

Training Notes



TF No Fear at JRTC: *Maximizing Opportunities While Supporting a Combat Training Center Rotation*

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The Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, LA, prepares brigade combat teams (BCTs) to deploy, fight, and win on battlefields throughout the world. Since 2012, JRTC has emphasized the decisive action training environment (DATE) scenario to incorporate unified land operations, ensuring units and Soldiers are sufficiently prepared for any mission worldwide. JRTC provides several key training enablers for rotational training units (RTUs) conducting a DATE scenario. These enablers are composed of highly professional units, Soldiers, and leaders; however, they remain constrained with manning and resource shortfalls that require additional support from the RTU's command headquarters.

This RTU support package generally consists of augmentation units to support opposing force (OPFOR) and host nation security force (HNSF) elements, key leaders to serve as observer-coach-trainers (OCTs), and additional sustainment elements to support the rotation. For JRTC Rotation 17-04, the 25th Infantry Division's 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (2/25 IBCT) was the RTU while the 25th's 3rd IBCT was assigned with providing augmentation and support requirements. The 3rd IBCT gave the OPFOR and HNSF augmentation mission to its 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment "Wolfhounds" — Task Force (TF) No Fear.

This mission included the following specified tasks, among others:

- 1) Provide two infantry companies to serve as OPFOR companies with the 1st Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment (TF Geronimo);
- 2) Provide one infantry company to serve as an untrained and unorganized resistant guerrilla force for the Special Forces Operation Detachment Alpha (SFODA); and
- 3) Provide one infantry company to serve as an HNSF element with battalion key leadership to mission command the HNSF and interact as role-players with RTU leadership.

The TF No Fear command team analyzed this requirement and determined that JRTC provided an ideal

opportunity to maximize multiple training resources to increase unit proficiency and improve readiness. TF No Fear could focus collective training objectives on assigned mission essential tasks (METs), leverage additional training opportunities provided by JRTC, and culminate with post-rotation platoon (PLT) live-fire exercises (LFXs) at the Peason Ridge training area. TF No Fear's ultimate training objective was to complete PLT LFXs since the next opportunity for this level of training would not be until the 4th Quarter of FY17. This opportunity also afforded TF No Fear Soldiers to train on Peason Ridge, one of the U.S. Army's premier live-fire training areas. This required the battalion to deploy its entire staff and establish a "white cell" command post (CP) to facilitate this mission. Based on this assessment, TF No Fear increased its augmentation package to include the majority of the entire battalion and specified the following tasks:

- 1) A/2-27 IN and B/2-27 IN will serve as the OPFOR companies for TF Geronimo; B/2-27 IN will conduct PLT LFX following the rotation.
- 2) C/2-27 IN will serve as the guerilla force for the SFODA and conduct PLT LFX following the rotation.
- 3) D/2-27 IN and Headquarters and Headquarters Company

Task Force No Fear Task Organization

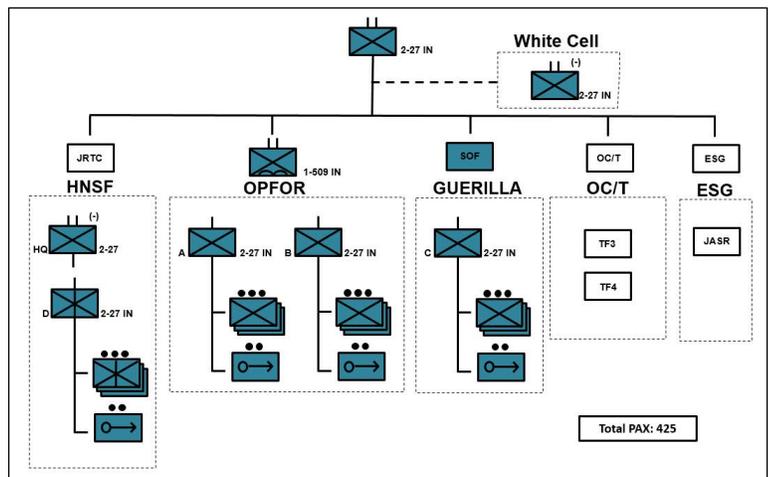




Photo by CPT Josh Geis

Soldiers from Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment (Wolfhounds) serving as a Geronimo OPFOR element establish a company command post to mission command offensive operations against the rotational training unit.

(HHC)/2-27 IN will serve as an HNSF battalion (-) including HNSF key leaders and mission command node.

4) HHC/2-27 IN will also establish an administrative mission command node or “white cell” to serve as a resource provider, establish and run the JRTC aid station rear (JASR) on North Fort Polk, and provide additional OCTs for the RTU.

5) The white cell will resource and establish the PLT LFXs on Peason Ridge, coordinate staff training with the leader training program (LTP), and coordinate any additional training throughout the rotation.

TF No Fear deployed under the task organization seen below. It deployed a robust battalion headquarters element to establish a battalion CP on the North Fort Polk cantonment area. The white cell was centered around the majority of the primary staff. Led by the executive officer (XO), its priorities included expediting the reception, staging, and onward movement, and integration (RSOI) process; coordinating and resourcing training opportunities; exercising supply and maintenance functions; and mission-commanding all rear battalion operations at Fort Polk with the rear detachment remaining at Schofield Barracks, HI.

The white cell began with establishing the JASR and mission command of its units through the RSOI process. This removed the burden from company leadership and eased the processes of units drawing prepositioned vehicles, uniforms, and multiple integrated laser engagement system (MILES) equipment. The white cell integrated those TF No Fear staff members who were not participating as HNSF with TF Geronimo. This offered the capability of observing OPFOR mission command processes and getting an external perspective on the OPFOR military decision-making process (MDMP). The white cell also integrated a liaison officer (LNO) with the JRTC Operations Group (OPSGRP) on South Fort Polk to maintain situational awareness on the RTU, HNSF units, and all exercise operations.

Once the exercise began, the white cell’s primary function

was to plan and resource the PLT LFXs, conduct regular sustainment functions, and coordinate any available training opportunities. To assist with PLT LFX coordination, 3/25 IBCT provided TF No Fear with additional personnel (a captain, staff sergeant, and three Soldiers) to serve as the LFX Tiger Team. This team was under operational control (OPCON) of the white cell and given the task of coordinating and liaising with Fort Polk range control to ensure completion of LFX range requirements. As the LFX Tiger Team began synchronizing with range control, the white cell coordinated with various tenant units on Fort Polk to sign for vehicles and equipment necessary to execute PLT LFX training.

Mission Essential Tasks

A/2-27 IN and B/2-27 IN provided OPFOR augmentees to serve as South Atropian People’s Army (SAPA) forces and fully incorporate into TF Geronimo operations. This included integration into TF Geronimo’s MDMP where companies conducted parallel and collaborative planning, troop leading procedures (TLPs), and combined arms rehearsals (CARs) prior to entering the “box” to begin the rotational exercise. To effectively mission command operations, both companies established CPs forward in the box as well as in the rear area to resource training support with the white cell on North Fort Polk. The OPFOR augmentation task enabled both companies to train lethal platoons and squads with a focus on the following METs: conduct an area defense, conduct a movement to contact, and conduct area security.

The “conduct an area defense” MET was the task that most commanders had assumed risk with on their collective training plans leading up to JRTC. During the scenario, TF Geronimo ordered A/2-27 IN to conduct a defense of Marjani Village. This mission enabled the Alpha Company commander to train on a key MET emphasizing the following supporting collective and individual tasks: area reconnaissance, engagement area development, employment of obstacles, integrate direct and indirect fires, establish fighting positions, and individual and equipment camouflage.

The C/2-27 IN Soldiers working with the SFODA team focused various tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) at the squad and team levels including infantry battle drills, reconnaissance, human intelligence (HUMINT) information collection, and field craft.

D/2-27 IN was tasked with providing two HNSF company elements operating under a small battalion headquarters. This assignment provided a unique perspective on the interactions between the RTU, HNSF, and the civilian population. The company gained new TTPs on building relationships with civilian and local nationals on the battlefield.

No matter the task assigned, companies were able to focus on training lethal platoons and squads. The companies validated unit tactical and planning standard operating

procedures (SOPs), mission command systems, battle drills, and collective and individual TTPs.

Additional Training Opportunities During the Rotation

During the rotation, threat cap levels limit how many OPFOR Soldiers can operate in the training area at a given time. TF Geronimo had the ability to reinforce or scale back operations based on the RTU's training objectives. When operations scaled back, the OPFOR companies were able to seize a variety of different training opportunities. Supporting the SFODA, C/2-27 IN was spread over a large area conducting individual and small unit operations for the rotation. With SFODA support requiring only small numbers of Soldiers for various events, this was an ideal opportunity to maximize training resources for individual and collective training. The C/2-27 IN commander's (CPT Dan Woods) intent was to "find and maximize all training opportunities." The C/2-27 IN's rear CP used the white cell to resource various training events including the Fort Polk obstacle course, land navigation site, Engagement Skills Trainer (EST), Call-for-Fire Trainer (CFFT), and an orienteering course.

The C/2-27 IN events tested individual physical and mental capacity and exertion and built teamwork and camaraderie within the company and attached fire support team (FIST), scout, and mortar elements. With CPT Wood's guidance, the company conducted a variety of opportunity training which included buddy-team competition events, EST/CFFT, urban assault course, individual day/night land navigation, obstacle course, and a meta-cognitive challenge event.

To prepare for squad and PLT LFXs, B/2-27 IN needed to qualify a few remaining Soldiers on close quarter marksmanship (CQM). With B/2-27 IN focused on its training rotation mission, the white cell resourced the land, ammunition, and support requirements needed to execute a CQM range. As TF Geronimo scaled back the threat level, B/2-27 IN rotated its Soldiers to conduct the CQM range on South Fort Polk. This was an essential opportunity, enabling B/2-27 IN to continue its mission against the RTU but still be prepared for the squad and PLT LFX following the rotation. B/2-27 IN additionally resourced one of the unused villages in the box to conduct close quarters battle (CQB) to further train lethal platoons and squads.

Commanders stated that the training areas were generally superior to what they have access to at their home station, and they were excited that they were able to take advantage of the various opportunities while at JRTC.

HHC was also able to execute additional staff training. The battalion XO and primary staff coordinated with the Fort Polk LTP program to receive classes on aspects of MDMP. LTP coaches provided the academics and staff members began establishing relationships with the trainers and coaches they will be working with in the coming year during TF No Fear's LTP. And while not a doctrinal mission command element, the battalion tactical command post (TAC) forward in the box was able to exercise many young assistant staff officers and NCOs while serving as the foreign security forces' battalion HQ.

Post-Rotation LFX

Following the rotation, TF No Fear began redeploying elements to Hawaii while the battalion staff and two rifle companies re-focused on conducting PLT LFXs. The battalion faced numerous friction points planning and executing the PLT LFXs at Peason Ridge in addition to normal LFX planning requirements. Logistically, the main friction point was that the LFX training took place after the containers had been packed with equipment and sealed in order to meet 2/25 IBC's reverse RSOI timeline. The battalion CP that provided mission command through both the rotation in the training area and reverse RSOI was essential to overcoming this friction. While companies conducted various OPFOR missions throughout the training area, the battalion CP was focused on looking ahead to the reverse RSOI process and planning to reduce any friction. Because of this, companies were able to smoothly turn in MILES gear and pre-positioned equipment before signing out new equipment from Fort Polk tenant units for LFX execution.

Friction throughout the planning process was complicated even further due to the fact that the unit was planning a complex LFX in a different time zone than its home station and with agencies that it was initially unaware of. The LFX Tiger Team officer-in-charge (OIC) and NCO-in-charge (NCOIC) were able to attend the JRTC D+90 conference at Fort Polk. The LFX Tiger Team was also able to return TDY to Fort Polk in order to become Fort Polk OIC/range safety officer (RSO)-certified so that the team could provide RSO/OIC support to 2-27 IN without needing help from Fort Polk tenant units. In addition to the LFX Tiger Team, 2-27 IN was able to send two planners to recon the training areas and confirm possible LFX scenarios. Due to the support of its higher headquarters, Fort Polk tenant units, and Fort Polk agencies, 2-27 IN was able to execute a successful PLT LFX. The Tiger Team was essential in taking administrative requirements off of the training audience so



Photo by 2LT Charles Chikelu

Soldiers from Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, work in conjunction with Soldiers from the 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division while serving as a host nation security force element.



Photo by SGT Perique Roseberry

Soldiers from Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, suppress an enemy objective while executing a platoon attack live-fire exercise at the Peason Ridge Training Area.

that those companies could focus on getting the most of the training opportunity. As LTC Glen T. Helberg, commander of 2-27 IN, stated in the after action review, it is important to "... take as many requirements off of the training unit as possible."

Lessons Learned

TF No Fear quickly realized how to successfully maximize training opportunities while concurrently providing augmentation support during JRTC Rotation 17-04. However, there were several key lessons learned and recommendations for units looking to accomplish similar training events. These recommendations include:

* Ensure the LFX Tiger Team is OPCON to the augmentation unit prior to deployment and throughout the duration of the rotation. The team was a key asset for coordinating and executing the LFX. However, its focus was diverted to other 3/25 IBCT priorities prior to departure and throughout the rotation. This caused slight friction with getting the LFX Tiger Team oriented to the latest LFX plan. Integrating the LFX Tiger Team into the battalion planning process and keeping them attached throughout completion would facilitate the overall execution.

* Another way to better integrate the LFX Tiger Team into the planning process would have been by tasking a battalion planner to the LFX Tiger Team. This would ensure the LFX Tiger Team had a relationship with all the 2-27 IN companies and staff that would reduce planning friction.

* While the JRTC Live Fire Branch that provides LFX support to the RTU was not tasked to support 2-27 IN, their planners were essential in providing previously used LFX training scenarios for many of the training areas within Peason Ridge. In the future, units should contact the Live Fire Branch as early as possible in the planning process.

* The JRTC is provided with two to three companies from around the army for a typical DATE rotation. Sending the majority of 2-27 IN with a headquarters element reduced friction points with the planning process. It also provided the OPSGRP and TF Geronimo a central mission command node versus multiple company command nodes throughout the rotation.

* Each company participating in the LFX should send representatives early to attend the Fort Polk OIC/RSO Course with Range Control. This would assist with companies gaining access to available ranges throughout a rotation and maximize opportunities.

* Coordination with Fort Polk tenant units was discussed between planners but was not codified in the orders process. This led to friction in execution due to not all Fort Polk tenant units being aware of the previous agreements. If units wish to utilize support from Fort

Polk tenant units, it would be beneficial to codify agreed-upon requirements in an order from the JRTC G3 to ensure a formal tasking rather than "handshake con."

Conclusion

This article describes how a battalion task force can take advantage of training opportunities while supporting a JRTC rotation. It offers a practical framework for how units under similar circumstances can take advantage of available training during a support rotation. Overall, JRTC Rotation 17-04 served as an incredibly valuable event for TF No Fear. All participants were impacted in a positive manner, and it assisted the unit with improving readiness through accomplishing individual training and collective-level METs. TF No Fear capitalized on various training opportunities offered by JRTC while concurrently supporting 2/25 IBCT's rotation. There is no doubt that deploying an entire battalion task force provided the task organization necessary to coordinate the variety of training options available and enable companies to focus on the specified missions.

At the time this article was written, **MAJ AI LeMaire** was serving as the executive officer (XO) for the 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment (Wolfhounds), 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), 25th Infantry Division, Schofield Barracks, HI. His previous assignments include serving as maneuver planner for the 25th Infantry Division; student at the School of Advanced Military Studies; student at the Air Command and Staff College; observer-coach-trainer (OCT) at the Mission Command Training Program (MCTP); commander of A Company and assistant operations officer for 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, 4th IBCT, 101st Airborne Division; and S2, scout platoon leader, and mechanized rifle platoon leader for the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. MAJ LeMaire earned a bachelor's degree in history from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a master's degree in adult and continuing education from Kansas State University.
