12 Things Your Unit Should Consider Before Coming to JMRC

CPT MICHAEL P. WALLACE

Observer-controller-trainers (OCTs) at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) have the benefit of watching units from across our Army and allied partners from across Europe tackle a dynamic and challenging problem set. Decisive action training environment (DATE) rotations at JMRC combine fighting a hybrid near-peer threat with the natural friction of interoperability. JMRC has a unique ability to stress the three dimensions of interoperability due to the training center's location in Hohenfels, Germany. Hohenfels has extremely challenging terrain that can restrict any unit's ability to reach its objective. Units that fail to understand the terrain consistently find themselves located by the opposition force (OPFOR) when the OPFOR has a position of advantage. The OPFOR battalion — the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment — provides rotational training units (RTUs) with a world-class replication of the hybrid, near-peer threat during DATE rotations. This forces RTUs to understand Soviet-style threat doctrine; units that do not spend organizational energy preparing for the hybrid, near-peer threat always struggle to compete in this challenging and dynamic environment. After observing rotations at JMRC and throughout Europe, the following 12 things are considerations for units preparing for a DATE rotation.

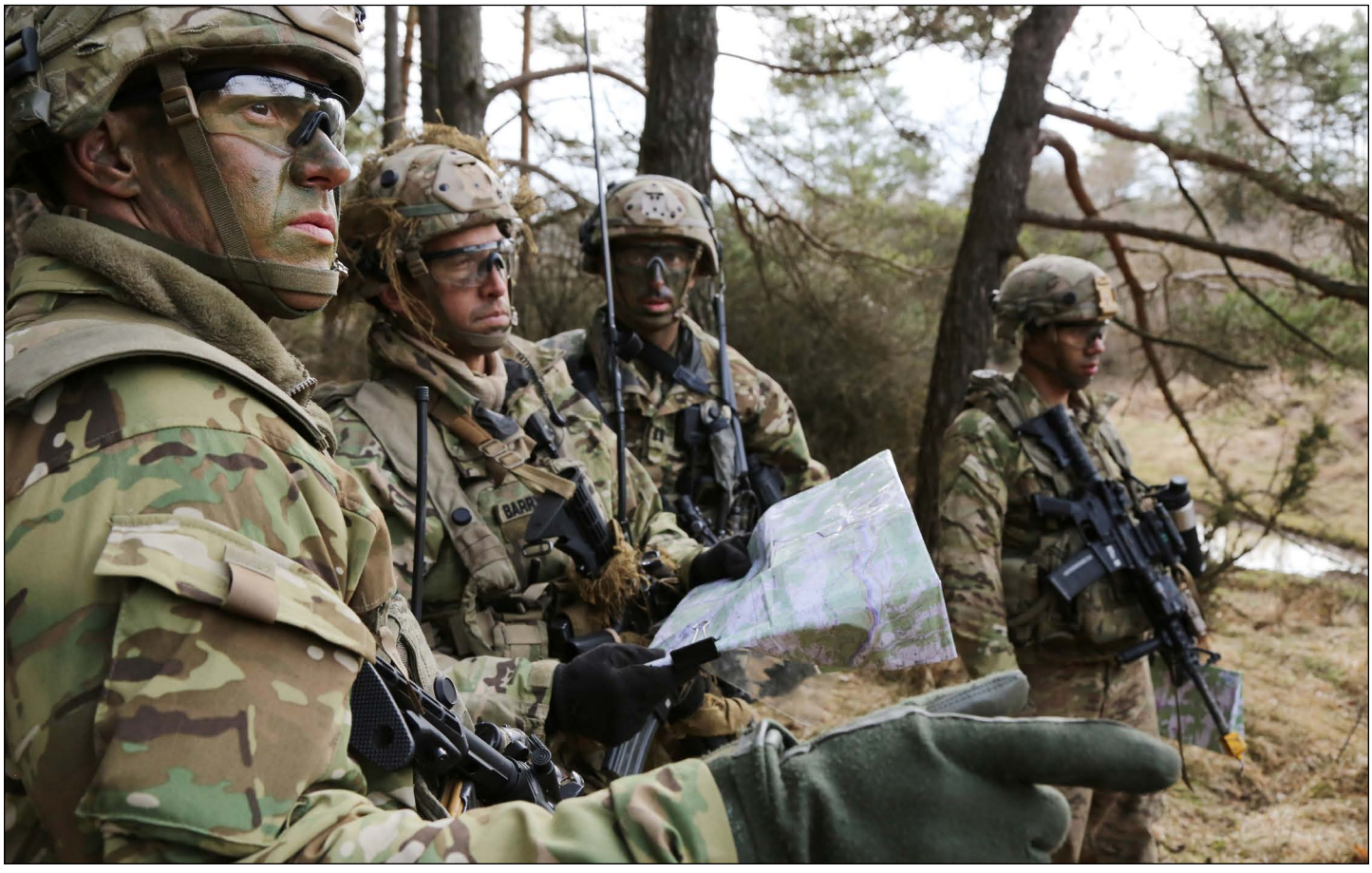


Photo by SGT Seth Plagenza

Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, discuss where to place obstacles while conducting a terrain walk during Exercise Allied Spirit VI at Hohenfels Training Area, Germany, on 20 March 2017.

Come to JMRC to Learn

There are two types of unit outlooks coming into a rotation at JMRC: units that come to learn and units that come to beat the OPFOR. OCTs often observe units that come to JMRC with the intent to only beat the OPFOR without capturing lessons learned and growing as a formation from their experience. These units typically marginalize their experience by getting easily frustrated with limitations of the training environment which exist at any Combat Training Center (CTC). Everything at JMRC is geared to provide units opportunities to grow through realistic training environments. It is true that both the RTUs and the OPFOR operate without the fear of death that is present during combat operations. However, even the limitations inherent in the multiple integrated laser engagement system (MILES) or any scenario can be training events and opportunities for units when approached properly.

Photo by SGT Devon Bistarkey

A Stryker assigned to the 4th Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment pulls alongside a U.K. Jackal Fighting Vehicle during an operation at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center on 12 March 2017.

When units come to JMRC, they should approach the rotation with the attitude that the experience will only make the formation better while using the challenges faced to identify areas where the unit can improve. There are limitations and constraints in any operation; can we develop creative solutions and show the agility needed to create opportunities for success or will we simply throw our hands up in frustration?

Transition to Unified Land Operations from COIN

The U.S. Army has more combat experience in its formations today than at any other point in history. Most of our officers and NCOs have completed multiple successful combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. As leaders, we should not abandon the hard fought lessons we have learned in these theaters during the counterinsurgency (COIN) fight. However, we must abandon the "been there, done that" attitude shown by a large number of young combat veterans in the force. During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, our Army had the advantage of fighting insurgents who lacked night-vision capability, air superiority, close combat attack aviation, artillery support, chemical weapons, body armor, and armored vehicles. When fighting the hybrid, near-peer threat a unit will face at JMRC, the formation must address a similar insurgent threat as well as a near-peer force that possesses all the above mentioned capabilities. It is critical when conducting operations at JMRC for units to understand that they will not always be able to gain fire superiority immediately and that only certain munitions fired in the appropriate amount can have an effect on armored vehicles.

OCTs have observed that RTUs ignore the threat that armored vehicles pose, which typically results in the loss of company-sized elements during the exercise. Prior to coming to JMRC, units should develop and execute a leader development program focused on expanding the understanding of fighting in a DATE rotation. Units need to be prepared to address the armor threat as well as develop systems to operate while engaged in continuous contact with the enemy. From the time a unit enters the training area, it is wise to assume it will be in at least one form of contact with the enemy for the duration of its rotation at JMRC.

Prepare for Interoperability

Multinational interoperability is a challenge that JMRC stresses on an unparalleled scale, mostly due to its location in Europe. Most units have conducted training exercises with multinational allies and partners to some degree, but it is tough to find exercises outside of JMRC that are more than 60 percent non-U.S. units or led by a non-U.S. brigade headquarters. The 7th Army Training Command has identified three dimensions that a unit must consider to be effective when partnering with a multinational unit. The three dimensions of interoperability are **technical**, **procedural**, and **human**.

The **technical** dimension includes finding solutions to the challenges of multinational equipment such as mission command and Army Battle Command System (ABCS) equipment that is simply different than U.S. equipment and therefore not typically compatible. The **procedural** dimension encompasses the training and doctrinal differences between our armies and the efforts we make to bridge gaps using NATO standardization of doctrine. The **human** dimension is best described as our efforts to bridge language and cultural differences to build a shared understanding with multinational partners.

As units prepare for a DATE rotation at JMRC, they should consider a comprehensive study across all warfighting functions aimed at informing initial planning sessions with NATO allies and other multinational partners. The U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) commander (LTG Ben Hodges) defines the goal for interoperability as having secure FM

communications, the ability to employ digital fires, and development of a digital common operational picture with our multinational partners and allies. Units must understand the capabilities and limitations of their multinational allies and their equipment in order to find ways to bridge gaps in capability with liaison officer (LNO) teams or have redundant analog systems to meet the USAREUR commander's vision for interoperability between units.

Train with Anti-Tank Weapons Systems

Most company/troop-level leaders do not spend the requisite amount of time training to master the use of anti-tank weapons. Since 1939, when the Russians invaded Finland on the Karelian Isthmus, tanks have been a significant challenge for combat units who lack proficiency with anti-tank weapons. A large percentage of units have not integrated anti-tank weapons into their home-station training. Even when units have trained anti-tank weapon operators, the unit leaders lack experience integrating those systems into their operations effectively. OCTs often observe incorrect firing positions and elements attempting to engage armored vehicles inside the minimum arming distance required for the weapon system. These problems are compounded when working with multinational units who may be using a Panzerfaust or Spike system and are not able to properly integrate an unfamiliar system without a full understanding of its capabilities and limitations. If your unit is unable to integrate individual and collective training with anti-tank systems as a part of the home-station training glide path, then dedicate time during troop leading procedures (TLPs)/intermediate staging base (ISB)/reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) operations to gain proficiency quickly and integrate a discussion on engagement techniques across your multinational task force.

Get the Most Out of MILES

MILES is a point of contention during every rotation at JMRC because unit leaders typically lack understanding of the system and how to maximize its effectiveness during the rotation. OCTs often hear things like:

"*If this was real combat, that element would be destroyed;"*

"This system doesn't work;" and

"The OPFOR is cheating because..."

Leaders who adopt this narrative really only accomplish two things: they expose a low maturity level and demonstrate that they have no idea how to train with MILES equipment. OCTs acknowledge that the system does not perfectly replicate the battlefield effects of combat.

In order to be successful at JMRC, units must understand and accept two key points about MILES and the simulated battlefield environment:

- MILES is designed to provide "a way" to adjudicate effects of weapons systems based on probability, engagement techniques, composition of the engaged vehicle, and ammunition to control a simulated training environment.
- When MILES fails to adjudicate a realistic effect during the rotation, it is the OCT's job to adjudicate effects based on the situation.

Units that accept this and focus on training personnel to use the system properly are immensely more successful. MILES should be treated like any other weapon system or task that needs to be trained on in order to be lethal on the battlefield. Furthermore, units should place command emphasis on understanding how MILES is attached to their assigned equipment, learning how simulated anti-tank systems need to be fired, routinely conducting MILES zero as part of pre-combat inspections, and spot checking to ensure all MILES systems are operational. Units that do not place special emphasis on MILES will not be successful during their rotation.

During every rotation at JMRC, RTUs express frustration during after action reviews (AARs) regarding the replicated effects of their weapons on the OPFOR elements during the exercise. Most leaders who have not served as an OCT or in an OPFOR element at a CTC do not have the context as to why rotational units experience these frustrations. There are two systems that govern battlefield effects replication at JMRC: MILES and the Simulated Artillery and Weapons Effects (SAW-E) system. During the rotation, units will often hear OCTs say that MILES rules the battlefield because OCTs are required to let the systems replicate the fight and only get

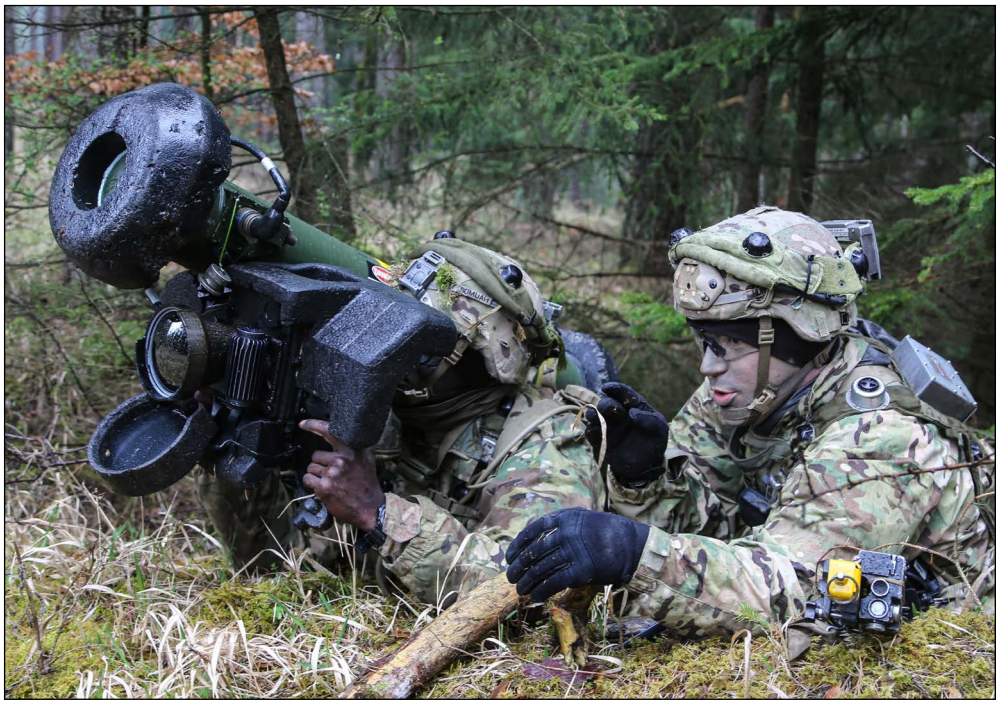


Photo by SGT Matthew Hulett

Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, provide security with a training Javelin shoulder-fired anti-tank missile while conducting defensive operations during exercise Saber Junction 16 in Hohenfels, Germany, on 15 April 2016.

involved with adjudication as a last resort. There are several pitfalls that most units discover at the conclusion of a rotation in the final AARs. A common trend OCTs observe is a unit attempting to destroy a target with an inappropriate amount or type of ammunition. Leaders get incredibly frustrated when they call for fire and the vehicles are not destroyed, but they have not engaged the threat with enough firepower to have a lethal effect.

The second point of contention relates to direct fire weapon systems. All .50 caliber ammunition and below has little to no effect on armored vehicles unless the gunner or troop commander is sitting high in the turret and exposed. In order to effectively address the threat armored vehicles pose, units must consider the location and ability of anti-tank weapons and forward observers to identify and engage armored vehicles. As with artillery and mortars, both MILES and SAW-E work by using probability based on the engagement technique, distance, line of sight, and type of vehicle to determine effects. Most RTUs do not consider the low probability that they will have a catastrophic kill with every shot fired from an anti-tank weapon. Leaders need to understand that based on all the aforementioned factors their anti-tank weapons may or may not have effects on the vehicle they are targeting.

Prior to the rotation, units should focus on effective engagement area development that facilitates early, continuous, effective, and redundant engagement of armored vehicles with anti-tank weapons, close air support (CAS), close combat attack (CCA) aviation, and heavy artillery in engagement areas. During fires planning, leaders, fire supporters, and observers need to understand that vehicles will be moving during their engagements, and the observer plan needs to have triggers that allow time for the mission to be processed and shot in order to have effects on a moving vehicle. Incorporating these techniques will ensure units achieve desired effects on the OPFOR throughout the exercise.

Come Armed with Training Objectives

Training objectives are critical in order to focus the OCT observations on areas the chain of command would like to target. Due to the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) cycles of the last 10 years, most mid-level Army leaders have grown accustomed to being told exactly what training tasks their unit will execute in order to be successful at their mission rehearsal exercise and eventually on their combat deployment. Now that the Army has transitioned to building a force characterized by operational adaptability and sustained readiness for world-wide contingencies, leaders are relearning lessons on training management and how to build and execute a training glide path.

Prior to coming to JMRC, leaders at every echelon should have a clear understanding of their Department of the Army (DA)-directed mission essential task list (METL). A clear understanding of the unit METL combined with a METL discussion with their higher element commander (see Army Training Network Unit Training Management tutorial) should inform training objectives at any CTC. OCTs at JMRC understand that not all units come to the training center have completed all the requirements in the U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) Command Training Guidance regarding CTC preliminary training. OCTs at JMRC tell their counterparts to look at the rotation, regardless where it falls in the training glide path, as a way to target specific areas to improve proficiency on METL tasks and improve readiness regardless of the unit's current level of proficiency. Establishing training objectives early and communicating those objectives to the OCTs will contribute immensely to the amount of growth the formation will experience at the training center.

Bring All of Your MTOE Equipment

OCTs encounter units every rotation that leave key modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) at home station for a variety of reasons. Units leave important equipment such as Joint Chemical Agent Detectors (JCADs), mortar systems, Command Launch Units (CLUs) for Javelin missiles, AT4s, M320 grenade launchers, Joint Service Lightweight Integrated Suit Technology (JSLIST), maps, compasses, Long Range Advanced Surveillance System (LRAS), Lightweight Laser Designator Rangefinders (LLDRs), and thermal sights. Most of the leaders in the organizations that OCTs have observed have conceded that they did not fully understand the capability of the item they left behind and what it brings to the fight. When approaching an era of uncertainty, complexity, and austerity, leaders must remember that the preponderance of our Army's combat experience is not unified land operations against a near-peer threat and must ensure that subordinates understand MTOE equipment is authorized because it is needed and critical for mission accomplishment. OCTs strongly recommend reviewing the unit's MTOE and METL prior to the rotation and bringing all the equipment the Army has allocated the unit to accomplish its METL.

Understand Limitations Imposed by the Terrain

For the most part, all RTUs struggle with the terrain at Hohenfels. The training area there has surprisingly restrictive terrain that causes significant restrictions to unit movement during rotations. Thorough terrain analysis to identify tenable movement corridors and restrictive terrain is key for any unit that intends to conduct operations in the Hohenfels training area. Units routinely underestimate on the length of time necessary for movement to an objective and fail to account for the cost of moving mounted elements through restrictive terrain or through open areas. During engagement area development, units routinely fail to identify likely enemy avenues of approach and locations the enemy will use to bypass their obstacle belts. OCTs rarely observe units releasing reconnaissance assets early enough to do an effective zone or route reconnaissance to confirm or deny assumptions about the terrain and assist in decision points during the planning process.

When coming to JMRC for rotations, ensure that your formation takes the time to thoroughly analyze the terrain and then use your reconnaissance assets to confirm movement corridors and assist with decisions during the planning process and execution. Executing terrain analysis and using

reconnaissance assets early and effectively with a well thought-out collection plan will greatly increase your formation's chances of success during the rotation.

Understand your Multinational Task Force

Due to JMRC's location in Europe, OCTs observe an incredible amount of friction from units not understanding the capabilities and limitations of their multinational partners. JMRC has a unique ability to stress multinational interoperability by task organizing forces that consist of 60 percent multinational partners. OCTs observe situations where the task force is dealing with a problem that could easily be solved if the staff had a more detailed understanding of the capabilities and limitations of multinational partners based on their national caveats, culture, equipment, and doctrine.

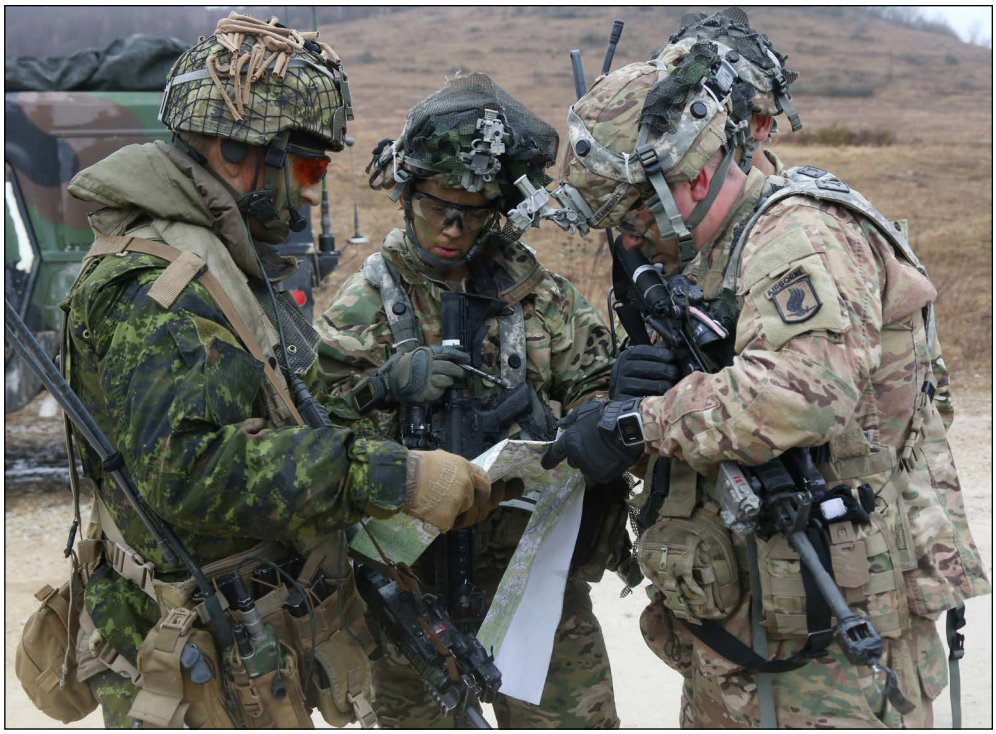


Photo by SPC Nathaniel Nichols

U.S. and Canadian Soldiers plan their next course of action while conducting a leader's recon mission during Exercise Allied Spirit VI at Hohenfels Training Area, Germany, on 19 March 2017.

Through numerous AARs and discussions with the rotational units, OCTs understand that most units do not have time during their busy pre-rotation schedules to manage a comprehensive study of their multinational partners. In order to bridge this gap of understanding, the OCTs recommend early discussion with assigned multinational partners with a focus on equipment, capabilities, and employment considerations aimed at creating shared understanding. This should occur at mid and final planning conferences as well as during the Joint Combined Academics Program (JCAP). Units need to address and identify liaison teams early so they will effectively serve as the connective tissue with multinational allies and partners.

Additionally, when the formation arrives at the ISB, have each multinational unit give your staff a comprehensive lay down of their doctrinal capabilities, equipment, and employment considerations to inform the staff's planning efforts. Involving your multinational partners in the planning efforts and having a clear communication plan with them will greatly increase the effectiveness of your multinational task force.

Engagement Area Development is a Continuous Process

Engagement area development is a constant struggle for units at JMRC. Most units only consider the seven steps of engagement area development when they are conducting defensive operations. However, during DATE rotations, OCTs have found these steps are applicable to all facets of unified land operations. For example, using the steps of engagement area development to establish effective observation posts is key to reconnaissance assets conducting security operations. During offensive operations, understanding how the enemy will fight in the defense requires an in-depth look at how the enemy will array its elements.

OCTs observe units that lack understanding of how to effectively plan and integrate fires based on the location of their observers, the approach routes, and the rate of movement of enemy elements. Company fire support elements are routinely frustrated by the lack of responsive fires that could have been mitigated with pre-coordinated fire support measures. Every rotation the engineer obstacle priority rarely matches the supported unit commander's intent because the engineers are not involved in the planning process and do not have the context required to plan and integrate obstacles effectively.

OCTs rarely observe effective engagement area rehearsals mostly due to time and leaders not understanding the benefit of conducting rehearsals. Effective rehearsals could alleviate most of the issues the OCTs observe such as actions when disengagement criteria are met, passage of lines, use of effective triggers, and engagement criteria and priorities. During the force-on-force portion of the rotation, company commanders have not had the time to give detailed enough guidance to subordinate leaders to conduct effective engagement area development. Leaders down to the team level must understand all seven steps of engagement area development and must be able to implement them throughout their operations during rotations.

Maximize the Use of Reconnaissance Elements

During every JMRC rotation, OCTs observe units that do not effectively maximize the use of reconnaissance assets to action a well thought-out, deliberate collection plan to inform commanders at echelon. Over the last 10 years in Iraq and

Afghanistan, reconnaissance forces have been relegated to conducting economy of force infantry missions and serving as an additional battlespace owner. During unified land operations, staffs should not marginalize the reconnaissance effort and ignore the deep fight the way they have grown accustomed to in the last 10 years of combat operations.

Issuing generic priority intelligence requirements that are not tied to decision points for the commander is another systemic problem that stems from our Army's lack of experience with unified land operations against a near-peer capable threat. OCTs routinely observe units that task their reconnaissance elements to perform rear guard and then send combined arms elements directly to an objective with no handover of the objective from a reconnaissance element. Forcing your attacking elements to conduct an approach march to a heavily defended objective without a reconnaissance effort limits the effectiveness of attacking forces during almost every rotation. Commanders should push the staff to construct an operational framework that allows reconnaissance assets to deploy early and provide their doctrinal capabilities to the task force early and often.

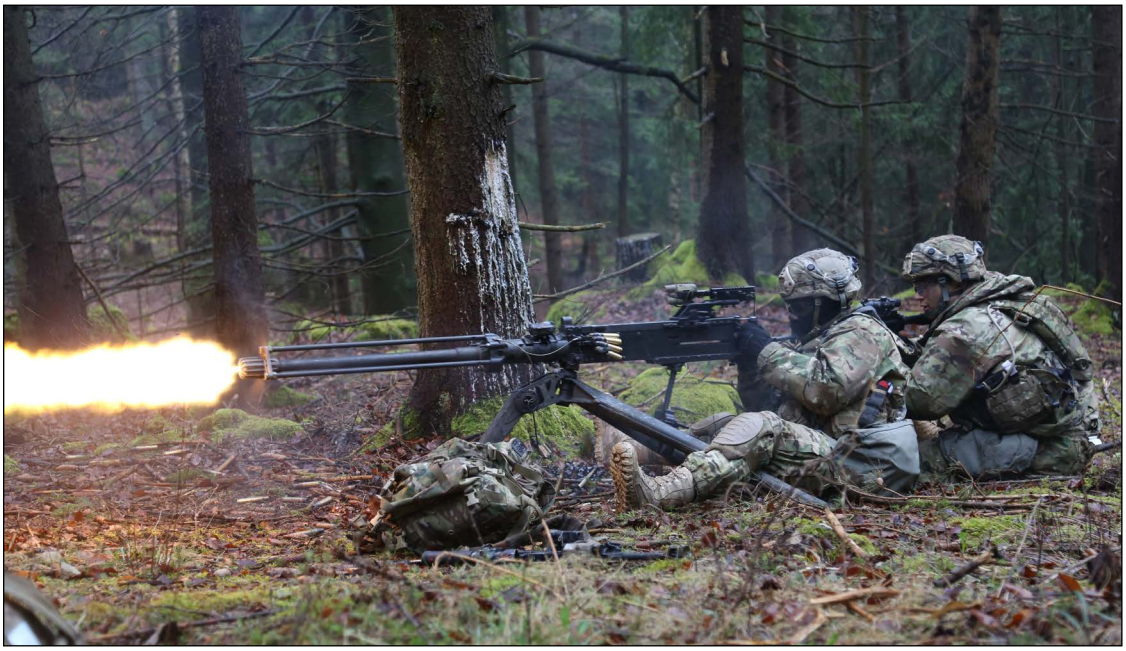
Train Vehicle Identification, Order of Battle, and Reporting

During every rotation, leaders misidentify vehicles, do not understand indicators, and misreport to their commanders — all which can have a catastrophic effect on a task force's operations. Leaders and Soldiers at all levels need to have a clear understanding of the difference between a T-72 tank, a Boyevaya Mashina Pekhoty (BMP), Boyevaya Razvedyvatelnaya Dozornaya Mashina (BRDM), and a technical vehicle. Leaders need to understand that reporting that an element has engaged and destroyed two T-72 tanks has a much different meaning for the commander than if the element only actually destroyed two BRDMs. OCTs often observe units that misreport, which forces commanders to make uninformed decisions that have second and third order effects across the formation. Ensure the elements have a clear understanding of the order of battle and know how the enemy will fight prior to conducting operations.

Allowing company commanders to have enough fidelity with the order of battle to assist the unit intelligence officer in determining what element of the enemy formation they are currently fighting greatly increases the situational awareness across the formation and the situational understanding of commanders at echelon.

As leaders move forward and continue to pursue objective T and the sustained readiness model, it is clear that leaders at echelon must engage in the training process and maximize every opportunity at CTCs. These observations were made by OCTs who are learning from challenges faced by leaders currently serving in demanding and challenging leadership positions. These observations are not meant to cast doubt on the abilities of leaders serving in tough assignments, but rather share the tough lessons learned in JMRC's realistic training environment. There are a ton of great lessons learned and best practices that arise from training rotations at JMRC every day, and our Army needs to share these with the entire force to increase our readiness for unified land operations against any adversary.

CPT Michael P. Wallace is currently serving as the aide de camp to the deputy commanding general of U.S. Army Europe. He previously served as the cavalry troop observer-controller-trainer (OCT) at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Hohenfels, Germany. His other assignments include serving as a rifle platoon leader, company executive officer (XO), and assistant S3 Air with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, N.C.; battle major for Regional Command South during the 82nd Airborne Division's deployment to Afghanistan; and company commander and BCT chief of current operations with the 1st BCT, 82nd Airborne Division. CPT Wallace received his commissioned in 2007 from the University of Richmond ROTC program.



Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, provide covering fire while conducting a react-to-contact scenario during Exercise Allied Spirit VI at 7th Army Training Command's Hohenfels Training Area, Germany, on 23 March 2017. Allied Spirit VI involved more than 2,700 participants from 12 NATO and Partner for Peace nations.

Photo by PFC Keion Jackson