are not eligible for centralized selection boards until 36 months TIG and cannot be promoted to SFC until 48 months TIG.

Volunteer Pathway

Infantry Soldiers wishing to volunteer for DASR duty should contact their talent manager. After Infantry Branch screening, the Recruiting Branch finalizes assignment locations and ATRRS reservations.

- **CONUS Soldiers:** USAREC issues assignments once the Soldier is attending ARC.
- **OCONUS Soldiers:** USAREC coordinates assignments prior to DEROS; Soldiers report to their recruiting station first and attend ARC approximately 90 days later.

OFFICER UPDATE

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

ATAP Cycle	Market Opens	Market Closes	Report Months
ATAP 27-02	14 SEP 2026	04 NOV 2026	APR-SEP 2027
ATAP 28-01	14 APR 2027	13 MAY 2027	OCT 2027-MAR 2028
ATAP 28-02	14 SEP 2027	03 NOV 2027	APR-SEP 2028

Fiscal Year (FY) 26 LTC Promotion Selection Board (PSB) Reflections (June 2026). The FY26 Army Competitive Category (ACC) LTC PSB results highlight the competitive nature of promotion to LTC and reinforce key waypoints in the promotion process. Infantry in zone promotion rates (77 percent) have remained consistent relative to the ACC over the past five years and have exceeded ACC rates in the last two cycles.

1. Overall Key Selection Factors

- Sustained performance (≥ 4/5 Most Qualifieds [MQs])
- Two key development (KD) MQs
- Exclusive enumeration at any point in KD
- Continued post-KD performance

2. Above Zone Selection (15.7 percent, 11 of 70)

Key trends:

- 4 of 5 MQs: six officers
- 3 of 5 MQs: five officers
- ≥1 MQ in KD: eight officers
- 0 MQs in KD: three officers (all followed by ≥2 MQs in post-KD broadening with exclusive enumeration)

3. In Zone Selection (76.5 percent, 62 of 81)

Key trends:

- Two KD MQs
- Minimum 3 of 5 MQs (with ≥2 MQs in KD) or 4 of 5 MQs (with ≥1 MQ in KD) within the last five officer evaluation reports (OERs)
- At least one KD OER with exclusive enumeration

4. Below Zone Selection (4.3 percent, 5 of 117)

Key trends:

- All received 5 MQs in their last five OERs
- All received exclusive enumeration on their last five OERs
- Two officers ranked #1 in their senior-rater population on all five OERs
- One officer ranked #1 on four of the last five OERs

5. Factors in Non-Selection

- Weak performance (≤ 2/5 MQs = 0 percent selection)
- Highly Qualified KD OER (≥ 2 HQ = 0 percent selection)
- Stair step in KD with ≤ 3/5 MQs = 50 percent selection

Closing Comments from the Infantry Branch Chief

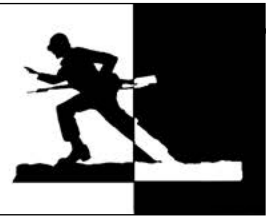
In conclusion, I would like to introduce myself as the 52nd Infantry Branch Chief and welcome SGM Jeremy McDonald as the new Infantry Branch Sergeant Major. I look forward to upholding the proud legacy of the Infantry in this assignment. I could not be more excited to serve our Infantry Soldiers, NCOs, and officers as we continue to fight and win on every objective.

Closing the “Last Hundred Yards” for the nation since 1775, Follow Me!

— LTC Paul R. Brown
Infantry Branch Chief 52

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

Book Reviews

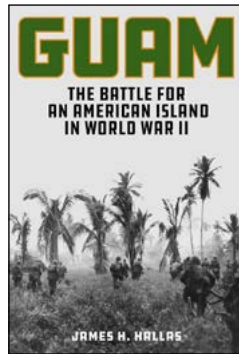


Guam: The Battle for an American Island in World War II

By James H. Hallas

Essex, CT: Stackpole Books,
2025, 600 pages

Reviewed by LTC (Retired)
Jesse McIntyre III



The recapture of Guam is one of the lesser-known battles in the Pacific Theater during World War II. The 20-day battle from 21 July to 10 August 1944 has been overshadowed by the seizure of Saipan and the Battle of Philippine Sea. James Hallas — author of *Uncommon Valor of Iwo Jima*, *Saipan*, and *Fly Boy Heroes* — tells the story of one of the deadliest battles of the Pacific War in *Guam: The Battle for an American Island in World War II*. Hallas provides an unprecedented analysis of the battle from a small unit perspective and its timely relevance for today. Hallas begins by presenting a brief history of the island and its native Chamorro people, Japan's seizure of Guam, and its occupation of the island. The author excels in detailing the extensive challenges faced by American planners. In spite of a 13-day devastating pre-landing bombardment, initial assault forces faced fierce resistance from entrenched interlocking Japanese positions. Hallas paints a hellish experience for the American forces involved in recapturing Guam.

Japanese forces negated our fires and armor through rear slope positions and connected fighting positions. Layers of hidden fortified positions, spider holes, interlocking fires, preregistered kill zones, along with the ability to counterattack behind American lines, made Guam a nightmare for American forces. Japan learned from its Guam experience, transitioning from its strategies of defeating the enemy on the beach line and mass counterattacks. Japan's goal was to prolong the war long enough to gain a more desired agreement.

Hallas' work includes several stories of interest to include that of Navy Radioman First Class George Tweed who was able to stay hidden from the Japanese for two years and seven months. Tweed and five others slipped into the jungle when Japanese forces captured the island. Once the Japanese became aware, they hunted them. Tweed was especially sought for his communications background. Eventually, Japanese forces captured the other five prisoners, who were quickly put to death. Local Chamorros hid and supported Tweed in spite of Japanese cruelty. Many were interrogated, tortured, and murdered but remained

loyal to Tweed. Readers may find themselves wondering if Tweed jeopardized the lives of locals in the process. Using a mirror and semaphore, Tweed was able to signal Navy warships information on Japanese defenses and to set the conditions of his rescue.

Readers will realize the Battle for Guam quickly evolved into a small unit fight as Marines and Soldiers rapidly learned that small groups of men were required in eliminating Japanese positions one by one using a variety of tactics. Hallas excels in describing the horrors of Japanese counterattacks in the darkness of night. The fact that the Marines were able to withstand countless such attacks reflects their character and grit. Hallas' research indicates grenades, knee mortars, and flamethrowers became the weapons of choice on Guam. In the end, Army and Marine Infantrymen quickly learned how to identify and neutralize Japanese positions in securing Guam.

Hallas' work comes at a time when Guam's strategic value has become more important as United States-China tensions mount and Washington grows more concerned of Chinese aggression in the South China Sea. Guam is home to a U.S. Air Force base, naval base, and there has been talk of relocating Marines currently based on Okinawa to a new base on the island. Guam could serve as a critical logistics hub in a potential conflict in the Pacific.

Hallas compels readers to reflect on the 3rd Marine Division chief of staff's post-operation assessment that Guam was a textbook solution executed as contemplated with minimal difficulties. Guam was the second costliest operation at the time, only to be exceeded by Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. The author's research informs the reader that Guam remained dangerous long after the 3rd Marine Division commanding general reported the island secured. An estimated 130 hard-core Japanese soldiers refused to surrender and returned to the jungle in continuing to resist American forces. Sightings of these soldiers and attacks on American personnel and Guamanians were reported for years following the battle. On 24 January 1972, Corporal Shoichi Yokoi was reportedly the last Japanese soldier to come out of hiding.

The strength of *Guam: The Battle for an American Island in World War II* is Hallas' ability to capture the detail and brutality of the battle from commanders and infantryman alike on both sides. It contains many grainy graphics that may require the reader to use outside sources in gaining an understanding of battle lines and geographical locations. However, it remains a must for any combat leader's reading list and would make an excellent addition to *Saipan: The Battle That Doomed Japan in World War II* by the same author.



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