

The Power of the Full-Dress Rehearsal

by MAJ Jeffrey J. Barta

Dating back to 1990, more than 65 professional articles about rehearsals were published in the Center for Lessons Learned,¹ *ARMOR* magazine² and *Cavalry and Armor Journal*. This critical step of the troop-leading procedures (TLP) is essential to mission success, and the importance of effective rehearsals continues to be relevant now that we've returned to decisive-action training exercises at the National Training Center (NTC) for the past two years.

Conducting a full-dress, combined-arms rehearsal (CAR) is the most powerful method to create shared understanding; it prepares units for complex operations while serving as an efficient use of time in consideration of concurrent subordinate rehearsals and pre-combat checks.

The Army's operational environment in Iraq and Afghanistan changed the way the current generation of leaders used rehearsals. With units spread across disparate outposts and bases, back-brief rehearsals via digital or Integrated Tactical Network Environment systems became the primary means to prepare for operations. However, in a decisive-action training environment (DATE), CARs are necessary. They present the opportunity to bring subordinates together for a key-leader or full-dress rehearsal on their combat platforms.

Observations by observers/controllers/trainers (O/C/Ts) at NTC show that terrain-model CARs are the technique most frequently employed. Further observation illustrates this type of rehearsal is actually a back-brief with leaders standing on the terrain model as a platform to read back their portion of the script, and then they exit before the next participant enters the terrain model. Out of the 10 rotations during Fiscal Year 2015 at NTC, only seven full-dress rehearsals were conducted at the brigade combat team (BCT) echelon. The division headquarters directed six of the seven rehearsals in preparation for BCT-level live-fire attacks. Units conducting full-dress mounted rehearsals improved their tempo, synchronization and lethality compared to missions in which they conducted only terrain-model or back-brief rehearsals.

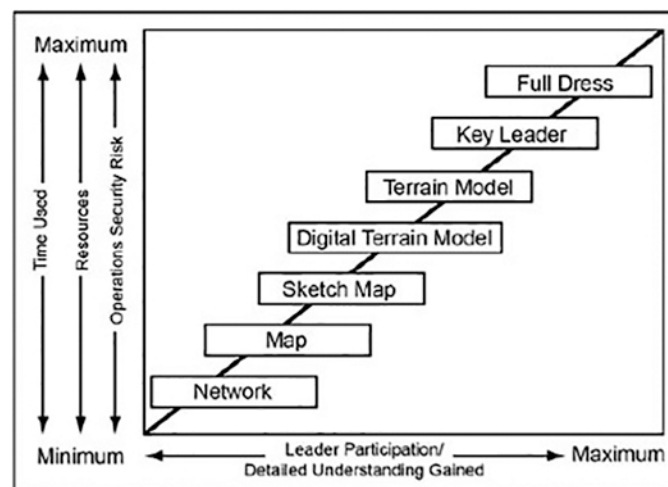


Figure 1. The direct relationship between the complexity of rehearsal techniques and the understanding they produce. (Original is Figure 12-1 from *Field Manual 6-0*)

Another training unit further improved the processing time of fire missions by an average of nearly 12 minutes and the tempo of a combined-arms breach by more than one hour after conducting a full-dress CAR.³

During live-fire training, full-dress rehearsals are an institutionally practiced method to prepare for complex training events. It's common for key leaders to conduct back-briefs about their concept, and the collective unit conducts dry and/or blank-fire full-dress rehearsals on the range where they will execute. This process creates a shared understanding for all participating in a challenging event as well as mitigates risk.

Concurrently, the full-dress rehearsal drives participants to complete their pre-combat checks well before execution. These practices all align with the tenets of rehearsals described in Chapter 12 of *Field Manual 6-04*⁴ and

the performance measures detailed in the Combined Arms Training Strategies (CATS) Task 71-8-5122, “Perform a Rehearsal.”⁵ These practices should be performed with equal energy while preparing for a live-fire training range or preparing for live, virtual, constructive and operational missions.



Figure 2. An M777 cannon crew conducts drills as part of a BCT full-dress CAR at NTC.

The most powerful technique to employ full-dress CARs is to choose a piece of terrain in the unit rear area with enough space to maneuver the rehearsal attendees. The selected terrain should mirror the terrain for the upcoming battle. Creating a small-scale area of operations will allow unit members to see each other in time and space as well as to identify and fix friction points. Some goals and guidelines:

- Smaller-scale graphics should be produced specifically for the full-force rehearsal and ideally distributed in conjunction with the operations order.
- The execution of the rehearsal will also serve as a pre-combat check for all systems and tools such as the communications network, the fire-control infrastructure, reconnaissance platforms and sustainment processes.
- All participants are able to mount their combat platform and maneuver in space and time with their adjacent, forward and rear units.
- The direct-fire plan can be validated while combat identification markings of friendly forces are verified.
- The integrated indirect-fire plan links will be verified from the observers to the fires assets.
- All can understand the spatial relation of each echelon of aid stations and critical resupply elements.

An important aspect of executing a full-dress rehearsal is to induce friction and rehearse the planned branches, sequels and contingencies. The induced elements of friction should not become new wargaming, but rather should focus on the enemy courses of action and contingencies developed during the military decision-making process. The rehearsal is not the time for collaborative brainstorming, but rather for the validation of shared understanding among the higher headquarters and subordinates, as well as the resolution of friction identified in the plan.

Another counterintuitive benefit to a full-dress or reduced-force CAR is that it saves time for subordinates. A full-force rehearsal is able to create shared understanding across multiple warfighting functions simultaneously, reducing the requirement for pulling subordinate staff members away from their units for separate warfighting-function rehearsals.

In a time-constrained environment, terrain-model or digital-terrain-model CARs are still relevant. To improve the outputs of a terrain-model rehearsal, it needs to be structured and facilitated in a manner that takes it beyond a back-brief. While conducting a back-brief is an approved type of rehearsal and increases the understanding between the leader and subordinate, this type limits the collaboration among all participants. Placing all participants on the terrain model in relation to each other in time and space leads to greater collaboration and shared spatial understanding of their place on the battlefield. Similar to a full-dress rehearsal, friction must be induced and contingencies practiced to identify potential challenges and ensure synchronization of all participants.



Figure 1. Brigade leadership at NTC conducts a terrain-model rehearsal in preparation for a deliberate attack.

The DATE at NTC is complex and challenges units to fight against a near-peer enemy force. Preparation for each mission using effective rehearsals is necessary to achieve success. While this may be the latest in a number of articles on the subject, the suggestions listed in this article offer techniques to gain the most value from this crucial part of the TLPs.

MAJ Jeff Barta is the BCT S-3 O/C/T for NTC's Operations Group at Fort Irwin, CA. Other assignments include BCT S-3, 4th BCT, 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, KY; battalion executive officer, 2nd BN, 506th, 4/101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell; maneuver task force S-3 and company O/C/T, Joint Maneuver Readiness Center, Hohenfels, Germany; troop commander, Troop G, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 2/1st Armored Division, Baumholder, Germany; and company executive officer and platoon leader, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry, 2/1 Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, TX. His military education includes the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and the Armor Captain's Career Course. He holds a bachelor's of science degree in environmental science from the University of Illinois and a master's of science degree in administration from Central Michigan University. Barta also deployed to Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and Assured Delivery.

Notes

¹ Web search of indexed topics focused on rehearsal techniques through the Center for Army Lessons Learned.

² Web search of indexed articles focused on rehearsal techniques through past issues posted on the **eARMOR** Webpage.

³ Empirical data collected during a BCT live-fire attack at NTC observed by the author.

⁴ Field Manual 6-0, Change 1, **Commander and Staff Organization and Operations**, Headquarters Department of the Army, May 11, 2014.

⁵ CATS identifies the performance standards for Army tasks per Army Training Network, 2015.