



Members of the 4th Infantry Division tactical command post (TAC) conduct a seven-minute drill in preparation for a handoff to the division main command post (MCP) November 2020 at Fort Carson, Colorado, during Warfighter Exercise 21-2. The TAC routinely displaces and needs to coordinate with the MCP to facilitate continuity of the close fight. (Photo by Maj. Josh Silver, Mission Command Training Program observer)

# Restructuring the Division Command Post in Large-Scale Ground Combat

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Adversaries of the United States can detect and destroy targets throughout the depth and breadth of the battlefield. Their capabilities place division command post operations at risk of disruption and the command post itself at risk of destruction during large-scale combat operations (LSCO). Additionally, the complexity of LSCO requires division-level senior leaders to simultaneously shape the deep fight while controlling the close fight and rear areas. These two factors—vulnerable command posts and an increased complexity of operations—suggest that Army doctrine found in Field Manual (FM) 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*, identifying the need for three command posts is sound; however, LSCO requires commanders to consider permanently employing a tactical command post (TAC) as opposed to employing it episodically.<sup>1</sup>

The 4th Infantry Division (4ID) faced two simultaneous problems at the onset of Warfighter 21-2. The first problem was how to implement the command and control warfighting function across the depth and breadth of the area of operations while ensuring the command post structure remained survivable. The second problem was how to allow the division commander to simultaneously fight the division's deep, close, and support areas. For the entirety of Army Warfighter Exercise 21-2, 4ID deployed a main command post (MCP), a TAC, and a support area command post (SACP). Employing three enduring command nodes assisted the division commander with simultaneously fighting the deep, close, and support areas (see figure, page 3). This organizational construct increased the survivability of the division mission command infrastructure and kept the division commander and staff from being consumed with the close fight at the expense of setting future conditions.

## The Threat

Peer and near-peer adversaries employ an integrated fires command comprised of integrated air defense systems, long-range strike systems (theater ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and rocket and cannon artillery), attack rotary-wing capabilities, and fixed-wing platforms. Potential adversaries can employ both conventional and unconventional munitions. These lethal assets operate in tandem

with multi-domain reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities. Special purpose and irregular forces work in concert with unmanned aircraft systems—both armed and unarmed—to increase the threat's military detection capability. The integrated fires command's suite of capabilities threaten U.S. ground combat forces from the moment the formation crosses the line of departure.

Specifically, U.S. mission command systems are at risk due to their electronic signature. Potential adversaries employ a doctrinal approach to systems-based targeting that intentionally seeks to disrupt or destroy these systems. Simply put, command posts at all echelons are high payoff targets for our adversaries. If our adversaries can detect our command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, then they can range them with physical munitions and/or cyber and electronic attack.

Adversaries' multi-domain ability to see and kill requires the Army to employ small, agile, and dispersed command elements to survive and fight in LSCO. Protection and survival come from smaller footprints, frequent moves, rapid displaceability, electronic emission discipline, local security, dispersion, and camouflage and concealment. In other words, mobility is survivability.

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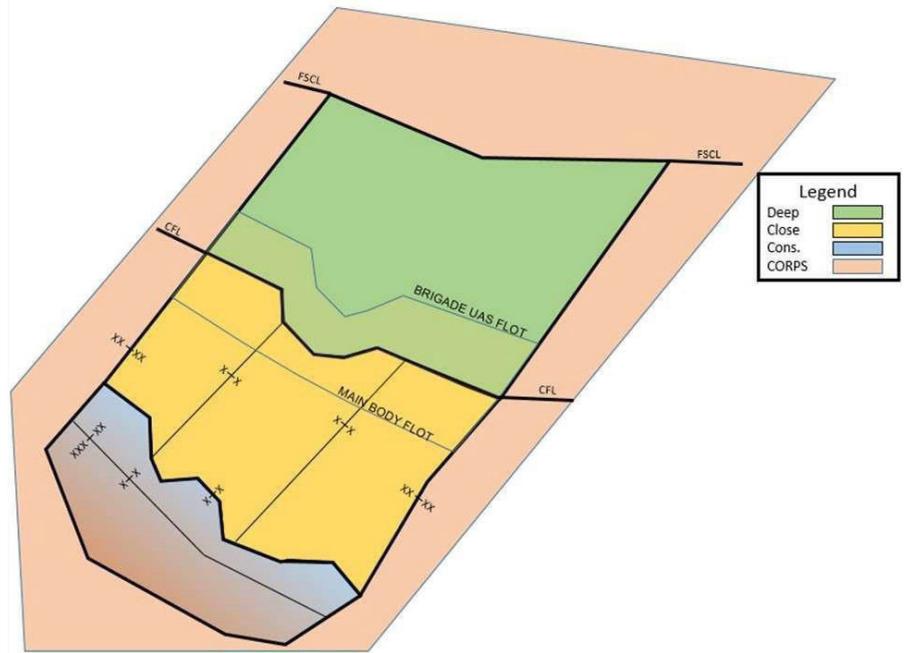
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## A Solution

To manage the complexity and scope of the division's area of operations—which was approximately eighty kilometers wide and over one hundred kilometers deep—and increase its survivability during the Warfighter, the division commander directed the establishment of three separate and enduring command posts. The deputy commanding general for maneuver served as the senior officer in the TAC, the deputy commanding general for support served as the senior officer in the SACP, and the division commander remained the senior member of the MCP.

Recognizable delineations of responsibilities for each command node facilitated efficiency. The MCP's primary role was to empower the division commander to manage the deep fight. The division defined the deep fight as beyond twenty-four hours within the area beyond the coordinated fire line and short of the fire support coordination line. In accordance with FM 6-0, the MCP contained "the majority of the staff designed to control current operations, conduct detailed analysis, and plan future operations."<sup>22</sup> Other key members of the division staff included the chief of staff, the division primary staff officers (with the exception of the G-4), and the joint air-ground integration cell.

The SACP was responsible for sustaining the division and controlling the division rear area. The SACP area of operations covered the terrain from the brigade rear boundaries to the division's rear boundary. The SACP possessed the capability to control fires and maneuver formations within the support and consolidation areas. This command post consisted of representatives from across all warfighting functions and could operate twenty-four hours a day for an indefinite period. The SACP's current operations and fires cell enabled the deputy commanding general for support to control the rear area fight. Personnel from both the sustainment brigade and the maneuver enhancement brigade augmented the SACP.

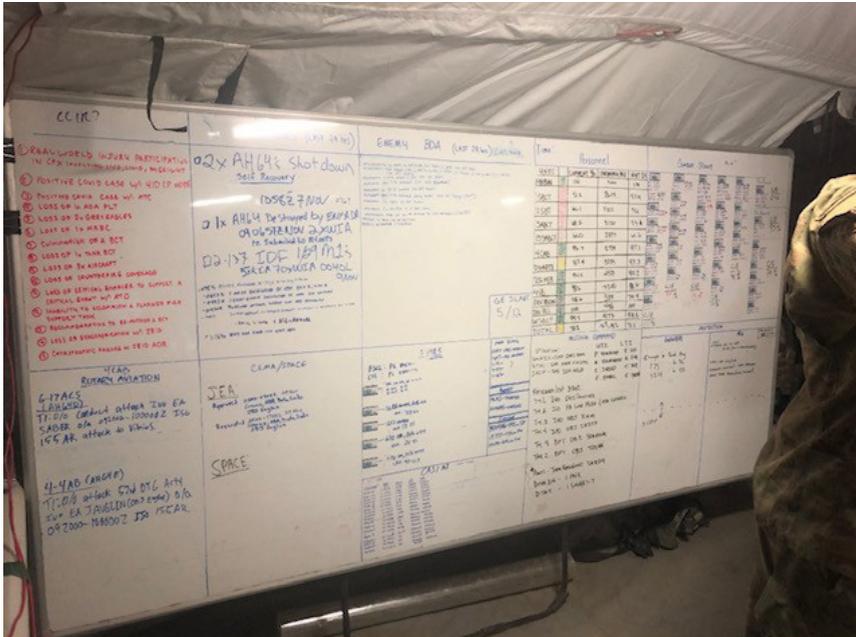


(Figure courtesy of the author)

**Figure. Geographic Separation**

The TAC was responsible for controlling the close fight. The division defined the close fight as the area between the coordinated fire line and the brigade combat teams' rear boundary. The TAC contained representatives from across the warfighting functions and could operate twenty-four hours a day for an indefinite period. The TAC had the capacity to clear fires, control maneuver formations, and adjust the division scheme of maneuver in accordance with the operating environment. For example, the TAC controlled the "close fight" while the division transitioned to defensive operations. The TAC coordinated and synchronized the maneuver of multiple brigades and refined battle positions and engagement areas. The TAC focused on developing the area that brigade combat teams could fire and maneuver. These actions allowed the MCP to focus on developing the deep fight. In conjunction with the corps headquarters, the MCP concentrated its effort on targeting enemy formations forward of the fire support coordination line.

This construct is markedly different from the Army's traditional employment of a TAC. FM 6-0 describes the tactical command post as "a facility containing a tailored portion of a unit headquarters designed to control portions of an operation for a limited time.



An analog running estimate assists the members of the 4th Infantry Division tactical command post (TAC) maintain situational awareness while on the move November 2020 at Fort Carson, Colorado, during Warfighter Exercise 21-2. This product is built to hang from the side of the deputy commanding general for maneuver's vehicle when the TAC is mobile. (Photo by Maj. Josh Silver, Mission Command Training Program observer)

Commanders employ the tactical CP as an extension of the main CP to help control the execution of an operation or a specific task, such as a gap crossing, a passage of lines, or an air assault operation.<sup>3</sup> Typically, when the TAC is not providing command and control at a critical event, it moves into a “cold status,” and its personnel are absorbed into the main command post.

The risks associated with this construct are twofold. First, the consolidation of the TAC with the MCP places the majority of the division's leadership in one location, exposing them to the enemy. Second, without a fully operational TAC, the main command post must simultaneously control both the close fight and shape the deep area. Inevitably, the commander and staff become consumed with the close fight instead of shaping the fight beyond the coordinated fire line or setting the conditions for the next phase of the operation.

4ID experienced tangible benefits by geographically separating command nodes and delegating specific responsibilities to each. Mainly, the decentralization of personnel and focus enabled the division commander to focus on shaping the deep fight and maintaining the division's operational reach, thereby setting conditions for future engagements. For example, instead of focusing on the tempo of the wet gap crossing, the commander

used the joint air-ground integration cell to set the conditions for the division's offensive operations planned for forty-eight hours after the wet-gap crossing. Conditions setting included attacking the enemy's integrated air defense system, engineer assets, and integrated fires command. Furthermore, without focusing on the close fight, the division commander provided the staff more opportunities to receive his guidance. For example, the division executed two targeting meetings daily, providing priorities for 96 to 120 hours into the future. Beyond the increased command and control that an enduring TAC affords to a division, the TAC's continual involvement also allowed for the professional development of numerous members of the staff.

Multiple majors, captains, and mid-grade NCOs were able to serve as primary staff members, controlling their respective warfighting function, and thus increasing the division's depth and their professional development.

Maintaining a functioning TAC for the entirety of a warfighter not only provided survivability but also enabled the division commander and division staff to focus throughout the entirety of the division's battlespace. This construct enabled the division commander to shape the deep fight, maintain the division's operational reach through the SACP, and adjust priorities or guidance where necessary. The commander did not ignore the close fight; the TAC simply prevented the close fight from consuming him and the MCP. Employing this construct is not without cost. The decentralization of personnel—both geographically and with a differentiation of responsibility—challenged the ability to maintain shared understanding across the organization. The division fight must be integrated and synchronized between the different command posts. To preclude stovepiping the close, deep, and support area fights, the division had to implement a more disciplined battle rhythm and more rigid systems and processes, and rely on personal relationships to overcome the friction associated with dispersion.



The 4th Infantry Division tactical command post in the field November 2020 at Fort Carson, Colorado, during Warfighter Exercise 21-2. (Photo by Maj. Josh Silver, Mission Command Training Program observer)

## Conclusion

Employing three enduring command posts throughout Warfighter 21-2 required an exceptional amount of organizational energy and carried the risk of decreasing shared understanding across the division; however, the costs of decentralized positions and delegated areas of responsibility and focus were worth the risk. The enemy targeted the division's mission command system but could not sever the lines of communication—internally, externally, and with our adjacent units. The division dispersed its electromagnetic footprint, decreased its

physical risk, and most importantly, allowed the division commander to focus on shaping the future fight. The benefits of this construct far outweighed the risks. The Army Forces Command should consider directing the future employment of multiple enduring command posts during future Warfighter exercises. The MCTP cadre can independently evaluate the costs and benefits of the construct and ultimately recommend revisions to FM 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*, and FM 3-94, *Theater Army, Corps, and Division Operations*.<sup>4</sup> ■

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## Notes

1. Field Manual (FM) 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, May 2014), accessed 26 May 2021, [https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/NOCASE-FM\\_6-0-002-WEB-6.pdf](https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/NOCASE-FM_6-0-002-WEB-6.pdf).

2. *Ibid.*, 1-1.

3. *Ibid.*, 1-2.

4. FM 3-94, *Theater Army, Corps, and Division Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, April 2014), accessed 26 May 2021, [https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/pdf/web/fm3\\_94.pdf](https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/fm3_94.pdf).