

Lower Echelon and High Impact: *Indonesian Platoon Exchange 2020*

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The 25th Infantry Division earned the nickname “Tropic Lightning” due to its rapid deployment and fierce fighting throughout the Pacific Campaigns in World War II. The division again proved its lethality in the jungle environment in Vietnam where Light Fighters of the Tropic Lightning Division bravely fought through treacherous jungle terrain. As the only division in the U.S. Army that has never been stationed within the continental United States, the 25th Infantry Division routinely trains inside of its assigned area of responsibility (AOR). This training is most often executed through deployments and training exercises with allies and key partners, ranging in size and scope from brigade and division-supported joint, multi-country, and multi-exercise deployments to smaller scale unit-level subject matter expert exchanges.

Annual bilateral or multinational exercises such as Cobra Gold in Thailand, Yama Sakura in Japan, and Garuda Shield in Indonesia remain valuable training opportunities to allow Light Fighters to build readiness, lethality, and interoperability within the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command AOR. Multinational exercises not only provide senior leaders the opportunity to engage about shared national interests, but for junior Soldiers to train shoulder to shoulder with partners and inculcate the skills necessary to win in the Pacific. While the larger scale exercises are important to improve the ability of the division to operate across the AOR, the small-scale missions and exchanges can have a significant impact as well. The smaller scale training events empower junior leaders to plan and execute training within the Indo-Pacific AOR, enabling elements of the division to operate in the AOR at a relatively lower cost and thus more persistent basis. The Indonesian Platoon Exchange 2020 — conducted by platoons from 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, and platoons from two battalions of the Indonesian Army (Tentara Nasional Indonesia-Angkatan Darat [TNI-AD]) — improved the readiness and tactical interoperability of our two armies. The exchange also achieved strategic partnership objectives and honed the skills required for the 25th Infantry Division to deploy elements across the Pacific.



A Soldier assigned to 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment learns techniques in jungle movement, tracking, and counter-tracking from an Indonesian Army soldier on 16 November 2020. (Photo by 1LT Brian Amato)

The forward deploying element of the exercise required a U.S. platoon from C Troop, 3-4 CAV to deploy to Malang, Indonesia, to train with the Indonesian Army's 502nd Airborne Battalion. The planning phase began with specified training objectives identified by both U.S. and TNI-AD units. Once these training objectives were identified through collaborative planning sessions, the platoons began planning within the 10-step training model. The exercise provided an opportunity to train on the squadron's mission-essential tasks of infiltration and area security while simultaneously training the TNI-AD's mountaineering and patrol objectives. Leaders fully empowered platoon leadership to plan and execute their training plan based on the commander's intent. Throughout the planning process, the platoon leadership participated in weekly interim progress reviews hosted by division and brigade planners that allowed them to directly provide and receive inputs to the training plan. This was a unique opportunity to truly flatten the planning hierarchy and coach junior leaders at the platoon level about considerations and planning inputs that are normally reserved for squadron-level staff and above. This resulted in a common operating picture that flawlessly synchronized efforts from the division to platoon level.

The platoon deployed in late October and conducted a two-week restriction of movement (RoM) in accordance with COVID-19 guidance at a hotel in Surabaya, Indonesia. During this time the platoon continued coordination with the 502nd Airborne Battalion and conducted final rehearsals utilizing Microsoft Teams and other virtual mediums. Once released from RoM, the platoon moved to Malang, Indonesia, to begin the 11-day training plan. The first three days of training focused on individual soldier skills. Instructors from the TNI-AD and U.S. platoon conducted blocks of instruction utilizing their respective doctrine to teach reconnaissance fundamentals, camouflage, and tactical combat casualty care.

The next three days of training focused on operations at the squad level. Integrated squads of U.S. and TNI-AD Soldiers conducted security patrol lanes, jungle tracking lanes, and Indonesian jungle survival operations. The platoon of Light Fighters gained a new perspective of jungle operations during movements across the unrelenting jungle terrain of East Java. The classes and training conducted by the TNI-AD stressed the importance of self-sustainment during continuous jungle operations. This particular perspective focused on mission planning by increments of weeks, instead of days, prior to resupply. This emphasis on survivability and sustainment reinforced the importance of route selection, terrain analysis, and load plans to the U.S. platoon's NCOs. The final days of training focused on mountaineering and infiltration techniques. The U.S. platoon taught classes on lead climber implementation in severely restricted terrain, casualty evacuation utilizing a z-pulley, U.S. Army knots, and rappelling techniques. While the previous patrolling blocks of instruction challenged U.S. personnel to understand our sustainment limitations, these blocks of instruction challenged the TNI-AD leadership to understand their limitations on casualty evacuation, specifically with respect to their prolonged jungle operations. The infiltration training concluded with a practical exercise of rappelling from the 90-foot Coban Jahe Waterfall.

Simultaneous to the training executed in Indonesia, a platoon from the TNI-AD deployed to Schofield Barracks, HI, to complete the platoon exchange. The platoon from the 431st Para Raider Battalion trained alongside a U.S. platoon from Apache Troop, 3-4 CAV. As with the forward-deployed element, the small scale of the exchange provided some flexibility in training development that enabled a collaborative approach. At the request of the TNI-AD, the training incorporated elements of military operations on urban terrain, something that has not been emphasized in our standard training approach. Additionally, the exchange provided an opportunity to showcase the 25th Infantry Division Lightning Academy's Jungle Operations Training Course as both platoons conducted mobility, survival, and jungle operations lanes. The training also covered elements of mounted and dismounted movement, communications training and interoperability, and physical fitness and cultural events. Through the exchange, the U.S. troopers were able to train shoulder to shoulder with key partners and refresh our knowledge of tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) in urban terrain while the TNI-AD had the opportunity to exchange TTPs with the U.S. Army jungle experts.

Similar to larger scale exercises such as Garuda Shield, the Indonesian Platoon Exchange 2020 increased interoperability and cemented relationships with a key partner in the Pacific AOR. Additionally, the execution of the exchange provided an incredible opportunity for junior leaders to execute the 10-step training model and truly own the training, while the smaller scale mitigated some of the higher risk and cost associated with larger scale international training exercises. By conducting tough, realistic, and challenging training within the arduous jungle terrain of Indonesia and here in Hawaii, the Light Fighters from across 3-4 CAV and the Bronco Brigade continued



A Soldier assigned to 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment shows Indonesian soldiers from the 431st Para Raider Infantry Battalion how to operate a small unmanned aircraft system during military operations on urban terrain training at Schofield Barracks, HI, on 22 November 2020. (Photo by SSG Alan Brutus)

the prestigious legacy of the 25th Infantry Division's ability to rapidly deploy and conduct operations throughout the Pacific.

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