



The CTC Program

Leading the March into the Future

The Combat Training Centers (CTCs) provide realistic, doctrinally based, joint and combined arms training that approximates actual combat.

Colonel Michael Barbee, U.S. Army

The CTCs serve a dual role in . . . generating unit readiness while serving as a crucible experience for leader development.¹

(Army Training Strategy, November 2012)

THE ARMY'S COMBAT Training Centers (CTCs) continue to serve as the premier leader development and collective training venues in the world. The CTCs provide a complex, challenging operational environment, highly capable opposing forces (OPFOR), professional Observer-Coach-Trainers (OCTs) who are doctrinal experts, and world class instrumentation to capture cause-and-effect data. Training at the CTCs is the next closest thing to actual combat operations. Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) participate in force-on-force and live-fire training at one of the three maneuver CTCs: the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), National Training Center (NTC), or Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC). Corps, Division, and Functional/Multifunctional Brigade Headquarters conduct simulation-supported Warfighter Exercises (WFX) with the Mission Command Training Program (MCTP). Regardless of the venue, the CTC experience provides the capstone event to home station training, providing feedback to commanders on how well they trained their units and leaders and what they need to do to improve readiness in future training at home station.

Established in the 1980s, the CTCs changed the way we train units and develop leaders and significantly improved Army readiness for operations. Leaders attributed their units' performance in Operation Desert Storm to the rigorous training provided by the CTCs. More recently, the CTCs proved their value by quickly adapting training to readiness requirements for Operations Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Iraqi Freedom (OIF)/New Dawn (OND), transitioning from a pre-9/11 sole focus on major combat operations to training units and leaders deploying to counterinsurgency operations in training environments accurately reflecting the complex and challenging nature of the theater. The CTCs are dynamic training resources for commanders. They rapidly adapt the training environment to reflect the operational environment and ensure the "practice is tougher than the game."

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PHOTO: Artillery conducting live fire operations at the NTC. (DOD)

Army in Transition

With the conclusion of combat operations in Iraq, and the initiation of the drawdown in Afghanistan, the Army is now focusing on preparing our formations and soldiers for future operations. To support this transition, the CTCs are transforming the way we train. Since the CTC Program has always served as an engine of change for the Army, the CTCs are adapting to support commanders as they train units to conduct Decisive Action against hybrid threats as part of Unified Land Operations. Decisive Action is the simultaneous conduct of offensive, defensive, and stability tasks (or defense support to civil authorities on the domestic side). Hybrid threats are diverse and dynamic combinations of regular and irregular forces, terrorists, and criminal elements working to achieve mutually beneficial objectives and effects.

The purpose of this article is to describe the CTC Program's efforts to enable this transformation and to inform soldiers on what they can expect when they train at our CTCs. There are five critical lines of effort in this transformation:

- Rebalancing leader development with unit readiness.
- Maintaining Special Operations Force—Conventional Force (SOF-CF) interdependence.
- Reestablishing an expeditionary mindset in the Army.
- Adjusting the CTCs to adapt to Army force structure changes.
- Ensuring the training Operational Environment (OE) replicates the necessary complexity and dynamic nature to challenge units for future operational requirements.

Leader Development

The CTCs have long been the Army's premier venue for developing adaptive leaders with the intellectual agility to respond to volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous conditions on the modern battlefield. They replicate battlefields where a commander can try new concepts without the fear of failure. However, over the last decade the CTCs focused more on unit readiness than leader development due to operational requirements and lack of dwell time for the operating force. OCTs played a greater role in training units, rather than providing observations to the training unit commander to

support his role as the primary trainer. The CTC Program is now rebalancing leader development with unit readiness.

Coupled with our new Training Doctrine (ADP/ADRP 7-0), the CTCs are renewing the focus on commander-driven training.² Commanders will accomplish this through execution of mission command during planning, preparation, and execution of missions, as well as through leader-led after-action reviews (AARs) in which unit commanders guide their soldiers through development of self-generated solutions to improve unit performance. The AARs, conducted throughout the exercise, help commanders and their soldiers learn to improve and sustain unit performance through the process of self-discovery. AARs focus on mission command and the factors that led to decisions and actions, rather than on inculcating theater-unique processes and techniques as was necessary when training units for OEF and OIF/OND. OCTs will support unit commanders and leaders by providing doctrinally based observations and insights, as well as assist the unit in determining solutions based on cause-and-effect.

Exercise scenarios will support leader development as well. The Army chief of staff (CSA) directed the CTCs to design scenarios which "require units to



Engineers prepare defensive obstacles to defeat a conventional OPFOR attack at the JMRC. (DOD)

conduct Decisive Action as the predominant training theme, with leaders at all levels challenged to integrate and synchronize all warfighting functions . . . with the commander challenged to determine the most effective application of the elements of combat power.”³ The CTCs are already aggressively executing this guidance in Decisive Action rotations at the maneuver CTCs (MCTC) and in MCTP Warfighter Exercises. The CTC scenarios are challenging leaders at all levels to accomplish both the missions and the commander-developed training objectives through mission command, while providing commanders the flexibility to “rheostat” the intensity level based on individual and unit needs. Though both OPFOR and BLUFOR want to “win,” unit and leader training is still the primary objective of any CTC exercise.

SOF-CF Interdependence

“The ultimate goal of SOF-CF interdependence is to increase operational effectiveness by enabling the joint force to present a seamless front to our enemies and a united face to our friends and partners.”⁴

In OEF and OIF/OND, special operations forces and land-owning BCTs routinely operated together or in mutual support. When operating separately, they worked to ensure complementary effects. The CTC Program will maintain SOF-CF interdependence in the transition to Decisive Action training. Anticipated SOF future operational requirements may challenge this goal. The CTCs and U.S. Army Special Operations Command (as well as Joint SOF) are campaigning to ensure the SOF-CF interdependence lessons learned in combat are carried forward into future training and leader development. In future rotations, the success of the rotational units, both SOF and CF, will hinge on their ability to interoperate, with training outcomes impacting both training audiences—SOF will no longer be an enabling capability, but an interdependent capability required to achieve the desired exercise end state.

At the operational level, MCTP will stress SOF-CF integration at the division and corps level, with combined/joint special operations headquarters participating in future corps (and some division) WFXs as a prime training audience rather than only as a response cell. This increased SOF participation will be critical as corps and division headquarters train to serve as Joint Task Forces

and Land Component Commands for future contingencies. The four CTCs must ensure the training environment enables both SOF and CF commanders to achieve their training objectives.

Expeditionary Mindset

Prior to OEF and OIF/OND, the U.S. Army trained to deploy and operate as an expeditionary force. ADRP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, defines an expeditionary capability as —

the ability to promptly deploy combined arms forces worldwide into any area of operations and conduct operations upon arrival. Expeditionary operations require the ability to deploy quickly with little notice, rapidly shape conditions in the operational area, and operate immediately on arrival exploiting success and consolidating tactical and operational gains. Expeditionary capabilities are more than physical attributes; they begin with a mindset that pervades the force.⁵

To achieve this end, the expeditionary force must be able to sustain itself in a very austere environment. However, this pre-9/11 mindset gradually dissipated over time as large, secure forward operating bases (FOBs) were established with hard-stand facilities and mature sustainment lines of communication in theater. The same can be said for training at the CTCs, with procedures modified and contracts let, which minimized pre- and post-rotational requirements for soldiers due to lack of dwell time. To prepare for the future, the CTCs must adapt to the requirements associated with an expeditionary force.

The CTCs will lead the way in reestablishing an expeditionary mindset across the Force. Decisive Action rotation soldiers will be expected to shoulder almost all of the burden for reception, staging, onward movement, and integration at MCTCs. This includes conducting their own rail download, establishing and securing tactical assembly areas away from the security and facilities of FOBs, establishing mission command systems without benefit of hard-wired facilities, and conducting sustainment operations from brigade sustainment areas that must secure themselves and be mobile in order to support operational requirements. Corps and division HQs will revert from operating in fixed site, hard-wired buildings to establishing field command posts, with soldiers challenged to set up the significant

communications architecture required for mission command at that level.

The prepositioned (PREPO) fleets of vehicles and other equipment at all three MCTCs will be modified, so training units can optimize their use. Initial analysis indicates increasing the fleets of wheeled vehicles, trailers, and generators, as well as adding Blue Force Tracker/Movement Tracking System installation kits to PREPO vehicles will significantly expand the draw capabilities at JRTC, JMRC, and NTC. This will also reduce wear and tear on a unit's home station fleet, and free up transportation funds to be applied to other training requirements.

Rebuilding an expeditionary mindset will be an exciting challenge for our junior leaders and soldiers who have never really experienced it. Lieutenant Colonel Matt Canfield, JRTC's Operations Group chief of staff, offered the following insights based on his observations of Decisive Action rotations:

The Decisive Action model offers a striking contrast to the Mission Rehearsal Exercise. No FOBs, no contracted chow, no laundry service, no air conditioning in the TOC and sleeping quarters, no "commuting" to work to and from the FOBs. The soldiers lived out of their rucksacks for the 11 day period with MREs on-the-go, no showers, and dismounted operations in the woods. They slept under poncho liners and had to figure out how to conduct their missions for the first three days without the benefit of the Mission Command network. They quickly learned to have a folded analog map in their pocket and a flashlight with plenty of batteries. It was a paradigm shift of game-changing proportions.⁶

Training Force Structure

Recent Army decisions to restructure the BCT will affect the CTC Program. The addition of a 3d Combined Arms Battalion, the transition of the Brigade Special Troops Battalion into the Brigade Engineer Battalion (BEB), and the addition of a Fires Battery to the BCT's force structure make it a much more formidable force on the battlefield. It also requires a different echelons-above-brigade (EAB) force package to adequately train its mission essential tasks to standard. Last year FORSCOM worked with

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the TRADOC warfighting function proponents to develop EAB support packages for each of the three types of BCTs for future MCTC rotations. These "troop list" packages include aviation, maneuver enhancement, and sustainment task forces, as well as fires, SOF, and Joint-Interagency-Intergovernmental-Multinational (JIIM) capabilities. The future BCT force structure with approved echelons-above-brigade enabler packages will represent a 17 percent increase in the number of soldiers being trained at the MCTCs. Additionally, the Division Tactical Command Post will deploy to the MCTC and integrate with the CTC Operations Group to provide a "Higher Headquarters Control" mission command function for the BCT.

The CTC program is adjusting to meet this 17 percent growth in the training unit's strength and BCT structure. Adjustments include restructuring the Operations Groups to provide OCTs at the right level and with the right skill sets to ensure units and soldiers receive optimal benefit from their CTC training rotations. Modernized instrumentation systems at the MCTCs will be able to track 4,000 dismounts, 3,000 vehicles, and 95 aircraft—four times the current capability at JRTC or JMRC, and a slight improvement for NTC. Live fire capability upgrades at each of the MCTCs will enable simultaneous battalion-level live-fire exercise opportunities that can be integrated with ongoing force-on-force operations. TRADOC is now exploring using the Live, Virtual, Constructive-Integrating Architecture to link the integrated training environment at home station with training at an MCTC to allow more units to train for less money during a CTC "dirt" rotation.

Operational environment

The more formidable BCT will require a more robust and challenging OE than pre-9/11. This OE must include a strategic setting, both tailorable and scalable based on unit training objectives, and contain a rich variety of potential

threats, including near-peer with anti-access, area denial, cyber, and weapons of mass destruction capability. Additionally, the operational variables (PMESII-PT) and mission variables (METT-TC) in this OE must be adaptable to facilitate training for any type operation, anywhere in the conflict continuum. Based on these requirements, the CTCs are utilizing the Decisive Action Training Environment.

The Decisive Action Training Environment is a complex OE with a hybrid threat that can be employed asymmetrically to counter our strengths. While not a scenario, it provides the PMESII-PT variables to create scenarios to enable commanders to meet their training objectives both at home station and the CTCs and is based on “real world” threat capabilities and tactics. To populate this OE, the MCTCs are using a combination of permanent party OPFOR, augmentation units, and role players. These forces perform a wide variety of roles, including host nation forces,

threat conventional forces, insurgents, guerrillas, civilians on the battlefield, criminals, etc., all of which are necessary to establish the conditions to enable units to achieve their training objectives.

Threats encountered at CTCs today are not the Krasnovians or Atlanticans encountered at a CTC pre-9/11. Today’s OPFORs are sophisticated elements with UAVs, tier II mission command systems, and cyber capabilities, including GPS jamming, cell phone networks, and social media capability. The CTCs also provide both host nation forces and civilians on the battlefield, with stability operations a part of every exercise. Effective stability operations can lead to valuable intelligence, while poor execution or neglect of stability operations can lead to friendly and neutral villagers becoming insurgents. This complex OE is necessary to challenge leaders and units to accomplish missions while executing simultaneous Wide Area Security and Combined Arms Maneuver under exceptionally stressful conditions.



Brigade Combat Team (BCT) leaders conduct a Combined Arms Rehearsal (CAR) at the JRTC. (DOD)

Mission Command Training Program

While most of this article has focused on the MCTCs, the MCTP is undergoing its own transformation. The first change is implementation of the “bigger-fewer” concept. Rather than conducting separate exercises to support training of an individual HQ, the MCTP will conduct five to six large, multi-echelon WFXs annually, with all Operations Groups supporting each exercise. For example, a corps WFX may include a division HQ, one or two BCTs, and up to nine functional/multifunctional brigades as part of the training audience. This exercise architecture provides optimal mission command training opportunities, improves both vertical and horizontal staff coordination, and increases the potential for attracting JIIM participants. It will also facilitate post-OEF integration for the Active Army and Reserve Components, since these WFXs will be multi-compo. This “bigger-fewer” construct will not require all training units to collocate to train. The MCTP will use improved network capabilities to connect these units to the exercise so many can conduct distributed training using their mission command systems from home station, while avoiding transportation and temporary duty costs.

The long-term goal is to integrate these MCTP corps and division multi-echelon WFXs with Global Combatant Command exercises. This will increase the Joint-Interagency-Intergovernmental-Multinational component and provide high-payoff training opportunities for Special Operations Forces, multinational partners, and our Unified Action Joint partners that enable operational level headquarters to tie tactical capabilities to regional or national strategies. It also enables the Global Combatant Command to work with their regionally-aligned corps and divisions, standardizing operating practices and procedures while fostering relationships. Additionally, these exercises will enable corps and division HQ to build the capability to serve as either Joint Task Force or Land Component Command HQ.

Establishing Joint Task Forces /Land Component Command capability in training will significantly reduce required reaction time should a crisis arise. To facilitate this future capability, the MCTP is building on their long-standing wartime training



M1 Abrams tank and M2 BFVs maneuver around a host nation village while in the attack at NTC. (DOD)

support relationships with the USAF 505th Command and Control Wing and Joint Staff J7-South Training Team (formerly the JFCOM-derived Joint and Coalition Warfighting Center), the organization that trains Joint HQ. This relationship includes an OCT exchange program, as well as integrating exercise planning and design efforts. Finally, MCTP is collaborating with Army Cyber Command to help commanders hone critical cyber-warfare skills emergent in today’s strategic environment.

To add multinational complexity and improve interoperability, MCTP is establishing OCT exchange programs with both the British and Canadian armies. Tied to this are plans for NATO partners to participate habitually in future U.S. corps and division WFXs.

Overall, MCTP’s transformed exercise architecture and OCT initiatives will ensure operational level HQs can train in a much more relevant, realistic, and complex environment than previously possible, with all the required enablers to fully train commanders and staffs.

Leading Change

The CTC Program is leading the Army's transition to provide ready units capable of conducting Decisive Action against hybrid threats. This comprehensive approach includes rebalancing leader development with unit readiness, maintaining the SOF-CF interdependence developed over a decade of war, and reestablishing the expeditionary mindset of the American soldier. The CTCs themselves are transforming as well by restructuring the Operations Groups, and enhancing the OE with a hybrid threat OPFOR that can challenge training units conventionally, asymmetrically, and in cyberspace. The Army is also restarting the Project Warrior program, which will ensure our best officers serve

as OCTs at the MCTCs, followed by a tour as a Small Group Instructor at a TRADOC Center of Excellence. Candidates will be a select group of individuals who have demonstrated outstanding performance in key leadership positions, and have great potential for future service. They must also possess superb training skills, coaching abilities, and tactical proficiencies to enable the knowledge and experience transfer between the CTCs and the school houses. The combined effects of these initiatives will help drive the transformation of the CTC Program to ensure the U.S. Army remains the best trained land force in the world, with agile, adaptive leaders and units ready to win in all operational environments. **MR**

NOTES

1. *Army Training Strategy*, October 2012, 15.
2. Army Doctrine Publication 7-0, *Training Units and Developing Leaders* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office [GPO], August 2012) and Army Doctrine Reference Publication 7-0, *Training Units and Developing Leaders* (Washington, DC: GPO, August 2012).
3. CSA GEN Raymond T. Odierno provided this guidance at the 8 November 2011 CSA Combat Training Center Huddle.

4. Bennet S. Sacolick and Wayne W. Grigsby Jr., "A Critical Role in 'Prevent, Shape, Win,'" *Army* (June 2012), 39-42.
5. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, May 2012) 1-7.
6. LTC Jack Canfield, chief of staff for the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) Operations Group, made this statement in February 2013 based on his observations of decisive action training at the JRTC.

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- GEN Raymond T. Odierno

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