

Operational Planning Teams—Organizing the Staff for Endurance

Lessons Learned from the 4th Infantry Division’s Employment of Persistent Operational Planning Teams

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Operational planning teams (OPT) are a staple of military staff work. Typically, leaders serving on large staffs form OPTs to tackle newly identified problems as they emerge. The OPT structure is often boutique—custom-built for a specialized output, and then quickly dissolved once the assigned problem is resolved or evolves beyond the original scope. This approach works well for enterprise-level defense problems where a large talent pool (across the entire U.S. Army, for instance) allows the organization to rapidly build high-quality, customized OPTs without an appreciable impact on steady-state operations. Unfortunately, this does not hold for smaller organizations in which a small number of staff leaders juggle many problems while sustaining routine operations.

Permanent OPTs managing portfolios of problems over time offer an alternative well-suited for long-term continuous operations.

In the summer of 2023, the 4th Infantry Division (4ID) staff began experimenting with using persistent OPTs. Before the experiment, the 4ID staff followed traditional Army staff processes. This article will demonstrate the value of persistent OPTs through four successive discussions. First, we will lay out the 4ID approach to “collaborate and dominate,” minimizing meetings to maximize collaboration with common battle rhythm frameworks in both tactical and garrison environments.¹ Second, we will summarize a division staff’s traditional and doctrinal organization to provide a point of departure when comparing the



Gen. Darryl A. Williams, commanding general of U.S. Army Europe and Africa, and Maj. Gen. David S. Doyle, commanding general of 4th Infantry Division, attend a briefing 10 August 2023 at Forward Operating Site Boleslawiec in Poland. (Photo courtesy of the 4th Infantry Division)

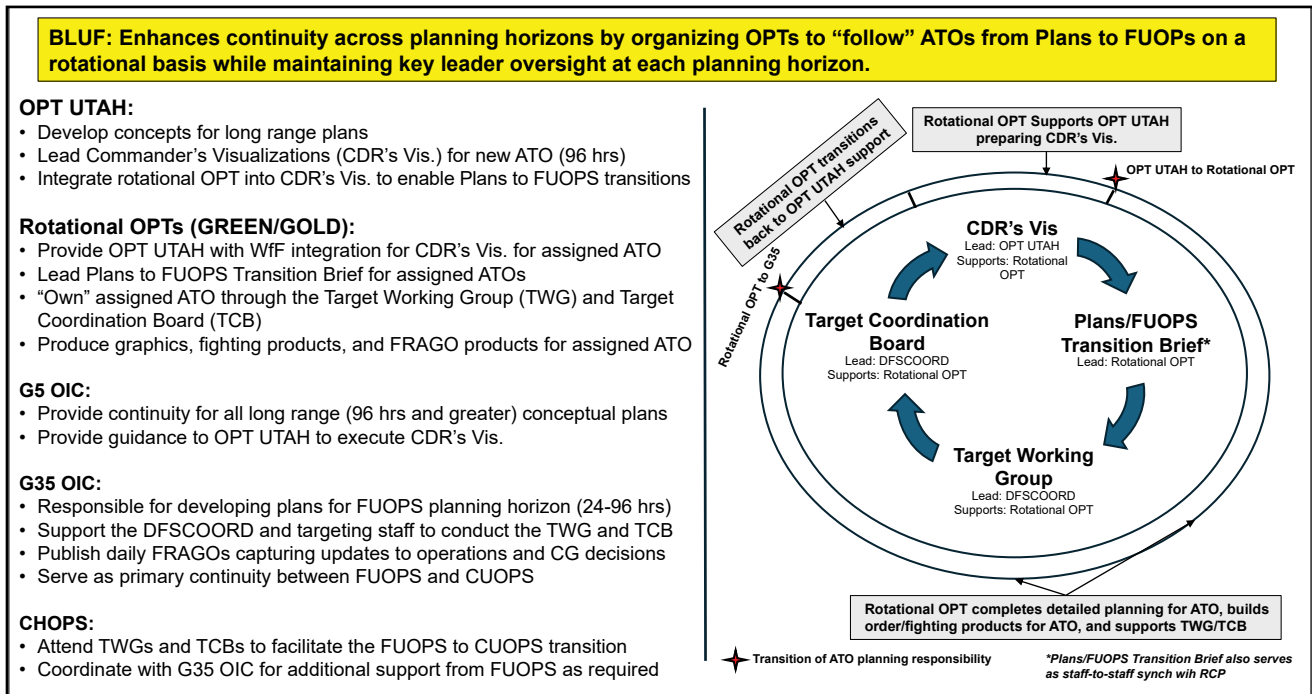
OPT structure and process. Third, we will define how we structured, manned, and assigned responsibilities to OPTs during garrison and tactical operations. Fourth, the article will conclude with specific advantages and disadvantages and recommend changes for employing OPTs in the future. Deploying persistent OPTs allow the staff to reduce transitions, increase shared understanding, ensure multiple and diverse perspectives when solving complex problems, and enhance staff endurance.

Context—“Collaborate and Dominate”

4ID has consistently adhered to the principles of “collaborate and dominate” since before its formal publication in June 2018. “Collaborate and dominate” has three principles: focus on the relentless destruction of the enemy, use decision point tactics, and collaborate at echelon.² Over time, 4ID has evolved its processes and organization to more effectively center on the targeting process as the primary model for staff

functions. This model treats all operations or planning objectives as targets, and these are then processed through the “Buzzsaw,” which consists of three collaborative meetings: the commander’s visualization, the target working group, and the target coordination board (TCB) (see figure 1).

The visualization produces the initial long-range concept of operations and captures the commander’s planning guidance. The target working group takes the approved concept and planning guidance through a cross-functional working group to add the details necessary for proper synchronization and execution. The TCB is the division commander’s opportunity to provide final refined guidance and approve the target for execution. The output of the TCB is an approved plan that is fully resourced, integrated, and prepared for order production and execution. These meetings ensure cross-functional and multi-echelon conversation. The Buzzsaw has proven advantageous at processing information and delivering outputs at the speed of tactical operations. Experimenting with



(Figure by authors; see glossary for acronyms and abbreviations)

Figure 1. The Buzzsaw

operationalized, persistent OPTs further enhanced the Buzzsaw construct.

Molding the military decision-making process into the targeting cycle (as opposed to the converse) has proven efficient at managing multiple targets properly nested within the broader operations process. However, the increased speed in the division’s main command post (the central orders and targeting hub) can often outpace support from sustainment and protection warfighting functions concentrated in satellite command nodes. The rapid movement from the whiteboard concept to detailed planning and orders production requires reliable digital connectivity tools to allow the distributed staff to participate in visualization; otherwise, the ensuing tail chasing will negate any potential efficiencies. When digital collaboration tools broke down, we observed a need to spend more time in intrastaff coordination; otherwise, operations orders suffered from insufficient detail.

Enter the use of persistent OPTs. This modified approach used standing, cohesive, cross-functional teams to plan across well-defined time horizons and carry those future problems from plans to execution. This design balances efficiency and staff focus to maximize

time for proper cross-domain synchronization at the anticipated pace of the modern battlefield.

Context—Doctrinal Staff Organization

Traditional staff organization differs from the operational planning team structure described later in this article. Traditional staff design is organized functionally, with most staff sections having individuals who work in specified planning horizons.³ An example is the operations section, or G-3, which has current operations (short-term planning and execution), future operations (mid-term planning), and plans (long-term planning) cells. Functional staff are responsible for sustaining expertise in their field and employing their individuals to accomplish tasks within their specialty. Historically, a division staff creates cross-functional teams to solve problems on a case-by-case basis. Once the team has produced the required output, whether a concept, operations order, or execution function, it typically dissolves, and the members return to their assigned G-staff sections.

This episodic nature surges talent in the short term but does not maximize the long-term advantages of

cohesive teams working together for extended periods. Notably, the traditional staff section organization is aligned with the U.S. Army evaluation system, where individuals are rated primarily based on their performance within their assigned staff section (or functional specialty) rather than their contributions to the collaborative efforts of the command's priorities. The remainder of this article will define how the 4ID used OPTs and describe the advantages, disadvantages, and recommendations for using persistent OPTs alongside traditional staff organization rather than strictly adhering to the doctrinal model.

The "Ivy" OPTs Defined

In July 2023, 4ID created three persistent OPTs while forward deployed to Poland. Over the first few months of the experiment, these OPTs evolved in a few ways, finally settling on a stable concept. During garrison operations, there were three permanent OPTs (see figure 2). Two OPTs, Green and Gold, were cross-functional teams of eight core members. The third, OPT Utah, was a smaller planning cell of three members. During tactical operations, OPTs Green and Gold remained while the individuals participating in Utah integrated into the other two OPTs. The following three sections describe how the OPTs operated in garrison and tactical environments.

OPTs Green and Gold—Garrison. OPT Green and Gold were inherently cross-functional with organized core members representing the G-2 (intelligence), G-33 (current operations), G-35 (future operations), G-5 (plans), G-4 (logistics), G-6 (signal operations), fires, and engineer sections.⁴ The G-35 representative served as the OPT lead and was responsible for every planning effort assigned to the OPT.⁵ The eight core members were required to attend each OPT meeting and act as both generalists and specialized experts in their core warfighting functions.⁶ The OPT leads had the authority to expand temporarily outside the core members to pull in additional expertise from special

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staff or outreach to adjacent units for parallel planning (see figure 3).

OPT Green was responsible for planning and executing all events with execution dates during the first and second quarters of the fiscal year up to a calendar year from the current date. Commensurately, OPT Gold was responsible for all things in the third and fourth quarters of the fiscal year.⁷ Organizing in this manner reduced transitions and ensured cross-functional planning by a small, cohesive group on all future activities, both great and small.

OPTs Green and Gold—Tactical. OPT structure transformed during tactical operations to ensure the division's actions in the deep and support area integrated lethal and nonlethal multidomain effects to shape on behalf of the brigade combat teams. OPTs Green and Gold reduced in size to seven core members.⁸ These core members were representatives from the G-2, G-4, G-5, fires, aviation, engineer, and G-39 sections.⁹ The G-5 representative became the OPT lead and was responsible for the OPT overall. This allowed the experienced G-35 representatives to serve in other command nodes or as liaison officers to key external headquarters. OPT Green members worked out of the plans trailer within the 4ID main command post and were responsible for planning from ninety-six to more than 120 hours. OPT Gold members worked out of the future operations (FUOPS) trailer within the 4ID main command post and were responsible for planning from forty-eight to seventy-two hours.¹⁰

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While this may appear as a simple variation on the traditional

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4ID Operational Planning Team (OPT) Garrison Structure

Organization:

OPT **Green** is responsible for ALL planning efforts that execute in 1Q & 2Q
 OPT **Gold** is responsible for ALL planning efforts that execute in 3Q & 4Q
 Ownership: Cradle to grave for a planning effort (concept through execution)
 • OPTs can direct planning efforts to an Office of Primary Responsibility (OPR) or an action officer

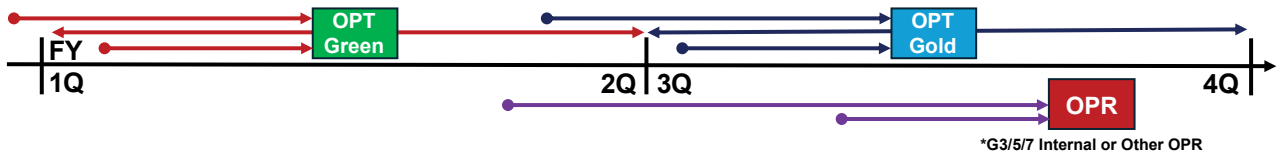
OPT Battle Rhythm:

4x dedicated OPT MTG times weekly
 (Mon: 1300-1400, Wednesday: 0930-1100, 1400-1600, Friday: 0930-1130)
 • OPT **Green** meets Monday & Wednesday afternoon
 • OPT **Gold** meets Wednesday morning & Friday
 • Allows low-density enablers to attend both OPTs
 • Ensures flexibility for OPTs needing additional touchpoints

Core team is a standing team

• Can draw from the OPT Pool of additional enablers as necessary

1x OPT (Utah)	2x Integrated OPTs (Green / Gold)
Core Members	Core Members
G5 (Lead)	G35 (Lead)
G37	G5
G39	G33
	G2
	G4
	G6
	Fires
	Eng



(Figure by authors; see glossary for acronyms and abbreviations)

Figure 2. Garrison Planning Team Structure

Operational Planning Team (OPT) Garrison Task Organization

OPT Utah		OPT Green / Gold		OPT Pool*		
Core	Responsibilities	Core	Responsibilities			
G5	Lead / Conceptual Planning	G35	Lead / Detailed Planning	AVN	IO	AMD
G37	Readiness Planning	G5	Assistant Lead / Conceptual Planning	CBRNE	KM	ORSA
G39	Engagements	G33	Maneuver WfF / Execution	DTO	CEMA	PMO
		G2	Intel WfF	Space	Surgeon	Chaplain
		G4	Sustainment WfF	PAO	SJA	G1
		G6	C2 WfF	G8	Brigades	Tenant Units
		Fires	Fires WfF	Garrison		AFSBN
		Eng	Protection WfF			

OPT

- Conceptual development for efforts executing within the one-to-two-year time horizon
- Programs of record
 - IVY ARC

Integrated OPTs

OPT **Green**

- All planning efforts executing in 1 & 2Q

OPT **Gold**

- All planning efforts executing in 3 & 4Q

*OPT leads are authorized to expand beyond the core and request a planner from all 4ID staff sections, and request planner support from Fort Carson garrison and tenant units.

(Figure by authors; see glossary for acronyms and abbreviations)

Figure 3. Garrison Planning Team Task Organization

“plans” and “FUOPS” breakdown, there is one key difference. The G-5 OPT leads would rotate. Once OPT Green would receive command approval on their tactical concept, the OPT Green G-5 representative would rotate over to OPT Gold and carry the concept through detailed planning. Upon publishing the operations order, the G-5 representative returns to OPT Green and begins looking deep. This rotation of G-5 leads ensures continuity of planning for every order.

This organization ensured robust, cross-functional capability and expertise across both OPTs, significantly reducing friction during plans-to-FUOPS transitions. OPT members provided expertise in solving the current tactical problem and coordinated with their parent staff section or counterparts in the other OPT to collaborate effectively. This daily focus on a few specific outputs maximized the endurance of OPT members—a vital requirement when preparing to fight large-scale combat operations over weeks or months.

OPT Utah—Garrison/Tactical. OPT Utah was responsible for conceptual planning events within the one-to-two-year planning horizon. Like a commander’s initiative group, OPT Utah would capture complex or ill-defined ideas or command priorities and develop them into a structured framework that the OPTs could run with. Additionally, OPT Utah was the conceptual lead for any programs of record that were enduring and unbounded by discrete execution windows. OPT Utah’s limited requirement of achieving an approved concept rather than a detailed, executable plan required a smaller team. OPT Utah had three core members: representatives from the G-37 (training), G-39 (information operations), and G-5 (plans) sections.¹¹ The G-5 representative was the OPT lead responsible for project management. Like the other OPTs, the OPT lead could pull in special experts for short periods when needed. During tactical operations, OPT Utah’s members were reassigned to the other OPTs, with the G-5 lead responsible for liaising with Corps or Joint Task Force planners to inform planning options beyond 120 hours.

Advantages

4ID identified four crucial advantages from the persistent use of OPTs. These advantages included (1) minimizing transitions, having all planning horizons represented at the inception of planning and

eliminating the requirement for formal transition meetings; (2) improving shared understanding among the division staff and subordinate brigades; (3) ensuring consideration of diverse perspectives when solving complex problems; and (4) enhancing staff endurance.

OPT structure and manning reduced the number of transitions required from the inception of a planning effort through its execution. Before the persistent use of OPTs, 4ID had three separate transitions that, despite numerous fail-safes and formal transition briefs, led to lapses in information dissemination and increased the requirement for meetings, thereby reducing opportunities for collaboration. The three transitions were

- conceptual plan to detailed planning (G-5 to G-35),
- detailed planning and orders production to execution (G-35 to G-33), and
- execution and fragmentary order (FRAGO) production through after action review (G-33 back to G-35, if necessary, to the knowledge management team).

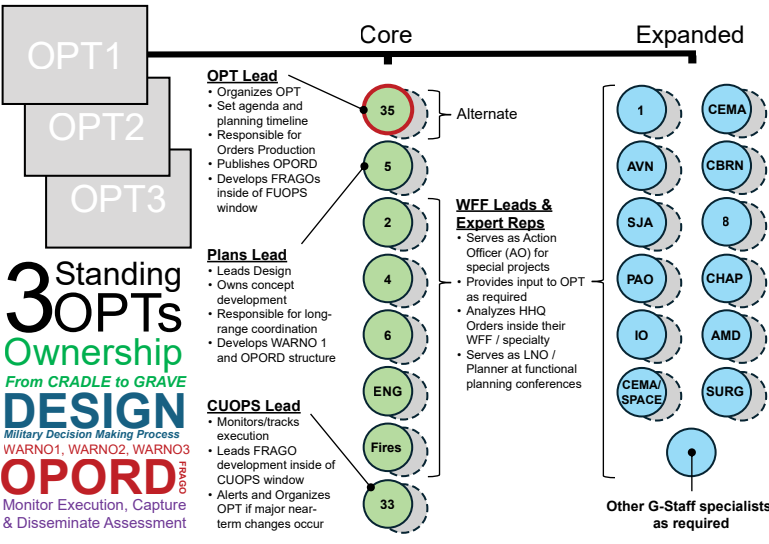
The OPT structure incorporated all three planning horizons, including plans, future operations, and current operations, eliminating the need for formal transitions (see figure 4). All OPT representatives contributed to each planning effort from the beginning, ensuring that the plans included the necessary details for real-world execution. Notably, the participation of the executing officer, whether it was the current operations representative or another designated office of primary responsibility, did not require a formal transition and had the same level of information as any other member of the core OPT.

The operational planning team can manage multiple planning efforts simultaneously and ensure that all staff members have a shared understanding. The OPT consists of seven qualified individuals representing all warfighting functions who are the primary planners for a planning effort. This method allowed 4ID to address issues, generate options, and progress through the operations process more efficiently than when we used a traditional staff organization. Additionally, with the largest staff sections represented within each OPT, there was a significant boost in shared understanding across the staff. To promote collaboration and shared understanding among the staff, we ensured that an OPT handled most planning efforts. Every problem



How IVY Plans

Operational Planning Teams (OPT) are cross-functional teams assembled and organized for purpose to understand a problem, analyze in detail, inform the Commander's decisions, develop an executable plan, and implement and assess that plan. In the Ivy Division, we prioritize standing teams who solve common problems. However, we will (when needed) build custom OPTs to address unique problems. Note: Not all "problems" require an OPT. G-Sections retain most routine, simple tasks.



OPT "Keys to Success"

- 1. Understand the Task.** Clearly define your starting point, initial guidance, and context of the project.
- 2. Get Organized.** Build the team you need. The OPT comes with incredible depth. Tailor it to the needs of the project.
- 3. Develop a Calendar.** Manage the project by building a clear calendar that holds the team accountable. Stick to it!
- 4. Record and Synchronize.** Diligently record progress and ensure that the whole team stays abreast of change.
- 5. Collaborate.** Pull small groups together with purpose. Groups larger than 8 share information, they don't collaborate.
- 6. Iterate.** Brief status and milestones regularly to principals or decision makers. Refined guidance prevents drift.

A note on calendars...
 We (the Army) think we do calendars well. The truth is...we're typically amateurs. When we fail to prepare, we just change it! We call it being "adaptive", but really, we're undisciplined.
 A project management calendar is a tool that shows the schedule, tasks, deadlines, and milestones.

(Figure by authors; see glossary for acronyms and abbreviations)

Figure 4. How Ivy Plans

became a cross-functional problem, and the resulting solutions benefited from this mindset.

The final benefit of using OPTs is their ability to provide staff endurance. Although this advantage is still largely theoretical, we observed some increases in efficiency that, if fine-tuned, can allow OPTs to operate at pace for weeks or even months in large-scale combat operations. OPTs with a clear output requirement and sufficient teamwide familiarity with assigned tasks can distribute the workload more effectively among a team. Collaboration can be more focused and productive, leaving more time for individual work and recuperation.

Disadvantages

4ID identified two significant disadvantages of the consistent use of the OPT: fighting Army staff process inertia ("How things have always been done") and friction with the Army evaluation system.

We observed predictable friction while implementing the new OPT structure. The first and most obvious friction is that it is unfamiliar. Implementing a new staff design meant investment in reforming and retraining teams, which is a tough sell with the high

pace and demanding requirements already placed on any division-level staff. Thankfully, our staff principals were mature, and the chief of staff had early buy-in on the change.

Naturally, the operations section had to invest the bulk of the energy to drive updated battle rhythms and communications processes to institutionalize the OPT change. Once the command team became familiar with the OPT "faces," briefing the products, and seeing the improved quality and completeness of OPT-aligned planning efforts, the senior leaders drove the increased inertia on putting human talent against the OPTs. This process took about three months, from start to full command buy-in. Once adopted, the OPT priorities became the command's temporal view of the operations process (see figures 5 and 6).

One hurdle or friction point endemic with the recommended OPT design is a conflict with the Army evaluation system. The current evaluation system prioritizes qualitative assessment of competence within a specialized warfighting function combined with quantitative assessment of productivity. This is not bad, but the alignment of rating chains within G-sections does not position

Example OPT Priorities and Overview

OPT	Project	AO	WARNO 1	MA	COA DEV	ORDER PUBLISHED	EXECUTION DATE	Description	Next Action
GREEN	CP/SOP Updates	Multiple	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	FEB 25	Refine SOPs prior to CPX 1	TWG: 5 DEC 24
GREEN	ARSTRUC	MAJ Lueck	N/A	OCT 24	OCT 24	NLT DEC 24	APR 25	Plan and produce OPORD for 45th MICO (GS) integration	TWG: 14 NOV 24
GREEN	DSB Support to CTCs	MAJ Lueck	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	MAR 25 ASRC	Anticipate requirements to provide predictability	TWG: 21 NOV 24
GOLD	CPX I	MAJ De Lancey	2 OCT 24	9 OCT 24	9 OCT 24	16 OCT 24	31 JAN 25-7 FEB 25	WFX 25-4 training progression	TWG: 14 NOV 24
GOLD	CPX II	MAJ De Lancey	2 OCT 24	16 OCT 24	16 OCT 24	7 NOV 24	24-28 FEB 25	WFX 25-4 training progression	TWG: 14 NOV 24
GOLD	Ivy Week	MAJ King	10 OCT 24	17 OCT 24	24 OCT 24	21 NOV 24	25-29 AUG 25	Celebrate unit history and build esprit de corps within the division	TWG: 14 NOV 24

OPT GREEN

- CP SOP Way Forward
- ARSTRUC (MAJ Campbell)
- Installation Support Plan (4DSB)
- DSB CTC Support (MAJ Lueck)
- ATSI (MAJ Shumaker / MSG Eckert)
- Redeployment and Reset SOP (MAJ Lueck)
- IVY ARC (MAJ Shumaker) (G33)
- 3ABCT Red Cycle Relief (MAJ Shumaker)
- R2E (CPT McQueen)
- Winter Opportunity Leave (MAJ Shumaker) (CHOPS)
- Birthday Week / Dining Out (CPT Hair G1) (CHOPS)

OPT GOLD

- 4ID CPX I (MAJ De Lancey)
- WFX 25-04 Progression (MAJ De Lancey)
- 0WFX 24-4 Risk Reduction Event (CPT Frey)
- IVY Week 2025 (MAJ King)
- Division PT Event (MAJ Burnett)
- MDO Symposium (Ms. Keri Brandt)
- 1SBCT Deployment (MAJ Arvin)
- Roving Sands (MAJ Hernandez)
- DoD Warrior Games (AO TBD)
- CST 2025 Support to 1CD (AO TBD)
- III Corp FY 25 Protection Assessments (MAJ Drew)

OPT UTAH

- LI/WFX Academics Way Forward (ALL OPT)
- The SW Maneuvers (MAJ Patterson)
- Ivy Mass 2026 (MAJ Patterson)
- Capstone 6 & 7 (MAJ Patterson)
- Vanguard 25 (MAJ Rasak)
- 2Q FY25 QPC (MAJ Patterson)
- OPLAN Review (MAJ Patterson/Scully-Wolfe)
- In-Processing OPT (MAJ Patterson)
- Tactical DYK Series (CPT Messmer)
- Theater Threat Briefs (MAJ Scully-Wolfe)
- Engagements Campaign Plan (MAJ Patterson)
- Harding Project (MAJ Patterson)

(Figure by authors; see glossary for acronyms and abbreviations)

Figure 5. Example Planning Team Priorities and Overview

raters to observe the qualitative input that OPT members contribute. Some “heavy hitters” serving as core OPT members may never receive much public credit for their contributions, and their efforts away from their G-staff section may be obscured from their established raters.

The OPT structure pulls individuals from their assigned staff section to work on planning efforts and priorities that have nothing to do with their assigned section. Significantly, most of the work and effort these assigned OPT individuals produce was not delegated to them by their first-line supervisor or rater. The responsibility for most OPT planning efforts did not reside in their assigned staff section.

Additionally, we observed the “war for talent” play out inside the staff itself. Some sections that provided OPT members quickly anchored on losing a talented individual who could no longer be counted upon to produce solely on behalf of their assigned staff section. This dissonance with the typical staff structure requires

extensive command emphasis to ensure that OPTs and OPT members are protected, valued, and evaluated fairly, sacrificing traditional “staff section” work by working on behalf of the entire command.

Adjutant General Considerations for Supporting an OPT

The current Army evaluation system is designed to ensure officers’ performance and potential are recognized, and the Army’s professional development program is designed to provide officers with a clear path to a successful Army career. It uses key developmental positions and broadening assignments to provide options for career success. Within these positions, leaders expect their subordinate officers to use their education, training, and experience to fully complete their assigned obligations and contribute to the unit’s planning efforts and mission. This clarity of purpose aims to assist officers in staying focused on their career goals.

Example Garrison Targeting Cycle for Command Influence

Legend <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Green ▪ Gold ❖ Utah 	Target Coordination Board	Commander's Visualization	Target Working Group
	Tuesday	Tuesday	Thursday
TW 19 (04 FEB – 10 FEB)	IVY 6 – 06 FEB: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 4CAB CPCE Fielding Options (MAJ Moure) 2. MAR Social (MAJ Miller) 3. CST Laydown (MAJ Mathys) 4. Innovation Cell (MAJ Hudson/MAJ Thompson) 5. Power BI Training Course (MAJ Martinez) 6. MAY Hail and Farewell (MAJ Delapaz) 	IVY 6 – 06 FEB: No Visualization	COS – 08 FEB: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IVY STING 3 / IVY MASS (MAJ Billings-Reber) 2. April IVY ARC (MAJ Gonzalez / MAJ Ortiz) 3. MAY IVY ARC (MAJ Townsend) 4. FEB IVY ARC Final Conditions Check (MAJ Arias) 5. How We Fight Slide (MAJ Hudson) 6. TAC DOCTEMP (MAJ Ortiz)
TW 20 (11 FEB – 17 FEB)	IVY 6 – 13 FEB: No TCB (STING 2)	IVY 6 – 13 FEB: No Visualization (STING 2)	COS – 22 FEB: No TWG (STING 2)
TW 21 (18 FEB – 24 FEB)	IVY 6 – 20 FEB: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IVY STING 3 / IVY MASS (MAJ Billings-Reber) 2. April IVY ARC (MAJ Gonzalez / MAJ Ortiz) 3. MAY IVY ARC (MAJ Townsend) 4. How We Fight Slide (MAJ Hudson) 5. TAC DOCTEMP (MAJ Ortiz) 	IVY 6 – 20 FEB: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ ASRC (MAJ Hudson) ▪ ARSTRUC (MAJ Ortiz) 	COS – 22 FEB: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IVY Week (MAJ Curry) 2. Pinyon Canyon Range 9 (MAJ Kozimor) 3. New Staff Onboarding 4. FEB IVY ARC After Action Review (MAJ Arias)
TW 22 (25 FEB – 02 MAR)	IVY 6 – 27 FEB: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IVY Week (MAJ Curry) 2. Pinyon Canyon Range 9 (MAJ Kozimor) 3. New Staff Onboarding 	IVY 6 – 27 FEB: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Colorado Maneuvers (MAJ Hudson) 	COS – 29 FEB: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ARSTRUC 25-29 (MAJ Campbell) 2. IVY STING 2 AAR (MAJ Miller) 3. MDO ARC 3 (MAJ Hudson) 4. IVY MASS MPC Out-brief (MAJ Billings-Reber)
TW 23 (03 MAR – 09 MAR)	IVY 6 – 05 MAR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ARSTRUC 25-29 (MAJ Campbell) 2. MDO ARC 3 (MAJ Hudson) 3. IVY MASS MPC Out-brief (MAJ Billings-Reber) 	IVY 6 – 05 MAR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lethal IVY Concept (MAJ Ortiz) 	G3 – 07 MAR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IVY Week (MAJ Curry) 2. OIP Inspection (MAJ Conrad) 3. Colorado Maneuvers (MAJ Hudson)
TW 24 (10 MAR – 16 MAR)	IVY 6 – 12 MAR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IVY Week (MAJ Curry) 2. OIP Inspection (MAJ Conrad) 3. Colorado Maneuvers (MAJ Hudson) 	IVY 6 – 12 MAR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MCTP Academics (MAJ Ortiz) 	COS – 14 MAR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MAR ARC Event Conditions Check (MAJ Moure) 2. IVY STING 3 Conditions Check (MAJ Miller) 3. Deployment Readiness Exercises (MAJ Conrad) 4. Lethal IVY Concept (MAJ Ortiz)

(Figure by authors; see glossary for acronyms and abbreviations)

Figure 6. The “Buzzsaw” during Garrison

Keeping rating schemes under the designated staff section is important, mainly if the officer only serves as a subject-matter expert for the OPT. If the officer takes on the role of a full-time project lead for over ninety days, they should be reassigned to that position; otherwise, it should be considered an additional task. The evaluation narrative of the rater and senior rater should attempt to include feedback regarding achievements from the OPT. Commanders can customize rating chains if the situation requires it, and chief of staff can develop dedicated forums for staff principals to routinely talk about the balance of talent across the staff and the performance of individuals contributing heavily to OPTs.

Recommendations for Future OPT Employment

The key lesson for future OPT employment is to ensure the chief of staff is the driving force behind transitioning to the OPT structure. 4ID staff noted that the most significant improvement after using the OPT approach for over a year was when the chief of staff took ownership of the OPTs. The chief of staff has the authority to assign tasks to all division staff members and can effectively enforce the OPT process. The division

G-3 should continue to supervise OPT management and synchronization, but only the chief of staff can empower the OPT leads in their cross-functional capacity. Otherwise, each staff section may prioritize their specific roles and responsibilities over the OPTs’ collective role for the organization. Shortsightedness is rarely malicious, but in the crush of a busy Army rapidly transforming to meet emergent strategic challenges, it is pervasive.

Conclusion

Implementing persistent operational planning teams presents a promising approach to optimizing staff organization for long-term continuous operations. By adhering to the principles of “collaborate and dominate” and emphasizing the targeting process through the Buzzsaw model, 4ID observed improvements to efficiency and quality in planning by employing dedicated cross-functional teams. By using OPTs Green, Gold, and Utah, the division reduced transitions, fostered diverse perspectives, and saw increased capacity to address complex problems over time in both garrison and tactical operations. Using persistent OPTs offers valuable insights and opportunities for improving staff performance, endurance, and coordination in demanding operational contexts. ■

Notes

1. 4th Infantry Division (4ID), *Collaborate and Dominate: The 4th Infantry Divisions Experience in WFX 18-04* (Fort Carson, CO: 4ID, 21 June 2018), 1.
2. Ibid.
3. Field Manual 5-0, *Planning and Orders Production* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, May 2022), 4-24.
4. 4th Infantry Division and Fort Carson Standard Operating Procedure, Operations – Planning, “Operational Planning Team” (4 June 2024), 2.
5. Ibid., 3.
6. Ibid., 6.
7. Ibid., 2.
8. Ibid., 3.
9. Ibid., 8.
10. Ibid., 9.
11. Ibid., 2.

Glossary—Acronyms and Abbreviations

AFSBN	Army field support battalion	HICOM	higher command
AMD	air and missile defense	IO	information operations
ARSTRUC	Army Structure	IPPS-A	Integrated Personnel and Pay System-Army
ATO	air tasking order	JRTC	Joint Readiness Training Center
AVN	aviation	KM	knowledge management
CBRNE	chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosives	LNO	liaison officer
CDR	commander	MCTP	Mission Command Training Program
CEMA	cyberspace electromagnetic activities	NTC	National Training Center
CHOPS	chief of operations	OIC	officer in charge
CST	cadet summer training	OPORD	operation order
CUOPS	current operations	OPR	office of primary responsibility
DFSCCOORD	deputy fire support coordinator	OPT	operational planning team
DTO	division transportation officer	ORSA	operations research and systems analysis
FRAGO	fragmentary order	PAO	public affairs officer
FUOPS	future operations	PMO	provost marshal officer
G-1	assistant chief of staff, personnel	POC	point of contact
G-2	assistant chief of staff, intelligence	R2E	Rapid Removal of Excess
G-4	assistant chief of staff, logistics	SJA	staff judge advocate
G-5	assistant chief of staff, plans	SURG	surgeon
G-6	assistant chief of staff, signal	TBD	to be determined
G-8	assistant chief of staff, financial management	TCB	target coordination board
G-33	current operations	TWG	target working group
G-35	future operations officer	USAG	U.S. Army garrison
G-37	future plans	VIS	visualization
G-39	information warfare	WARNO	warning order
H2F	holistic health and fitness	WFF	warfighting function
HHQ	higher headquarters	WFX	Warfighter Exercise