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Pathways

A Division Commander's Observations in the Pacific

Maj. Gen. Charles A. Flynn, U.S. Army

As dawn broke across the Manila skyline, it seemed like a normal April morning in the Philippines. But, for the thousands of U.S. soldiers, marines, and airmen working shoulder to shoulder with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the day was anything but routine. Exercise Balikatan 2016 continued at full speed despite the death of eighteen Filipino soldiers who were killed fighting Abu Sayyaf militants in Mindanao the night before.¹ Also, the omnipresent tension over the militarization of the South China Sea added layers of complexity and purpose to the ongoing efforts in this region.

The AFP were using this year's exercise with the 25th Infantry Division (ID) to work through their "Philippine Army 2028," a comprehensive redesign of their army. I was scheduled to meet with Lt. Gen. Ano, Philippine army chief of staff, to discuss the exercise, but our engagement was cancelled so he could attend a speech by U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, who had just arrived in Manila. Carter was to discuss the recently signed Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, which would allow the U.S. to build and operate facilities on Philippine bases and rotate troops into the country for extended periods. These are interesting times in the Indo-Asia-Pacific Theater, with many lessons to be learned.

Filipino soldiers demonstrate methods for preparing food for soldiers from 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, during jungle survival training 5 April 2016 as part of Exercise Balikatan 2016 at Fort Magsaysay, Philippines. Training with host-nation forces helps bridge language barriers, correct misconceptions, and overcome bias, ultimately forging strong relationships and enhancing readiness. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Meilletis Patton, U.S. Army)

A New Paradigm

Years before, as a young major in the 25th ID, I played a role in many of the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) theater-security-cooperation exercises that seemed to be scattered extensively across that half of the globe. My experience then, almost two decades ago, was extremely different from what one might experience today. In the late 1990s, we moved companies and battalion task forces (TFs) to partner nations, spending thousands of dollars on travel costs, conducting mostly unilateral training, and ultimately missing the partnering (or advise and assist) aspect of the exercise. The outcomes were singular and predictable.

Today is very different—so much so that we have had to embrace a new paradigm. In fact, if you served in the 25th ID before the advent of Pacific Pathways in 2014, you would not even recognize the scale, scope, and complexity of the missions now associated with our theater security cooperation exercises. You would also be amazed at the professional and resilient "Tropic Lightning" soldiers. On any given day, the 25th ID is deployed across fourteen time zones in ten to twenty different countries, continually conducting shaping and deterrence operations in support of USPACOM.² The sun never sets on the Tropic Lightning Division.

Balikatan 2016 was the third of three

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exercises that Pacific Pathways 16.01 tied together during the year.³ Prior to deploying to the Philippines, elements of 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 2nd Infantry Division, began the operation in Thailand in support of Exercise Cobra Gold, an annual bilateral exercise we have conducted with the Royal Thai Army for over thirty years. They followed this mission with a deployment to the Republic of Korea in support of Exercise Foal Eagle, where they executed reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) operations and then conducted four weeks of partnered collective training before finally deploying to the Philippines.

Observations

By weaving a series of tactical actions and deployments across an operational construct, U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) and I Corps achieved the strategic effects of shape, prevent, and deter in the Indo-Asia Pacific. After planning, synchronizing, and executing mission command during six Pacific Pathways exercises in over two years of division command, I offer the following observations in an effort to describe the Army's

A soldier assigned to the 25th Infantry Division crosses a river during the waterborne operations portion of the Jungle Operations School 21 January 2015 at the 25th Infantry Division East Range Training Complex, Hawaii. The training, associated with the Pacific Pathways 16.01 exercise, included soldiers from the Singapore Army's 6th Division. (Photo by Spc. James K. McCann, U.S. Army)

success in the USPACOM area of responsibility so that others may visualize and more completely understand the scope of our efforts.

Observation #1: Continuous operations—the totality of the deployment. Pacific Pathways places the 25th ID and its associated enabling assets at the BCT and echelon-above-brigade levels into a continuous state of planning, coordinating, synchronizing, and executing deployments and operations across the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. Even as we concluded Pacific Pathways 16.01, iterations 16.02 and 16.03 were just one terrain feature away from execution. In Pathways, no country, training event, or series of experiences matters more than another does. Rather, it is the totality of continual forward-deployed operations that builds readiness—a readiness that simply cannot be

quantified in a unit status report or a Government Accountability Office audit. The same can be said of the deterrence effort Pathways simultaneously supports; Pathways is a whole greater than the sum of its parts. From an operating tempo perspective, Pacific Pathways is sustainable, since the associated deployments are roughly ninety days. Our soldiers and leaders regard a Pathways deployment as a mission with a clearly defined and tangible purpose, and not just another tasking. As I interact more and more with our younger deployed soldiers, NCOs, and officers, this observation becomes unquestionable. It is exactly what they thought they would be doing in the Army: forward deployed, operating continually, mission-focused, and ready. This type of readiness contributes directly to Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Mark A. Milley's number one priority.⁴

Observation #2: Flexible response options for the USPACOM and the theater land force commanders. The capabilities forward deployed and resident in the BCT, aviation TF, and logistics TF, coupled with their associated mission-command nodes and enabling expeditionary communication access, provide several credible options for the USARPAC and USPACOM commanders. This unique mix and forward positioning of capabilities, experience, technical skills, and environmental understanding has created the initial framework necessary to seize and maintain the initiative. Examples range from battalion TFs training and partnering with host-nation forces during combined-arms live-fire exercises (CALFEXs), to aviation TFs supporting operations and fighting wild fires that threatened U.S. and partner-nation people and property, to our BCT and division command posts forming the nucleus of a mission-command node for any emerging situation. The division early-entry command post is structured to rapidly grow into a joint-task-force-capable node with few modifications and additional assets. This flexibility offers a myriad of options for our joint and Army commanders, and the partner nations we support.

Observation #3: Readiness is job one—building readiness at echelon. Participation in Pacific Pathways builds soldier, leader, and unit readiness. This statement can be summarily addressed by relating a conversation I had with a BCT commander and two of his battalion commanders. I asked them, “Are

you more ready today than before you deployed and why?” The BCT commander responded emphatically, “Absolutely.” He explained further by saying that at the combat training centers, commanders have an opportunity to stress their units, and the units truly begin to see themselves. But, during a Pathways exercise, they not only get to see themselves, they also get to see and understand their force, their soldiers and leaders, in the actual environment where they would have to operate and potentially fight.

Not only are our soldiers conducting live-fire exercises more frequently during a Pathway than they would typically conduct at home station, but they are executing this training in a foreign country, on nonstandard ranges, and under a plethora of adverse conditions. I have observed several battalion operation officers and company commanders build remarkable squad and platoon live-fire lanes in host-nation training areas. I have seen young platoon leaders explain to their partner platoons, sometimes through an interpreter and sometimes through a drawing in the dirt, the fundamentals and importance of surface danger zones. Our young soldiers are focused, motivated, and diligently working to master their craft, regardless of the environmental factors.

At the corps, division, and BCT levels, we are in a continual state of mission command, executing countless repetitions, jumping command posts from country to country, and learning valuable lessons. After seven Pathways, our forces have entered and exited foreign ports in excess of forty times—an example of how we learn to overcome enemy anti-access/area denial capabilities with speed. These repetitions are critical to building readiness in real time.

An unintended outcome of Pathways was the spiral development of materiel solutions. Problems such as communications in triple-canopy jungle, ground mobility across host-nation road networks, and the requirement for region-specific soldier equipment would not have surfaced were it not for our presence in the theater. By discovering these shortcomings now and rapidly sourcing and providing solutions, we are saving time and money while also contributing to Gen. Milley's priority number two, the “Future Army.”⁵

Observation #4: The three Rs—relationship building, rehearsals, and reconnaissance. Because of Pacific Pathways deployments, the leaders of our BCTs



and other organizations have spent countless hours with their foreign counterparts, from every branch and across the Total Army; the bonds they created through their shared tactical experiences in training will have positive strategic impacts. This is time well spent, as gestures of respect and friendship are all in an effort to create interoperability at the most junior levels.

For example, our pilots and crew chiefs invited the Filipino pilots and leaders to fly with them at night while wearing night vision goggles. This is not a capability typically found in their aviation units, and the Filipino aviators were thrilled with the opportunity. Days later, as a nearby brush fire grew into a raging wildfire and began to threaten Fort Magsaysay, a Filipino operations officer who felt comfortable with our battalion commander and his team asked our pilots if they would provide support to help contain the fire. Our battalion commander and his superb soldiers immediately began preparing and flying buckets of water to drop on the blaze. Over the next three days, day and night, they provided over three hundred “Bambi Bucket” drops totaling 63,000 gallons of water. They successfully extinguished the fire despite

Soldiers from Company B, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, and Indonesian soldiers from 1st Infantry Division of Kostrad conduct tomahawk training 23 August 2015 during Garuda Shield, Pacific Pathways 2015, at Cibenda, West Java, Indonesia. Garuda Shield is a regularly scheduled bilateral exercise sponsored by U.S. Army-Pacific and hosted annually by the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesian National Armed Forces) to promote regional security and cooperation. (Photo by Spc. Michael Sharp, U.S. Army)

the threat it posed by coming within five hundred meters of the fort.

Relationships are everything. Our ability to bridge language, perceptions, and biases is accelerated when Army leader and soldier relationships manifest to solve problems.

The combined capabilities of a division early-entry command post and BCT, logistics, and aviation TFs provide a flexible and formidable force package with command-and-control options for USARPAC and USPACOM. These capabilities are becoming far better understood by other U.S. leaders and our partners the more they see them. The mixture of experience and capability resident in the division and BCT TFs allows us

to plan, coordinate, synchronize, and execute missions both quickly and effectively. This continuous process is an ongoing, iterative rehearsal; the more we do it, the better we get. The lessons learned through our continuous rehearsals form the basis of a greater regional reconnaissance effort. Small details such as customs procedures in each country, host-nation electromagnetic spectrum management, airspace coordination, port procedures, terrain management, and equipment and weapons effects are all part of theater setting. Pacific Pathways affords us the opportunity to tackle these warfighting challenges.

Mere presence alone provides remarkable insights into our partnered countries' governments. Given the growing importance of the South China Sea, its surrounding nations, and the extensive span of tactical operations in Balikatan this year, the units participating in Pathways TF were well versed in what was required to operate in the Philippines. Our planners at every echelon, our understanding of the operational environment, and our knowledge of the threats and the political nuances in that environment were excellent. The BCT commander emphatically stated that he could not have accomplished his mission were it not for the endless behind-the-scenes work of the logistics TF, and the communications and network operations that enabled his tactical actions. From port operations, to customs, command-and-control nodes, airspace, and cyber, the reconnaissance that our soldiers and leaders accomplished on Pathways was extraordinary. It set conditions for the United States to be in a position of relative advantage upon arrival if called upon to respond to a crisis.

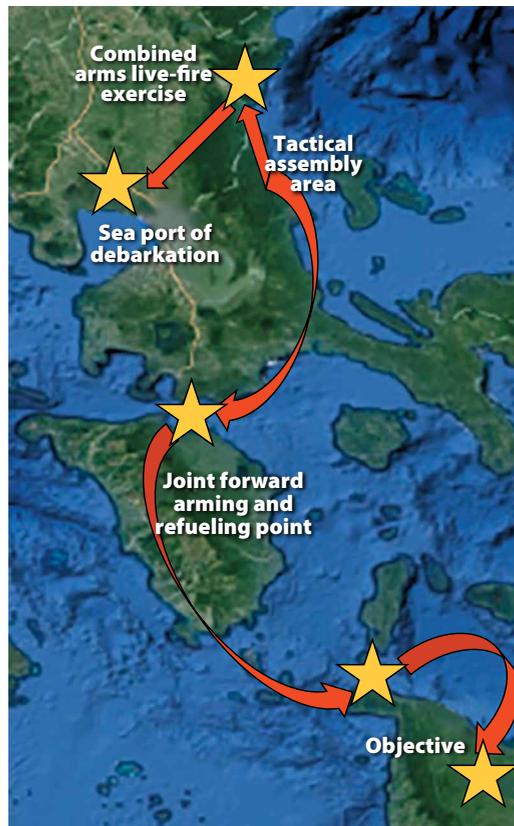
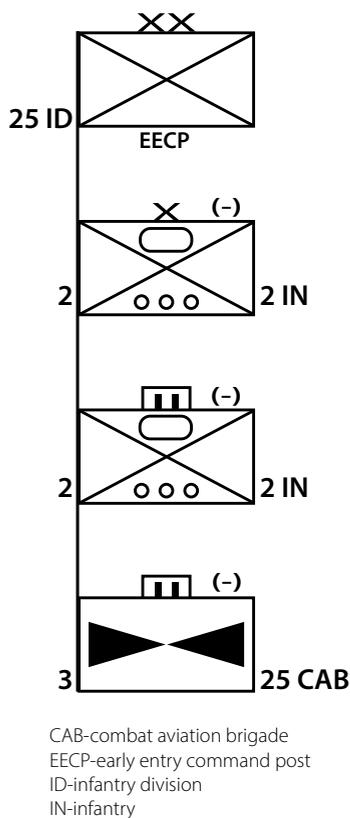
Observation #5: Empowering leaders and soldiers—building soldiers to thrive in chaos and complexity. Soldiers, leaders, and, most important, commanders at every echelon, learn and grow while deployed on Pathways. They develop confidence in their skills and abilities through the repetitive performance of tasks and the continual decision making associated with accomplishing missions in foreign countries. These stressful performance situations build true capabilities beyond what our equipment alone can do and create a unique level of soldier and leadership mastery; one that is gained by being on the ground and working through problem after problem, day after day, risk after risk. It is the learned ability of commanders and leaders to look

in the eyes of their soldiers and get a “fingertip feel” of a situation. Pathways affords the opportunity for real soldiers, in real time, to solve real problems, and it is paving the way for a new generation of intellectually curious, very agile, and adaptive Army soldiers and leaders that thrive in complexity and chaos.

Observation #6: Army force projection and presence—an expression of U.S. national commitment and resolve. Placement of U.S. soldiers on foreign soil goes a level beyond interest; it is a physical manifestation of national commitment. We are committing people, time, and money because we care, and because we know real relationships must be built on trust. And, from this trust, we can build teams. Absent trust, you can build nothing. Pathways reassures our partners and allies while simultaneously deterring adversaries and aggressors. Our ability to project forces via Pathways builds a deep reservoir of experiences in our officer and NCO corps.

For example, our BCT TFs' agility and force-projection capabilities were peerless in the Philippines. Over the span of ninety-six hours, the Pathways TF executed and provided mission command over a joint and combined TF CALFEX, recovered that element from the Crow Valley Gunnery Range to Fort Magsaysay, conducting a 125-kilometer road march from their objective areas to Subic Bay, where they commenced vessel upload. Simultaneously with ground operations, the supporting aviation TF conducted a 350-nautical-mile air movement involving multiple joint forward arming and refueling points across four different islands into the southern island of Panay. After consolidating, building combat power, and conducting troop-leading procedures, they air assaulted a raid force to a fifth island objective. Following the raid, the TF collapsed all combat power in country from four different camps back to the port in Subic Bay, closing and executing reverse RSOI of all helicopters, equipment, and soldiers. Again, all this was done with joint and partner forces over a period of just ninety-six hours (see figure, page 112).

This was a true rehearsal of U.S. force projection, illustrating U.S. resolve and demonstrated U.S. Army capabilities. Operations of this size, scope, and complexity are happening in every country our Pathways forces deploy to; these are a visible display of U.S. capabilities. Finally, they highlight the asymmetrical advantage: the American soldier.



Force package

- Division tactical command post
- Stryker brigade combat team (-)
- Aviation task force
- Logistics task force
- Enablers
- Approximately 1200 people
- Forty-one Strykers
- Eleven helicopters

Task force combined arms live fire exercise

- 125-kilometer road march
- Strykers, artillery
- Joint fires

Air assault

- 350 nautical miles
- Four joint forward arming and refueling points
- Four islands
- Raid

All events occurred over ninety-six hours.

(Graphic courtesy of author)

Figure. Brigade Combat Team Pacific Pathways Training Exercise

Observation #7: Posture, presence, and purpose.

The value of our presence in theater, expressed by our Pathways forces in continual operations, cannot be overstated, nor can its true readiness be accurately measured exclusively in metrics. One example is a simple exchange I recently heard between another senior official and a BCT commander in the Philippines. The official asked how long it takes to get the Pathways force from the air and sea ports of departure to arrival at Fort Magsaysay.

The BCT commander’s response was, “Within seventy-two hours we are up and operating. We take forty-eight hours with the logistics TF to offload, marshal, and move equipment from the port. The aviation TF builds up and flies on its own timeline, coordinating routes and airspace as they go. Then we take another twenty-four hours to close the force of forty-two Strykers, eleven helicopters, nearly one thousand soldiers, and all other vehicles and containers. We then match up soldiers with equipment after a 130-kilometer ground move to the training area at

Fort Magsaysay. After that, we are ready to partner and train.” Impressive, to say the least.

Conclusion

In the end, the presence of the Army in theater matters. It matters to our partners, allies, and adversaries alike. It is a telling and strong message when we take our most-ready forces—who are certified at combat training centers and postured by training at home station—and then invest that readiness into the region to increase both our partners and our proficiency. This investment of readiness provides purpose for our soldiers and leaders; you can see it in their eyes and their actions on the ground. Said another way, these operational deployments are being viewed at every level and by every soldier I engage with as a mission with a purpose.

Pacific Pathways is also a worthwhile investment of resources because it solves multiple problems for the Army and the Pacific Command combatant commander. Ultimately, it prevents conflict in the region; our

persistent engagement and presence in this massive area of responsibility is undoubtedly one of the main reasons we continue to avoid open and escalating conflict in the region. At the same time, the Pathways operations are building readiness and creating a generation of soldiers and leaders who are agile, adaptive, and prepared for whatever circumstances the future holds.

In fact, one of the most important benefits from these deployments is the incredible professional growth that our soldiers get from combining forces and leaders from different formations (e.g., USARPAC, I Corps, 25th ID, 7th ID, 593rd Sustainment Brigade, 10th Regional Support Group, National Guard and Reserve Component units, Special Operations Command Pacific, and units from the U.S. Marine Corps and Air Force). Their shared forward-deployed Pathways experiences help them form relationships built on trust that will last for the rest of their Army careers. Finally, this deployment experience of empowered soldiers may provide the most crucial long-term outcome for the Army by exemplifying desired leadership traits and values for our partners and allies to witness and to replicate in their own armies. ■

Notes

1. CNN Philippines Staff, "18 Soldiers Dead, 5 Abu Sayyaf Bandits Killed in Basilan Encounter," CNN Philippines website, 10 April 2016, accessed 26 September 2016, <http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2016/04/10/basilan-encounter-araw-ng-kagitingan-abu-sayyaf.html>.

2. Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 11 August 2011), xxiii–xxiv. This publication identifies six phases of a campaign or operation: shape, deter, seize the initiative, dominate, stability, and enable civil authority.

3. Seth Robson, "Army's Pacific Pathways 2016 Kicks Off with Cobra Gold Exercise," Military.com website, 13 February 2016, accessed 26 September 2016, <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2016/02/13/army-pacific-pathways-2016-kicks-off-with-cobra-gold-exercise.html>.

4. Mark A. Milley, "39th Chief of Staff of the Army Initial Message to the Army," Army.mil website, accessed 26 September 2016, https://www.army.mil/e2/rv5_downloads/leaders/csa/Initial_Message_39th_CSA.pdf.

5. Ibid.

MilitaryReview

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Article

Suicides in the U.S. Military: Birth Cohort Vulnerability and the All-Volunteer Force

James Griffith¹ and Craig J. Bryan¹

Abstract

This paper builds a case for examining suicide in the U.S. military relative to broad societal context, specifically, the unique experiences of birth cohorts relating to processes described by Durkheim's theory of suicide. In more recent birth cohorts, suicide rates have increased among teenagers and young adults. In addition, suicide rates of age intervals at a given time period have been reliably predicted by the size of the birth cohort and the percentage of nonmarital births—supposed indicators of Durkheim's diminished social integration and behavioral regulation. Consequences of these trends are likely more evident in the U.S. military due to having proportionally more individuals known to be at risk for suicide, that is, young males who are from nontraditional households. The all-volunteer force compared to draft force has fewer applicants to select, and proportionally more of applicants are accepted for military service. Consequently, more recruits having varied conditions now than before, perhaps including greater vulnerability to suicide, serve in the U.S. military. These points are further elaborated with supporting evidence, concluding with a call for new directions in suicide research, practice, and policy.

Keywords

military suicides, birth cohort, social integration, all-volunteer force

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Among the most challenging and puzzling issues the U.S. Army has faced among combat veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan since 2002 has been the unusually high number of suicides as compared to the number of such incidents associated with previous wars. In "Suicides in the U.S. Military: Birth Cohort Vulnerability and the All-Volunteer Force," originally published in *Armed Forces & Society* in 2015, authors James Griffith and Craig J. Bryan provide original research from which they develop unique and persuasive explanations for the underlying causes of the unusually high number of suicides occurring among veterans of the U.S. Army. In conjunction, they recommend mitigating solutions aimed at lowering the number of suicides. Their paper can be found at the below noted address:

<http://afs.sagepub.com/content/ear-ly/2015/11/16/0095327X15614552.full.pdf+html>