



Soldiers on the 1st Infantry Division staff conduct the daily battle update brief 7 April 2015 at the Mission Training Complex, Fort Riley, Kansas. The brief provides the commanding general with an update on current operations and the combat strength and effectiveness of subordinate units. It marked the start of each day during for the "Big Red One" during its warfighter exercise. (Photo by Master Sgt. Mike Lavigne, 1st Infantry Division PAO)

From Riley to Baku

How an Opportunistic Unit Broke the Crucible

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Warfighter exercises (WFXs) are the crucible training events for division headquarters and staffs. With this in mind, the 1st Infantry Division (1ID), the “Big Red One,” set out on an eight-month journey culminating in the division successfully executing a near-peer, hybrid-warfare training exercise. The Big Red One would secure the fictional city of Baku and drive the World Class Opposing Force (OPFOR) south of the Kura River back into its territory. Throughout the WFX, the 1ID staff, subordinate units, and unified action partners demonstrated adaptability, innovation, and initiative on a broad scale. In the complex “Decisive Action Training Environment,” where units are presented with a highly capable “near-peer competitor in a hybrid threat environment,” the 1ID and its partners were able to blunt enemy strengths, mitigate risks to the force and the mission, and rapidly seize upon tactical and operational opportunities whenever they arose.¹ This article describes how the 1ID built a cohesive team, met the vaunted World Class OPFOR in battle, and broke the crucible.

Planning: Before the Crucible

The 1ID is an *opportunistic* unit: It demonstrates the ability to create shared understanding, innovate rapidly, observe and anticipate future enemy actions and events, exercise disciplined initiative, and react quickly to seize upon fleeting opportunities.² An opportunistic unit is not epitomized by a few brilliant leaders sprinkled throughout its ranks. Nor is it characterized by a dictatorial, genius commander bending the unit to his or her will. Rather, it is saturated with trained, informed, and empowered leaders who act with disciplined initiative to drive the organization toward a common goal. Opportunistic units exemplify the principles of mission command in training and in combat. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-0, *Mission Command*, describes such a unit:

Commanders provide a clear intent to their forces that guides subordinates’ actions while promoting freedom of action and initiative. Subordinates, by understanding the commander’s intent and the overall common objective, are then able to adapt to rapidly changing situations and exploit fleeting opportunities.³

The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World describes future operating environments as

complex, defining a complex environment as one “that is not only unknown, but unknowable and constantly changing.”⁴ In complex environments, potential enemies will seek to outmatch U.S. military forces asymmetrically and to challenge them across every domain. The *Army Operating Concept* further describes how future operating environments will require “innovative and adaptive leaders and cohesive teams that thrive in conditions of complexity and uncertainty.”⁵ Both the *Operating Concept* and Army mission-command doctrine agree that in future conflicts, U.S. military units must demonstrate opportunistic behavior in order to defeat their enemies. Their leaders need to commit the time and energy to cultivate critical relationships based on trust, to focus on training and leader development, and to encourage the exercise of disciplined initiative throughout their formations.

In this context, many military units seem to lack enough trained and experienced personnel, specialized technology, and resources to build an opportunistic organization. However, while obstacles clearly exist, they can be overcome—not through technology, but through leaders who develop a unifying vision and utilize the principles of mission command to create lasting cultural change throughout the organization. As the Big Red One headed toward its crucible training event, the division’s leaders developed a clear idea of where they needed to go. But, success did not happen overnight.

Big Red One’s situation. In August 2015, on the heels of its deployment in support of Operation Inherent Resolve (U.S. Central Command’s operation against the Islamic State), the Big Red One faced a unique set of challenges. In addition to the perennial problem of personnel turnover after a deployment, the division headquarters struggled to adapt to the Focus Area Review Group II restructuring initiative: the headquarters would reduce by 25 percent but maintain all mission requirements.⁶ The division had also just lost one of its three brigade combat teams (BCTs) to Army structure changes. Of the two remaining BCTs, the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), had recently returned from Operation Spartan Shield (conducting regional engagements in southwest Asia) and had been replaced in the Middle East by the division’s 2nd ABCT. In addition, the 1st Sustainment Brigade (SB) was not aligned to the division and was deployed in support of U.S. Central Command missions. With the

2nd ABCT deployed, the 1ID was essentially a one ABCT division, with all of the responsibilities and missions of a fully manned division.

The 1ID Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) was in the midst of the Army Restructuring Initiative, while supporting division training requirements and getting ready for a deployment to Afghanistan. The division also stood up the 1ID Division Artillery (DIVARTY), which would have a major role in the WFX and precious little time to train. The division possessed many talented, hardworking people, but they would need to coalesce into a team across the division, and into unit-level teams, to make the commander's vision for the warfighter a reality.

Commander's intent and risk. A simple and clear commander's intent is the key to disciplined initiative, and it is the basis for transforming "thought into action."⁷ A mission statement and commander's intent help integrate and unify tasks during operations. As the 1ID struggled to come to grips with its myriad challenges, division leaders seized upon the upcoming WFX as a venue for focusing effort across the division and post. The WFX is the "culminating event within the Army force generation process" for division headquarters and staffs.⁸ Although scheduled for April 2016, nearly eight months away, the exercise served as the center of gravity for the commander's vision, and it would drive all division activities.

Risk is inherent in all Army operations. It was no different for the 1ID. Division leaders recognized they would need the full attention and focus of the staff and subordinate units. The staff had to commit to the work it would take to prepare the division, including numerous repetitions of deliberate planning, rehearsals, and command-post exercises. Deciding to "go all in" on the WFX meant that the division would accept risk to other priorities.

While complete commitment was required for WFX success, risks would need to be articulated early and often during planning. Commands at all levels accepted the risk inherent in committing to a rigorous planning and preparation schedule, and risk was a constant topic of discussion over the months leading up to the WFX. It is important to note that the command knowingly accepted significant risk to other missions. For instance, at the division level, long-range planning virtually ceased so the planners could lead multiple iterations of WFX planning. Subordinate units such as the 1st ABCT sacrificed

precious tactical training time to man and train response cells for several command-post exercises, and they risked leadership resiliency due to constant training for both the WFX and upcoming deployments. Commanders analyzed these risks, ultimately deeming them prudent.

The increased preparedness for the WFX and the reciprocal benefits of having highly trained staffs and units outweighed the potential for negative consequences. However, the division had to overcome the second- and third-order effects of their risk decisions for many months following the WFX, including the disruption to ongoing division campaign planning efforts, 1st ABCT preparations for deployment to the National Training Center, and division headquarters deployment preparations and planning.

The warfighter team. Upon establishing a vision and priorities, the division's leaders set about building the WFX team. The 1ID's parallel maxims of "Training and leader development are one word in the First Infantry Division," and "Every training event is a venue for leader development," set the stage for team building. The division commander emphasized strict adherence to doctrinal planning processes, and he personally coached the division staff. Over the ensuing months, the planners gained greater understanding of the commander and his intent, while building mastery of planning processes, decisive action, and offensive tasks.

The 1ID established four battle-staff teams

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under the leadership of the plans (G-5) staff section. The battle staff served as dedicated, cross-functional, operational-planning teams that attacked various aspects of WFX planning, provided solutions to complex problems, and expedited planning processes. Each battle-staff team was composed of eight people, including a School of Advanced Military Studies graduate as a planning team lead, a representative from each warfighting function, and a digital master gunner who would operate the Command Post of the Future and other systems.⁹ The cross-functional nature of the teams broke down stovepipes in planning and information flow throughout the division headquarters. Although they were composed of mostly junior officers from each staff section, the battle staff soon became central to the division's WFX preparations.

The division commander owned and drove the operations process.¹⁰ He sought frequent, candid dialogue with the division staff, the battle staff, and subordinate commanders. The planning team received personal coaching from the division's senior leaders, sometimes several times a day, for guidance, and for understanding and visualizing ongoing efforts. The deliberate planning provided a venue for developing junior officers, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and staff leaders. Regardless of rank, leaders listened to, conversed with, and accepted



The 1st Infantry Division "Big Red One" main command post sits outside the Mission Training Complex 9 April 2016 on Fort Riley, Kansas. Division and brigade staffs use the facility to conduct training events such as warfighter exercises in a simulated decisive action training environment. (Photo by Spc. Anna Pongo, 1st Infantry Division PAO)

frank assessments from battle-staff planners. As a result, junior leaders gained confidence, and the team developed innovative solutions to complex problems.

In addition to creating opportunities for professional growth, the division conducted a robust leader development program. The program included professional readings, doctrinal classes, and professional development sessions with military and civilian leaders, including retired Generals Gordon Sullivan, David Petraeus, and Stanley McChrystal; Lieutenant Generals H. R. McMaster and Gustave Perna; Dr. Emma Sky; Deputy Assistant Secretary of Western Hemisphere Affairs Gonzalvo Gallegos; and others. These sessions provided staff and subordinate units with valuable insights on leadership, mission command, and the current security environment. The final component of the leader development program was a series of warfighting-function clinics, where subject-matter experts presented topics relevant to their areas of expertise. The commanding general, division command sergeant major, deputy commanding generals, division staff primaries, battle staff members, and subordinate brigade and battalion commanders attended these clinics, which included dialogue on doctrine, best practices, and future employment.

The 1ID also built upon the experiences of other units to inform its planning and preparation. Key leaders observed the 1st Armored Division, 4th Infantry Division, and 101st Airborne Division WFXs, and the 1ID received augmentation of experienced intelligence personnel from the 25th Infantry Division. This collaboration with other divisions allowed the 1ID to capitalize on their experiences and begin its training at a high level. The 1ID also ensured that it shared its lessons learned at every step of its WFX preparation. The division commander updated all Active Component and National Guard division commanders after each command-post exercise, providing them the division's after-action reviews (AARs), lessons learned, and best practices. The staff did likewise with their counterparts, effectively creating a large network of experienced leaders throughout the Army to share ideas and increase functional knowledge.

The division carried this information-sharing approach to its interactions with the other units that would be participating in the WFX. The 18th Airborne Corps and the 3rd Infantry Division would serve as the higher command and adjacent units, respectively, in the 1ID's WFX. The 1ID worked closely with these units leading up to the exercise to develop a cohesive plan and rehearse

execution. When it came time to execute the WFX, the 1ID staff had already developed solid relationships with their counterparts in these units, participated in planning sessions, and executed a command-post exercise from various distributed mission-command nodes across the Army.

1st ABCT and its battalions provided response cells that replicated the multiple BCTs that would fall under the 1ID during the exercise. They were also part of the team-building process. Battalion commanders and their staffs were included in every stage of planning and participated in three command-post exercises. From the lowest tactical unit response cell to the corps headquarters, the team had already worked together and overcome the kinds of challenges that often detract from mission accomplishment.

Just as critical as building great teammates within the 1ID was building the broader unified action team, including Total Army and institutional Army partners. The 1ID developed a strong partnership with the 35th Infantry Division from the Kansas National Guard, which provided observer/controllers and external evaluation for the division's command-post exercises. The division further integrated critical staff members into its newly established 1ID Main Command Post Operational Detachment from the Nebraska National Guard. These staff members proved crucial for execution of the WFX, and they prepared for the key roles they would fill during the 1ID's upcoming deployment. Just as directed in the *Army Total Force Policy*, 1ID integrated Army Reserve and National Guard forces at the division level, but it did not stop there.¹¹

The integration of the 300th SB and the 110th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB) further demonstrated the division's commitment to building a total force. These Reserve Component partners were "training units" for the exercise, and they were critical to enabling the division's opportunistic behavior. Realizing that the 300th SB and 110th MEB would have as few as eight days to train before the exercise, the 1ID developed comprehensive liaison officer (LNO) and technical support teams for each unit. These LNO teams were led and staffed by personnel from the 1st SB and the 97th Military Police Battalion, and they were responsible for ensuring that the 300th SB and 110th MEB were fully integrated and able to achieve their training objectives. Months before the exercise, the LNOs traveled to the

supporting units during their drill weekends, conducted training, planned WFX operations, and executed staff battle drills. Further training on critical mission-command systems ensured these partner units could talk on the same networks, see the same common operating picture, and use the products and standard operating procedures they needed to be successful. The division's deliberate efforts to build a cohesive team were critical to ensuring opportunistic behavior by all teammates throughout the WFX.

Preparation: Command-Post Exercises

The Mission Command Training Program (MCTP) World Class OPFOR benefits greatly from the principle that repetition leads to mastery. Having conducted countless battles upon the same constructive battlefield, the OPFOR has mastered the Decisive Action Training Environment and its fictional Atroplan area of operations.

Intensive training. Any unit that hopes to achieve some measure of success against this trained and experienced OPFOR should seek to level the playing field through its own intensive training program. The Big Red One team conducted a staff exercise, a robust WFX academic seminar at Fort Leavenworth, and three multiechelon command-post exercises. Using a deliberate planning process, the division increased the complexity of each subsequent exercise. In this way, it refined systems and increased competency, trust, and shared understanding throughout the organization. The division maximized the capabilities of the Fort Riley home-station Mission Training Center, and it leveraged Total Army and institutional Army partnerships to expand the scope and quality of the division's exercises.

During the WFX academic seminar at Fort Leavenworth, the staff attended the program of instruction during the day and conducted the military decision-making process over lunch and in the evening. The staff essentially deployed from Fort Riley to Fort Leavenworth. In fact, the 1ID took three times more people to the academic seminar than is typical. This minimized distractions and let the unit use the time to its fullest, running key-leader seminars during staff planning that included the BCTs and staff primaries. The seminars allowed the division commander to explain his vision to the staff, and they helped the team to

gel as staff sections learned from one another. This first repetition of the planning process for the WFX set the stage for future iterations.

Most division-level headquarters will conduct one or two command-post exercises in preparation for their WFXs. The 1ID conducted three. Each of these events included a deliberate planning process that took the entire staff and subordinate units through all steps of the Army design methodology and the military decision-making process. Each concluded with a combined-arms rehearsal, a fires-and-intelligence rehearsal, and a sustainment rehearsal. Additionally, each command-post exercise included a four- to five-day operation against a thinking OPFOR on the Atroplan terrain.

The command-post exercises proved crucial to bringing the final WFX team together and refining systems and processes. The 1ID experimented with and improved all its systems, including the configuration of command posts, the battle rhythm, rehearsal formats, information processing, targeting, and time-constrained planning. Using three command-post exercises allowed the division to address another atrophied skill: command-post displacement, or "jumping." Between the second and third command-post exercises, the division tactical command post (DTAC) jumped five times, and the division main command post (DMAIN) jumped once. Each jump increased the proficiency of the soldiers staffing the command post while significantly decreasing displacement time. The staff revised its processes for battle handoff of mission-command functions between command posts while ensuring situational awareness was maintained. The 1ID made significant revisions to its systems and processes between the second and third command-post exercises, and it was not until the third that the team truly came together and began exhibiting opportunistic behavior.

Simulation operators. Planning, mission command, and command-post operations are only a few of the proficiencies a unit must master to maximize opportunistic behavior. While the WFX does a good job of simulating a real-world decisive-action environment, it is bound by the digital constraints of the computer program called WARSIM (Warfighter's Simulation). The 1ID leadership realized quickly that they needed to train WARSIM operators at every level, and allow them to practice on the system. Officers and NCOs selected as WARSIM operators

were responsible for maneuvering critical assets and units around the simulated battlefield and engaging enemy formations with direct and indirect fires. They had to move quickly, react to changing circumstances, and employ weapon systems to their full capability. Within the WARSIM program, these are not intuitive tasks; they require detailed understanding of the system's functionality.

The 1ID incorporated the WARSIM and other similar digital simulations into the division's command-post exercises, and subordinate units tracked WARSIM operators by name. In addition to being experts at their "weapon systems," these operators participated in planning and rehearsals, and they clearly understood the unit's mission and commander's intent. Their location within their respective command posts provided them shared understanding of the developing fight, and they were empowered to react quickly to changing circumstances. Trained, informed, and empowered WARSIM operators were a critical component in the division's success.

The reason the command was able to empower the WARSIM operators was because the division created and sustained shared understanding. Through a series of deliberate battle-rhythm events, aided by digital products that effectively communicated knowledge and understanding—not just information, leaders and soldiers at all levels understood the mission, the situation, and the commander's intent.

Digital master gunners. In a complex operating environment, units operate over great distances using systems such as Command Post of the Future, Blue Force Tracker, Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data Systems, and Distributed Common Ground System-Army. These are just a few of the systems that must function together to create an accurate common operating picture that communicates shared understanding across distributed mission-command nodes. However, the highly technical capabilities needed for digital integration are not resident within units. To address this deficiency, the 1ID worked with the Mission Command Center of Excellence to train over

seventy mission-command digital master gunners across the division. The master gunners returned to their units and executed digital gunnery tables that developed a high level of proficiency throughout the division. Trained and certified digital master gunners solved countless system-interoperability issues during the command-post exercises and the WFX. Because of their efforts, the 1ID was able to create shared understanding across distributed mission-command nodes on an unprecedented scale.

They knew their systems and processes, they knew their teammates, and they grasped the enemy and operating environment that they would face.

Learning organizations.

Repetitions do not spontaneously result in mastery. Units must be learning organizations, in which leaders at all levels are capable of seeing themselves in a critical light and then adapting their perspectives, systems, and processes to improve the organization's performance. AARs and external evaluations were critical to the

1ID's development as an opportunistic unit. In addition to partnering with the 35th Infantry Division for external evaluation, the Big Red One also drew on the strengths of the institutional Army. With Fort Leavenworth just two hours away, the division benefited from a close working relationship with the School of Advanced Military Studies, and it took advantage of the school's vast depth of academic knowledge and real-world experience. Dr. Alice Butler-Smith provided valuable insights for the 1ID's planning. Faculty members from the School of Advanced Military Studies—PhDs and fellows consisting of former Army battalion commanders, future brigade commanders, and equivalent joint and international partners—served as observer/controllers during the division's third command-post exercise. Their feedback paid dividends during WFX execution.

After the third command-post exercise, the 1ID team looked and felt like a different organization than the one that started its journey eight months before. Leaders at all levels worked with a confidence born of trust and mastery. They knew their systems and processes, they knew their teammates, and they grasped the enemy and operating environment that they would face. Most of all, they understood the plan and the commander's intent. They were ready for any challenge. An opportunistic unit had been born.

Breaking the Crucible: The Success of an Opportunistic Division in Decisive Action

Throughout its WFX planning and preparation, the 1ID had innovated and adapted to address emergent challenges. Army Techniques Publication 3-91, *Division Operations*, describes how a division, “shapes the operation for subordinate brigades, resources them for their missions, and coordinates, synchronizes and sequences their operations in time and space.”¹² While simple in principle, the sheer scope of this definition is daunting. With tens of thousands of soldiers spread out over hundreds of kilometers, the synchronization of units, critical assets, operations, intelligence, and fires appears a near impossible task. Over the course of three command-post exercises, the 1ID adapted its systems to simplify the synchronization process and set conditions for subordinate commanders to exercise disciplined initiative and seize fleeting opportunities.

Many of these adaptations were already considered fundamental operational principles, yet they are often misunderstood or misapplied. Four adaptations in particular stand out for their importance to generating opportunistic behavior. Creating an appropriate task organization and the necessary command-and-support relationship are perhaps the most important adaptations, followed closely by articulating a well-defined operational framework and establishing clear graphic control measures. Combined, these adaptations facilitated the division’s opportunistic behavior.

Task organization and command-and-support relationships. Within an ad-hoc formation of multiple unified action partners, assigned and attached brigades, and countless smaller enabling units and assets, two functions that units must get right are task organization and command-and-support relationships. Opportunistic behavior implies that a unit not only sees an opportunity but also can take advantage of it. If critical assets are not available to the unit, it cannot exercise disciplined initiative. In the 1ID, Annex A (Task Organization) of all operation and fragmentary orders detailed units down to the separate-company and critical-asset level. This task organization was refined daily based on changing circumstances. Commanders at all levels provided detailed briefings of their task organization during daily updates, and commanders conducted digital “flyovers” of their formations within

the WARSIM program to check that their task organization was correct in the simulated scenario.

Equally important was the emphasis on the doctrinal understanding and implementation of command-and-support relationships. Commanders and staffs conducted significant dialogue to assign units appropriate relationships. This was of substantial importance as the task organization shifted rapidly to meet emerging challenges. To reduce the potential for confusion, planners would often detail the inherent responsibilities associated with each command-and-support relationship as specified tasks in operation and fragmentary orders.

Operational framework. Another adaptation that enabled synchronization throughout the division was the clear and continual articulation of the operational framework’s deep, close, and security areas, and main and supporting efforts. This provided subordinate units temporal orientation and prioritization of efforts at all times.¹³ Commonly referred to as the “division fight,” the headquarters used the operational framework to define how it would enable subordinates for the current fight while setting the conditions for the next fight. The operational framework further assisted the commander by providing a conceptual basis for planners to build branches and sequels to the base plan and anticipate future decision points. While clear articulation of an operational framework is vital to enabling opportunistic behavior, the framework must be continuously reevaluated to ensure its suitability for changing conditions.

Graphic control measures. Well-developed graphic control measures are another key adaptation. They communicate the commander’s intent on a map or common operating picture, providing a basis for shared understanding and flexibility throughout the formation. The 1ID staff built robust operational graphics, and duplicated them across all analog and digital platforms. Operational graphics by definition support the overall scheme of maneuver, intelligence, sustainment, and fires, but opportunistic units take graphics a step further. They build graphic control measures, including routes, checkpoints, phase lines, and fire-support coordination measures beyond those required for the selected course of action. They build them to be both internal and external to their areas of operation. For the 1ID, graphics facilitated rapid guidance to subordinate units when unforeseen challenges and opportunities arose.

Critical and creative thinking about employing assets. Not everything that the 11D achieved was due to an adaptation of, or refinement to, existing doctrinal principles. The division also applied critical and creative thinking to generate new ideas and learn from past doctrine. Over the course of its training progression for the WFX, the 11D and its subordinate units experimented with multiple options for employment of key enablers. What emerged was a tension between centralized control and decentralized execution, between control of key assets and flexibility at the tactical edge. On one hand, the division had a broader view of the fight and could provide the most efficient use of key assets such as unmanned aircraft systems and counterfire radars.

On the other hand, centralized control of assets such as mobile bridges might give the division positive control of their employment but ultimately would prevent subordinate units from rapidly seizing the initiative.

The task organization of key and critical assets should be a deliberate decision based on a larger, iterative discussion and articulation of roles and responsibilities at certain points in the fight between the division and its subordinate units. For the 11D to conduct offensive tasks as part of decisive action, centralized control of Q37 weapon-locating radars under the DIVARTY allowed for better coverage and forward positioning. As the sole counterfire headquarters in the division, DIVARTY also monitored and recommended positioning of Q36 radars to fill gaps in Q37 coverage. Similarly, based on poor utilization of unmanned aircraft systems during the first two command-post exercises, the division centralized shadow systems under control of the CAB. With a centralized headquarters, the systems were much more responsive to intelligence collection requirements, while maximizing their utilization and capabilities.

In contrast, the division task-organized critical mobile bridging capabilities down to the lead brigades. While the division often lost visibility of this critical enabler, when the lead brigade saw an opportunity to conduct an unopposed water crossing, it was able to rapidly move the bridges to the proper location and seize the initiative. It is

likely there will always be a tension between maintaining centralized control of critical assets and maintaining tempo and combat capability at the lowest tactical levels.

An advance guard force. One of the greatest challenges facing any division performing offensive tasks as an element of decisive action is its ability to collect information around the clock and in any weather conditions.

In the past, armored cavalry regiments and division cavalry squadrons were able to conduct aggressive reconnaissance against an unknown enemy force, make contact, develop the situation, and protect the main body of the maneuver force. With the loss of a dedicated ground reconnaissance capability at the division level, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operations have become almost synony-

mous with the use of unmanned aerial vehicles and unmanned aircraft systems. In poor weather conditions or a high-threat environment, the division must place BCTs in the lead, often losing critical capabilities and combat power for the decisive operation.

To address this challenge, the 11D developed an advance-guard capability, which allowed the division to make contact with the smallest elements possible, maintain contact with the enemy, protect the division's main body, and provide the division commander flexibility in how he would mass combat forces. For the WFX, the 11D took its trail brigade's armored reconnaissance squadron (ARS), attached two additional tank companies along with engineer, air defense artillery, acquisition radar, intelligence, and sustainment assets, and put the ARS under the mission command of the CAB. A direct-support artillery battalion with two rocket batteries in a general support-reinforcing role provided responsive indirect fires as far forward as possible. This allowed the division not only to fight for information and protect the division's main body but also to have a fourth maneuver unit, which provided flexibility in executing the plan. The use of the CAB as a higher headquarters for the advance-guard force provided several additional benefits, including the effective integration of unmanned aircraft systems, the optimization of air-ground operations in the reconnaissance-and-security fight, and the retention

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of combat power in the division's primary echelon for water-crossing operations.

The use of the CAB as a higher headquarters for the advance guard was challenging. Within its organic organization, the CAB staff lacks a robust intelligence-and-fires section, and the CAB does not have organic sustainment systems developed to support a heavily task-organized ARS. Within the 11D construct, rehearsals were critical to ensuring the ARS and the CAB could work together as an advance guard. Creating a habitual relationship between the ARS and the CAB headquarters early in planning was imperative to mission success.

Multiple command posts. Another innovation developed during planning and preparation was the use of four command posts to control the battlefield. The division employed the doctrinal DMAIN and DTAC, and alternate command posts, including a DIVARTY tactical operations center (TOC). It also pioneered the use of a support-area command post (SACP) to command and control the rear area. The way the division used the

DIVARTY TOC yielded significant benefits. When the DMAIN jumped, the DTAC assumed responsibility for the close and deep fights, and the DIVARTY TOC received additional division staff members from the G-2 (intelligence) all-source collection element, the joint air-ground integration cell, and the current operations section. This not only provided a location from which the commanding general could maintain situational awareness, but it also provided the reciprocal benefit of expediting target acquisition and fires prosecution times. The deep fight belonged to the DTAC during the DMAIN jump; however, it proved vital that a contingent from current operations monitored the battle from the alternate command post. While jumping the DMAIN during the WFX, enemy indirect fires significantly degraded the DTAC. Because current operations staff monitored the fight from the DIVARTY TOC, they rapidly assumed control of the battle.

The SACP was crucial in allowing the DMAIN to focus solely on the deep fight. The deputy commanding general for support led the SACP, with constant input from the 110th MEB commander. The SACP maintained rear-area security and allowed supplies and services to flow through the operational area. The SACP staff conducted movement control and managed the reception, staging, onward movement, and integration process, while also preventing the irregular threat from influencing the efforts of the rest of the division. Placing the rear area under the command and control of a deputy commanding general with a dedicated command post allowed the 11D to integrate rear-area operations into the overall battle. The staff of the SACP had full situational awareness and was able to take preemptive action to ensure forward mission success. While this fourth command post required a significant investment in people and resources, it contributed immeasurably to the division's success in the fight.

WFXs are designed to challenge every aspect of a unit, and the 11D was tested. Both command posts (DMAIN and DTAC) were brought into play as part of the exercise and subject to enemy activity. To execute mission command over extended distances and protect against OPFOR actions, both command posts jumped several times. Further still, the OPFOR employed persistent chemical weapons against the division, a rarely used tactic. With each successive challenge, the division continued to adapt and thrive. Eventually, with the OPFOR's

strategic objectives thwarted, its tactical reserve defeated, and the remaining combined combat power of two Army divisions prepared to resume the attack, the OPFOR had no option but to withdraw toward its own territory.

Integration, partnership, dialog, and trust. The division's success is less the story of its distinct WFX experiences than the story of building an opportunistic division. In addition to the topics discussed above, several other hard-fought lessons contributed to the 1ID's opportunistic behavior in the WFX.

During WFX execution, a clear commander's intent was the most critical aspect of enabling and integrating disciplined initiative. Building upon lessons learned during previous command-post exercises, the commanding general continuously articulated and emphasized a simple mission statement, an expanded purpose, and key functions that all soldiers throughout the division had to know by heart: tempo, aggressive reconnaissance, fires forward, protection, and partnerships. With this commander's guidance, subordinate commanders could quickly assess risk to the mission and take disciplined initiative.

Partnerships played an important role throughout the exercise. The 1ID partnered early and often with Atropian forces within their area of operations. Units at all echelons reached out to the Atropians, often conducting in excess of twenty engagements a day. At the division level, the commander personally met with Atropian leadership at least once a day, and the Atropian brigade commander participated in 1ID updates and targeting meetings. Through the rigorous partnership activities, the Atropians quickly warmed to the 1ID and began to share intelligence and participate in combat operations alongside the division's forces. Throughout the fight, Atropian forces protected the northern flank of the division, provided rear-area security, and participated in the final attack to seize critical oil fields. Additionally, the Atropians provided significant long-range artillery and air-defense systems that were on par with those of the OPFOR; these were only available due to early command emphasis on partnership building. The same held true for interagency partners. It was crucial to understand each partner's interests and assets. Including all partners in the military decision-making process, rehearsals, updates, and targeting was a best practice.

Commander-to-commander dialogue was critical for enabling opportunistic behavior throughout the division.

The division ingrained commander-to-commander dialogue into the battle rhythm, with regular communications during update briefings, commander phone calls, and battlefield circulation. During nightly commander updates, subordinate commanders offered candid assessments of their units' fight and addressed potential opportunities and risks in the coming days. These conversations took place over the distributed mission-command network, and all command posts participated in the discussions. Soldiers at the lowest levels were privy to the highest levels of information and shared understanding. These regular engagements built an atmosphere of trust between the division commander, the deputy commanders, and subordinate commanders.

The division's leaders created an environment of shared trust and understanding in which innovation and adaptation could flourish. They put an emphasis on training repetitions, and thus complex operations became less complicated, because the division had done it all before. Prepared units are opportunistic units. The 1ID dedicated eight precious months of training time, deliberately accepting risk to ensure that the division staff, subordinate units, and all members of the team were ready to fight and win.

Why the Warfighter Exercise Remains the Crucible Training Event for Divisions

It would be easy to fault the 1ID leadership for focusing so much on winning the WFX. However, that point of view would be shortsighted; the global security environment requires leaders that understand how to fight and win through decisive action. Threats posed by Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran make it clear that the Army can ill afford to allow decisive-action skills to atrophy. Offensive tasks against a near-peer enemy are among the most difficult tasks Army forces perform. The challenging decisive-action scenarios at combat training centers and in WFXs are exactly what the Army needs to ensure it stands ready.

Not only did the WFX hone the division staff's decisive-action skills, but it also built the physical network and teams that are vital for future operations. The WFX enhanced the staff's ability to synchronize and employ intelligence, logistics, fires, and other enablers, and these skills translate to any operation. In addition, the exercise provided the challenge the staff needed to hone their

expertise and to develop the critical and creative thinking skills they will need for any mission. As masters of their craft, they can pass their knowledge on to units in their next assignments and to partner forces.

Opportunistic units are fleeting. The Army personnel assignment process does not reward leaders who take time to build a team capable of sharing understanding and displaying disciplined initiative, adaptability, and innovation. Within thirty days of the conclusion of the 1ID's WFX, the majority of the field-grade and senior company-grade leaders on the staff moved to the brigades to take key developmental positions or moved to other installations. The 1ID used the WFX as a venue for leader development and, in the process, it developed junior leaders who would spread the opportunistic mindset throughout the division and the Army for many years to come.

This meant that the division headquarters had to immediately plan for another intensive training cycle to bring new staff members on board after the summer transition period. Including senior NCOs and junior company-grade officers in the battle-staff teams insulated the division from a wholesale loss of knowledge during personnel turnover, but it remains to be seen if the Sustainable Readiness Model will solve this persistent, Army-wide problem.¹⁴ Thus, it is imperative to take personnel turnover into account when assigning key battle-staff positions. The 1ID spent considerable energy documenting its training for and execution of its WFX. The division staff recorded leadership-development

program sessions and cataloged assessments and AARs for the command-post exercises and WFX. Such a complete record should allow new staff members to come on board with a limited amount of turbulence.

Building an opportunistic division is a hard, continuous process. No single exercise, however successful, signals the end of the quest for an innovative, agile, and adaptive unit. The processes described above worked to get a new staff fully engaged and ready for one of the most difficult exercises they would ever face. It trained a group of leaders on the complexity of the decisive-action fight and applied the concept of an opportunistic unit. The experience had a positive effect not only on the division staff but also on the subordinate brigades and sister divisions, as Big Red One alumni moved on to other assignments.

The Big Red One's experiences during the warfighter exercise were consistent with its history. From the unit's inception as part of the American Expeditionary Forces under then Gen. John J. "Black Jack" Pershing during World War I; to its storied exploits in North Africa, Sicily, and on D-Day in France during World War II; to its service in Vietnam under then Maj. Gen. William E. DePuy, who modeled the modern squad after his experiences as the commanding general of the Big Red One; the 1ID provided the model for others to follow. The warfighter exercise gave the First Infantry Division the opportunity to evolve and to continue its legacy of leader development and innovation. ■

Notes

1. U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Regulation (TR) 350-50-3, *Mission Command Training Program* (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, 23 June 2014), 10.

2. William Adler, "Training Opportunistic Formations: Leading Transitions for the Brigade Combat Team," *NTC Decisive Action Training Environment Newsletter* 12-19 (September 2012), 93–103. The authors of this article credit William Adler for inspiring their "opportunistic" construct; they adapted Adler's term to their own purposes.

3. Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office [GPO], 17 May 2012), 1-4.

4. TRADOC Pamphlet (TP) 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World, 2020-2040 w/chg. 1* (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, 31 October 2014), iii.

5. *Ibid.*, 16.

6. Jamie Crawford, "Army Announces Force Reduction of 40,000 Troops," CNN Politics website, 9 July 2015, accessed 7 September 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/09/politics/army-announces-force-reduction-40000-troops/>.

7. ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 2-3.

8. TR 350-50-3, *Mission Command Training Program*, 7.

9. The six Army warfighting functions are mission command, movement and maneuver, intelligence, fires, sustainment, and protection. A digital master gunner is a subject-matter expert on mission-command information systems including the Command Post of the Future command-and-control system.

10. ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, v; ADRP 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, May 2012), 1-3–1-7.

11. Secretary of the Army, *Army Directive 2012-08: Army Total Force Policy* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of the Army, 4 September 2012).

12. Army Techniques Publication 3-91, *Division Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 17 October 2014), 1-1.

13. ADRP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 16 May 2012), 1-9.

14. "Army Readiness Guidance," U.S. Army Stand-To! website, 19 May 2016, accessed 8 September 2016, <https://www.army.mil/standto/2016-05-19>.