

Working to Master Large-Scale Combat Operations

Recommendations for Commanders to Consider during Home-Station Training

Col. Michael J. Simmering, U.S. Army



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As the U.S. Army continues to refine its ability to execute the tasks set forth in the 2018 *National Defense Strategy*, the ability of units to operate in large-scale combat operations (LSCO) becomes a critical component of deterrence, compelling our enemies, and winning.¹ In the coming years, as the Army introduces new capabilities into the force, tactical units must not lose sight of the reason that they exist. The Army's proficiency at the tactical level provides strategic leaders time, space, and known capabilities to inform their decision-making processes. For that reason, the core capabilities that allow the Army to conduct sustained LSCO against near-peer threats must be maintained. Building upon the proficiency achieved in the last few years is necessary, improving the force at various levels must continue, and commanders should focus their efforts on the following critical areas when executing home-station training in preparation for LSCO.

Mastering the Fundamentals

The word “fundamental” gets tossed around by leaders at all echelons quite often in conversation. Is physical training fundamental? Is maintenance fundamental? Yes, on both counts. However, when speaking of fundamental tasks that units must perform at the *collective level*, we should gauge our unit training proficiency by our ability to perform the fundamental tasks for which a unit was designed. For example, an FM radio retransmission team that is great at maintenance but cannot establish a retransmission site to extend the reach of tactical communications in a timely manner is not trained at a fundamental task for which it was designed. A tank platoon that cannot conduct tactical movement toward an objective and conduct a subsequent attack by fire or support by fire is not trained in

the fundamental tasks for which the organization was designed. A forward observer team that cannot call for fire both digitally and via voice is not trained in the fundamental task for which the team was designed. Brigade, battalion, and even company commanders should ask themselves these questions when formulating their home-station training plans:

- Have I focused collective training in my organization on the fundamental battle tasks (platoon and lower) and mission essential tasks (company and higher) we must accomplish at echelon to be successful against a near-peer threat in the decisive action training environment?²
- Once task focus has been achieved, have I geared the training program in my organization, at echelon, to allow the repetitions required to achieve true mastery of these tasks under battlefield conditions?
- Have I allowed time for critical retraining at lower echelons?
- Am I moving my formation to the next level (squad, platoon, company, battalion) too quickly, or am I prudently accepting risk to retrain deficiencies at a later point?
- Have I held leaders accountable for the ability of their organization to perform these tasks?

The recently published Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 7-0, *Training*, describes “battle focus” as commanders “consciously narrow[ing] the training focus to those collective tasks (METs [mission essential tasks]) and weapon systems necessary for the unit to meet the higher commander’s guidance.”³ Simply put, a unit “cannot simultaneously train every task to standard because of mission, time, or resource constraints. Attempting to train too many tasks to proficiency only serves to diffuse the unit’s training effort.”⁴ A unit’s ability to achieve battle focus and subsequently train to a high standard for the decisive action operational environment determines a large portion of its performance at the National Training Center. Above all, remember the Army principles of training, whether at home station, deployed, or at a combat training center:

- Train as you fight.
- Train to standard.
- Train to sustain.
- Train to maintain.⁵

For further information to help an organization master the fundamentals, see ADP 7-0, *Training*.

Previous page: Soldiers assigned to 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Georgia, engage the opposing force 13 February 2020 during Decisive Action Rotation 20-04 at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California. Decisive action rotations ensure Army brigade combat teams remain versatile, responsive, and consistently available for current and future contingencies. (Photo by Spc. Brooke Davis, U.S. Army)

Command and Control

Most units embrace the philosophy of mission command as set forth by ADP 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*. However, the ability to command and control a brigade combat team (BCT) spread over more than sixty kilometers has always represented an immense challenge. Coordination, timing, and synchronization all stem from an ability to simply talk to one another. Yet, Army doctrine states that “different operations and phases of operations may require tighter or more relaxed control over subordinate elements than other phases.”⁶ Intermix typical command-and-control challenges with the ability of near-peer threats to deny FM and satellite communications and to contest the electromagnetic spectrum and cyberspace, and just talking becomes an emotional event. Therefore, a well-thought-out communications plan across all warfighting functions, at echelon, such as the PACE (primary, alternative, contingency, emergency) plan becomes essential in allowing commanders to conduct the operations process and simply command-and-control operations. When exploring the functionality of command-and-control systems, commanders (regardless of echelon) should ask themselves these questions:

- Does my organization have an established, resourced, and trained PACE plan? (Note: If only 30 percent of the Force XXI Battle Command, Brigade and Below [FBCB2] Joint Capabilities Release [JCR] systems are operational, then is JCR really a viable “alternate” in the PACE plan?)⁷
- Have I forced my organization to establish our entire communication architecture at home station—at distance?
- As a BCT commander located on the forward line of own troops, how would I personally communicate with my rearward-most unit?
- Have I assigned responsibilities for command and control throughout the depth of the battlefield to help me coordinate and synchronize operations?
- Within my staff sections, is there an established PACE plan by warfighting function? How is my brigade S-2 (intelligence officer) coordinating with all battalion S-2s? Brigade S-6 (signal officer) with battalion S-6s? Brigade fire support officer with task force fire support officers?

ADP 6-0, dated 31 July 2019, clearly describes the criticality of effective command and control. Most importantly, it states,

Command and Control (also known as C2) is fundamental to the art and science of warfare. No single activity in operations is more important than command and control. Command and Control by itself will not secure an objective, destroy an enemy target, or deliver supplies. Yet, none of these activities could be coordinated towards a common objective, or synchronized to achieve maximum effect, without effective command and control.⁸

Finally, the command-and-control warfighting function speaks of a “system” made up of people, processes, networks, and command posts. Unless commanders personally invest the time in their command-and-control systems, their ability to drive the operations process becomes challenged.

For further information on command and control, see ADP 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*.

Staff Proficiency

Over the last two years, the Combined Arms Center reemphasized the importance of the military decision-making process (MDMP) by increasing the MDMP repetitions for each student. Every Captains Career Course and Command and General Staff Officers' Course graduate demonstrates proficiency in the MDMP. However, education not reinforced by practice creates gaps over time. Upon arrival at the National Training Center, staffs are not simply tasked to conduct MDMP. Instead, the decisive action training environment confronts staffs with conducting the MDMP at speed in an environment where planning and current operations must occur simultaneously. Most staffs

Col. Michael J. Simmering, U.S. Army, is the commander of Operations Group at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California. He holds a BS from the U.S. Military Academy and an MA from Kansas State University. His previous assignments include brigade command in the 3rd and 4th Infantry Divisions and chief of staff at the Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, Louisiana. He has deployed to Kandahar, Mosul, and Tal Afar.

find this a challenge—primarily because our education and training focus often revolves around planning alone. Often, commanders become frustrated in the ability of the staff to coordinate and synchronize current operations at the pace required during a combat training center rotation. Regarding their staffs, commanders should ask themselves the following questions:

- Does my staff clearly understand how I receive information?
- Do I have an established system/process for communicating the commander's guidance that my staff understands?
- Have I personally *taught* each staff section my expectations of them as the entire staff progresses through the MDMP?
- Have I built a progressive training program for my staff at home station focused on increasing our ability to operate at an increased tempo?
- Have I trained my staff to conduct both planning and current operations simultaneously?

As the Army hones our skills in LSCO, commanders should remember that a very well-trained staff becomes a critical requirement to effectively negotiate the operations process. ADP 5-0, *The Operations Process*, states,

During large-scale ground combat, command posts displace often, communications are degraded, and troops receive limited

precise information about the enemy. These conditions influence the operations process. Streamlining staff processes and the unit's battle rhythm to those related to the defeat of the enemy is essential.⁹

For further information on the operations process and the criticality of effective staffs at echelon, see ADP 5-0, *The Operations Process*.

Reconnaissance and Security

Reconnaissance and security (R&S) operations happen at echelon. From local security patrols and establishment of observation posts at the lowest tactical levels to the scout platoons at the battalion level, to the cavalry squadron at the brigade level, to the employment of additional collection assets, every organization plays a role in the reconnaissance and security fight. Reconnaissance operations focus on the collection against established priority information requirements at echelon in order to provide time and space for commanders to act. Security operations provide early warning in order to protect the main body of the unit. Both are invaluable but neither happens effectively when only the scout platoon or cavalry squadron executes them. Just like everything else, R&S is a team sport. Brigade and battalion commanders should ask themselves these questions:



- ◆ How, where, and when does the BCT plan for the R&S fight? Who are the key personnel required?
 - ◆ Am I providing my subordinates clear reconnaissance or security guidance? Am I employing my cavalry squadron and scout platoons to allow a greater understanding of the situation and allow for timely decision-making?
 - ◆ Have I articulated *everyone's* roles and responsibilities in the BCT's reconnaissance and security fights?
 - ◆ Who in the BCT is overall responsible for coordinating and synchronizing the R&S plan and fight? Who manages the information collection plan? Are they complementing each other's efforts?
 - ◆ Am I layering reconnaissance assets and sensors to establish contact with the smallest element possible?
 - ◆ Have I included both technical sensors and ground units as part of my comprehensive reconnaissance and security effort?
 - ◆ Have we developed a robust communications architecture plan that will support the R&S plan?
 - ◆ Have I resourced and enabled the reconnaissance organizations to perform the task I am asking them to achieve (e.g., dismounts to clear restricted terrain, fires capability, realistic amount of time, etc.)? Overall, how have I established a holistic reconnaissance effort to enable my organization? Does it allow for decision-making and plan adjustment?
 - ◆ Have I set conditions to successfully execute the R&S fights (e.g., position areas for artillery, Role 2 medical care, forward logistics elements established and ready to support; echelons-above-brigade assets collecting; attack aviation, etc.)?
- Field Manual (FM) 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*, clearly states that the BCT information collection, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance managers; S-3 plans; the brigade aviation element; the air liaison officer; and the fire support coordinator contribute to allocate organic, attached, and supporting assets and enablers against the named areas of interest to ensure seamless and in-depth reconnaissance operations. All too often, these elements work in isolation, focusing efforts predominately on the maneuver of a combined arms battalion independent of an overall synchronized reconnaissance-and-security effort at the BCT level. Continuous BCT-level operations at the National Training Center demonstrate that upon the conclusion of a major battle, setting conditions must begin immediately. FM 3-98 goes on to state,
- BCT reconnaissance and collection teaming is the pairing of collection assets, usually by the Brigade S-3, to enhance collection assets ability to conduct integrated reconnaissance and security tasks to answer the CCIR [commander's critical information requirements]. Do not

M1A2 Abrams tanks assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 68th Armored Regiment, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Fort Carson, Colorado, maneuver across the battlefield toward an objective 1 November 2018 during Decisive Action Rotation 19-02 at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California. (Photo by Spc. Lisa Orender, U.S. Army)





keep reconnaissance and information collection assets in reserve. The commanders form reconnaissance and collection teams to complement the capabilities of reconnaissance and intelligence collection. Those teams consist of appropriate combinations of Cavalry Soldiers and multi-discipline intelligence Soldiers.¹⁰

In order to be successful, information collection assets, manned by multidiscipline intelligence soldiers and reconnaissance elements of the BCT, must operate in tandem to create a comprehensive, fully resourced R&S plan at the BCT level. Remember, “through effective information collection and continuous reconnaissance, Brigades develop and sustain the necessary understanding to defeat adaptive and determined enemies.”¹¹

For further information on R&S operations, see FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*.

Fires Integration

The BCT commander and fire support coordinator should always consider the following problem statement in every operational effort: “How does the BCT establish, maintain, and transition a lethal, permissive

Soldiers from the 15th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, conduct base operations 11 April 2019 during Decisive Action Rotation 19-06 at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California. (Photo by Sgt. Nathan Franco, U.S. Army)

joint fires environment?” Units must synchronize fires with the movement of tactical formations at the speed required to function effectively in the decisive action training environment. Units that do not can find themselves out of range to effectively shape enemy formations in accordance with the BCT-commander-approved high-payoff target list, attack guidance matrix, and target selection standards prior to contact with “close area” forces. Units sometimes hesitate to push these critical brigade-level enablers forward enough in proximity of the forward line of own troops and coordinated fire line in order to truly effect and transition the fight from the BCT deep fight to the close fight. Those that do move forward fail to account for near-peer threat capabilities and attempt to operate in a manner not commensurate with the operational environment, requiring them to see

and protect themselves. Dispersion, extended distance communications, camouflage, and digital fires capability from sensor to shooter all take on an increased level of importance in this environment. Brigade and field artillery battalion commanders set the tone and enable the necessary discipline to execute a synchronized joint fires plan. When formulating a home-station training plan, ask these questions:

- Have I specifically focused my field artillery units on the tasks they must perform for the BCT in order to achieve collective success (i.e., fire support tasks with particular emphasis on special munitions)? Subsequently, have I tasked these units with so many requirements that I am diluting the effectiveness of fires in the BCT?
- Am I providing clear offensive (shaping) and defensive (counterfire) targeting guidance to my staff to allow them to effectively target the enemy?
- Am I putting my artillery in the correct positions, and do I have a clear understanding of how early I can start affecting the enemy with organic assets?
- Are the task force mortars capable of supplementing and complementing an echelonment of fires to properly influence each task force fight in accordance with a clearly defined priority of fires?
- Do I have a clearly defined observer plan, integrated throughout the BCT with both primary and alternate observers?
- Do those observers understand the desired effect and the importance of their role in the fight?
- Do I understand, down to the platform, which observers have the ability to digitally call for fire, and is the BCT aggregate retransmission plan supportive of the applicable networks?

For further information on ensuring a unit effectively integrates fires, see Army Techniques Publication 3-09.42, *Fire Support for the Brigade Combat Team*.¹²

Sustainment in Contact

Sustainment constitutes one of the most challenging warfighting functions to synchronize effectively in a BCT. However, a failure to sustain our BCTs serves as the single most guaranteed method to hinder success. The sustainment business, like other warfighting functions, relies heavily on relationships. The relationship between the brigade support battalion (BSB) commander, the brigade executive officer, the support operations officer, and the BCT S-4

(logistics officer) is a critical and complex relationship that needs clear delineation of roles and responsibilities for the BCT sustainment enterprise to function at its best.

It is important that each of these key leaders understands his or her role as described in FM 3-96, *Brigade Combat Team*.¹³ The BCT executive officer ensures synchronization of the concept of support with the scheme of maneuver. The BCT S-4 develops the support plans and determines support requirements. The support operations officer, while not a BCT staff member, is responsible for synchronizing all support operations in the BCT, including the actions taken by the fires support coordinators. The BSB commander is the senior logistician in the BCT and is the proponent for the sustainment warfighting function, which includes logistics, health service support, personnel services, and financial management. The BSB commander needs to be able to surge, mass, and reallocate capabilities if he or she is going to fulfill his or her responsibility to sustain the BCT fight.

Additionally, while we generally focus our sustainers on supporting the remainder of the BCT, we often forget that sustainment units have training requirements as well. The ability to sustain an entire BCT in the decisive action training environment depends on the ability to develop, organize, and execute a simple, comprehensive concept of support that is understood throughout all echelons of the formation. The decisive action training environment typically includes a great deal of fighting and sustaining in contact. As units become contaminated and work to decontaminate, the rate that commodities are consumed, specifically water, increases dramatically, and the battlefield geometry can drastically change. Planning for survivability moves and decontamination operations will set the unit on the path toward success.

High-intensity combat operations produce casualties, and the BCT's ability to move soldiers from the point of injury to Role 1 medical care (specialized first aid, triage, resuscitation, and stabilization) and beyond is critical to the regeneration of combat power. The died-of-wounds rate is greatest between the point of injury and the Role 1 level of care. The movement of soldiers from the point of injury to Role 1 care must be rehearsed at echelon like any other battle drill. Focus all efforts on identifying the vehicles and locations for the nonstandard evacuation platforms, rehearse self-aid and buddy aid, and ensure every soldier understands casualty evacuation in order to reduce the died-of-wounds rate.

All commanders must ask themselves these questions:

- Does my unit have a well-developed concept of support understood from the platoon through the brigade levels?
- Does my unit have a redundant system for passing logistical status reports to my higher headquarters?
- Are my sustainment units trained to protect themselves in the support area, including chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear contamination?
- Are my sustainment units trained to protect themselves as they maneuver supplies throughout the consolidation area?
- Have I resourced my sustainment units with the tools necessary to defend against the threats that they will likely encounter?
- Is the BSB commander empowered to influence the allocation and distribution of assets for the entire BCT, including fire support coordinator resources?

- Has each battalion within my organization properly trained, manned, and equipped a field trains command post capable of requesting, organizing, and coordinating for supply movements?
- Is my unit giving the same level of emphasis on the sustainment rehearsal as on the combined arms rehearsal and the fires rehearsal?

For further information on sustainment operations, see ADP 4-0, *Sustainment*.¹⁴ ■

For further information on common observations or recommendations for home-station training, any leader in our Army should feel free to contact Operations Group at the National Training Center. Points of contact for all Operations Group leadership are distributed each month to brigade combat team and division commanders. Battalion commanders should never hesitate if they need assistance. The National Training Center's singular focus is helping them win the U.S. Army's next fight.

Notes

1. Department of Defense, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 2018).

2. Field Manual (FM) 7-0, *Train to Win in a Complex World* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 5 October 2016), 1-10.

3. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 7-0, *Training* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 31 July 2019), 4-3.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 3-1-3-3.

6. ADP 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 31 July 2019), para. 1-25.

7. "FBCB2 System," JBC-P [Joint Battle Command-Platform], accessed 5 February 2020, <https://jbc-p.army.mil/jbcp/Help/FAQ/index.cfm?type=2>. "FBCB2 [Force XXI Battle Command, Brigade and Below] is a digital battle command information system providing integrated, on-the-move, timely, relevant battle command information to tactical combat leaders and soldiers from brigade to platform and across platforms within the brigade

task force. It allows warfighters to pass orders and graphics to visualize the commander's intent and scheme of maneuver. FBCB2 is a key component of the Army Battle Command System"; "Joint Capabilities Release," Stand-To!, 21 February 2013, accessed 5 February 2020, <https://www.army.mil/standto/2013-02-21>. "Joint Capabilities Release (JCR) is the Army's next generation friendly force tracking system."

8. ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, para. 1-74.

9. ADP 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 31 July 2019), para. 1-25.

10. FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 1 July 2015), 1-16.

11. Ibid., para. 1-58.

12. Army Techniques Publication 3-09.42, *Fire Support for the Brigade Combat Team* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 1 March 2016).

13. FM 3-96, *Brigade Combat Team* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 8 October 2015).

14. ADP 4-0, *Sustainment* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 31 July 2019).