



WELCOME (BACK) TO THE JUNGLE

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The 25th Infantry “Tropic Lightning” Division in Hawaii has resurrected the Jungle Operations Training Course (JOTC) on the island of Oahu in order to prepare and train Soldiers, joint services, and foreign partner nations to conduct successful operations in a jungle environment.

Not since the late '90s has the Army had the capability to train a battalion-sized element in jungle operations — nor did we have the interest. Our focus was quickly drawn (and rightly so) to the urban, desert, and mountain environments of Iraq and Afghanistan. Currently within the Department of Defense, only the U.S. Marine Corps maintains a jungle course in Okinawa, Japan, and its future is uncertain. The U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region necessitates jungle training as a very relevant and necessary move for our Soldiers. This is especially so for the regionally assigned and regionally engaged 25th Infantry Division whose partnerships and theater security cooperation exercises often draw them into a jungle environment.

An Idle Peace-Time Army? Not So Much!

In the spring of 2013, in conjunction with the 25th Infantry Division being off-ramped from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) deployments, the division initiated a plan to set conditions for the “Asia-Pacific Rebalance.” First, it established a much-needed expeditionary mindset, which propelled the division into a readiness status not seen since the advent of the global war on terrorism (GWOT). A battalion task force would provide an immediate reaction company

Soldiers assigned to 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, descend into the jungle environment of Oahu as they validate the lanes used for the Jungle Operations Training Course.

Photos by SGT Sean Freiberg

(IRC) within 18 hours and battalion task force with a brigade combat team (BCT) assault command post at 96 hours in order to provide the Pacific Command (PACOM) commander with a contingency response force (CRF). Within 90 days, an N-hour sequence, a pre-assumption inspection program, and an emergency deployment readiness exercise (EDRE) program had all been developed, validated, and tested. A battalion from each of the two BCTs were empowered to assist in the development of the CRF requirements. The CRF1 (the alert battalion) requirements were primarily planned and validated by the Cacti of the 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment. How to support the load out, the CRF5, fell to the Gimlets of the 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment. This empowerment fostered “ground up” development and proved essential to the rapid and effective emplacement of this new capability. This effort was capped off with a 3rd BCT EDRE which combined live, virtual, constructive, and gaming (LVCG) along with live-fire operations all integrated under BCT and division mission command. The culmination exercise validated that we could rapidly deploy and be ready — but ready for what?

Along with this CRF initiative, the division needed to address the missing link to our readiness in the Pacific — the jungle environment. The Bronco Brigade (3/25th ID) had the task and again, empowered a battalion task force

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to take the lead in developing this training capability. This fell on the 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment's Wolfhounds, who were already eagerly pursuing jungle training. The "No Fear on Earth" battalion vigorously attacked this problem with elements from across the 3rd BCT and division assisting to provide support to the initiative. The battalion researched and collated our U.S. historical jungle operations documents and manuals from World War II forward. This included our previous JOTC in Panama and the 25th Division's Jungle and Guerilla Warfare Training Center that was established in 1966 as part of the Special Warfare Training and Orientation Center (SAWTOC) on Schofield Barracks that was designed to prepare Soldiers for the jungles of Vietnam. American Professor Dr. Daniel Marston from Australian National University assisted in providing more historical data and expertise on jungle warfare from across the Pacific. We also tapped into resident experts in the BCT who had attended foreign jungle schools such as the Malaysian tracker course, Australian jungle school, and the British jungle school in Brunei. The Wolfhounds continued to develop this capability simultaneously with the CRF initiative. In the end, 2-27 Infantry coordinated, resourced, and validated the entire course within six short months despite CRF and other training requirements. In addition, the division obtained a myriad of equipment to facilitate training such as hundreds of sets of old Battle Dress Uniforms (BDUs), mountaineering ropes, squad water purification systems, and other special equipment.

The New JOTC

The JOTC today is not the same as the version conducted in Panama at Fort Sherman and came with



At top, Soldiers assigned to Company A, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, use their poncho raft to tactically maneuver down a river during the first phase of Jungle Operations Training Course. Below, a Soldier assigned to Company A, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, pulls himself across a rope bridge as part of the JOTC.

jungle while platoons hone their patrol base activities. Both resiliency training and performance enhancement from the Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness Program is embedded early on, and Soldiers begin practical application in this phase. This is a key to preparing for three rigorous weeks of field training without the luxuries of garrison life (no cell coverage either!).

Phase II is the squad/platoon situational training exercise (STX) module that consists of STX lanes for various combat patrols, close-quarter marksmanship, point-man and cover-man live-fire exercise (LFX), squad react-to-contact LFX, and platoon LFX ambush. It is here where Soldiers begin to practice the methods learned in Phase I in a tactical environment. Soldiers change from their ACUs into BDUs

an associated cost. The course was built completely out of hide without any additions to the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) from Soldiers within the 25th ID's Lightning Leaders Academy that is responsible for Air Assault School, Lightning Leaders Course, and several performance enhancement courses.

Because of the size and breadth of the operations, JOTC had to be limited to company and below operations. Over the course of five weeks, a battalion task force cycles its companies through, starting a new company each week. An artillery battery, forward support company (FSC), weapons company, and a cavalry troop are also integrated. Each company spends 21 days in the field, which forces Soldiers to endure the hardships of the jungle and to put into practice the field craft they learn.

The course is broken down into three phases. Phase I is jungle skills training that includes land navigation, survival skills, waterborne operations, rope assisted movements, jungle communication techniques, insertion/extraction techniques, and survival techniques. Each of these classes are taught in the



Soldiers with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, receive training in the typical classroom environment present during the Jungle Operations Training Course on Oahu.

and add camouflage to themselves and equipment. This phase also includes the clearing and establishment of an artillery fire base and the conduct of multiple air assault “gun raids” where guns are slingloaded into remote enemy territory to provide fire support for short-duration missions.

Phase III is the culmination company-level FTX that includes hasty attacks, ambushes, a raid, and multiple air assaults. Throughout all phases, the battalion task force provides the overall mission command from their tactical operations center (TOC) in the field. The division CRF-5 battalion (support cycle) provides the backside support and opposing forces for both Phase II and III.

The BCT’s combat enablers also learn how to adapt to the environment to provide critical support. FSCs are forced to be innovative in their sustainment techniques using low cost low altitude (LCLA) air drops, “speed ball” resupply (free drop), door- kicker bundles, and bulk water purification. At the completion of the course, Soldiers will earn the coveted jungle expert tab authorized for wear while assigned in the Pacific theater.

The Way Ahead

The last edition of jungle doctrine, FM 90-5, was written in 1982. Efforts are being made now in conjunction with the Maneuver Center of Excellence to update the field manual. To assist in bridging the gap, 2-27 Infantry reconstructed the “Green Book,” which is a handbook for Soldiers operating in a jungle environment. The “Green Book” dates back to

our British allies’ field manual used extensively in the Pacific theater during WWII.

For now, this course is designed to prepare and train 25th Infantry Division Soldiers to conduct successful operations in a jungle environment. The course will continue to evolve and be refined after each iteration as more leaders and Soldiers develop jungle expertise. Over the next six months, 3rd BCT, 25th ID will conduct over eight partnered exercises throughout the Pacific Rim where they will have an opportunity to put their expertise to use. The long-term goal will be to have I Corps units pass through this course in preparation for partnered exercises in the Pacific. Also, future opportunities for joint services and foreign partner nations to attend the course and exchange instructors will be incorporated.

With no issues determining relevancy in a “peace-time” or “garrison” Army, the 25th Infantry Division is a more responsive and prepared force in the Pacific theater. The 25th Infantry Division is building a unique skill set for our Army and offering a premier jungle operations venue within the Pacific Command area of responsibility. Tropic Lightning!

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