

Fundamentals, Adaptive Leadership and Mission Command:

Meeting the Challenge of Executing Missions in Deployed Environments While Maintaining Home-Station Readiness

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The 3rd Cavalry Regiment (CR), a Stryker brigade combat team (SBCT), has deployed multiple times to Iraq and Afghanistan like most BCTs in our Army. However, not until its most recent deployment to Afghanistan (May 2016 to February 2017) did the regiment encounter several unique challenges, many of which now constitute a new “norm” for BCTs in the Army — deploying with less than half of its assigned force and being spread throughout an operational theater. Thus, the 3rd CR’s preparation for and execution of its mission offers pertinent lessons to other BCTs which may face a similar set of challenges in the future.

The 3rd CR was successful in spite of the challenges it faced because it focused on **developing fundamental skills, encouraging adaptive leadership, and exercising mission command**. Strengthening these three initiatives enabled the regiment and its troopers to accomplish a variety of unique mission sets, both in combat and at home station. As future leaders prepare for similar challenges, they should plan and execute a training path to accomplish five things:

- Build warfighting competence through decisive action (DA) training;
- Integrate specific mission requirements into training events where appropriate;
- Develop the right training plan to appropriately switch from a DA-focused mission set to mission-specific training;
- Develop adaptive leaders who build teams and solve complex problems; and
- Continually exercise mission command.

This article proceeds in three parts. First, we will analyze the regiment’s actions within the broader context of the training and operating environment. Second, we will demonstrate how the regiment ensured mission success as they planned, prepared, and executed home-station training and combat operations. We will conclude by offering recommendations to the Army going forward.

Defining the Problem

Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Operations*, conceptualizes the Army’s unified land operations (ULO) framework as the activities units undertake to “synchronize the efforts of non-governmental entities with military operations in order to achieve unity of effort.” ULO are executed through decisive action, by means of combined arms maneuver (CAM) as well as wide area security (WAS), and guided by mission command.¹

Decisive action requires simultaneous combinations of offense, defense, and stability tasks. Typically thought of in terms of decisive battles fought squarely against conventional or hybrid threats, units often revert back to conducting

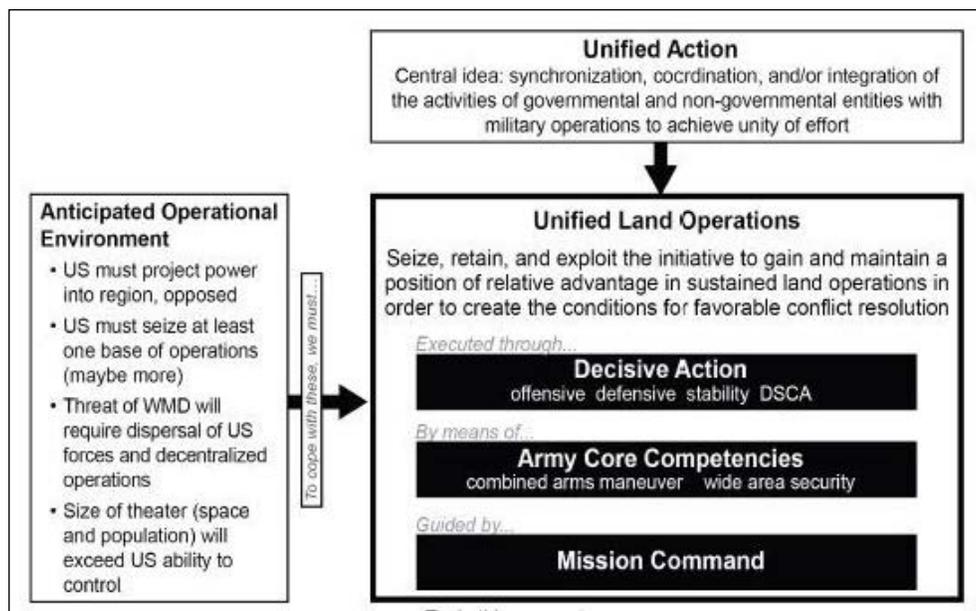


Figure 1 — Unified Land Operations

“force-on-force” training. However, under the new ULO framework, it must be noted that decisive action consists not just of the traditional offensive and defensive tasks but also stability operations and defense support of civil authorities.²

Doctrine describes adequately what is supposed to happen. The operating environment greatly affects what actually happens. The regiment’s squadrons, troops, and small units experienced the full challenges associated with training for multiple mission sets. At Fort Hood, TX, these challenges included personnel turnover, maintenance schedules and equipment fielding, and the professional growth associated with conducting a maneuver-centric training path. In Afghanistan, troops worked through force management-level requirements, targeting engagement authorities, and force protection needs. These constraints affected daily operations even as 3rd CR advised and assisted a partner force battling a resurgent Taliban, a persistent al Qaeda threat, and an aggressive Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-K). It is within this complex framework that the 3rd CR would plan, prepare for, and execute its mission in support of Operation Resolute Support (ORS) 2016-17.

Building Capability by Training the Fundamentals

The primary reason the regiment successfully met the demands of executing the forward and home-station missions is because it focused on training and developing fundamental skills. Having redeployed from ORS in the spring of 2015, the regiment began training for its next mission, which at the time, remained unknown. After experiencing significant personnel turnover and re-hauling equipment, the regiment’s training cycle began in earnest. Initially, squadrons focused on increasing operational readiness, which included the development of individual and collective skills as well as maintaining the regiment’s fleet of Strykers. This period of fundamentals-focused training would prove extremely important. Not only did it develop the individual and collective skills necessary to further build trained and ready troops and squadrons, but it also laid the foundation from which troopers could later transition to assume the wide variety of skill sets needed in Afghanistan.

Individual proficiency was the regiment’s early focus in the summer of 2015. Using Army readiness standards as a guide, the regiment and its squadrons ensured that all Soldiers met individual medical, fitness, weapons qualification, and other administrative requirements. To increase the proportion of healthy troopers, physical readiness training was redesigned to focus on strength, agility, and endurance. Additionally, special population physical training (PT) was organized at the squadron level (as opposed to the troop level where typically leaders were inevitably consumed by other tasks). Troops spent weeks rebuilding marksmanship proficiency utilizing basic, close quarters, and advanced progressions.

As a motorized brigade, the regiment also needed to emphasize the maintenance and readiness of its Stryker fleet.

Unlike infantry BCTs (IBCTs), which can largely meet company-level training objectives without incorporating vehicles, SBCTs and armored BCTs (ABCTs) must integrate their vehicle fleet into collective training tasks. Unfortunately, by the end of ORS 14-15, troopers had not seen their Strykers for months. As a direct result, leaders and troopers lacked experience in maintenance as well as mounted marksmanship and tactics. Moreover, at Fort Hood, a significant amount of vehicle maintenance was performed by civilian contract and contributed to the loss of operator 10-level proficiency. However, through proactive leader involvement and adherence to strict maintenance standards, the regiment successfully regained this proficiency over time. The regiment specifically found a way to account for the myriad of crew certifications, platform modifications, communication integration, and maintenance schedules associated with its fleet. The 3rd CR's 1st Squadron, for example, achieved the highest operational readiness rate through driver and crew certification, maintenance training, and by exceeding post-wide commodity shop standards. In this case, leader involvement ensured trooper ownership and care of equipment at the operator level and ultimately contributed to their success.

As individual proficiency improved, the regiment deliberately introduced collective training with a focus on developing the skills of CAM. Proficiency in CAM requires a significant amount of organizational energy, dedication, and in many cases, a willingness to learn (or in some cases, relearn). Beginning in the summer of 2015 and lasting through the regiment's decisive action training environment (DATE) rotation (16-04) to the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, CA, in February 2016, the regiment's collective training experience demonstrated the unique interaction between dismounted infantry squads and reconnaissance teams, terrain, the Stryker platform, and various enabler units.

Early on, the collective training period focused on the crew and squad level. Maneuver squadrons conducted team and squad live-fire exercises (LFXs) while vehicle and fires crews conducted Stryker live-fire density as well as M777 and fire support team (FIST) certifications. In the early fall, squadrons conducted platoon LFXs which incorporated the use of Strykers.



Troopers with Lightning Troop, 4th Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, tactically move through grassy terrain toward their target on 27 April 2016 at Pilot Knob Multi-Use Range on Fort Hood. (Photo by SSG Tomora Clark)

Then, in the late fall, the regiment drastically increased the pressure on its squadrons by conducting a regimental field training exercise (FTX). This exercise replicated NTC’s hybrid and conventional threat environment and included both live and constructive iterations in the form of a troop combined arms live-fire exercise (CALFEX) and FTX respectively. In turn, these were controlled by a regimental tactical operations center (TOC) concurrently conducting a fire control exercise (FCX). The CALFEX specifically tested troops in their ability to integrate fires and breaching assets with organic mounted and dismounted squads as they reduced obstacles and seized objectives. The concurrent FTX, Rifles Strike II, focused on developing the respective squadron and regimental staffs in the conduct of supporting troop movement to contact, defense, and urban clearance. The FCX — the first done in over a decade — not only controlled CALFEX iterations but also simulated command post (CP) activities across multiple domains as leaders reacted to friendly and enemy injects. The completion of all of these exercises ultimately certified each troop, squadron, and the collective regiment for NTC.

To enable CAM, the other warfighting functions also focused on the fundamentals. The regiment’s Military Intelligence (MI) professionals began by establishing Fort Hood’s first MI gunnery in more than two years. Unit MI teams focused on the basics of analysis: intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB — ATP 2-01.3) to provide intelligence support to mission analysis, operational terms and military symbols (ADRP 1-02) to enable analysts to communicate effectively to maneuver leaders, and lastly opposing force (OPFOR) tactics (TC 7-100.2) to understand the fundamentals of offensive and defensive maneuver. Gunnery methodology established a regimen of sequenced individual training that would develop the necessary skills for collective training. MI Soldiers of varying disciplines trained on individual systems and programs to hone knowledge of their instrument of war. Many of these systems were a part of the Distributed Common Ground System-Army (DCGS-A) family of intelligence systems that provided interconnectivity to other Army Battle Command Systems (ABCS). DCGS-A was essential to allow intelligence to feed into mission command. Analysts and collectors trained on their DCGS-A systems in classrooms and in field environments throughout the training cycle. This painstaking process during MI gunnery paid dividends both at the regimental FTX and NTC, which in turn enabled staffs to leverage these powerful tool sets and intelligence feeds once deployed.

During this training period, our higher headquarters informed us that our mission would change — that the regiment needed to be capable not only of conducting pure DA but also security force assistance (SFA) as seen in Afghanistan. Yet, the requirement to conduct a regimental-level FTX as well as a DA rotation at NTC did not disappear. Thus, the regiment faced somewhat of a conundrum as it departed for NTC: the missions at NTC would not fully replicate the operating environment in Afghanistan. Indeed, the lack of a simulated partnered force, ORS legal authorities and rules of engagement, and theater-specific concepts of operation (CONOP) requirements suggested that the regiment would leave its NTC rotation fully trained in CAM but merely proficient in mission-specific tasks.

Figure 2 — The Regimental FTX

DEC TRP LFX																	
	1-DEC-15	2-DEC-15	3-DEC-15	4-DEC-15	5-DEC-15	6-DEC-15	7-DEC-15	8-DEC-15	9-DEC-15	10-DEC-15	11-DEC-15	12-DEC-15	13-DEC-15	14-DEC-15	15-DEC-15		
30-NOV-15																	
Set-Up	TLP	A/1/3			Re-Training	LFX Retrain	G/3/3			Re-Training	TLP				MICLIC		
		TLP	B/1/3			LFX Retrain		H/3/3			LFX Retrain	1/3 FCX					
			TLP	C/1/3					I/3/3					3/3 FCX			
	TLP	K/4/3+Predator PLT LFX w/Tiger					K/4/3 FTX									4/3 FCX	
		L/4/3 FTX				TLP	L/4/3+Pred PLT LFX w/Thunder										
							M/4/3 FTX						M/4/3+Pred PLT LFX				
	Thunder FTX				Tiger FTX				RGT/SQDN FCX								
Unit	1 Dec	2 Dec	3 Dec	4 Dec	5 Dec	6 Dec	7 Dec	8 Dec	9 Dec	10 Dec	11 Dec	12 Dec	13 Dec	14 Dec	15 Dec		
A/1/3	CALFEX	CALFEX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	TLP	FCX	REC	REC	REC		
B/1/3	FTX	CALFEX	CALFEX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	TLP	FCX	REC	REC	REC		
C/1/3	FTX	FTX	CALFEX	CALFEX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	TLP	FCX	REC	REC	REC		
G/3/3	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	CALFEX	CALFEX	FTX	FTX	FTX	TLP	TLP	FCX	REC	REC		
H/3/3	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	CALFEX	CALFEX	FTX	FTX	TLP	TLP	FCX	REC	REC		
I/3/3	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	CALFEX	CALFEX	FTX	TLP	TLP	FCX	REC	REC		
K/4/3	CALFEX	CALFEX	CALFEX	CALFEX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	TLP	TLP	TLP	FCX	REC		
L/4/3	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	CALFEX	CALFEX	CALFEX	CALFEX	FTX	TLP	TLP	TLP	FCX	REC		
M/4/3	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	TLP	FCX	FCX	FCX	REC		
Pioneer	CALFEX	CALFEX	CALFEX	CALFEX	FTX	CALFEX	CALFEX	CALFEX	CALFEX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	REC		
RSS	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	FTX	REC		
Steel	CALFEX	CALFEX	CALFEX	CALFEX	FTX	CALFEX	CALFEX	CALFEX	CALFEX	FTX	TLP	FCX	FCX	FCX	REC		

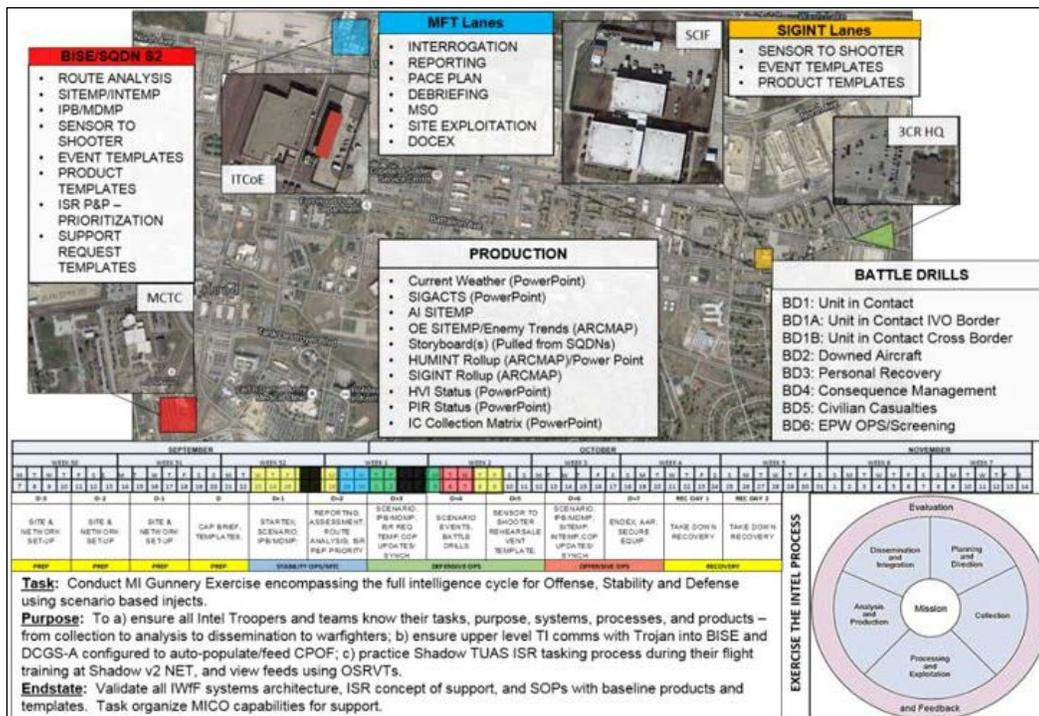


Figure 3 — MI Gunnery

After a short but intense mission analysis, the regimental and subordinate staffs concluded that the regiment needed to conduct a concentrated training progression to certify individuals and junior leaders on mission-specific tasks prior to deploying. Key tasks revolved around critical recertification of drivers and gun crews for usage of specific in-theater vehicle platforms as well as route clearance and counter-improvised explosive device (C-IED) training for engineers. In order to prepare for Guardian Angel (GA) requirements, troops would need small arms progressions and advanced situational awareness training (ASAT). The regimental intelligence section, along with its MI company (MICO), would also need to synchronize information collection (IC) platforms with analytical systems being used in theater to ensure maximum input and output of exploitable intelligence products. Additionally, intelligence personnel within the regiment would need to transition their focus from the expansive doctrinal methodology of a conventional “near-peer” threat to the highly dynamic and diverse counterinsurgency mindset. Squadrons would also need to work with Fort Hood Training Support to replicate expeditionary advisory platform (EAP) operations and fixed-site security operations. Finally, with little time to prepare for its upcoming train, advise, and assist (TAA) mission, the regiment reached out to the forward deployed unit (3rd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division) in Train, Advise, and Assist Command-East (TAAC-E) to prepare an Afghan-centric mission readiness exercise (MRX).

In February 2016, the regiment executed NTC Rotation 16-04. This DA rotation trained the regimental commander and staff in synchronizing assets in time and space against a hybrid threat. This hybrid threat consisted of irregular, special operations forces (SOF), or non-state actors with conventional weapons and maneuver capabilities. As such, this rotation offered opportunities for junior leaders to incorporate the Stryker platform against tanks and infantry fighting vehicles in a CAM and WAS environment. During the rotation, the Brave Rifles conducted one regimental defense and three iterations of offensive operations to include a regimental LFX. As such, the rotation at the NTC offered the regiment multiple repetitions to further develop and enhance the fundamental skills which it had trained during the preceding nine months. Uniquely, 2nd Squadron was on a separate training path and would not participate. Instead, a combined arms battalion, combat service support battalion, aviation task force, and Paladin battery were attached to the regiment. These organizations brought with them capabilities foreign to the regiment. To ensure success, these units integrated with 3rd CR during the FTX, FCX, and certified artillery Table 18 live-fire density prior to execution.

Undoubtedly, this DATE rotation thoroughly tested the regiment’s ability to execute mission command and utilize organic systems in an austere environment. As such, the rotation at NTC exposed and underscored several relative strengths and weaknesses of the regiment. One of the relative strengths exposed was the regiment’s ability to employ

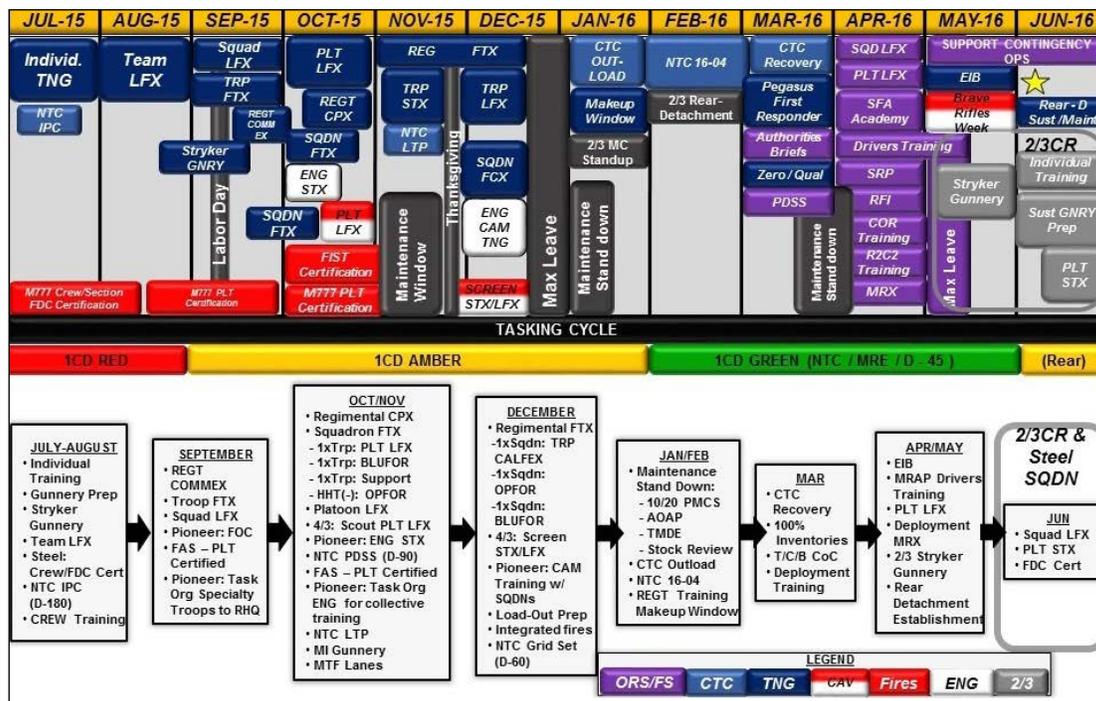


Figure 4 — The Road to War

the Stryker as a mobility platform vice fighting vehicle. This attribute surfaced while encountering the significant armored threat either during movements or within complex or urban terrain. In these instances, commanders refined their ability to utilize the Stryker either as a mobility platform, a support-by-fire platform, or a follow-on force. Specifically, troops maneuvered to vehicle drop-off points, conducted offset dismounted infiltration, and completed their stated mission successfully. A second strength exposed during the rotation was the ability of the regiment's combat support officers and NCOs to accurately predict the enemy's course of action and employ multiple ISR assets and targeting methods to find, fix, and enable the finish during operations. This included the integration of several systems, such as Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2) or Joint Capabilities Release (JCR) software, with geospatial intelligence and organic unmanned aerial system (UAS) enablers. Ultimately, this provided commanders with a timely and accurate read on the enemy's composition, disposition, and courses of action. Their ability to consistently provide intelligence and enable mission command was not founded entirely on systems or on a rigid cycle but, rather, the fundamentals engrained during earlier training events. Finally, the use, comprehension, and display of the common operating picture (COP) using collaborative platforms such as JCR and Command Post of the Future (CPOF) continued to progress during NTC. These systems and capabilities improved the commander's battlefield understanding to enable his ability to provide intent to his subordinate commanders.

In terms of relative weaknesses exposed at NTC, the greatest concerned communications. The vast distances at NTC directly affected FM retransmission (RETRANS) placement and therefore range of capabilities. Significant friction concerning the establishment and use of upper and lower tactical internet (TI) hindered horizontal and vertical communication. With respect to fires, although targeting proved effective in support of the deep scheme of maneuver, failures in communications and redundancies in the approvals process hampered the synchronization of fire and maneuver at the small unit level. Additionally, complex terrain and enemy capabilities influenced fixed-site security to become an economy-of-force effort. As a result, few troopers gained any significant repetition in this regard and would inevitably retrain security operations prior to deployment. Finally, shortages in manpower continued to lower effectiveness on the battlefield (even if notional). For example, rifle platoons averaged two fully manned squads; the average mounted reconnaissance section had only three to five dismounts. Furthermore, the average NCO was serving at one echelon above his typical position. Although this presented the regiment's leaders with opportunities for growth, it had a direct and tangible impact on combat power and maneuver capabilities in training.

After returning from NTC, the regiment conducted brief recovery before executing a short but intense training period to certify newly arrived troopers and all leaders prior to deployment. This period included Expert Infantryman

Badge (EIB) training in support of fundamental individual tasks as well as other collective, mission-specific tasks. Many of these tasks proved difficult to replicate, such as contracting, dynamic targeting operations, or working through host-nation counterparts. Although the squadrons and the regimental staff touched these elements during the MRX, they would not gain full proficiency until deployed. This was also true in many instances for the troop level and below. For example, although 60mm mortars are not organic to a reconnaissance squadron, during the deployment, 4th Squadron certified these crews and utilized the asset on multiple patrols. Additionally, C-IED and route clearance training, which would prove essential in Afghanistan, was fundamentally constrained at Fort Hood. Dismounted clearance equipment, for example, was not readily available for Soldier use. As a direct result, route clearance was conducted as an off-post training event at Fort Leonard Wood, MO. Other small unit requirements — such as sensitive site exploitation (SSE) tactics, SOF support, and Guardian Angel requirements — were difficult to incorporate given the focus on CAM. Perhaps the constraint most difficult to replicate was the impact of terrain and weather on both organic and/or theater-level assets. In addition, typically highly involved staff efforts such as deliberate “green” and “red” targeting were virtually impossible to replicate simply because these processes remained underdeveloped until the regiment actually deployed.

By April 2016, the regiment had spent nearly 12 months executing a high operational tempo training program focused on the fundamentals of DA. At key moments, mission-specific training had also been introduced. In doing so, the regiment’s leaders helped develop a foundation of skills which emphasized individual and collective proficiency across each of the warfighting functions. Moreover, multiple repetitions of training, both at Fort Hood and at the NTC, instilled a high degree of confidence in the regiment’s troopers as they prepared to deploy. Most importantly, the regiment’s training cycle successfully built a foundation of fundamental skills which enabled the regiment and its troopers to adapt to the specific demands of operating within TAAC-E.

Encouraging Adaptive Leadership and Teamwork

The second reason behind the regiment’s ability to overcome the challenges associated with this period of concurrent combat and home-station training was the regiment’s continual emphasis on leader development and team building.



Soldiers from the 3rd Cavalry Regiment identify enemy targets during the unit’s National Training Center rotation on 21 February 2016. (Photo by SPC Joshua Wooten)

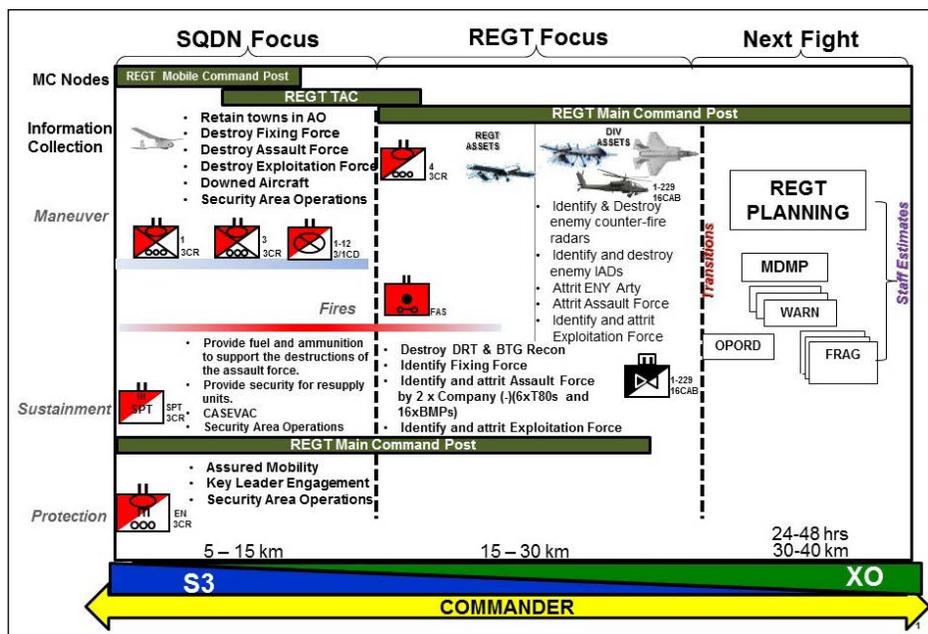


Figure 5 — How We Fight LPD Series

Throughout the training cycle, the regiment continued to address an existential shortage in senior officers and NCOs. To compensate, the regiment sought to continually challenge its on-hand leaders through a variety of methods. This enabled the regiment to select the right leaders to serve in the right roles and positions where they, subsequently, could build cohesive teams capable of accomplishing their respectively assigned missions.

One of the key ways the regiment challenged its junior leaders — to include platoon sergeants, platoon leaders, first sergeants, and troop commanders — was through a series of deliberate oral, written, and physical events. Individual briefings, counseling sessions, professional military discussions, and PT revealed unique personalities as well as individual leader strengths and weaknesses. These events, and their results, enabled regimental and squadron leadership to better compare available leaders with the needs associated with future roles and responsibilities.

The primary method of leader development outside of training events was through a robust leader professional development (LPD) program to develop the key leaders in the squadrons as well as in the entire regimental staff on how to fight and win in both DA and SFA environments. The LPD program consisted of three separate series: a troop/company/battery commanders series, a field grade officers series, and a weekly “how we/they fight” seminar with all key leaders. This LPD program ensured all leaders were current in Army doctrine, SBCT tactics, and recent lessons learned. Sessions specifically integrated maneuver and support company-grade commanders with field grade officers. For example, it was during these LPDs that intelligence leaders and analysts honed their skills in articulating intelligence through multiple IPB briefs, presentations on 11th ACR tactics, and updates on the current enemy situation in eastern Afghanistan. They produced a weekly open-source graphical intelligence summary (GRINTSUM) that broadened the understanding of varying threat actors around the globe. Not only did these projects and exercises develop the fundamentals of the MI team, but they also built self-confidence and trust in the intelligence warfighting function with the commanders as they learned “how to fight” both Donovanian and real-world adversaries. Furthermore, sessions always concluded with a practical exercise or tactical exercise without troops (TEWT). Finally, squadron commanders and command sergeants major subsequently replicated these events for their own platoon leadership.

With a clear understanding of individual leader abilities, commanders at each echelon made specific decisions concerning the placement of leaders one to two levels down. Those identified to serve as advisors underwent a brief but important period of cultural training appropriate for the roles they would soon assume. One such event was ASAT. Considered invaluable by many senior leaders, ASAT increased an individual’s emotional quotient or self-awareness by exposing leaders to the moods and intentions of host nation security forces. Ultimately, this would enable advisors and troopers filling Guardian Angel requirements to better prevent insider attacks in theater. Troops and platoons identified to deploy to locations which were geographically isolated from their higher headquarters

were similarly handpicked based on the maturity and experience levels of their leadership.

Identifying the right kinds of leaders for specific requirements and tasks is certainly not a novel concept. Indeed, the Army expects its leaders to do this routinely. However, the challenges caused by leader turnover, unique manning requirements, and a constrained training timeline compounded as the regiment prepared for deployment. The regiment's constant emphasis on leader development throughout the training cycle, combined with an emphasis on decentralized mission command, further enabled subordinate commanders to build teams based on one central principle — place the right leader in the right role.

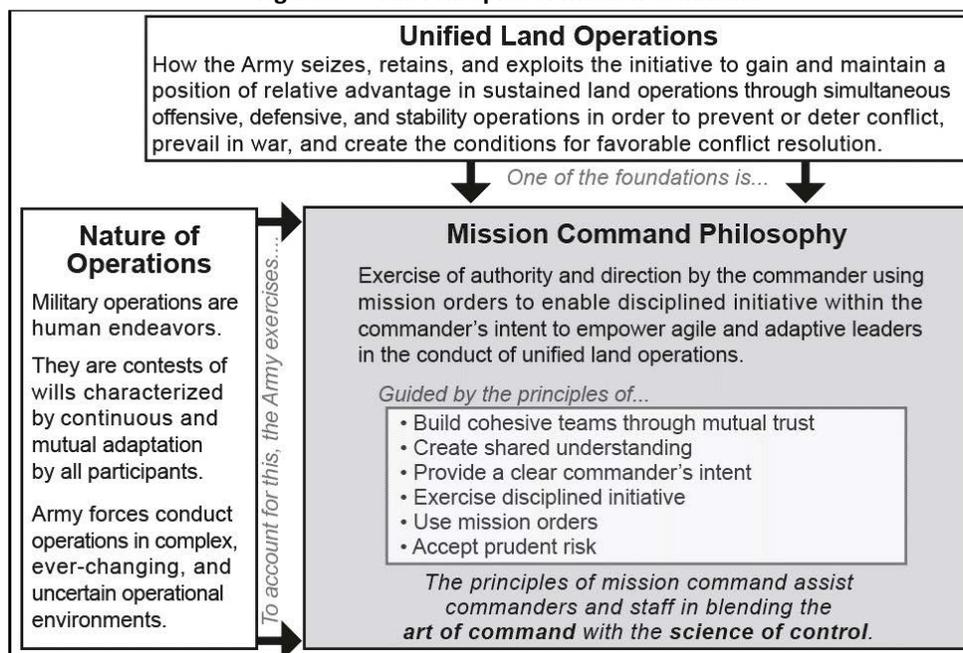
The fact that a significant percentage of the force would remain at Fort Hood during the deployment — more than 50 percent — merited special consideration and carried important ramifications for training expectations and tasking availability. The regiment decided early on that rear detachments, often used by the Army's brigades during deployments, would not be used. Instead, squadron commanders and their staffs would be held equally responsible for home-station mission command as they would be for results in combat. Indeed, home-station leadership became as much of an important investment in mission accomplishment as the forward team. Thus, squadrons had to make tough decisions as to who would deploy and who would stay at home. Some squadrons used non-branch-qualified captains to fill duplicate staff functions as primaries went forward. Many squadrons used outgoing branch-qualified captains and field grade officers to act as home-station element commanders. In the same way that using talented individuals as liaison officers to external organizations can build unit credibility, so too did entrusting home-station responsibility to good leaders ensure success at Fort Hood. It should be noted that unit leadership clarified command relationships to aid with disciplinary adjudication, assist with orders production and concept approval, and retain an emphasis on maintenance.

Exercising Constant Mission Command

Preparing to Deploy

The third and final component of the regiment successfully meeting the demands of executing concurrent mission sets was a continual emphasis on the exercise of mission command. Undeniably, executing a DA-centric training path developed important fundamental skills and focusing on the development of adaptive leaders helped build and form teams, but the role of mission command was likewise paramount as it ultimately enabled successful operations. Specifically, the exercise of mission command during each training event enabled leaders to gain valuable experience operating within a commander's intent, taking prudent risks, producing mission orders, and exercising disciplined initiative.³

Figure 6 — The Principles of Mission Command



The regiment sought to incorporate mission command as heavily as possible during the execution of current operations. The Joint Operations Center (JOC) staff specifically conducted multiple mission command exercises (MCXs) or mission command systems integration (MCSI) exercises. MCSIs are three-part exercises that progressively focus on the installation and maintenance of the network and mission command systems. MCSI-1 focuses on internal effectiveness factors, concentrating on TOC setup and baseline systems and procedures. MCSI-2 focuses on system functionality, networking, and the establishment of SOPs and continuity throughout shift changes and battle drills. MCSI-3 is the culmination of the previous phases and is conducted as part of the regimental FTX, prior to NTC. MCSI-3 validates the regimental and squadron functional and integrated cells fusing the commander's and staff's tasks on a COP and creating subsequent mission orders.

NTC fully stressed CPs' deployability, capacity, range, and survivability as units countered the moves of a free-thinking OPFOR. For example, the regimental headquarters was greatly tested while using the upper and lower TI. The regiment successfully created collaborative space, which allowed staff and subordinate commands to effectively and efficiently report and keep a COP for the commander. Additionally, the transportation of highly sensitive equipment during maneuver operations impacted the equipment's functionality and ability to effectively support multiple TOC jumps. Although RETRANS training was conducted during all events, it ultimately proved easier to execute during the FTX and MCSI than at NTC due to the nature of the local terrain.

The regiment's ability to conduct mission command was further honed by the execution of an MRX prior to deployment. Conducted at Fort Hood, the MRX included participants from the forward unit and successfully tested JOC networks, functions, and leaders as they balanced SFA with coalition force (CF) maneuver operations. This exercise was particularly valuable as the regiment was able to at least partially replicate theater-level ISR integration, joint terminal attack controller (JTAC) use in Combined Joint Operations Afghanistan (CJOA), and unique communication requirements of expeditionary advisory packages for its squadrons. Targeted requests for information were brought back from the forward subject matter experts, enabling the first realistic repetition in TAAC-E daily operations.

Finally, as the regiment prepared to deploy, staffs expended considerable effort to flatten their organizations by developing a battle rhythm that anticipated frequent interaction between deployed and home-station elements. This required the generation of a unique battle rhythm and orders production model that had to be nested vertically with the 1st Cavalry Division (CD) as well as TAAC-E and HQ Resolute Support. Over time, a useful model emerged, and communication between elements in Afghanistan and Fort Hood occurred regularly throughout the deployment. Horizontally, staff counterparts and command teams communicated at least weekly via VTC. Regimental leadership incorporated routine home-station briefs into their schedules to ensure there was no loss of focus on readiness or family care as units dispersed geographically.

Deployed Environment

The regiment's ability to conduct mission command at echelon was tested in May 2016 when the first elements of the regiment deployed to Afghanistan. Initially, four out of the seven squadron commands went forward while three remained at Fort Hood. The 2nd Squadron, one of three remaining at Fort Hood, would later go forward as the situation in Afghanistan changed. As a result, 2nd Squadron needed to conduct an additional Stryker live-fire density and several iterations of troop collective training. This presented the home-station regimental and squadron staffs with the significant challenge of supporting and certifying an element of considerable size for combat operations while fulfilling garrison support requirements. Specifically, the regiment assumed risk by conducting a condensed training path without a rotation to NTC. To mitigate this risk, the regimental staff planned to focus on critical collective tasks, to include a CALFEX. The 1st CD ultimately approved this training path, enabling 2nd Squadron to deploy as a trained and ready force.

As the regiment deployed, it immediately assumed responsibility for the execution of multiple mission sets across Afghanistan. The bulk of the regiment, to include its headquarters, comprised TAAC-E. Our mission was to provide functionally based security force assistance (FBSFA) to the 201st and 203rd Afghan National Army (ANA) Corps and the 202nd and 303rd Afghan National Police (ANP) Zones. Portions of three squadrons, along with an infantry squadron in its entirety, assumed different mission sets. The 1st Squadron provided security forces to the commander of Bagram Airfield (BAF) and helped secure the BAF ground defense area (GDA). Two squadrons, with their subordinate troops, secured their own respective GDAs within TAAC-E. Squadron leadership advised counterparts at the corps



Soldiers assigned to the 3rd Cavalry Regiment provide security during an expeditionary advisory package mission to the Surobi district of Afghanistan on 27 December 2016. (Photo by CPT Grace Geiger)

level while regimental leadership divided roles and responsibilities with 1st CD leadership for advising senior Afghan leadership as well as non-governmental organizations. In addition, four separate troops provided uplift to NATO Special Operations Component Command Afghanistan (NSOCC-A). In total, the regiment worked in five locations across Afghanistan for various disparate headquarters.

Fundamentals, Leadership, and Mission Command

As the deployment began and both forward and home-station elements became familiar with their respective missions, each soon encountered challenges that had been anticipated but not fully trained for. However, by developing fundamental skills, placing the right leaders in the right positions, and exercising constant mission command, the risks to mission and the force were ultimately overcome. Several unique challenges, as well as the regiment's means of meeting and overcoming them, are described in further detail below.

Functionally Based Security Force Assistance

The primary task of FBSFA is to TAA Afghan staffs to develop systems and capabilities, build capacity across key functions, and communicate vertically and horizontally. This type of SFA requires advisors at the operational and strategic level. In traditional SFA, the partnered force is generally trained at all levels to ensure proficiency (similar to foreign internal defense). In FBSFA, the main effort is at the corps or ANP type-A level. There, staffs and commanders advise their counterparts across essential functions focused on budgeting, internal controls, civilian governance, force generation, intelligence, communications, and maneuver operations.

The key challenges and nuances associated with FBSFA were indicative of the health of the host nation force. There was (and remains) an existential issue with the quality of Afghan leadership, to which there may only be a generational solution. Endemic intelligence weaknesses, a lack of technology, and a fluid political situation hindered the Afghan National Security Forces' response to the increasing threat throughout the country. Conversely, the ANDSF learned to consolidate combat power, coordinate to support maneuver, and in some cases, correctly utilize SOF elements

to augment conventional efforts or conduct targeting efforts. TAA efforts in information collection, management, and dissemination dramatically improved the ANA corps' and police zones' ability to rely less on U.S. partners for battlefield situational awareness and prediction of enemy activities. The regiment continued to move closer to the end state of ANA implementing its own intelligence production models that drive maneuver operations. There has also been some success with train-the-trainer programs as U.S. forces and Western contractors have slowly withdrawn from ground-level operations and maintenance.

Undoubtedly, the majority of leaders conducting advisory operations were executing missions outside of their traditional skill sets. In spite of this, the regiment was successful because of prior leader development and placement. This theme would continue to play out in other ways unique to the Afghan theater.

Tactical Nuances in Theater

There are other nuances to the effort in Afghanistan worth noting that drastically altered our ability to affect wide area security. First and foremost, the primary maneuver force in theater is the host nation force. Outside of named operations or kinetic strikes, the majority of CF combat power efforts were directed at enemy groups within non-contiguous GDAs. Furthermore, an unpredictable and well-resourced enemy force provides continuous challenges to both efforts of force protection and FBSFA. The enemy composition in TAAC-E is the most diverse and complex in all Afghanistan. More than 1,000 kilometers of shared border with Pakistan serves as a permissive environment for three-quarters of the DoD-recognized insurgent organizations in Afghanistan. The regiment's area of operations was expansive, with more than 124,000 square kilometers consisting of 14 provinces, 165 districts, and a population of more than eight million. Stability remains ever-threatened with the 80,000 ANDSF soldiers and policemen having to battle an entrenched insurgency and numerous violent extremist organizations.

In spite of the TAA mission, force protection remained the number one priority. This was maintained through security patrols, terrain denial missions, active information operations, and multiple security shuras with local leaders and ANDSF counterparts. Specifically, GDA operations consisted of combined arms route clearance, perimeter security, or partnered patrols that enable CF to prevent and deter indirect fire attacks or complex attacks on various bases. Although it may sound limiting in nature, the Brave Rifles were as proactive and aggressive as possible in order to maintain a high state of force protection. Intelligence collection and analytical teams at the TAAC and squadron levels provided the necessary focus on each enemy threat network within each GDA. This information drove the maneuver mission and aided in the synchronization of enabler assets to include close air support (CAS), air weapon teams (AWT), ISR, and fires.

Although it may have been difficult to mass combat power, massing effects was relatively easy. Task force staffs worked to synchronize enabler use with CF or ANDSF action in order to disrupt or destroy the enemy across TAAC-E. For example, to produce complementary effects against imminent high profile attack (HPA) or indirect fire (IDF) threats, organic ISR could be used in conjunction with IDF or CAS assets to conduct point of origin (POO) site terrain denial missions.

There is, however, a tangible trade-off in assets when making decisions pertaining to ANDSF support vice Resolute Support lines of operation. As the CF presence has decreased with the transition to the TAA mission set, so too has the wealth of intel enablers (ISR, human intelligence, signal intelligence collectors, etc.) afforded to U.S. units. Yet, the TAA mission requires that TAAC-E provide intelligence support to our ANDSF partners. In practice, countless hours of analytic effort and allocation of limited ISR assets were devoted to confirming or denying convoluted reporting processes from the host nation force. To reduce this impact, extra attention was paid to fostering the intelligence of the ANDSF and creating releasable "REL AFG" intelligence to enable the regimental FBSFA advisors to ensure Afghan intelligence drove operations. This freed assets to support other Resolute Support priorities. These priorities were subsequently revised and revisited on a bi-weekly basis as part of the green (ANDSF) and red (threat) targeting processes.

Finally, even with limited manning, traditional requirements such as the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP), Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF), and field ordering officer (FOO) remained critical functions. Drivers and marksmanship training, as well as re-certification of IDF systems, required a unique process that took weeks to conduct. This delayed the unit's ability to rapidly affect the battlespace upon arrival.



Continuous Training

Remaining focused on the fundamentals of soldiering was a challenge in Afghanistan. Even so, readiness remained a top priority, and those who could continue to train did so. Physical fitness, first responder, marksmanship progressions, and EIB and Excellence in Armor training remained constants. Other events (such as selections for Ranger School, the Gainey Cup, and the Best Ranger Competition) punctuated security operations. Some locations offered outstanding facilities which enabled troops to conduct collective training such as squad situational training exercises (STXs) and LFXs. The ability to train enabled units to merge with their home-station counterparts seamlessly upon return from Afghanistan.

The Home-Station Mission

Those at home station continued to work towards accomplishing the commander’s vision and priorities. In doing so, they ensured a smooth transition upon the regiment’s return from Afghanistan. Personnel in the rear provided a massive reach-back capability for the regiment in the event of personnel loss, personal family events, or intelligence support. To support forward elements and simultaneously prepare for the next fight, individuals continued to focus on medical readiness, small arms marksmanship, and physical fitness. Collective training occurred where feasible but proved difficult due to home-station mission requirements and leader shortages.

The majority of the home-station element consisted of the regimental engineer and regimental support squadrons. Through these organizations, along with the squadron forward support companies, the regiment made significant progress on Stryker maintenance. Leaders developed a detailed maintenance plan designed to meet the desired goal of an operational readiness rate above 95 percent. Not only did this plan help to identify priority of effort for the subordinate squadrons, but it also established an efficient method of conducting services with limited combat power.

Finally, legacy equipment still lingered from the unit’s previous designation as an armored cavalry regiment. In addition to removing excess equipment, squadrons redistributed equipment across their formations. Typically, the majority of unit equipment shortages are identified during critical periods. In our case, home station continued to focus on filling shortages throughout the entirety of the unit’s deployment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Like that of other Army BCTs, the regiment’s recent history involves the completion of a deployment with less than half of its forces to multiple locations within a combat theater while forces at home station continued to maintain readiness. For the foreseeable future, the Army’s BCTs will continue to encounter similar endeavors and all of the associated challenges therein — primarily how to deploy the right teams capable of fighting and winning in a dynamic environment while maintaining the right leaders at home to ensure the organization maintains proficiency and accomplishes all assigned tasks.

The 3rd CR leadership proactively analyzed the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization, recognized

impending friction points, and applied leadership early in the training cycle to mitigate risk. These same leaders focused on three factors that ultimately contributed to 3rd CR's ability to overcome these challenges. First, a training path focused on developing DA proficiency established a foundation of fundamental skills from which troopers could quickly adjust to mission-specific tasks and requirements. Second, a continuous emphasis on leader development forged trained and ready teams led by bold and adaptive leaders serving in the right positions. Finally, constant mission command employment and enforcement during both the regiment's training cycle and deployment enabled leaders to operate within the intent of their respective squadrons while taking prudent risks and exercising disciplined initiative to accomplish the mission. The combination of these three factors — fundamental skills, adaptive leadership, and mission command — ultimately contributed to the success of 3rd CR from 2015-2017. As BCTs continue to embark on similar missions, we recommend the following:

Build Capability Through the Fundamentals. The Army continues to train for a variety of conflicts. This is evident in the return to DATE rotations at our CTCs and simultaneous regional alignments within our BCTs. There is little doubt that we have a responsibility to continue to prepare for the next war. We absolutely must continuously train and certify our staffs in CAM, for our Stryker knowledge and ability to integrate fires or conduct reconnaissance against hybrid threats may be tested in the near future. Stryker units must purposefully make a continual effort to maintain balance across the warfighting functions and integrate all service and support into planning, operations, CAM, and WAS in order to maintain this proficiency.

Additionally, there is a direct conflict between the available population and garrison or U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) requirements. It is difficult to train individual skills, or even conduct effective collective training, when units lose leaders and troopers immediately following certification. As a result, units must recertify the same collective training repeatedly or in a condensed time period. Internal to the BCT, every effort must be made to seek and exploit efficiencies in training. For example, certifications that may be critical to unit readiness status, such as gunnery and drivers training, can be delayed until after the typical Army manning cycle is complete.

Incorporate the Current Mission Wherever Possible. Over time, it was clear that the CTC did not fully address the complexity of the current state of the conflict in theater. Admittedly, we exercised WAS and elements of CAM in



**Soldiers with the 3rd Cavalry Regiment participate in a combined live-fire exercise on 21 July 2016 at Fort Hood, TX.
(Photo by SGT Marcus Floyd)**

Afghanistan, but the nuances cannot be ignored. Yet, there is a conflict between training for a purely DA mission and one that primarily utilizes host nation forces as the maneuver element. TAAC-E requirements — such as contracts, SOF support, military or police advisory teams, Guardian Angels, C-IED, and force protection efforts — simply could not be entirely covered at NTC or the regimental FTX. Again, every effort should be made to seek out and exploit efficiencies in rotations to integrate potential mission-specific training with METL-based collective training. For example, establishing a tactical command post during collective training has direct parallels with the expeditionary advisory packages that are currently conducted in Afghanistan. A thorough understanding and training of both analog and regular mission command systems will provide concrete examples to share with our ANDSF partners. Fixed-site security, targeting processes, kinetic strike battle drills, and the integration of unique indirect or direct fire platforms can only add to the quality of training. Conducting defensive operations can also alleviate the learning curve for fixed-site security operations in theater. In other cases, some training events, such as C-IED, would be easier to integrate if equipment and subject matter experts were simply more readily available or led by mobile training teams.

Incorporate Mission-Specific Training at the Proper Time. The incorporation of mission-specific training can alleviate some of the pain associated with a mission pivot. However, there is an appropriate time to focus on mission-specific training for those deploying. This must be a deliberate decision on the part of regimental leadership. At the operational level, planners must clearly articulate the priority for the unit within the collective training timeline. Conducting MRXs or adjusting task organization early can help build cohesive teams prior to execution. There is no feasible way to safely ignore kinetic strike battle drills, Guardian Angel requirements, theater-engagement authorities, and targeting processes. Even if brief, robust MRXs can mitigate risk by forcing advisory teams, maneuver elements, and operational staffs to test planning, coordination, and synchronization systems prior to going forward. As staffs refine these skill sets, the home-station element can focus on red-cycle requirements and individual training.

Additionally, the time between a BCT's CTC rotation and its MRX and subsequent deployments must be adjusted to give adequate time to prepare. Six to seven weeks is simply not enough time, which places significant stress on personnel, systems, and equipment.

Develop Adaptive Leaders. We must develop leaders that are not only experts in 10-level tasks but adaptable subject matter experts capable of both CAM and navigating the nuances of unique combat environments. A deliberate and aggressive LPD program will allow BCTs to assume risk where manpower and resources are reduced. Participating leaders must subsequently be carefully placed to enable execution of mission command regardless of geographic separation.

Continually Exercise Mission Command. As is increasingly acknowledged across the force, we are in an era of continual planning, coordinating, and synchronization. We must continue to make every effort to create clarity around what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how we are going to get there. To drive towards this clarity, we need to focus on two common points of friction.

First, we need to continually strive to flatten our organizations by enforcing knowledge management, ensuring that proper communication and network platforms are operational, and supporting training on these systems in order to fully enable shared understanding. One way to ensure this occurs is by conducting repetitive command post exercises and FCXs which stress and build important staff capabilities. At the troop level, integration of multiple domains and communications platforms such as high frequency and tactical satellite radios will build a baseline of proficiency that will enable operations in combat.

Second, we need to keep our organizations intact. We expect our small unit leaders to utilize a sensible task organization, disseminate a clear intent, and execute simple plans that enable subordinates. Unfortunately, at higher echelons we have continued to reduce unit readiness and effectiveness by muddling our BCT task organizations. There is a tangible impact on the combat effectiveness of our maneuver formations when we divide and task units for too great a number of various combat and home-station missions. In the same way we enforce a concept of commander-centric operations, we need to enforce a concept of unit-centric operations. In other words, an organically whole unit — BCT, squadron, or even troop — is fundamentally more effective than a team of borrowed leadership and mixed labor.

Notes

¹ ADP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (2011), iii, 1-2.

² William Shoemate and Benjamin Jensen, "Training for Decisive Action," *Military Review*, September-October 2016, 102-103.

³ ADP 6-0, *Mission Command* (2014), iv.

At the time this article was written, **COL Kevin D. Admiral** was serving as the commander of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment at Fort Hood, TX. He earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Kansas, as well as a master's degree in campaign planning and strategy from the Joint Advanced Warfighting School, National Defense University. Prior to arriving at Fort Hood, he was a Senior Service College Fellow at the Royal College of Defence Studies in London. Previously in his career, COL Admiral has served in various command and staff positions. Additionally, he served in Project Warrior as an observer-controller at the National Training Center, CA, and a small group instructor for the Armor Captain's Career Course at Fort Knox, KY.

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CPT Paul D. Erickson and **CPT Dino C. Buchanan** are currently serving within the 3rd CR in command and staff positions.