



A soldier assigned to the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment observes the valley below as a UH-72 Lakota helicopter passes by 13 April 2018 during Decisive Action Rotation 18-06 at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California. (Photo by Spc. J. D. Sacharok, Operations Group, National Training Center, U.S. Army)



# “Ready Now”—Our Number One Priority

Col. Christopher R. Norrie, U.S. Army

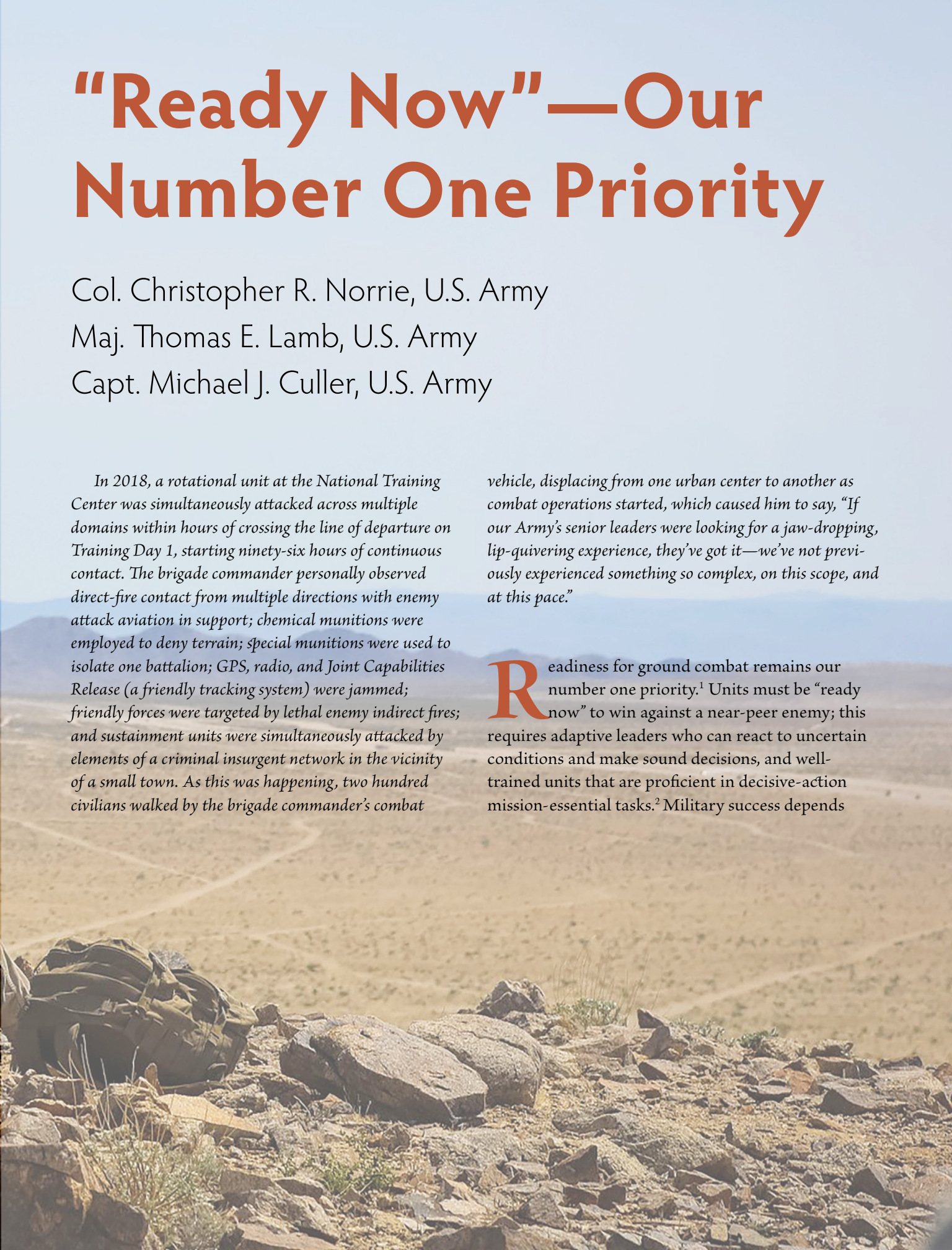
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*In 2018, a rotational unit at the National Training Center was simultaneously attacked across multiple domains within hours of crossing the line of departure on Training Day 1, starting ninety-six hours of continuous contact. The brigade commander personally observed direct-fire contact from multiple directions with enemy attack aviation in support; chemical munitions were employed to deny terrain; special munitions were used to isolate one battalion; GPS, radio, and Joint Capabilities Release (a friendly tracking system) were jammed; friendly forces were targeted by lethal enemy indirect fires; and sustainment units were simultaneously attacked by elements of a criminal insurgent network in the vicinity of a small town. As this was happening, two hundred civilians walked by the brigade commander’s combat*

*vehicle, displacing from one urban center to another as combat operations started, which caused him to say, “If our Army’s senior leaders were looking for a jaw-dropping, lip-quivering experience, they’ve got it—we’ve not previously experienced something so complex, on this scope, and at this pace.”*

**R**eadiness for ground combat remains our number one priority.<sup>1</sup> Units must be “ready now” to win against a near-peer enemy; this requires adaptive leaders who can react to uncertain conditions and make sound decisions, and well-trained units that are proficient in decisive-action mission-essential tasks.<sup>2</sup> Military success depends





on an organization willing to learn—the Army must adapt at least as fast as the Nation’s adversaries change their ways of conducting operations.<sup>3</sup>

Combat training centers remain the cornerstone of our integrated training strategy to win, and they replicate the complexity of a near-peer enemy and operational environment.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of the National Training Center (NTC) remains to ensure that units have their hardest day in the desert so that no soldier goes untrained into combat. In 2018, a typical fourteen-day NTC rotation was structured as continuous, open-phased, force-on-force and live-fire decisive-action operations against a near-peer enemy. Open phasing is continuous competition across multiple domains, with less restrictive guidance to units on where and when to maneuver, focused on training leaders *how to think* versus telling them *what to think*, to reward commanders, both rotational and enemy, who identify and exploit opportunities on the battlefield.<sup>5</sup>

As visualized in Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, complexity at the NTC continues to increase.<sup>6</sup> The currently replicated operational environment is best characterized as simultaneous,

Soldiers assigned to 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, provide security from their Stryker while waiting for a smoke screen to fully engulf a breach 12 September 2017 during Decisive Action Rotation 17-09 at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, California. (Photo by Spc. J. D. Sacharok, Operations Group, National Training Center, U.S. Army)

continuous combat across multiple domains, to include an overwhelming enemy fires capability; direct-fire, air, and information parity; challenged lines of communication; full-spectrum enemy sensing; hyper chaos; accelerated tempo; and exponential lethality at echelon.

The multi-domain operations concept is not only driving change and design for the future Army, but it is also driving change now.<sup>7</sup> Replicating the complexity of multi-domain operations is improving decisive-action proficiency and driving that change. Leaders and soldiers are learning how to continuously synchronize combined arms across multiple domains in an ambiguous and uncertain environment, with a solid foundation in the fundamentals of warfighting,

at echelon. Units are arriving at the NTC with good habits, grounded in the fundamentals of shoot, move, communicate, and sustain. Live-fire operations are now continual, and units are not allowed to see the terrain they will fight from prior to execution. Units are consistently issuing effective warning orders, and they are adhering to reasonable planning timelines. Command posts are smaller and more agile. The volume of fires is increasing, and the use of joint enablers in support of the brigade close-area fight is improving. Increasingly, units are proficient in exercising basic chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) tasks related to force protection, detection, and decontamination, and fewer logistics resupply missions are unforecasted. Multiple repetitions, at pace and in complexity, have improved our ability to simultaneously compete across multiple domains and win today. While we have made considerable progress building decisive-action readiness, we must continue to raise the bar. Units are developing multi-domain tactics to account for the complexities of multi-domain operations and are starting to settle on tasks that have historically been a challenge: combined arms breach operations; fires integration; combined arms synchronization; rigor in planning processes; and command post echelonment. In an uncertain, fast-paced, and ambiguous environment, units often recognize what is happening, but often do not understand why it is happening. This includes being comfortable operating in a communications-degraded environment; actively targeting sensors; using physical and digital camouflage; further improving fires and aviation integration; increasing the tempo of combined arms breach operations; and further building a

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bench of leaders who are masters of the fundamentals of shoot, move, communicate, and sustain.

## What We Are Learning and How We Are Growing

As previously stated, the multi-domain operations concept is not only driving change and design for the future Army but is also driving change now. Units are learning from their experience fighting large-scale combat at the NTC against a replicated near-peer adversary, and combining these lessons with those learned over the last seventeen years to build exceptionally capable and lethal combat formations. Specific examples of growth and learning, consistent with that visualized in FM 3-0, include the following:

(1) Units are adjusting to fighting at an exceptionally fast pace and are comfortable operating in ambiguity and uncertainty. Accelerated tempo requires leaders to understand why things are happening or risk losing momentum. Recognizing multiple forms of simultaneous contact is difficult—even more difficult, particularly at pace, is understanding how the enemy is able to converge capabilities and to understand where specific vulnerabilities might be targeted. Units are investing in repetitions and visualization, and learning how to operate in a communications-degraded environment. Often, simple is best—efficient command posts; codified standard operating procedures; cluttering the battlefield;

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Soldiers in Stryker armored vehicles assigned to 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, maneuver through a pass 16 January 2018 during Decisive Action Rotation 18-03 at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, California. (Photo by Spc. Esmeralda Cervantes, Operations Group, National Training Center, U.S. Army)





and the fundamentals of shoot, move, communicate, and sustain at echelon.

(2) Units are arriving at the NTC with good habits, grounded in the fundamentals of shoot, move, communicate, and sustain. The fundamentals matter—there are no shortcuts in decisive action, just the hard work of doing things correctly and routinely, as a habit. This includes maintenance, orders production, rehearsals, checks and inspections, casualty evacuation, boresighting, fires distribution, and battle drills at echelon. Lethal platoons and companies, paired with rehearsed command posts and efficient planning processes at echelon, are very effective in a decisive-action, multi-domain environment.

(3) Units are comfortable operating with information parity. Data is widely accessible to a large audience, whether through electromagnetic detection or social media, which makes it more difficult to gain information advantage—certainly, opportunities are not clear, and there are no easy choices about where to put combat power. Units are creating opportunity through action, encouraging disciplined initiative, and leveraging positions of advantage to destroy enemy formations, amidst ambiguity and at a very fast pace, in a complex environment.

(4) Mass matters. Diluting combat power to account for a range of perceived problems may elevate risk if there is no single problem where an adversary is outmatched, and immobility increases the likelihood that units will be effectively targeted. Units are massing formations that are effectively enabled by fires, aviation, close air support, and sensors to overwhelm the enemy at points of weakness, and they are committing combat power to get the information needed to quickly enable the synchronization of combined arms at a decisive point.

(5) Units are operating on intent. Synchronization of combined arms is a significant endeavor—doing so amidst the chaos of simultaneous contact is even harder. Units are investing in teaching leaders “how to think,”

because the pace of operations is so fast that leaders must solve difficult problems quickly at their level, and ideally, in ways that do not create larger problems in the process. Information parity, pace, communications degradation, confusion, and intermingled friendly units mean that information naturally flows in a fragmented manner. Commanders are simplifying complexity, discerning specific places where an effect is needed, and allocating resources to achieve that effect. Empowered units that are resourced with assets and intent are making decisions at echelon, often at the edge of the network, to further accelerate synchronization while in simultaneous contact.

(6) Because a near-peer adversary will likely make first contact electronically, units are increasingly comfortable operating with degraded communications.

(7) Sustainment is moving faster. Units are more fully enabling sustainment and protection operations through transitions, in an anticipatory way, which is critical to enabling continuous expeditionary offensive and defensive operations without losing tempo or lethality. Field maintenance is improving.

(8) Units must learn faster, and synchronize combined arms faster than the enemy. This quote by Gen. George S. Patton remains relevant today:

There is still a tendency in each separate unit ... to be a one-handed puncher. By that I mean that the rifleman wants to shoot, the tankier to charge, the artilleryman to fire ... That is not the way to win battles. If the band played a piece first with the piccolo, then with the brass horn, then with the clarinet, and then with the trumpet, there would be a hell of a lot of noise but no music. To get the harmony in music each instrument must support the others. To get harmony in battle, each weapon must support the other. Team play wins. You musicians of Mars must not wait for the band leader to signal you ... You must each of your own volition see to it that you come into this concert at the proper place and at the proper time.<sup>8</sup>

Absolutely nothing in our formations can be at rest, and consistently synchronizing effects to exploit advantage is essential. Brigades are investing in enabling a battle rhythm while in constant contact, to include plans to current operations transitions; operational synchronization meetings; logistics synchronization meetings, and battle updates. A near-peer adversary will likely not present

**Previous page:** Soldiers assigned to 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, clear a trench 18 April 2018 during Decisive Action Rotation 18-06 at the National Training Center (NTC) in Fort Irwin, California. Decisive action rotations at the NTC ensure units remain versatile, responsive, and consistently available for current and future contingencies. (Photo by Spc. Daniel Parrott, Operations Group, NTC, U.S. Army)



formations uniformly across the battlefield but will more likely attempt to mass with overwhelming combat power in a few places in an attempt to achieve favorable force ratios. Platoons, as an example, may make first contact with full-strength, company-sized or larger enemy formations and must use all of the tools at their disposal, to include mortars, smoke, and other effects to rapidly isolate and destroy enemy elements. Units are effectively using obscurity as a condition to allow formations maneuver space to get underneath enemy formations at a place of their choosing to maximize combined-arms platforms from a position of advantage. Favorable force ratios are often realized by aggressive, creative maneuver and the efficient use of effects.

(9) Units are proficient in exercising basic CBRN tasks related to force protection, detection, and decontamination. The demands of operating in a chemical environment are exceptional. Units are able to fight in chemical protective gear and are conducting well-rehearsed decontamination operations.

(10) Multi-domain operations are driving leaders to imagine what might be possible. Not imagining in this way but relying instead on a framework that is most convenient (or comfortable) to us is a significant danger. The enemy gets a vote and will likely not fight as we planned. The concept of multi-domain operations is helping leaders understand how capabilities might converge, and is helping them to visualize a range of competitive domains that may influence the outcome of a fight with a near-peer adversary. Units are challenging themselves to imagine the possibilities—how social media, sensors, data, electromagnetic signatures, civilian populations, infrastructure, combat formations, and enablers might all be combined in ways that uniquely offset our own capabilities, and then changed while in contact. Replicating the complexity of multi-domain operations is improving decisive-action proficiency and driving change.

## What Is Next

To win the first fight, brigade combat teams must master these fundamentals:

- ◆ a commander-driven operations process
- ◆ operating in a communications-degraded environment
- ◆ reconnaissance and security
- ◆ digital fires (specifically, sensor to shooter)

- ◆ gap crossing (combined-arms breaching)
- ◆ decisive action in an urban environment
- ◆ counterfire
- ◆ CBRN operations
- ◆ joint integration and interoperability
- ◆ sustainment in decisive action<sup>9</sup>

Lethal platoons and companies, enabled by rehearsed command posts and efficient planning processes, are essential. For each, it is critical to ask, how would the enemy fight us? How would we fight the enemy? And, how do we best enable interoperability? At home station, units are investing in getting the fundamentals right—quality repetitions of tasks common to every training event (squad through brigade), to include

- ◆ rehearsals (all forms of contact, daily—and an investment in the quality of information collection and fires rehearsals, sustainment rehearsals, combined arms rehearsals, and fires technical rehearsals);
- ◆ command post operations (standard configurations, small and well-rehearsed);
- ◆ crew management;
- ◆ sustainment (at distance and pace);
- ◆ creating, maintaining, and sharing a common operating picture;
- ◆ reporting;
- ◆ the fundamentals of shoot, move, communicate, and sustain; and
- ◆ simple orders.

This investment is building leaders and soldiers able to continuously synchronize combined arms across multiple domains in an ambiguous and uncertain environment, who have a solid foundation in the fundamentals of warfighting at echelon. Units are arriving at the NTC with good habits, grounded in the fundamentals of shoot, move, communicate, and sustain. Rigor of repetition while operating at pace in a complex and hyperlethal environment is driving change.

While we have made considerable progress building decisive-action readiness, we must continue to raise the bar.<sup>10</sup> At the NTC, rotational aviation units will continue to conduct operations against an array of increasingly complex live sensors at China Lake Naval Air Station. The opposing force at the NTC has also improved significantly in the last three years of decisive-action operations and will continue to

increase complexity while replicating a near-peer enemy across multiple domains.

The scenario will continue to evolve to increase planning repetitions and the number of operational dilemmas, with additional south-to-north rotations planned in 2019 to take advantage of more complex terrain and increase opportunity for additional defile drills, less restrictive guidance about when and where to conduct operations, more permissive control measures for fires and aviation, increased pace and tempo, and more geographic dispersion. Enemy forces will continue to mass attack aviation aircraft against rotational units to increase lethality throughout the operating environment. During live fire, rotational units will need to reinforce the brigade support area with attack aviation or with organic indirect fires, or

risk loss of critical supplies. Conventional and special operations force interoperability will further increase, with a cost associated with not efficiently sharing information or enabling shared interest, throughout the operating environment. There will be a further enriched social media environment, to include indicators that, if understood, will benefit rotational units as they conduct multi-domain operations. Units will be allowed to employ sensors earlier to set conditions for the introduction of maneuver units into combat operations, and there will be increased cyberspace electromagnetic activities and operations through the space domain (codified in the latest FM 3-12, *Cyberspace and Electronic Warfare Operations*), to include electromagnetic signature mapping and further link to precision long-range enemy fires.<sup>11</sup> ■

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## Notes

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5. *Ibid.*

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8. Martin Blumenson, *The Patton Papers: 1940-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1974), chap. 2.

9. Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), "Ten Fundamental Brigade Combat Team Skills Required to Win the First Fight," CALL Newsletter 17-19, August 2017, accessed 23 July 2018, <https://usa-cac.army.mil/organizations/mccoe/call/publication/17-19>.

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