

Building Readiness in the Total Force

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One Army

In his initial message as Chief of Staff of the Army, GEN Mark A. Milley wrote, “Readiness for ground combat is — and will remain — the U.S. Army’s number one priority. We will always be ready to fight today, and we will always prepare to fight tomorrow.” Executing the Army’s operational concept — unified land operations — demands the effective integration of the Regular Army and Reserve Components (RC — the Army Reserve and National Guard). As noted in Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Operations*, “Only by training as an integrated Total Army in a replicated training environment against a realistic threat will the Army generate appropriate readiness levels to meet current requirements and build endurance for prolonged operations.” The effective integration of all components of the Total Army is critical to our ability to win on the battlefield.

To build readiness and to improve the integration of Active Component (AC) and RC forces, the 76th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) from the Indiana Army National Guard (ARNG) and the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division conducted an integrated training exercise in the summer of 2016. The exercise — eXportable Combat Training Capability (XCTC) 16-04 — improved the readiness of both units and was a major step forward in the Army’s attempt to integrate AC and RC forces. The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the training event and to discuss lessons learned from the planning and execution. For many Soldiers and leaders in both IBCTs, this was the first training event that integrated AC and RC forces. Given the increasing importance of Total Army integration, we wanted to provide major lessons learned from XCTC 16-04 to better prepare units for future integrated training.

XCTC Overview

The XCTC program consists of a brigade field training exercise (FTX) that is designed to certify platoon proficiency in an environment that is similar to that of a standard Combat Training Center (CTC) rotation. Based on the brigade commander’s training objectives, the program develops and customizes a series of training lanes for maneuver and support units. The 76th IBCT used the XCTC program to prepare subordinate units for a Joint Readiness Training



Figure 1 — Locations and Units Involved in XCTC 16-04



An observer-coach-trainer from the 1st Battalion, 335th Infantry Regiment leads an after action review following a mortar firing exercise at Camp Atterbury, IN, on 12 August 2016. (Photos by SGT Jarred Woods)

Center rotation (Fort Polk, LA) scheduled for the summer of 2017. For 2nd IBCT, the exercise was an opportunity to increase small-unit proficiency up to the platoon level and to improve integration and collaboration with the National Guard. Initial guidance from COL Robert Burke, commander of the 76th IBCT, set the stage for a successful training event. He said, “We’re all held to the same tasks and standards. We all learn from each other no matter what flavor of service you are. It makes us a better Army, regardless of component.”

Elements of the 2nd IBCT, along with more than 3,900 Soldiers from the 76th IBCT, conducted the training at three locations – Camp Atterbury, IN, the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center near Butlerville, IN, and Fort Knox, KY (see Figure 1). Units from the 76th IBCT were trained and evaluated on troop-leading procedures, movement formations, mission command, and logistical support. Units from the 2nd IBCT provided a realistic and well-trained opposition force (OPFOR) for the 76th IBCT’s training. The exercise design also enabled 2nd IBCT to conduct small-unit training on the XCTC training lanes.

Soldiers from the 157th Infantry Brigade, First Army Division East, from Camp Atterbury provided teachers, coaches, and mentors for the training event. These First Army Soldiers also used the opportunity to improve their readiness for their primary mission to mobilize, train, and oversee the pre-deployment preparation for all deploying U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard Soldiers.

The value of the XCTC was that it allowed both the 76th IBCT and the 2nd IBCT to train and certify platoons in a demanding and complex training environment. Most importantly, the training validated the 76th IBCT’s unit readiness as well as its ability to integrate into a Total Army scenario prior to its deployment to JRTC.

Brigade Warfighter Exercise

In addition to the XCTC exercise, the 76th IBCT simultaneously conducted a brigade warfighter exercise (BWFX) that incorporated the U.S. Army Reserve’s 437th Civil Affairs (CA) Team. During the BWFX, the 76th IBCT’s brigade and battalion staffs were externally evaluated by Operations Group Charlie observer-controller-trainers (OCTs) from Fort Leavenworth’s Mission Command Training Program (MCTP). The integration of the USAR civil affairs team into the staff enhanced the brigade’s capability and improved planning and operations. The 437th CA Team is scheduled to train with the 76th IBCT during its JRTC rotation in the summer of 2017. The integration of a USAR unit into a National Guard training exercise that was evaluated by active-duty OCTs is another example of training to improve Total Army readiness.

Lessons Learned

1) AC and RC integrated training events are opportunities to bolster the proficiency and readiness of both types of units. In the past, some units have made the mistake of treating integrated training events as unit taskings. Simply providing forces as tasked will degrade the training and readiness of both types of units. Instead, leaders should pursue integrated training opportunities at home station and at the CTCs. The main purpose of this exercise was for the 76th IBCT to train on platoon collective tasks and mission command systems from the company to brigade level. However, because 2nd IBCT viewed the event as a training opportunity and not a tasking, they were able to train company and battalion mission essential task list (METL) tasks while serving as the OPFOR. Throughout the training event, 2nd IBCT conducted platoon LFXs, squad situational training exercises, and mission command and sustainment training at the company and battalion level over three geographically separated areas. Collaboration between active and reserve leaders during the planning and execution of the training event forged professional relationships that will be critical for future missions.

2) Leaders from AC and RC must collaborate early and often. Collaboration and dialogue between leaders at various levels is critical for three reasons. First, collaboration between commanders and staffs allows units to create a shared understanding of purpose. This shared understanding reduces friction and maximizes the net training effect of the exercise for all units. Second, collaboration helps leaders identify and mitigate risks and maximize opportunities. Collaboration ensures unity of effort. Finally, collaboration bolsters critical analysis and the assessment mechanisms used to evaluate units in the training. Collaboration early and often between commanders and staffs from 76th IBCT, 2nd IBCT, and the 437th CA Team ensured that the XCTC and the BWFX were effective training events. Early collaboration also allowed units to select and train the personnel who coached, trained, and evaluated units on the XCTC lanes.

Weekly in-progress reviews (IPRs) conducted between the 76th IBCT and all enabling agencies were vital to mission success because they provided a comprehensive outline of requirements and progress toward a successful training event. The IPR process that began months in advance of execution also included the names and contact information of personnel in critical enabling agencies. This process paid huge dividends leading up to the final planning conference held at Camp Atterbury. The 2nd IBCT gained access to a network of resources and critical support nodes during the training event. Due to these early collaborative efforts, the 76th IBCT and 2nd IBCT were able to develop logistics support packages across all classes of supply, establish accounts with support agencies at Fort Knox and Camp Atterbury, and consolidate OPFOR support requirements to gain shared understanding across all echelons. As a result of the groundwork laid well in advance, the final planning conference served as a final confirmation of the roles, requirements, and expectations of the parties involved, as opposed to a scramble to develop a comprehensive plan.

3) AC and RC integrated training events help to reduce and eliminate the biases and misconceptions that leaders and Soldiers have about other components. Throughout the planning process, weekly IPRs, and final planning conference, it became evident to the 2nd IBCT that the 76th IBCT was extremely capable of conducting effective and long-term planning through the military decision-making process (MDMP) with a cohesive staff that had been together for several years. Rifle companies from 2nd IBCT validated all LFX lanes prior to the execution by NG Soldiers. When Soldiers from different components work with each other in training events like the XCTC and the BWFX, they shed erroneous perceptions that many have about other components. Soldiers and leaders realize that they share a common interest in training, readiness, and ultimately national security. Reducing or eliminating biases during training ensures a unified and cohesive force during multi-component deployments to support contingency operations abroad. Through tough, realistic training, Soldiers from the 76th IBCT, 2nd IBCT, and the 437th CA Team learned that we are a better Army when we fight together.

4) Unit training is more effective when AC and RC combine resources. Integrated training allows units to share resources to execute more comprehensive training events. This exercise was nearly equivalent to a CTC rotation for all components involved. Each component executed deployment operations from their assigned post to Camp Atterbury and Fort Knox. All components were able to train individual and collective tasks from squad to brigade level against a near-peer opponent with external and professional OCTs. If the Army National Guard had to conduct the XCTC and BWFX on its own, the training quality would have been degraded. By pooling the resources of the 2nd IBCT, First Army OCTs, and the 437th Civil Affairs Team, the 76th IBCT's training experience was much better than what the 76th could have achieved on its own. Consolidating manpower, equipment, and training resources

improved the proficiency and readiness of all units involved in the training.

Total Army Total Readiness

XCTC 16-04 and the BWFX improved individual and collective readiness and the integration of the Total Army. The 76th IBCT certified subordinate units for an upcoming JRTC rotation, the 2nd IBCT improved individual and small-unit proficiency, and the 437th CA team conducted operations while integrated into a brigade staff. The integration of First Army and MCTP Operations Group OCTs ensured that Soldiers and leaders were coached and mentored by trained personnel. The tough, realistic, and multi-faceted training met the commander's intent and presented scenarios that required adaptive and resilient formations, agile leaders, and staffs willing to collaborate. Ultimately, XCTC and the BWFX proved to be a good example of leaders seizing the opportunity to build and maintain total force readiness in our Army.

COL Robert D. Burke is the commander of the 76th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), Indiana Army National Guard. His previous assignments included serving as the G3 of the 38th Infantry Division in Indianapolis; deputy commander of the 76th IBCT; commander of the 1st Squadron, 152nd Cavalry Regiment in New Albany, IN; and commander of the 1st Battalion, 151st Infantry Regiment in New Albany. He earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Norwich University and master's degree in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College.

COL Eric Lopez is the deputy commander of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Fort Campbell, KY. His previous assignments include serving as the commander of the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division. He earned a bachelor's degree in history from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY, and a master's in military strategic studies from Marine Corps University.

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Infantrymen with A Company, 1st Battalion, 151st Infantry Regiment, 76th IBCT, move to engage the enemy during the eXportable Combat Training Capability at Camp Atterbury, on 8 August 2016.