

Building the Alliance: Multinational Integration in the Decisive-Action Training Environment

by LTC Esli T. Pitts

Given the reduction in force structure across our North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies and other partnered nations – combined with the increasing likelihood of multinational operations at lower and lower echelons – it is highly likely that leaders at brigade and below will participate in training or contingency operations in a multinational task force (TF). Multinational task organization at this echelon has become the norm at the Joint Maneuver Readiness Center (JMRC) in Hohenfels, Germany. This article looks at the difficulties associated with such operations and provides some solutions.

The sun was going down on TF Hammer, a combined-arms battalion (CAB) task-organized with a mechanized-infantry company, 3rd Company Panthers, from a NATO ally. The TF had fought all day, but now conditions had changed significantly. In the latest wrinkle, although it had 7,500 gallons of Jet Propellant (JP) 8 on hand, the distribution platoon was unable to refuel Panther's tracks, which used Diesel Fuel 2 (DF2).

It was the most recent, but certainly not the last, in a long series of instances of "discovery learning."

As the shadows lengthened into full darkness, it only grew worse for TF Hammer when they discovered that Panthers' personnel carriers did not have night-vision capabilities ... and neither did the infantrymen. Hammer 6 shrugged his shoulders. Reasoning that the streetlights on Objective Ford – combined with effective suppression from Archer Company's Bradleys in the support-by-fire (SBF) – would mitigate the risk, he launched the attack.

There were no issues at first. The 3rd Company reached the dismount point and quickly maneuvered toward the objective. It was just as the enemy cut power to the streetlights that their lead infantry squad discovered the wire obstacle surrounding the objective. Deadly accurate small-arms fire began to strike them, and it quickly became apparent that 3rd Company was the only force that could not see in the dark. The company commander lost two rifle squads before he got through the obstacle and began his final assault on the objective. Sadly, 3rd Company had no organic medics, and most of the casualties bled out at the point of injury. They lost another squad as the boyevaya mashina pehoty (BMP) behind the objective opened fire. The BMP was too far away for Panthers' rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) to hit, and critical time was lost as they relayed the BMP's location to Archer 6 in the SBF.

As Panthers' infantry dismounts closed on Objective Ford, it became more and more difficult to differentiate friend and foe: nobody was marked with the battalion standard. Archer 6 ordered Red Platoon to move from the SBF around to the flank to engage enemy forces that might withdraw to the north. Mindful of the potential for fratricide, he called Panther 65, the U.S. liaison officer embedded with 3rd Company, and got an acknowledgement that Red Platoon was moving. However, the word never made it down to Panthers' line platoons. As their lead platoon exited the same building as the enemy force, they were confronted with "enemy" armor to their flank. They did what any good infantrymen would do and engaged the close threat with a volley of RPG fire, rendering Red 2 a mobility kill. Red 4 quickly realized what had happened, but his call to cease fire came too late. Red 3 killed 3rd Company's anti-armor team in a hail of coax and 25mm high explosive.

Hammer 6 was now in a dilemma. He ordered Archer 6 to a weapons-control status of "tight" and backed them off. He thought about putting Archer's dismounts into the fight, but Archer 5 reported that he did not have Panthers' operational graphics. Actions on the objective turned into a slugfest as 3rd Company fought through the three short rows of buildings on their own. In the end, the company commander seized the objective but, having lost two-thirds of his combat power, and with the battalion's emergency resupply of fuel and ammunition built for American tanks and Bradleys, he was unable to stave off the counterattack.

The 3rd Company's commander had seemed like a gift when he arrived. He was well versed in the local culture. His Soldiers were experienced and motivated – a definite asset. But the attachment had occurred at the last minute and now Hammer 6 was reaping the rewards of hasty and ineffective integration. What the attached company

apparently learned was that Americans don't care, don't provide enough information to attached multinational units and will misuse them. The Americans learned that they have to do the hard jobs themselves and that our allies can't be trusted to accomplish the mission. In both cases, nothing could be further from the truth.

This battle never happened, but various elements of it happen routinely at JMRC. In the last 18 months, JMRC has truly reinvented itself from the combat training center (CTC) that only supported 173rd Airborne Brigade, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment and a periodic Kosovo force mission-rehearsal exercise into a high-tempo training center that supports the United States' NATO allies and partners in training rotations. It is not unusual to see as many as 4,500 Soldiers from 13 nations conducting a variety of named U.S. Army Europe exercises with strategic impact.

At JMRC, the lessons begin during the pre-rotational Joint Combined Academics Program (JCAP), during which a brigade combat team (BCT) begins to form as a multinational team. Other than planning conferences, it is unlikely that these units did more than exchange a few emails before the rotation. Certainly, they have done little regarding what is required to mesh differing systems of mission command, movement and maneuver, intelligence, fires and sustainment together.

There are challenges here that no other CTC or operational environment can replicate. There is not an operational TF anywhere as uniquely organized as those rolling into the training area at JMRC, where we routinely see brigades or battalions with units from two to four nations task-organized under them. Not only is the rotational training unit task-organized in this way, but the opposing force and special-operations forces participating in the rotation also operate with attached multinational elements. In a first-time instance, the Lithuanian Iron Wolf Brigade participated in a recent rotation, providing mission command to several U.S. and NATO battalions, each of which was also task-organized with multinational attachments at company and platoon level. Consider that most units are still struggling to generate decisive-action training environment proficiency and there are many lessons to be learned. JCAP focuses on the big ones: capacity-building, integration and interoperability.

Aside from obvious problems such as differing radios and communications security (COMSEC), how do we simply build a multinational TF? It all begins with integrating the unit. Taking team photos and hosting a social gets the leaders together, and JCAP provides an academic framework; however, integration begins when units' leaders and staff get down to the details. It comes after gaining a complete understanding of the following questions: what are the attached unit's capabilities? What are the attached unit's limitations? And from these answers come the subsequent questions: given these capabilities and limitations, how will/can we best use the attached unit? And what must we do to best ensure the success of the attached unit? To ignore these questions, or the answers, invites surprises at best – or mission failure, fratricide and acrimony at worst.

We hand out a four-page integration checklist during JCAP. It is not the catchall but only a start point for a focused conversation between higher headquarters and subordinates by staff and warfighting function.

Anybody with a few spare minutes could identify a long list of questions to ask on interoperability. My intent here is not to generate a list but to highlight some of the questions and some associated perils as we integrate an attachment.

Movement and maneuver:

- [Are there national caveats on employment of this unit?](#) (Aside from the obvious ones such as restrictions on combat operations.) We were recently surprised by the national labor laws of a well-trained and well-equipped modern European army that mandated that drivers receive six hours of uninterrupted sleep a night. We only understood the full impact of this when that battalion crossed the line of departure 90 minutes later than the others during a brigade attack. Surprise!
- [What are the operational capabilities of this unit? Are they mounted, dismounted, motorized? Capable of air assault/air insertion? What do they possess in terms of anti-armor, breach, organic fire support and night-vision capabilities?](#) A recent rotational armored BCT was surprised to find that one of the attached multinational units brought Stinger man-portable air defense, thus providing the only capability for short-range air defense in the rotation.
- [Conversely, what are the operational limitations of this unit? What missions can't they do, and what essential equipment are they lacking?](#)

- What is the level of training proficiency within this organization?

Fires:

- Does this unit possess organic mortars?
- Can they provide observers for themselves?
- What are the capabilities of our attached multinational fire-support assets?
- What are the release authorities for various types of ordnance?
- Are the fire-support coordination measures and clearance of fire procedures compatible?

Intelligence:

- What organic intelligence assets does this unit possess? Tactical unmanned-aircraft system and/or company intelligence-support team equivalent? One-System Remote Video Terminal equivalent?
- What does “tactical questioning” vs. “interrogation” mean to a multinational partner?
- How does this unit traditionally receive and assess intelligence? Some nations are accustomed to receiving all their intelligence from higher, with the result that they do little analysis or refinement of that product. Nor do they provide much in the way of analysis of intelligence pushed from lower to higher.
- What is the ability of this company to participate as a tasked element in the battalion’s information-collection plan?
- Are we ready to accept their reporting?

Sustainment:

- Are Class (CL) I, III and V truly interoperable in type, quantity and material-handling equipment requirements? Many nations use DF2 or other grades of fuel, while the U.S. fleet burns purely JP8. Surprisingly, U.S. standard fuel nozzles don’t fit some of our partners’ vehicles.
- What munitions will our multinational force require in emergency resupply, and how do we get them?
- Are there restrictions on rations? Does the attached unit require augmentation in the field-feeding section?
- What is the capability of the attached unit to support itself from the standpoint of maintenance (i.e., recovery, mechanics, parts, etc.)?
- What is the company’s capability with respect to medics, Combat Lifesaver Course equivalents and CL VIII? Discovering that the attached company typically does not provide medics at the platoon or company level leads to awkward decisions about who to evacuate first.
- What is our ability to offset gaps in their maintenance and medical capability?
- How will the battalion report and track multinational casualties, and request replacements?
- What is the typical involvement of the company’s first sergeant and executive officer in sustainment?

Protection:

- What are their capabilities in terms of chemical-defense equipment and training readiness?
- What are the dimensions of attached vehicles? A two-tier fighting position looks a little bit different for a Danish CV90, a BMP and a Bradley, or an M1A2 and a T-72.
- What are their capabilities and doctrine in terms of obstacle emplacement? What are their national caveats on the use of mines? Do they have picket pounders?
- Does this multinational partner have a risk-management process? Many countries’ outlook on risk is significantly different than the U.S. view. For example, a recent rotational partner at JMRC experienced a death and several injuries during a rollover in a U.S.-issued uparmored humvee. The use of seatbelts in this country was not the norm. In this instance, JMRC policy was violated and none of the five occupants were using their seatbelt or gunner’s restraint system.
- Do they have appropriate field gear? Some deploy without sufficient cold- or wet-weather clothing or sleeping systems.

Mission command:

- What are the command and support relationships of our respective organizations? NATO doctrine adds tank-automotive and armaments command and operational command to the normal U.S. standards. Can they be further task-organized?

- What communication systems do they use, and are they capable of secure communications? The emerging standard at JMRC is use of the NATO COMSEC key.
- How does our multinational element usually receive and issue operations orders? Some countries are much more comfortable with a traditional paper Word document in five paragraphs than they are in PowerPoint concept-of-operation orders.
- What tools do we use at our multiple echelons to maintain the common operating picture (COP)? Equivalents to the Blue Force Tracker (BFT) and Command Post of the Future are rarely common or interoperable. If we vary between digital and analog systems, who is responsible for standardizing them?
- What is our common language on the command net? Picture a recent example of a Romanian infantry battalion using English as the common language with subordinate Romanian and non-Romanian attached companies.
- Are we using U.S., NATO or partnered national doctrine, and what are the foreign-disclosure requirements of each?
- Have we over-classified our documents? Have our allies over-classified theirs?
- What are the traditional roles and capabilities of our allies' noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and junior officers? Some of our allies still follow the Soviet tradition of doing only what the commander says – no more and no less.

Fratricide reduction:

- What uniforms, equipment and paint schemes do the attached forces and adjacent units use?
- Do we have standard vehicle markings that enable low-light or thermal recognition?
- Do we have a common understanding of operational terms and graphics?
- Have we kept the plan as simple as possible?
- Where will we actually meet on the ground with adjacent units? Events such as forward/rearward passage of lines (FPoL/RPoL) are filled with potential for fratricide.

Cultural:

- Are there historically contentious relations between multinational allies? Placing these nations in the same TF is not a good idea.
- Are there cultural considerations to be aware of, including religion or the use of alcohol, which should be known?

The previous considerations are just a sampling of the depth of questioning you need to do to truly understand your attached units. Without it, you are potentially in for some strange surprises.

Now that we have learned a lot about our attached multinational elements, what do we do with this information? There are some broad truisms about working with our multinational allies:

- **First, assign an appropriate and achievable task and purpose.** A CAB during a recent rotation with two attached companies from two nations used them as light infantry to great effect, clearing defiles before committing heavy forces. However, one of these same companies was a poor choice to throw into an urban environment at night; they lacked a plan, night-vision goggles, crew-served weapons or experience in that environment.
- **That unit's leader is the acknowledged expert on that unit. Ask him for his recommendations on employment.** A recent heavy battalion did not use the attached allied light-infantry platoon throughout the duration because they were not sure what to do with them.
- **In a digital Army, ensure you have analog products as necessary to provide the attached units, and ensure you are prepared to accept their analog products.** Experience shows their primary concern will be that they feel like they are not being provided with enough information.
- **If the attached unit does not have a capability you want them to have, you will have to provide it – either out of hide or as an additional attachment.**
- **Integration will not begin until both sides sit down at the table and begin the discussion.**

Movement and maneuver:

- Again, **assigning appropriate and achievable tasks is paramount**. No unit should ever be assigned as the main effort in a battalion/TF attack out of a sense of team-building or multinational goodwill, but only based on appropriate analysis that they can accomplish the mission. Make no mistake, there are some well-trained multinational units coming into JMRC, but not all nations' armies are trained or equipped to the same standards.
- **Focus on developing capabilities within the attached unit**. A recent rotational commander directed his attached companies to improve lethality with their 18 RPG launchers through training to increase accuracy and techniques of volley fire. This manifested itself on the battlefield with some timely BMP kills during a mission.
- **Task-organization** – a squad of sappers is an obvious choice to gain some breach capability within the attached companies. Not as obvious are attaching a Javelin team, fire-support officer (FSO) or medics as other options to generate capabilities.
- **Consider options such as developing air-assault capability, lift with organic trucks or employing early line of departure (LD) of dismounted forces**.
- Understand the impacts on tempo (i.e., incorporating light forces into a heavy unit) as well as increased requirements for tactical patience because of both this and language barriers.

Fires:

- **Be prepared to attach an FSO to your attached company, even at the expense of losing an FSO with an organic company**.
- **Ensure your LNO to your attached company is capable of planning and executing fires**.
- **Limit some multinational forces' tendency to use polar plot as a method of calling for fire**. Language barriers and voice calls-for-fire result in a higher-than-acceptable likelihood of the observer's location being fired upon.
- **Conduct a fire-support rehearsal and confirm understanding**.

Intelligence:

- **Don't hesitate to incorporate the attached unit into the battalion's information-collection (IC) plan**. Provide them with tasks and purposes linked to observable named areas of interest. A recent example is that a U.S. battalion tasked an attached company to clear and secure high ground to facilitate a breach but did not use the IC plan to focus the company. Ultimately, that company destroyed an outpost and manually breached the now-unobserved obstacle; however, it all came about as actions on contact rather than from a focused plan that provided operational guidance to the attached company based on intelligence.

Sustainment:

- **Your ability to sustain your attached units will hinge on their ability to plug into a U.S. system of sustainment**. This system will probably be unfamiliar to them and based largely on a U.S. tradition of execution at the NCO level, which may be unfamiliar to many of our allies. Getting them involved, particularly in medical evacuation, will be a steep learning curve for some nations. Establishing an accurate logistics COP (LOGCOP) will be another area in which units may struggle. Developing and reporting the LOGCOP, and understanding sustainment issues unique to each country, are critical. A sustainment rehearsal, while often the first thing to go in a time-constrained environment, is critical to understanding, and daily meetings at the logistics release point ensure face-to-face synchronization. Also, many of our allies use DF2 in their vehicles, rather than JP8. While both are technically diesel, they are not interchangeable.

Protection:

- **With regard to chemical-biological-radioactive-nuclear, you get what you get with equipment and training readiness. Risk management may be the biggest area of concern**, so engage early with attached leadership. Assess whether they have a process and whether they take it seriously. If not, give them an overview of ours and reinforce your expectations that they use it.

Mission command:

- **A liaison officer (LNO) team tasked from the higher headquarters to the subordinate headquarters is very useful**. We've seen success with both heavy and light forces in this. A model includes a minimum of a team of three Soldiers. In a heavy force, this team should include a humvee with dual long-range radios and BFT. The LNO team can do much to offset linguistic barriers and ensure a true COP between company and battalion.

Face-to-face communications at the company level help ensure that tasks are appropriately relayed over a chaotic and fast-paced command net while minimizing what is “lost in translation” over the net. LNOs to adjacent units and higher headquarters are also useful. Of course, there is a limited supply of excess officers, senior NCOs and trucks, so the commander has to manage risks as he spreads these critical enablers around the force.

- **Limit task-organization changes.** All the difficulties of quickly changing task-organization are compounded in changing attached multinational units. Pick one task-organization and stick with it, regardless of potential incremental gains.
- **Keep as much of your communications systems as secure as you can.** Don’t downgrade COMSEC standards to accommodate attachments. Use your LNOs.
- **Know and understand national policies regarding the limited ability to share digital systems and products, and work within those constraints.**
- **Your operations order was not as clearly understood as you like to think it was.** A personal visit with the attached unit’s commander and a detailed backbrief can offset that lack of understanding.
- **Invest the time with our allies to show you care.** Invariably, though you don’t mean it, you or your staff is short-changing them in time, attention, support, products and information. You are responsible for bringing them in and forming the team. Not them.

Fratricide reduction:

- **Understanding what equipment your forces, and that of adjacent units, are equipped with is critical, but even more important is planning with the requisite details and disseminating those plans to the lowest level.** Consolidated graphics should be built and pushed down in hard copy and digits, as well as on BFT. They also must get pushed higher.
- **What kind of graphics have we built? Are they restrictive or permissive? Do they require our attached elements to comply with them?**
- **LNOs can actively work to increase situational awareness and prevent potential conflicts in movement through cross-talk.**
- **Standardize vehicle markings, including low-light or thermal markings.** Share Command Inspection Program (CIP) panels or use reverse polarity paper to make ad hoc CIP panels.
- **FPoL / RPoL must be planned in detail, with appropriate guides or escorts allocated.** Consider co-locating LNOs or key leaders in passing or passed unit command posts.

A senior leader from an allied nation recently described that the most important ingredient in multinational operations was trust. I would agree that trust is key, but true trust must be built based on a thorough integration of attached units, sharing information and the commitment that we will employ our attached multinational units in accordance with their capabilities and with the same care and diligence we would give our own forces.

The initial after-action review on multinational integration is done. Let’s take the time to fully integrate 3rd Company Panthers into TF Hammer and get ready for the next mission. Train to win!

LTC Esli Pitts is the senior TF maneuver observer/controller/trainer at JMRC, Hohenfels Training Area, Germany. His past duty positions include commander, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, Fort Hood, TX; instructor, Department of Tactics, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS; executive officer and operations officer, 1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, GA; and S-3 and executive officer, 5th Squadron, 1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart. His military schooling includes infantry one-station unit training, Airborne School, Air Assault School, Armor Officer Basic Course, Infantry Mortar Leader’s Course, Armor Officer Advanced Course, Combined Arms Service Staff School, Command and General Staff College and NATO Staff Orientation Course. He holds a bachelor’s of arts degree in history from Washington State University and a master’s of science degree in international relations from Troy University.

Acronym Quick-Scan

BCT – brigade combat team

BFT – Blue Force Tracker

BMP – *boyevaya mashina pekhoty*

CAB – combined-arms battalion

CIP – Command Inspection Program
CL – class
COMSEC – communications security
COP – common operating picture
CTC – combat training center
DF2 – Diesel Fuel 2
FPoL – forward passage of lines
FSo – fire-support officer
IC – information collection
JCAP – Joint Combined Academics Program
JMRC – Joint Maneuver Readiness Center
JP – jet propellant
LNO – liaison officer
LOGCOP – logistics common operating picture
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO – noncommissioned officer
RPG – rocket-propelled grenade
RPoL – rearward passage of lines
SBF – support-by-fire
TF – task force



Figure 1. Danish soldiers exchange information while conducting zone reconnaissance during Exercise Combined Resolve III at JMRC Nov. 5, 2014. Combined Resolve III is a multinational exercise that includes more than 4,000 participants from NATO and partner nations. The exercise is designed to provide a complex training scenario that focuses on multinational unified land operations and reinforces the U.S. commitment to NATO and Europe.
(U.S. Army photo by PFC Lloyd Villanueva)



Figure 2. A Royal Danish Army soldier, left, of 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, Guard Hussar Regiment, and a U.S. Soldier, right, of 91st Brigade Engineer Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, provide medical assistance to a simulated casualty, a Romanian soldier of 21st Mounted Battalion, during Exercise Combined Resolve III at JMRC Nov. 3, 2014. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Ian Schell)



Figure 3. A Romanian soldier takes aim on a UH-72A Lakota helicopter simulating hostile forces during Exercise Combined Resolve III at JMRC Oct. 30, 2014. (U.S. Army photo by SPC John Cress Jr.)



Figure 4. A U.S. Soldier, left, of 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division; an Armenian soldier, center; and a Danish soldier update map information during Exercise Combined Resolve III at JMRC Nov. 7, 2014. (U.S. Army photo by SPC John Cress Jr.)



Figure 5. U.S. Soldiers of 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, prepare to fire a Javelin shoulder-fired anti-tank missile while Albanian soldiers provide security during Exercise Combined Resolve III at JMRC Nov. 6, 2014. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Ian Schell)