



A M1A2 Abrams Main Battle Tank crew participates in a Combined Arms Live Fire Exercise Jan. 15, 2025, on Fort Cavazos, Texas. Warfighting proficiency begins at home station. Through low-overhead, creative training at the individual, crew, and platoon levels, leaders build lethal, cohesive teams ready to fight and win. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Brandi Frizzell)

Warfighting Proficiency Through Home Station Training

By Command Sgt. Maj. John P. McDwyer

III Armored Corps

The Army's current focus is warfighting, the primary reason for its existence. For America's Army, warfighting means deploying, engaging, and decisively winning in any terrain or weather condition and against any adversary.

To achieve this mission, it must effectively train its Soldiers in core warfighting tasks while developing cohesive teams that understand the commander's intent.

Today, the Army operates in a resource-constrained

environment, making it crucial for leaders to employ innovative strategies to effectively train Soldiers at all levels.

Battalion and higher-level organizations primarily concentrate on major training events in preparation for their unit's culminating training exercise, which usually involves a successful deployment and redeployment to one of the Army's premier Combat Training Centers (CTCs). However, CTC rotations are costly in terms of resources and time.

Enhancing training — at home station and the crew and platoon levels — is essential for a successful training rotation. By investing in their development, we can ensure that battalions and brigades thrive, ultimately leading to more effective resource application and overall mission success.

Leaders can conduct highly effective training with minimal overhead, implement a multi-echelon approach, and enable repeated practice to achieve mastery at the home station's individual, crew, and platoon levels. These strategies will ensure that CTCs maintain an appropriate focus. While I'll reference armor formations, any unit can apply the concepts I present.

Innovation Enhances Lethality

We need to reflect on how we trained our forces in the past. As I look back on my career, from my first duty station in Baumholder, West Germany, to my formative years as a young gunner and tank commander at what is today Fort Cavazos, Texas, I recall spending a lot of time training at home station.

We trained in the motor pool — working on our vehicles and continuously training on individual and crew tasks. Many Soldiers today view spending time in the motor pool merely as a task related to equipment maintenance and often overlook the connection between

this hard work and operational effectiveness.

During my formative years, especially in Germany, we were forced to consistently train in our motor pools because the limited, crowded maneuver areas were in high demand at the installation. We trained maintenance and gunnery tasks in our small motor pool.

Maintenance is an essential part of training. The more you work on your equipment, the better you understand its fundamental capabilities and how to maximize its performance.

Additionally, we conducted low-overhead training — such as motor pool gunnery — where we practiced gunnery tables from our tanks, focusing on fire commands and crew interactions. We also practiced setting up listening posts/observation posts (LP/OP) and assembly area procedures.

This method, supplemented by simulator training, resulted in highly skilled crews capable of effectively operating and qualifying on their assigned platforms. Training in the motor pool was only limited by leaders' creativity and determination to make their Soldiers experts in their craft.

While we did a lot of training in the motor pool at Fort Cavazos, we dispatched our platforms at least once a week and traveled to local training areas (LTAs). The fort set aside these areas for



Maintenance is an essential part of training. The more Soldiers work on their equipment, the better they understand its fundamental capabilities and how to maximize its performance. (U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Jacob Kohrs)



Local training areas (LTAs) can also enhance platoon-level training by allowing platoon leaders to maneuver their units in a field environment to conduct individual, crew, and platoon tasks with minimal resources. The platoon can practice the chosen tasks until proficiency is achieved. (U.S. Army Photo by Sgt. Salvador Castro)

units to use without coordination to conduct driver training and crew drills. This arrangement differed from Germany's, since we had much more maneuvering area at Fort Cavazos.

We would also go to the LTA as a platoon and spend a day or two training at both the crew and platoon levels to enhance our proficiency and gain much-needed practice. Consistently using our vehicles allowed us to become masters of our equipment and skilled in our crew and platoon tasks and drills.

Looking back, we effectively conducted multi-echelon training by performing individual, crew, and platoon tasks with minimal overhead. These training events were always planned and aimed at achievable outcomes, even if it sometimes seemed as if they were spontaneous. This training method was standard in the past, enabling us to focus on higher-level objectives at training centers.

Moreover, it helped our NCOs develop into excellent trainers and contributed to our status as the best-trained force in the world. It also played a significant role in the Army's success in conflicts such as Operations Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom.

We must ask ourselves: Did we move away from this training practice? If it was so effective, why did we

abandon this concept? The answer is complex, and several factors contributed to the shift away from this method.

First, during the war on terrorism, we outsourced much of our training to contractors — including crucial areas such as counter improvised explosive device training, vehicle gunnery, and other tasks. As leaders, we became comfortable with this approach because it allowed us to turn units around quickly for redeployment.

Leaders also had to attend school before deployment, and many other circumstances influenced our training paradigm. However, when the war ended and we transitioned to large-scale combat operations (LSCO), we quickly realized we'd lost the leaders with the knowledge to train for large-scale combat. By relying on outsiders for our training, we neglected the essential training management skill.

How can we address the gap in individual and collective training quality? How do we ensure we focus on higher-level commanders and staff proficiency in a resource-constrained environment?

Based on my experience, one effective approach is to empower our junior leaders to be creative in their training. We must encourage them to take their Soldiers and units out of the motor pools and into the field.

We must eliminate barriers preventing our young



Vehicle commanders and squad leaders can take their vehicles into a field environment to train on individual and crew-level skills specific to their Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). The goal is to get Soldiers out of the barracks and motor pools and into the field with their leaders to train on what they joined the Army to do. (U.S. Army photo by Christopher Davis)

leaders from training effectively. We should make vehicle dispatches easier or allow for longer durations. We must ensure arms rooms are readily accessible, and installations must provide training areas for anyone to use without reservation.

We must also ensure our training schedules allow ample time for junior leaders to train their formations to mastery. They need the opportunity to conduct multiple repetitions of essential tasks, as repetition and time are crucial for integrating new Soldiers and leaders.

Adopting Local Training Areas (LTAs)

In the III Armored Corps at Fort Cavazos, we're taking a page from our past on how to train. The corps is designating a large LTA as a free maneuvering space area requiring no previous coordination.

This LTA won't require a reservation and will be open to everyone, from tank platoons to infantry squads to vehicle convoys. Units must deconflict with other units on-site for specific boundaries, so they don't interfere with each other's training. The goal is to get Soldiers out of the barracks and motor pools and into the field with their leaders to train on what they joined the Army to do.

Here are some examples of how we envision using LTAs. First, vehicle commanders and squad leaders can take their vehicles into a field environment to train on individual and crew-level skills specific to their Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). For instance, a tank

commander can leave the motor pool after physical training (PT), head to the LTA, and practice tasks his crew needs to learn or repeat to achieve mastery.

Tank commanders can incorporate vehicle movement, gunnery skills, maintenance, and vehicle action/contact drills into the training. The possibilities are endless in this low-resource environment. After completing the training, Soldiers can return to the motor pool, conduct post-operation maintenance, and finish with a quick after-action review, all before the end of the business day.

This LTA can also enhance platoon-level training by allowing platoon leaders to maneuver their units in a field environment to conduct individual, crew, and platoon tasks with minimal resources. For example, consider a scenario where a platoon receives a new platoon leader who needs time to learn how to employ his platoon effectively.

The individual develops a quick operations order (OPORD) and conducts a tactical road march to the LTA. Once there, the platoon leader and the platoon sergeant assess the platoon's training needs and perform the necessary training exercises.

The platoon can practice these chosen tasks until proficiency is achieved. Since this involves a platoon-sized element, they can easily remain overnight and conduct night iterations of the previously trained tasks. Class I (subsistence) and III (fuel and water) resources are the only tasks requiring coordination.

The final way to use this LTA is by training a company-sized element. Training at this level requires

resources and coordination with higher headquarters, providing additional training opportunities.

This approach will allow company commanders to get more repetitions with their units. Ideally, the training begins at the garrison — where the company commander issues an order to conduct a tactical road march or convoy to an assembly area in preparation for future operations.

The platoon leaders and platoon sergeants then execute their respective troop-leading procedures, break down the company-level order, and write their orders. Meanwhile, the company executive officer and first sergeant initiate coordination for classes of supply necessary to sustain the company throughout the exercise.

The field portion of the training begins with the first sergeant leading the quartering party to assess the selected site's feasibility. The first sergeant communicates findings to the company commander and executive officer to provide the green light for movement.

Once the company arrives at the assembly area, the commander issues a fragmentary order (FRAGORD) to the platoons, detailing additional tactical tasks. At the end of each training iteration, the commander conducts an after-action review.

Depending on the results, the commander may repeat the same scenario or issue an additional FRAGORD. This approach allows training at the

individual, crew, platoon, and company levels, facilitating as many repetitions as needed.

To create a culture of predictability, all training events — regardless of duration or scale — will be recorded on a training schedule. The rationale behind using the LTA is that it allows units to deploy to the field on short notice, particularly during downtime.

This approach also allows leaders to train their units with minimal overhead and resources. The LTA method will significantly enhance operational effectiveness, boost morale, and support talent retention. Soldiers enlist in the Army to perform specific roles. Allowing them to remain idle can harm organizational culture.

Conclusion

If leaders can find creative ways to train to achieve mastery of fundamentals, units will have well-trained formations ready to conduct higher-level training events. In the current resource-constrained environment, it's important that when our units go to CTCs, the subordinate units are proficient at warfighting. This readiness creates the opportunity for higher echelons to focus on further developing commanders, staff, and enablers. This focus will ensure units ranging from crews to corps are ready to deploy, fight, and win our nation's wars. ■

Phantom Lethal



Tank commanders can incorporate vehicle movement, gunnery skills, maintenance, and vehicle action/contact drills into training. The possibilities are endless in this low-resource environment. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Sgt. Nicholas Goodman)

Command Sgt. Maj. John P. McDwyer, command sergeant major of III Armored Corps, enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1988 as an Armor crewman. He has served as a tank driver, loader, gunner, tank commander, tank company master gunner, battalion master gunner, M1A2 instructor, platoon sergeant, brigade operations sergeant major, battalion command sergeant major, and division command sergeant major. He is a graduate of the Sergeants Major Academy Non-Resident Course and the Nominative Leaders Course, and he is currently completing his bachelor's degree from Troy University.



<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

