
OPFOR REPLICATION OF COMPLEX THREATS AT JMRC

MAJ RYAN LIEBHABER
MARIO HOFFMANN

During most of the previous decade, U.S. Army Combat Training Centers (CTCs) focused on executing mission rehearsal exercises that prepared brigade combat teams (BCTs) for deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan. To do so, the operational environment at the CTCs strictly sought to replicate a counterinsurgency (COIN) environment, and the opposing forces (OPFOR) served almost exclusively in an insurgent role. During this period, the OPFOR units' Sheridan and M-60 tank fleets were retired, their M113s were mothballed, and their focus on replicating a "conventional" threat was extinguished.

In 2012, as U.S. operational commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan began to decrease, the Army's training and readiness efforts shifted to wide area security and combined arms maneuver (Army core competencies, Army Doctrine Publication 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*), and the need for a competitive near-peer OPFOR once again emerged. The CTCs were thus tasked to modify their training environments that promote unit readiness for decisive action-focused forces. To ensure that training centers created a common foundation for a complex operational environment with hybrid threats, the Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) published a decisive action training environment (DATE) manual that describes required training conditions upon which training programs and units can develop their scenarios. This article will focus on the uniqueness of the Joint Multinational

Readiness Center's (JMRC's) multinational DATE rotations and the leader-development opportunities experienced by a JMRC OPFOR Soldier — leader development opportunities rivaled nowhere in the world.

At the turn of the 21st century, the U.S. Army began a shift that divested its training and readiness efforts from fighting against a Soviet Union-era OPFOR supporting air-land battle doctrine and redirected its efforts against a capability-oriented OPFOR at the CTCs. The intent was to turn away from training focused on fighting a predictive threat that U.S. forces might never face and conversely train on defeating any threat and its capabilities, regardless of what foreign flag or allegiance it may have. However, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 prematurely halted this OPFOR transition as the CTCs became engulfed with mission rehearsal exercises that prepared BCTs for deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Thus, it could be said that the Army is really picking up where it left off in the early 2000's — although not entirely so as DATE rotations also incorporate the hard lessons learned during 14 years of asymmetric combat.

Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment gather for an after action review following movement-to-contact training during exercise Allied Spirit II at the U.S. Army's Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, on 10 August 2015.

Photos by SPC John Cress Jr.



Formerly known as high-intensity conflict, combined arms maneuver operations are reemphasized at CTCs; gone are the days of fighting the old Krasnovian and Aragonian OPFOR bound to executing Soviet-era doctrine. Such simulated force-on-force or “metal-on-metal” engagements are much less relevant in today’s more complex and ever-changing operational environment with hybrid threats and near-peer weapons. Training conditions must reflect environments of modern battlefields that include the integration of joint, interorganizational, and multinational partners. No other training center in the world provides such a multinational training experience as JMRC, and no other OPFOR emulates a multinational OPFOR threat.

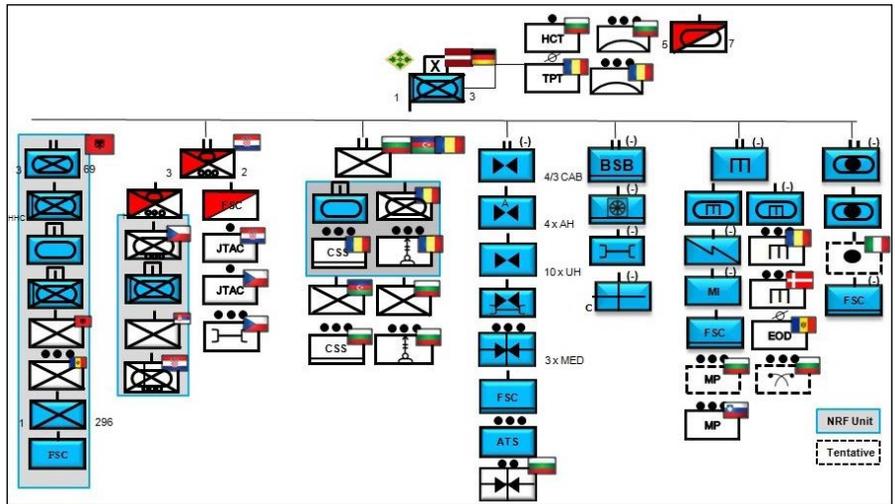
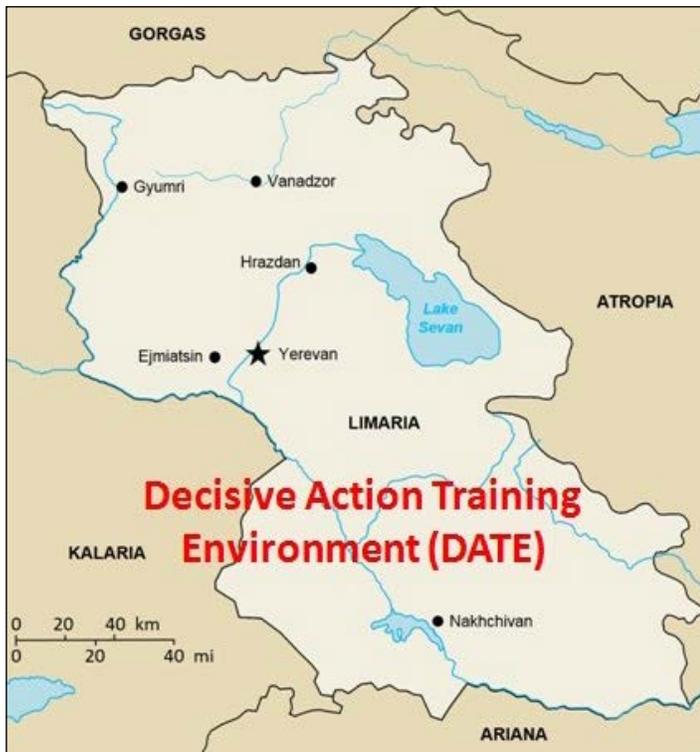


Figure 2 — Example of Multinational Training Brigade

The JMRC Multinational Experience

Former Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) GEN Raymond Odierno tasked JMRC to focus on multinational interoperability at brigade level and below, something that NATO never accomplished even during the height of the Cold War (NATO doctrine strictly addresses interoperability at the division level and above). During DATE rotations at JMRC, training brigades consist of either a U.S. or allied/partnered nation brigade headquarters, with a varying mix of U.S. and allied/partnered nation battalions for both maneuver and supporting elements. Furthermore, within the training brigade’s battalions, there is a mix of U.S. and allied/partnered nation companies and platoons, thus creating multinational battalions and companies within the multinational brigade. For the OPFOR,

Figure 1 — Map of Fictitious Countries in DATE Scenario



as one can conclude, planning operations and fighting against such multinational units is considerably different from planning to fight a homogeneous U.S. brigade.

JMRC sponsors three primary types of DATE rotations/exercises: (1) Saber Junction, which focuses on readiness training/certification for a U.S. brigade combat team (BCT); (2) Combined Resolve, which builds readiness for a U.S. regionally aligned brigade, and (3) Allied Spirit, which focuses on developing multinational interoperability at the brigade level and below. More information is available at <http://www.eur.army.mil/exercises/default.htm>.

Saber Junction rotations primarily focus on the readiness of European-based units and always involve one of the two remaining U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) brigades, the 173rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne) or the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, for their biennial CTC training event. Typically, this will involve the U.S. brigade headquarters leading a multinational brigade in the Hohenfels Training Area, nicknamed “the box,” with one of its organic maneuver battalions and two attached multinational maneuver battalions. Meanwhile, the other two organic battalions from the USAREUR brigade will conduct maneuver operations elsewhere in Europe, with recent locations including Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania. These off-site battalions are tied to the JMRC exercise and scenario through the use of mobile digital instrumentation and deployed observer/coach/trainers (OCTs) and OPFOR packages, which ensure that a professional OPFOR challenges the unit and that OCTs are present to provide mentorship and feedback despite the physical separation from JMRC.

The other two types of DATE rotations at JMRC, Combined Resolve and Allied Spirit, are not as U.S. brigade-centric but “get-after” the former CSA’s guidance to focus on multinational interoperability at the brigade level and below. Combined Resolve exercises involve a U.S. regionally aligned force (RAF) brigade leading a multinational brigade headquarters with at least one of its organic battalions and typically two allied/partnered nation battalions for the “box” fight. Like Saber Junction DATE rotations, some of the RAF

brigade's battalions that are not physically participating in the "box fight" will conduct operations elsewhere in Europe and are also linked to the Hohenfels scenario through deployed digital instrumentation and OCT and OPFOR packages. The final series of DATE rotations, Allied Spirit, involves a focus on high readiness allied and partner nations with an emphasis on technical interoperability between communications and mission command systems. Although the various exercises have different points of emphasis, all provide a rich environment for interaction between allied and partner nation forces, both from the sociopolitical aspect and the technical/tactical aspect — factors that are essential for the successful conduct of unified land operations in a multinational environment.

Within a multinational DATE rotation, there is no pre-set separation of rotational training unit (RTU) offensive versus defensive versus stability operations, so each rotation is unique in this regard and planned according to the RTU's desired training objectives and time available. Typically, multinational DATE rotations encompass seven to 10 days of force-on-force maneuver training. Rotations will often start with an initial movement to contact (MTC) that pits the multinational training unit against the OPFOR, which views such an engagement as a deliberate attack. Such engagements begin with the training unit starting on the east or west end of the box and the OPFOR brigade tactical group (BTG) starting on the other end of the box; a meeting engagement occurs somewhere in between. After this initial battle period, the rotation will then shift to alternating offensive/defensive battle periods with the intent that the training brigade gains ground through the conduct of successive offensive operations. During the days between offensive and defensive battle periods, the opposing brigades will conduct reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance operations, and the training brigade also focuses heavily

on stability operations, to include civil-military operations and area security. The varying nature of the RTU's task organization, length of the rotation, and desired training objectives mean that planning OPFOR operations requires far more than cookie-cutter techniques and requires a thorough military decision-making process (MDMP) with a special emphasis on developing an enemy (training unit) situational template (SITEMP).

JMRC's Professional OPFOR

The 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment serves as JMRC's professional and full-time OPFOR. The 1-4 IN is a relatively standard U.S. light Infantry battalion that is augmented with unique OPFOR equipment and capabilities that allow it to transform into a replicated threat combined arms BTG as outlined in TC 7-100.2, *Opposing Force Tactics*. Its Apache and Blackfoot Companies are each able to transform into OPFOR combined arms battalions (minus), replicating up to 20 threat infantry fighting vehicles (BMPs) and 13 main battle tanks (MBT) apiece, both which are replicated via M113-variant OPFOR surrogate vehicles (OSV) with visual modifications. Cherokee Company replicates the OPFOR division tactical group's (DTG's) reconnaissance and BTG reconnaissance elements using their 10 high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs) that replicate threat reconnaissance vehicles (BRDM) and four BMPs. Cherokee Company also replicates the OPFOR special purpose forces (SPF) and insurgent elements.

In addition to 1-4 IN's organic companies, the OPFOR BTG is augmented with multinational units as well as U.S. Army Reserve/National Guard Infantry and engineer companies. Figure 4 shows the OPFOR BTG task organization for Rotation 15-03 (Saber Junction 15), where the OPFOR BTG was augmented with a Romanian battalion headquarters, Bulgarian battalion headquarters, Romanian infantry company, Bulgarian infantry company, Lithuanian infantry platoon, and a U.S. Army Reserve engineer company. The 1-4 IN also sent a platoon from Apache Company to Romania to support the out-of-sector portion of Saber Junction 15, and thus they did not take part in the box fight at Hohenfels. When the OPFOR BTG is operating at its maximum vehicular combat power of 26 MBTs, 40 BMPs, and 10 BRDMs, it must rely heavily on augmentation for its dismounted infantry assets. The OPFOR BTG also has a "red air" capability that comes from the Falcons OCT team (aviation trainers at JMRC), which provides two Hind-D attack helicopters (replicated by LUH-72 Lakota helicopters with VISMOS). OPFOR artillery is mostly virtual but typically has at least one live artillery battery; all assets, live or virtual, are controlled by

Figure 3 — Variations of Multinational Armored Personnel Carriers





Soldiers with Apache Company, 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, engage opposing forces in a simulated combat scenario while conducting defensive operations training during exercise Combined Resolve V in Hohenfels, Germany, on 31 October 2015.

the OPFOR BTG and is fully susceptible to RTU counter-fires.

To provide a more holistic and realistic “capability-based” OPFOR, JMRC provides the OPFOR asymmetric weapons such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and aggressive threat information warfare capabilities. TC 7-100 describes information warfare within seven categories: (1) computer warfare, (2) deception, (3) electronic warfare, (4) information attack, (5) perception management, (6) physical destruction, and (7) protection and security measures.

Unparalleled Leader Development Opportunities

Serving within 1-4 IN as an OPFOR Soldier truly provides leadership development opportunities unparalleled anywhere in the U.S. Army; ironically, the only similar experience opportunities are within OPFOR units of the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., and the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, La. However, these are absent the exposure of serving with, in support of, or leading multinational units at various levels. The autonomy they enjoy in executing their mission — from the ranks of sergeant through even the battalion commander — is simply astonishing. When integrated with multinational units, where often foreign forces look for U.S. leadership, Soldiers at all levels learn to be flexible, agile, and adaptive, creating an experience far beyond an exercise; to them — it’s

all real — a true leader-development breeding ground.

Within the NCO ranks, a sergeant will lead a team of replicated insurgencies, and a staff sergeant may lead a replicated Special Operations Force (SOF). In both cases, these young NCOs will operate independently from any platoon or company for many days at a time and behind enemy (training unit) lines. To be successful, they must reconnoiter for their own targets, plan attacks and ex-filtration, synchronize with senior-ranking OCTs for effects, and coordinate for resupplies — all under tactical conditions. These experiences not only help them develop proven tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) based on lessons learned from the vast amounts of repetitions, but upon returning to regular operational units, those experiences serve them well to think differently and more robustly about COIN operations.

These Infantry Soldiers also serve as air defense teams, deep reconnaissance assets, combat security outposts, information operations specialists, and high-value targets that attempt to avoid rotational unit discovery and capture. Moreover, this is an environment where Soldiers routinely perform multiple roles in one rotation, and at times in one day (killed as an insurgent in the morning... part of a conventional attack by the afternoon).

Officers of the OPFOR battalion gain equally vast amounts

of leader-development opportunities in an environment where lieutenants act as company commanders, company commanders lead replicated maneuver combined arms battalions, battalion operation officers plan and synchronize maneuvers for a multinational threat brigade, and the battalion commander commands it all — to include threat helicopter elements, artillery and engineer units, and even cyber-attacks. This implies that company commanders, replicating threat combined arms battalions, often plan, construct, and execute their defensive operations against an entire U.S. brigade combat team, with little support from their higher headquarters — and win. When coupled with multinational units, the battalion staff is stretched beyond its normal adaptability as it figures out ways to synchronize operations and provide sustainment support for new subordinates who predominately speak another language, fight with different tactics and techniques, and bring equipment for which they have limited maintenance, parts, and/or ammunition.

Conclusion

JMRC's unique location in Germany (with training partnerships throughout Europe) and mission to integrate and build multinational training experiences with U.S. and allied forces, makes it truly a world-renowned training center and moreover a leader-development haven for its Soldiers.

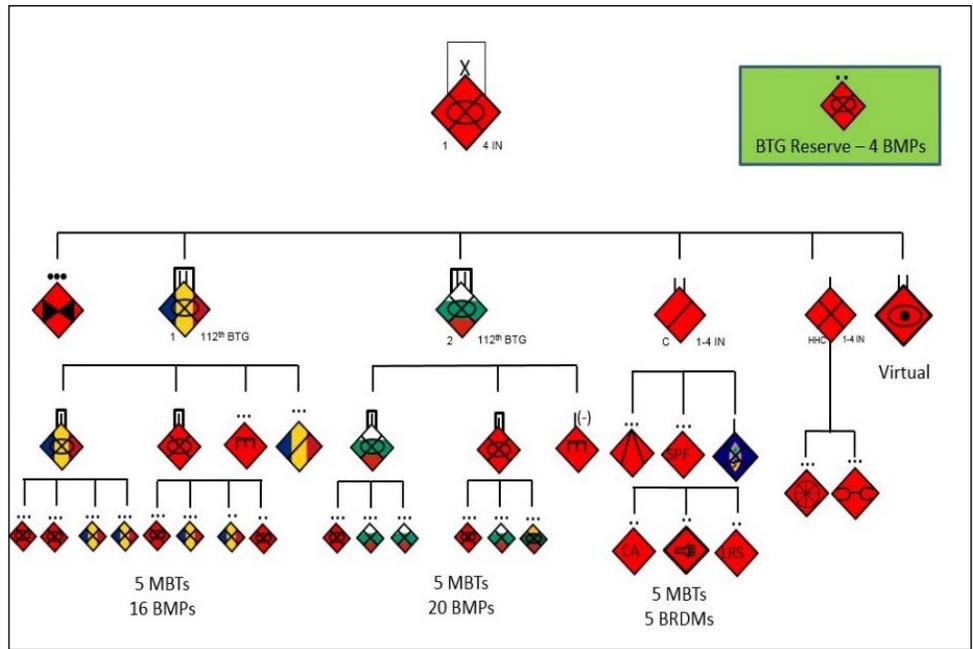


Figure 4 — OPFOR BTG Task Organization for Saber Junction 15

Units that train at JMRC will not only experience a battle-hardened fight against a hybrid threat within a complex environment, but against OPFOR Soldiers that loves their job — and are darn good at it. Most unique, however, is that the environment does not “replicate” a multinational experience... it is one!



Photos by SGT Brian Chaney

Bulgarian soldiers assigned to the 3rd Mechanized Infantry Battalion, 61st Mechanized Brigade, engage simulated enemy forces while conducting a react-to contact mission rehearsal during exercise Combined Resolve V on 29 October 2015.

MAJ Ryan Liebhaber is an Infantry officer and a 2001 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, N.Y. He is currently serving as the S3 and executive officer of 1-4 IN (OPFOR) at the JMRC, Hohenfels, Germany. His previous assignments include service as a rifle platoon leader with C Company, 3rd U.S. Infantry (The Old Guard) at Fort Meyer, Va.; a long-range surveillance platoon leader with F Company, 51st Infantry (Long Range Surveillance) (Airborne) at Fort Bragg, N.C.; a reconnaissance troop commander with A Troop, 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum, N.Y.; a rifle company commander with A Company, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry at Fort Drum; and an admissions officer at USMA.

Mario Hoffmann is a retired U.S. Army military intelligence officer and currently serves as a senior Department of the Army civilian in a dual-capacity as the Director of TRADOC's G27 Operational Environment and Opposing Forces (OE/OPFOR) Program and the TRADOC Project Office (TPO) for OE/OPFOR. For over 12 years, he has overseen all aspects of accrediting and validating how the Army replicates the complexities of the OE/OPFOR across the live, virtual, and constructive environments supporting training, education, and leader development. He also manages the Army's OE/OPFOR modernization program, and in support of the Deputy Commanding General of the Combined Arms Center (Training), leads the OE/OPFOR Pillar of the Army's Combat Training Center and Home-Station Training programs.