

Adjusting the Training Paradigm to ‘Win in a Complex World’

MAJ Ed Kim

“We believe, with the new Army operating concept, we have to be able to do multiple small-scale things simultaneously. You’ve got to be a bit more flexible, a bit more adaptable. You’ve got to be able to get there quickly...You have to be prepared to operate around the world.”

— GEN Raymond Odierno¹
Former Army Chief of Staff

This statement by GEN Odierno highlights the significance of training — or more precisely, realistic training — as the Army prepares to confront complex challenges throughout the world. Last October, the Army released its new Army Operating Concept (AOC) titled, “Win in a Complex World,” which anticipated faster rates towards instability, increased opportunities for adversaries to acquire asymmetric capabilities, and an increasing propensity for military operations to occur amongst dense population centers as some of the characteristics that will likely impact future warfare. Given this increase in complexity, the AOC calls for “globally responsive combined arms teams [that can] maneuver from multiple locations and domains to present multiple dilemmas to the enemy, limit enemy options, avoid enemy strengths, and attack enemy weaknesses.”² As a way to achieve these ends, the new concept is emphasizing the need to “develop innovative leaders and optimize human performance” by “foster[ing] discipline, confidence, and cohesion through innovative, realistic training.”³

Realistic training is no novel concept within the Army as the phrase “train as you will fight” is a long-standing tenet echoed within the ranks and even resides in current doctrine as a fundamental principle of unit training.⁴ However, as the decade-long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wind down and Army leaders balance resource constraints with force reductions to conduct effective training, our view (or existing paradigm) on what constitutes realistic training is at a critical juncture. The risk is overemphasizing the cognitive aspects of warfare, whereby overlooking the criticality of building the physical capacity to endure the hardships of warfare. Indeed, threat-based training is important to improve critical thinking, intuition, mental agility, and decision-making, which are all necessary aspects that enable us to effectively confront complex challenges. However, training to enhance physical performance is equally important to balance our approach towards what the AOC describes as “adaptive leaders, resilient Soldiers, and cohesive teams that thrive in uncertain, dangerous, and chaotic environments.”⁵

Thus, this article contends that as we transition our intellectual framework to train and operate in the manner described by the AOC, we must not forget a fundamental component of realistic training — training within various types of physical environments that mimics the potential or known operational environment. When combined with threat-based training, this provides the level of realism that not only enhances the cognitive aspects but also improves the physical capacity to operate under austere and complex environments.

The Significance of Geographically Focused Training

While the character of warfare is constantly evolving, the nature of physical exertion during war does not change. Carl von Clausewitz, the famous 19th century Prussian theorist and soldier, stated, “War is in the realm of physical exertion and suffering. These will destroy us unless we can make ourselves indifferent to them, and for this birth or training must provide us with a certain strength of body and

soul.”⁶ This physical exertion occurs within the context of an operational environment that encompasses a unique set of terrain and weather conditions. History demonstrates this relationship as evidenced by Napoleon’s campaign into Russia amidst the harsh winter weather and numerous river crossings in 1812, General Ulysses S. Grant’s expeditions along the bayous and high seasonal rains while attempting to seize Vicksburg during the Civil War, and the Allies’ experience within the deserts and high temperatures in North Africa during World War II. Most recently, our recent experiences over the past decade within the rugged mountainous terrain of Afghanistan and hot summers in Iraq again demonstrates how the physical aspects of war do not change. Thus, training to build physical performance, particularly amidst various terrain and weather conditions, is clearly an integral part of training for conflict.

In the future, the ability to operate under various geographic conditions will remain critical as the Army attempts to enhance its expeditionary qualities to become a globally responsive and regionally engaged Army.⁷ GEN Odierno recently observed, “One of the things that has changed in the world is, as I call it, the velocity of instability and the necessity to deploy our capabilities simultaneously to several different continents at the same time.”⁸ This “velocity” is evident as units continue to deploy on short notice to a wide variety of unforeseen contingencies such as the Ebola crisis in Liberia, the Ukraine crisis in Eastern Europe, and most recently, our return to Iraq given the emergence of the violent extremist organization, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Given these trends, this means units will have less time to prepare for the environmental factors prior to deploying. Additionally, given the dynamic and complex character of the potential threats, units will not have the luxury of slowly adapting to the environmental factors. Therefore, mitigating this risk requires greater emphasis on geographically focused training to enhance our ability to rapidly deploy and operate effectively under austere and hostile conditions. A cursory glance at potential crisis regions throughout the world reveals unique geographical conditions that pose a uniquely different set of environmental challenges than what the Army experienced recently. In the Asia-Pacific region, tensions in the East China and South China Seas, the unpredictability of North Korea, and the spread of violent extremism in Southeast Asia include dense population centers, jungles, and most noticeably, the vast Pacific Ocean.

In the African region, hot tropical climates with high humidity covers the northern portions of Nigeria where Boko Haram continues to terrorize the local population. Finally, extreme cold and rugged terrain cover the Arctic region where Russia is seeking to expand their influence. If Army forces deployed to these regions, could they “transition quickly and conduct operations of sufficient scale and ample duration to achieve strategic objectives?”⁹ Stated otherwise, is the Army prepared to fight in small numbers in a jungle environment, or participate in amphibious operations under hostile conditions, or conduct the full range of military operations amidst rugged terrain under extreme cold or hot weather conditions?

The Existing Training Strategies

Currently, the Army’s operational training domain is largely divided into three mutually supporting activities that consist of home station training, maneuver combat training center (CTC) training, and regionally aligned force (RAF) training.¹⁰

Each of these activities has clear benefits at various echelons that contribute to Army’s overall readiness and ability to respond to emerging threats across the world. However, they also possess limitations, which unless clearly understood, may leave our units unprepared for the physical aspects of armed conflict.

As advancing technology provides another medium to create realistic training scenarios, the Army is placing greater emphasis to incorporate the Integrated Training Environment (ITE) with home station training. By 2020, the Army expects to field this system to every installation, which will allow units to leverage a combination of live, virtual, constructive, and gaming training enablers to create a realistic training environment.¹¹ This tool allows commanders to optimize training time and mitigate the resource shortfalls required to conduct live training by integrating simulations to complement the live training. However, the risk with this strategy is the illusion that virtual, constructive, or gaming experiences, as realistic as they may be, equates to realistic training, when in reality, it cannot fully replicate the physical experiences of military operations. With decreased live experience during training, Soldiers, units, and staffs are less apt to gain the tacit knowledge that enables greater understanding on the effects of the physical environment on military operations.

Another critical component of the Army's training strategy is the maneuver CTCs, which include the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC), Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), and the National Training Center (NTC). These training centers were critical during the past decade while the Army's Force Generation (ARFORGEN) cycle consistently produced incrementally trained and cohesive units to deploy against a known threat within a known theater. Today, these centers continue to provide opportunities for leaders, Soldiers, staffs, and units to train against an unpredictable, free-playing, and thinking adversary in a live environment.

Indeed, the current training opportunities available at the CTCs provides the best medium to infuse a variety of the latest technologies and resources, which enhances the overall training experience. However, the limitation of these centers is the inability to replicate the full range of physical environments found across the world. As described earlier, what happens if the next conflict occurs in some of the more severe climates that are unlike Hohenfels, Germany, Fort Polk, La., or Fort Irwin, Calif.? In other words, the limitations of the CTCs are their fixed geographic locations, which only offer threat-based training vice threat-based training under conditions that resemble the physical environment of known or potential future conflicts.

The third component of the Army's training strategy is regionally aligned forces (RAF) training. This area has drawn more attention lately as the Army looks to become more globally responsive and regionally engaged by aligning specific units to combatant commanders from different regions of the world. Underpinning this training strategy is the ability for units to physically train or gain some degree of operational experience and familiarity within their assigned region. In terms of geographically focused training, this strategy is clearly the most beneficial. However, the weaknesses of this training strategy are opposite to that of the CTCs where units are unable to train in a robust and well-established training center that combines the myriad of technology and other key external supporting enablers. Granted, deployed forces gain invaluable experiences through partnerships and real-world security cooperation missions. However, without the full complements of a robust threat-based training environment, leaders and units are unable to train in an environment that combines the intensity created by an adaptive and lethal enemy with extreme geographic and weather conditions.

Insights towards Adjusting the Training Paradigm

"We have to replicate and provide all of the friction, the unknowns and things that detract from clarity, so they can use their expertise acquired in training to bring clarity in real situations."

— **GEN David Perkins**¹²
U.S. Army TRADOC Commander

Given the fiscal constraints and challenges of preparing for future complex environments, there are many ongoing Army-wide initiatives that provide valuable insights towards better integrating the physical environment into training events.

Embedded in all of these initiatives is the similar focus on preparing units to operate within unfamiliar geographic and climate conditions, whether it is through increased frequency, variety, or duration. Taken together, the underlying logic behinds these initiatives provide useful principles to help shape our training paradigm as we go forward. Last year, the 25th Infantry Division established the Jungle Operations Training Course in Hawaii to train Soldiers on jungle operations. Divided into three phases, the course allows companies to incrementally build from basic individual jungle skills up to a culminating company-level field training exercise. In similar fashion, 1st Armored Division recently established the Desert Warrior Course at Fort Bliss, Texas, to train Soldiers on desert operations. This course provides opportunities to train at the individual and small-unit collective levels. The key take-away from these two divisions' initiatives lies in the blend of geographically focused training with threat-based training at home station. By maximizing the geographic potential at their respective home stations, these units are now able to increase the frequency of realistic training opportunities. Granted, the requisite resources and available terrain to begin a similar initiative on this scale is not readily available to all units. Furthermore, many units may already have a similar training methodology established at home station. However, the point is, given the resource constraints and increasing velocity of instability, leaders can no longer afford to wait for major training events or CTC rotations to conduct what this article qualifies as realistic training. Instead, we must build sustainable solutions that properly prepare our Soldiers for the physical aspects of warfare.

In October 2014, Soldiers from the 75th Ranger Regiment went to the U.S. Army Alaska's Northern Warfare Training Center to conduct mountaineering and cold weather training. MAJ Jeremiah Hurley, the executive officer for 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment stated, "That's something across the regiment, whether it be the Arctic tundra or the mountains or deserts, jungles, we continue to look for opportunities to train in all these different environments so we can conduct operations anywhere in the world."¹³ At a much larger scale, U.S. Army Pacific's Pacific Pathways is another model where units travel to various countries within the Pacific region to conduct multilateral exercises. This concept not only provides a medium to train with our strategic partners, but it also enables our units to train in various geographic locations. The lesson with these examples is to look beyond the typical training locations offered through the CTCs and home station to expand the scope of exposure within various environmental conditions. This variety of experience is a key component towards helping our Soldiers and units appreciate and understand the effects of various types of terrain and weather on individual performance and military operations. Ultimately, this will enhance our ability to rapidly deploy in any type of environment and focus on the right problems — the existing threat. Indeed, every unit will not have the available resources or time to train in Alaska or across the Pacific, however, at a much smaller scale, this logic is applicable at home station or locally through a variety in seasonal, light, or terrain conditions.

All CTC rotations at the NTC and JRTC recently increased from 14 days to 18 days. This extension of the CTC rotations looked beyond a proven model that continuously produced mission-capable units throughout the past decade. COL Jeff Broadwater, the commander of the operations group at NTC, stated, "This is an opportunity to continue to focus on allowing the BCTs to really stretch their systems over an extended period of time. Instead of 14 days, we've got 18 days to do that now, so we can really sharpen some of those collective tasks at the brigade, battalion and company and platoon levels."¹⁴ The lesson here is to go beyond "what is" and critically examine "what if." By extending the duration of training, this provides opportunities to build endurance within our formations; this applies to our

systems and physical capacity. Introduced as a new tenet for Army operations in the AOC, endurance is a critical component of improving our overall capacity to sustain operations until assigned missions are accomplished. However, since it is impossible to know in advance how long missions will take, we must continuously build beyond our comfort levels by extending our exposure to unfamiliar and complex situations.

Given the anticipated complexity of future warfare, the Army must train to fight and “win” in complex environments. Proper training requires realistic training opportunities beyond a threat-based model. As physical exertion amidst specific geographic and weather conditions will continue to define the nature of conflict, Army leaders must not forget about this important aspect within their training strategy. Hence, the training paradigm going forward must look beyond the current limitations, whether it is limited resources or the existing training strategies. As evidenced by the numerous ongoing initiatives throughout the Army, adjustments are already underway. Collectively, we must make sense of these initiatives and incorporate the underlying principles at various scales and echelons to establish the level of realism in our training plans going forward. With greater emphasis on increasing the frequency, variety, and duration of realistic training, this is a potential step in the right direction.

Notes

¹ Michelle Tan, “Army Unveils New Plan to ‘Win in a Complex World,’” *Army Times*, 13 October 2014, <http://archive.armytimes.com/article/20141013/NEWS/310130024/Army-unveils-new-plan-win-complex-world->.

² Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-3-1, *U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army TRADOC, 2014) 17.

³ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴ Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 7-0, *Training Units and Developing Leaders* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, August 2012), 2-2.

⁵ TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, 39.

⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Peter Paret and Michael Howard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 101.

⁷ GEN Raymond Odierno, “Waypoint #2: Follow up to CSA’s Marching Orders,” U.S. Army website, 19 February 2014, <http://www.army.mil/article/118873/>.

⁸ GEN Raymond Odierno, “Interview: US Army Chief of Staff,” Defense News Website, 12 October 2014, <http://archive.defensenews.com/article/20141012/SHOWSCOUT04/310130013/Interview-Gen-Ray-Odierno-US-Army-Chief-Staff>.

⁹ TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, 17.

¹⁰ Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2014) 3.

¹¹ Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-8-3, *The U.S. Army Training Concept: 2012-2020* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army TRADOC, 2011), 35.

¹² GEN David Perkins, “TRADOC Commanding General Spells Out New Army Operating Concept,” U.S. Army website, 4 February 2015, http://www.army.mil/article/142218/TRADOC_commanding_general_spells_out_new_Army_operating_concept/.

¹³ Michelle Tan, “Rangers Tackle Alaska Terrain in First Visit Since 2011,” *Army Times*, 8 September 2014, <http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/pentagon/2014/09/06/-rangers-tackle-alaska-terrain-in-first-visitsince-2001/15190413/>.

¹⁴ Michelle Tan, "Combat Training Rotations Will Increase to 18 Days," *Army Times*, 6 February 2015, <http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/careers/army/2015/02/06/army-extends-ctc-rotations/22948785/>.

At the time this article was written, **MAJ Ed Kim** was attending the School of Advanced Military Studies at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. MAJ Kim's previous assignments include serving as an observer, coach/trainer with the Mission Command Training Program at Fort Leavenworth; he also has Stryker and light Infantry experience in the 82nd Airborne Division (Fort Bragg, N.C.) and 3-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team (Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.) to include deployments to Iraq and Haiti. He earned a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Washington and a master's degree in management and leadership from Webster University.



A Soldier crosses a river during training at the Lightning Academy's Jungle Operations Training Center in Hawaii on 21 January 2015. (Photo by SPC Benjamin Pollhein)