

Cold-Hit Live Fires:

Building Confidence and Trust in Leaders

LTC VALENT P. BERNAT III
MAJ JOSHUA I. WILES

Infantry Soldiers assaulting an objective sight unseen with live munitions and combined arms support is as close to combat conditions as we can replicate.

We refer to it as the “cold hit.” Cold-hit live-fire exercises (LFXs) inherently involve increased risk above the standardized dry-blank-live scenarios. We challenged ourselves to capitalize on the increased readiness enabled by conducting cold-hit LFXs while mitigating the increased risk to an acceptable level. The following methodology, which is based on rigorous application of doctrine and procedures, serves as our solution. This training methodology was deliberately thought through, implemented, and refined as we built capacity and confidence across the formation. Our Soldiers and units achieved cold-hit competence, and they continue to sustain their readiness at peak levels.

The 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry, 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), 25th Infantry Division, developed and sustained a training methodology that enabled cold-hit competency at all levels from squad/crew to company combined arms live-fire exercise (CALFEX). This methodology is underpinned by three key foundational cornerstones: Soldier discipline and junior leader responsibility, effective control measures, and certified

rehearsals. These cornerstones are essential to the process and require buy-in and implementation at all levels to be successful.

Individual discipline and junior leader responsibility of enforcement, particularly with regards to the application of the 15-degree rule, truly enable Soldiers to train up to the cold-hit level. Our Soldiers are inculcated with the concept that they are first and foremost responsible for ensuring they do not fire upon their teammates. They are enabled by being individually trained and certified by their leaders in the employment of the 15-degree rule. Additionally, team

leaders are held accountable to supervise and verify their Soldiers' application of the 15-degree rule (see Figure 2).

1-27 IN units incorporated focused 15-degree rule training into advanced rifle marksmanship, buddy team, and fire team LFXs.

Soldiers from Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, engage targets in a support-by-fire position during a combined arms live-fire exercise on Schofield Barracks, HI, on 4 December 2017.

Photos by 1LT Ryan DeBooy

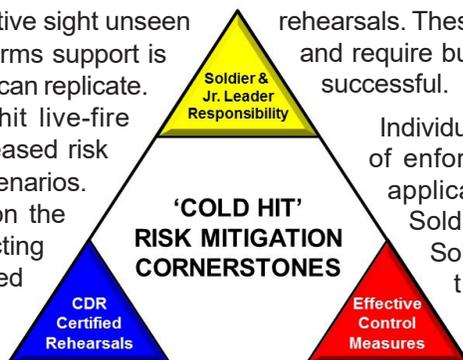


Figure 1 — Cold-Hit Risk Mitigation Cornerstones



Small arms (5.56mm, 7.62mm, and .50 caliber), ground-mounted or vehicle-mounted machine guns may be fired at low angles of elevation (near the flank of an individual or unit). For the SDZ (surface danger zone), there must be an angle of 15 degrees or 100m (whichever is greater) between the limit of fire and the near flank of the closest individual or unit and all impacts are beyond the individual or unit. For the batwing SDZ, all non-participating personnel must be outside of the SDZ. Tripod, traversing, and depression stops will be used on machine guns to maintain the required angle and distance between the line of fire and the near flank of an individual or unit.

— DA Pamphlet 385-63, 17-4o

Figure 2 — Firing Precautions

This training generated a foundational understanding for Soldiers and leaders while providing an opportunity to employ the method in relatively docile circumstances.

Company commanders built upon this foundation by executing the first cold-hit concept at the squad level. The limited number of Soldiers (nine) participating in the actual live fire presented a relatively reduced risk environment that was easily mitigated by the number of available observers and safety personnel. Leaders were able to validate Soldiers' understanding of the concept when they saw them actively checking their 15 degrees while maneuvering. Successful execution at the squad level generated increased confidence to continue to the platoon-level live fires.

Control measures are a doctrinal part of any combat operation, but their effectiveness is not always certain. This uncertainty is particularly true when a unit follows the standard dry-blank-live training method. Since the lane has been rehearsed twice prior to the execution of the live event, Soldiers may just execute the steps as rehearsed instead of truly employing the planned control measures to manage their fire and maneuver. The cold-hit process places distinct emphasis on effective and redundant control measures to ensure that subordinate elements de-conflict their fires and maneuver. Confirming a shift fire is not something the assault element leader can assume away. And the support by fire must be able to track the front line trace of the assault element.

The previous two foundational pieces are firmly buttressed by certified rehearsals. Rehearsals of actions on the objective are critical at the squad and platoon levels under the cold-hit concept. Unit leaders provided with a detailed intelligence packet of the objective — to include overhead imagery, maps, and sketches from scouts — are enabled to construct accurate replicas of the objective. These mock objectives are then certified for accuracy by the training official (two levels



1LT Andrew Cook, who is assigned to C Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, calls back to his subordinate leaders during a CALFEX on Schofield Barracks on 4 December 2017.

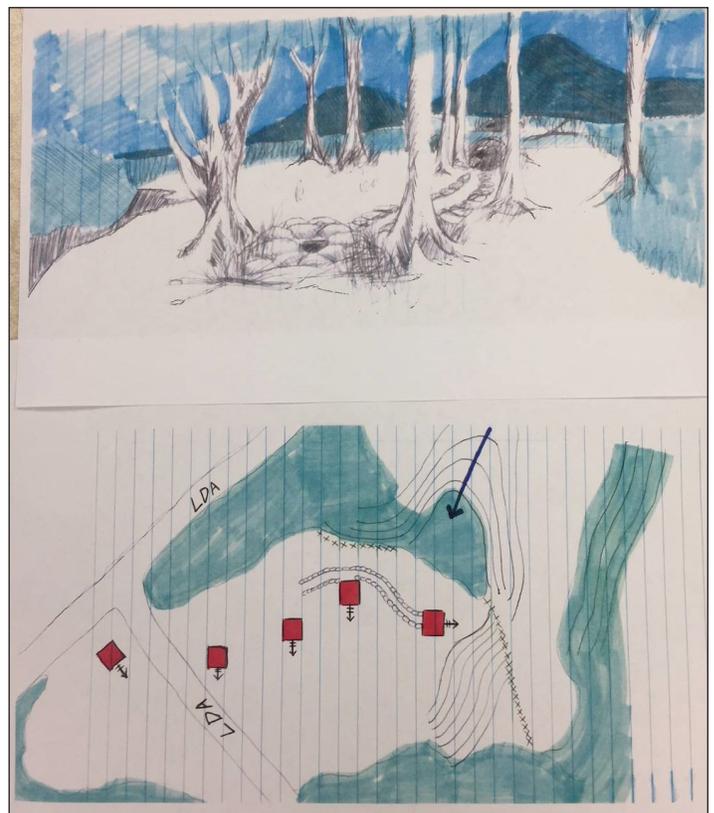


Figure 3 — Example of Products Provided to Training Units by Battalion Scouts to Build “Mock Up” Objectives

up). Recreating objectives at the squad and platoon levels is relatively easy. Creating a full-scale rehearsal site for a company or larger element is generally unfeasible. Therefore, the combined arms rehearsal and/or rehearsal of concept (ROC) drill is used as the certifying event in addition to certifying

platoons on their actions on contact/on the objective.

Cold-hit platoon LFXs are the nexus of complexity with the introduction of enablers: engineers, indirect fires, and combat aviation. These additional components distinctively increase the requirement for effective control measures and leader understanding of the plan. Our advanced rifle marksmanship and team/squad LFXs set the stage for the 15-degree rule while the platoon LFXs distinctly stressed clear and redundant control measures. Soldiers and leaders quickly learned the primacy of visual signals vice auditory and that radios were at best a tertiary means in the close fight.

Under the oversight of 2/25 IBCT, 1-27 IN concluded its cold-hit proof of concept with both a dismounted infantry company CALFEX and a mounted heavy weapons company CALFEX. Both iterations incorporated mounted and dismounted elements in the attack. Company-level cold-hit CALFEXs required the company leadership to conduct a combined arms rehearsal (CAR) as a final certifying event on top of the platoon-level actions on the objective. In keeping with the doctrinal two levels down rule, the battalion commander certified the platoons and the brigade commander certified the CAR. All of the steps executed in preparation for the cold-hit LFXs are in keeping with the preparations conducted prior to

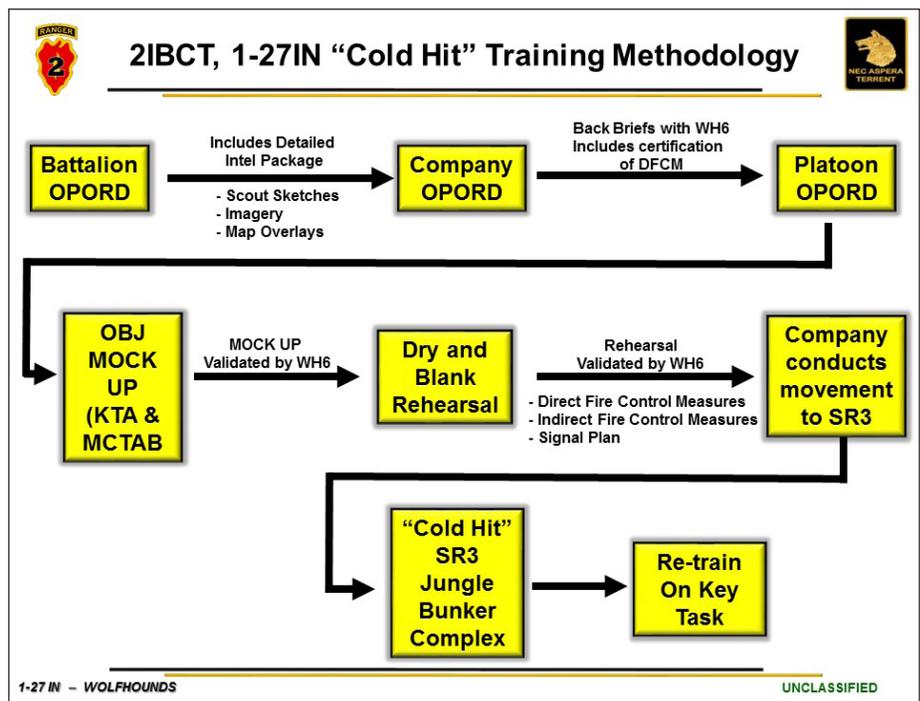


Figure 4 — Cold-Hit Training Methodology

executing a combat operation given the necessary time and resources. This process, in fact, reinforces and validates the doctrinal emphasis to develop a detailed plan and rehearse prior to all operations if possible. This training path resulted in distinctly increased competence and confidence at all levels of the formation including trust in our enablers.

Additionally, training efficiency was gained by executing this methodology, specifically with regards to time. Executing units built their rehearsal sites and mock objectives on available training areas away from the range. These dispersed locations greatly increased the available time to construct the actual range, and since units were only executing their live iterations on the actual lane, more time was available between iterations for range reset and retraining. Company-level leadership trained dry iterations with their units prior to the battalion commander certifying the blank iterations. The companies were enabled with more time and resources to validate control measures, signal plans, and unit standard



A squad leader in B Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, checks his Soldiers' points of aim to ensure he meets the 15-degree rule.

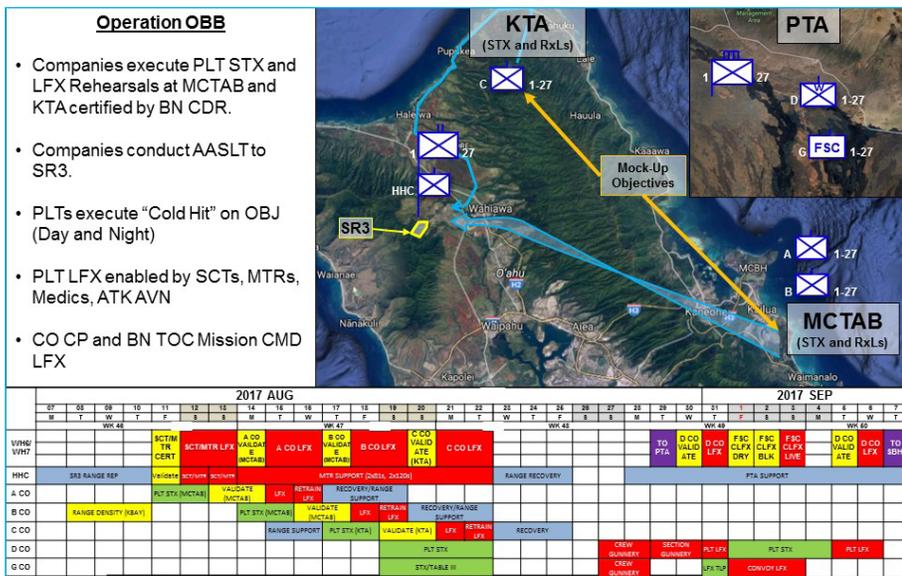


Figure 5 — Operation Barb Breakthrough Overview

operating procedures (SOPs). All of our platoons were able to take lessons learned from their first live iteration and apply them to their subsequent iteration — either correcting a deficiency or reinforcing good practices.

Cold-hit LFXs may seem to be fraught with risk and uncertain gain, but our team experienced the opposite. First, Soldiers and specifically junior leaders understood and accepted their individual roles and responsibilities to mitigate risk in order to protect one another. Secondly, the iterative building block methodology grew confidence among the Soldiers and leaders while also deepening discipline and trust across all levels. Finally, the competence and confidence generated at the conclusion of the company CALFEXs permeated the entire formation. These Soldiers and leaders understood they had successfully executed operations in conditions as close to combat as possible. We felt that the process would increase capacity in planning, control measures, and signal planning, but we underestimated the intangible confidence that was gained throughout the formation. These types of formations — those operating at the readiness levels our leadership requires of us — are the ones that can fight and win.



Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment overwatch breach operations conducted by the 65th Brigade Engineer Battalion during the unit's cold-hit CALFEX.

Day Live Fire

- Range scenario approved by Wolfhound (WH) 6
- Range scenario approved by range control
- Lane safeties certified by battalion
- Range construction certified by range control
- Commander/first sergeant/executive officer and lane safeties conduct tactical exercise without troops (TEWT)
- Soldiers certified on the 15-degree rule
- Weapons qualification certified
- Individual Soldiers trained on employment of hand grenades
- Scout/Mortar Platoon validate lane
- Executing leaders receive accurate intel of objective (including imagery)
- Mock up of objective validated by battalion commander
- Dry/blank day and night iteration on mock up of objective validated by WH6
- Confirmation of direct fire control measures
- Confirmation of signal for lift/shift fires
- LFX uniform briefed
- OIC/range safety officer conducts final safety brief
- Execute LFX on objective

Night Live Fire

- Identical target array to day
- Day live fire completed
- Weapons/PEQ15 bore sighted
- Automatic weapons laser bore sighted
- All targets have thermal signature
- All Soldiers have working NVGs
- Execute LFX on objective

Figure 6 — Cold-Hit Live Fire Conditions Check

At the time this article was written, **LTC Valent P. Bernat III** commanded the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, at Schofield Barracks, HI. He currently serves as the chief of operations for the Indo-Pacific Directorate of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. His previous assignments include serving as the senior Army advisor to the Adjutant General of the Vermont Army National Guard; chief of training, deputy G3, and chief of operations for the 10th Mountain Division; executive officer (XO) of the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division; operations officer for the 1st Squadron, 71st Cavalry; division maneuver planner and brigade assistant operations officer for the 1st IBCT, 10th Mountain Division; and experimentation staff officer in the Joint and Army Experimentation Division (JAED) of the Army Capabilities Integration Center (ARCIC) at Fort Monroe, VA.

At the time this article was written, **MAJ Joshua I. Wiles** served as the operations officer for 1-27 IN. He currently serves as the Joint Mission Training Officer, J74, with the U.S. Strategic Command. His previous assignments include serving as a battalion executive officer, headquarters and headquarters company commander, and heavy weapons company commander while serving with 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division at Fort Knox, KY. He also served as a platoon leader and executive officer with the 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team at Fort Lewis, WA.