



## *Training Today's Soldiers for Tomorrow's War:* **Implementing LSCO into OSUT**

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*"Wars are won by the courage of soldiers, the quality of leaders, and the excellence of training... training that is realistic, meaningful, and thorough... training that convinces our soldiers and our leaders that they can and must win the battle of the next war."*

— GEN Donn Starry

"The Soldier and Training," 9 January 1981<sup>1</sup>

The U.S. Army Infantry School's (USAIS) One Station Unit Training (OSUT) is designed to transform civilian volunteers into lethal Infantry Soldiers ready to deploy, fight, and win our nation's wars against any adversary, anytime, and anywhere. This year's National Security Strategic Guidance highlighted "that the distribution of power across the world is changing, creating new threats," most notably near-peer adversaries China and Russia.<sup>2</sup> To build Infantry Soldiers ready to combat these near-peer threats, the USAIS must implement large-scale combat operations (LSCO)-focused training into its Infantry OSUT program of instruction (POI).



Reminiscent of the post-Vietnam Army of 1970s, today's Army is transitioning from an emphasis on small-scale, COIN-centric conflicts back to LSCO. Over the past two decades, Infantry OSUT focused on small-scale asymmetric threats in a partially contested environment that involved fire team to squad-level dismounted patrols or route clearance missions operating out of forward operating bases or combat outposts. Enemy activity was depicted as capable but technologically and logistically inferior, resulting in Infantry Soldiers developing an overdependence on friendly enablers while maintaining consistent air superiority. This approach produced competent Infantry Soldiers for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, but did so at the expense of preparing to face near-peer competitors. Efforts to transition from COIN to LSCO in Infantry OSUT are well under way in both the LFX and STX training progressions that place a primary focus on performing individual Soldier skills through collective infantry tasks. This article will outline how the application of LSCO-focused training into portions of the 22-week Infantry OSUT cycle will better prepare Infantry Soldiers and leaders to fight our nation's wars.

### **LSCO in Live-Fire Exercises (LFXs)**

The Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCoE) Commanding General MG Patrick Donahoe directed that "our most immediate priority is completing the cognitive disconnect with counterinsurgency (COIN) operations, and ensuring our training focuses on preparing for LSCO."<sup>3</sup> As the lead for the 198th Infantry Brigade, the 2nd Battalion, 58th Infantry Regiment (2-58IN) began optimizing live-fire exercises (LFXs) and situational training exercises (STXs) to install a realistic and challenging experience that certifies trainees on individual Soldier skills through collective infantry tasks while operating in a LSCO environment. This optimization includes educating Infantry trainees on near-peer adversary weapons, equipment, uniforms, and battlefield tactics. Implementing LSCO into Infantry OSUT also capitalizes on the leader development initiative of training leaders at echelon to ensure they are prepared to lead Soldiers to defeat our nation's enemies in tomorrow's fight.

Infantry OSUT LFX progression consists of Buddy Team LFX (BTT), Fire Team LFX (FTT), and culminates with Enhanced Fire Team LFX (EFLX). It is intended to ground trainees on the individual Soldier skills required to produce lethal Infantry Soldiers ready to combat a near-peer enemy. This progression uses the crawl-walk-run methodology that

affords multiple repetitions on the following tasks:

- Move as a member of a team;
- Engage targets with an M4 Carbine;
- Use verbal and non-verbal communication;
- Maintain adequate suppressive fire;
- Employ hand grenades;
- Perform individual movement techniques; and
- Select proper cover and concealment to close with and engage an enemy.

BTT and FTT are the “crawl” and “walk” that train the fundamentals of operating as a member of a team and reinforce Soldier self-confidence on effectively engaging enemy targets, performing individual movement techniques, and selecting adequate cover and concealment.

Building on the foundation established with BTT and FTT, EFLX is the “run” that certifies Soldiers on fundamentals while operating in a more dynamic and challenging environment defined by complex natural terrain without pre-established fighting positions. This challenges Soldiers to accurately select fighting positions while conducting fire and maneuver through natural terrain and is the first LFX where enemy activity influences a fire team’s actions on the objective. While the standards for BTT, FTT, and EFLX remain consistent with doctrine, additions made to implement near-peer engagements include increasing targets to each lane (simulating engaging a larger force); developing targets that require multiple hits to go down (simulating an enemy with personal protective equipment); and replacing faceless

target silhouettes with images of armed foreign soldiers. These refinements remove COIN-centric approaches and instill the challenges of LSCO.

### Creating Near-Peer Opposition Forces (OPFOR)

*“The United States Army faces an inflection point... Our Nation’s adversaries have gained on [U.S. Army] qualitative and quantitative advantages. If the Army does not change, it risks losing deterrence and preservation of the Nation’s most sacred interests.”*

— GEN James C. McConville, Army Chief of Staff<sup>4</sup>

To optimize the LSCO training environment, Infantry OSUT needed to change the way it portrays a known OPFOR. Infantry Soldiers must become familiar with and train against an OPFOR that accurately represents a near-peer adversary who can engage forces across a range of military operations like Russia, China, Iran, or North Korea. Over the past two decades, Infantry OSUT OPFOR typically consisted of trainees operating in small, three-to-four-person teams armed with M4s, wearing Army Combat Uniforms, and executing tactics to match the incompetence of a small insurgent force. While that provided an easily controlled method for drill sergeants to prepare Soldiers for the Global War on Terrorism fight, it willfully missed on a variety of opportunities to enhance the fundamentals of fire and maneuver that produce versatile Infantry Soldiers.

The 2-58IN is validating a method towards improving OPFOR for a LSCO environment by incorporating foreign

uniforms, weapons, tactics, and an organizational structure that replicates a near-peer enemy. Coordination with the Training Aid Service Center helped establish an “OPFOR Package” consisting of foreign military uniforms, flags, insignia, and weapons such as AK-47s, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), PKMs (Pulemyot Kalashnikovas), AK-74s, RPKs (Ruchnoy Pulemyot Kalashnikovas), and SVDs (sniper rifles). This package includes modification equipment from the Army National Guard Exportable Combat Training Center that enables U.S. Army high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs) to resemble Russian BRDMs. These OPFOR adjustments improve collective training lanes by exposing actual enemy uniforms, weapons, and equipment. Units can resource this package to augment and provide realism to any situational train-



Photos courtesy of 2nd Battalion, 58th Infantry Regiment

**A Soldier in training with 2-58IN engages enemy targets from a selected fighting position in natural terrain during the Enhanced Fire Team Live-Fire Exercise.**



At left, an OPFOR soldier engages Bravo Company, 2-581N during a squad attack collective training lane. Above, OPFOR soldiers prepare for a near ambush against a friendly infantry squad during a field training exercise.

ing exercise. Additionally, 2-581N resourced visual threat posters that display weapons and equipment capabilities of Russian, Chinese, Iranian, and North Korean militaries. Boards for each country are hung in platoon bays throughout company training areas that enable Soldiers to regularly identify, study, and understand the capabilities and tactics of potential enemies. These applications provide a LSCO focus that improves the development of Infantry Soldiers and their understanding of our potential adversaries.

### LSCO in Situational Training Exercises (STX)

The Infantry OSUT STX progression begins with the Forge exercise that certifies trainees to become Soldiers and is followed by squad tactical training (STT) and the field training exercise (FTX)/Bayonet that certifies Soldiers to become Infantry Soldiers. After a thorough review of the STX progression, it became apparent that adjustments were necessary to instill a focus on LSCO. These adjustments include:

- Increasing physical rigor and mental hardship on Soldiers while operating as a member of a team;
- Enforcing strict standards towards individual camouflage,

noise-light-litter discipline, and Soldier field craft;

- Shifting from a non-contiguous/non-linear battlefield setting to a contiguous linear battlefield setting with particular respect to conducting defensive operations; and
- Introducing a disciplined OPFOR that wears enemy uniforms, uses enemy weapon systems, and fights with enemy tactics to accurately reflect combating our anticipated near-peer adversaries.

### Foreign Military Threat Boards

<p><b>China: People's Liberation Army</b></p>		<p><b>QBZ-95</b> (Infantry Equipment)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5.8mm</li> <li>• Effective firing range: 400m point target</li> </ul>	<p><b>Type 80</b> (Infantry Equipment)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7.62mm x 54mmR</li> <li>• Effective Firing Range: 100m-1,500m</li> </ul>
		<p><b>ZBC-04</b> (Breaching Fighting Vehicle Equipment)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main Weapon: 30mm/ATGM Machine Gun</li> <li>• Main Weapon Range: 2km / 4km</li> </ul>	<p><b>Z-9</b> (Attack Helicopter Equipment)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main Weapon: Various Guns, Rockets, and Missiles</li> <li>• Main Weapon Range: Various</li> </ul>
<p><b>Russian Army</b></p>		<p><b>AK-15</b> (Infantry Equipment)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7.62mm x 39mm</li> <li>• Effective firing range: 350m point target</li> </ul>	<p><b>PKP Pecheneg</b> (Infantry Equipment)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7.62mm x 54mmR</li> <li>• Effective Firing Range: 1,500m</li> </ul>
		<p><b>BMP-3</b> (Breaching Fighting Vehicle Equipment)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speeds: 45mph (road), 28mph (off-road)</li> <li>• Main Weapon: 2K23 turret with 100mm gun</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mi-24 Hind</b> (Attack Helicopter Equipment)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 23mm Cannon, Anti-Tank Munitions, IR Missiles</li> <li>• Main Weapon Range: 2, 6, 5.2km</li> </ul>

The Forge is the first STX where trainees conduct individual Soldier skills through collective Infantry tasks. The key LSCO-focused training events are:

- Formations and Order of March (FOOM),
- Night Infiltration Course (NIC),
- Battle March and Shoot, and
- Patrol Base Operations.

FOOM is the introduction to squad and platoon-level movement and maneuver that includes advancing through restrictive terrain under both day and night conditions; this is the event where trainees increase familiarization on operating with night vision devices. The NIC simulates maneuvering while under direct enemy fire during hours of limited visibility, like what is anticipated in LSCO. Battle March and Shoot incorporates strenuous physical and mental

challenges before transitioning into a “stress shoot.” The purpose is to put trainees under duress before performing a live-fire engagement wearing a full combat load. Additionally, this event also presents a chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) live-fire engagement that simulates engaging enemy targets in a contaminated environment. Throughout the Forge, trainees conduct patrol base operations that include how to occupy, establish security, construct fighting positions, and perform priorities of work consisting of weapons maintenance and field hygiene while enforcing noise-light-litter discipline. These events inculcate the necessary individual Soldier skills for LSCO as well as build the foundation to progress into STT and the FTX/Bayonet where Soldiers will be contested by an OPFOR.

STT builds upon the foundations established during Forge through an emphasis on squad collective training. STT mirrors the FTX/Bayonet and is where Soldiers gain an understanding of squad battle drills, establish squad and platoon fighting positions, and execute collective training lanes against a designated OPFOR. STT institutes a LSCO focus with companies occupying an assigned training area in a defensive posture oriented against a near-peer enemy threat. This company defensive posture reinforces individual and introduces squad and platoon-level fighting positions that serve as a launch point for squad collective training against an OPFOR. During this four-day STX, Soldiers get

multiple repetitions performing the collective tasks required to advance into the FTX/Bayonet.

The Infantry OSUT FTX/Bayonet are the culminating events that certify and produce Infantry Soldiers. During these two events, Soldiers execute squad and platoon collective training against an internally resourced OPFOR operating with a specific mission and intent that mimic a near-peer enemy. The FTX begins with the company establishing an area defense with mutually supporting platoon fighting positions. This generates a linear area of operations against an enemy force that is likely in a LSCO fight. Companies then transition into shaping operations consisting of the following platoon and squad collective training lanes: squad attack; movement to contact; near and far ambush; anti-armor ambush; react to contact/ambush; knock out a bunker; enter/clear a trench; and platoon attack. These collective training lanes reinforce the individual and collective tasks taught during Forge and STT with an additional emphasis on Soldier leadership. Collective training lanes during shaping operations are led by platoon leaders and platoon sergeants, with Soldiers rotating as squad leaders and fire team leaders while drill sergeants serve as observer-coach-trainers.

A typical FTX collective training lane consists of a squad receiving a mission while in its assigned defensive position. The squad then executes a series of assigned tasks

*Soldiers in 2-581N defend against an OPFOR attack during the FTX.*





*The 2-58IN Battalion Staff presents a large-scale combat operations order to Charlie Company cadre prior to their cycle's FTX/Bayonet event.*

against a designated OPFOR that simulates a near-peer enemy. At the completion of each training iteration, the squad returns to its established defensive position while remaining under constant enemy surveillance. This serves as the mechanism for achieving a continuously contested environment that includes periodic enemy probes into defensive positions, reaction to indirect fires and air attacks, and the occasional CBRN attack to simulate a contaminated battlefield. The FTX shaping operations phase consists of five days of continuous activity before transitioning into the Bayonet. The Bayonet is the final 48 hours of the FTX that consists of a 12-mile tactical foot movement followed by a platoon raid on a designated enemy objective occupied by OPFOR. Once Soldiers successfully complete the FTX/Bayonet, they are ready to advance to become "Infantry Soldiers." Incorporating LSCO into STX progression better prepares Infantry Soldiers to integrate into any operational unit across the Army ready to quickly develop into a fire team leader.

### Leader Development

*"Leader development is our top priority. It is through the touchpoints we have with junior maneuver officers and NCOs that we are capable of changing the trajectory of the Army... we must capitalize on every opportunity to make leaders who are more prepared to lead Soldiers in today's Army, and in future large-scale combat operations."*

— MG Patrick Donahoe<sup>5</sup>

The effort to implement LSCO into Infantry OSUT reveals additional ways to accomplish one of the MCOE commander's top priorities of leader development. Leader development is defined as "the deliberate, continuous, sequential, and progressive process... that grows leaders capable of decisive action."<sup>6</sup> To capitalize

on this opportunity, 2-58IN instituted a tactical orders process into the FTX/Bayonet event. The orders process trains a fundamental skill required of leaders at multiple echelons and is essential for preparing junior officers and NCOs to lead Soldiers in future LSCO.

The use of a LSCO tactical operation order (OPORD) in a company's FTX/Bayonet enables battalion commanders to develop leaders at echelon beginning with the battalion staff and continuing through company command teams, platoon leaders/platoon sergeants, and drill sergeant cadre. For each company's FTX/Bayonet, this process begins with the battalion issuing a tactical OPORD that provides the overall "road to war" (from division to company) and delivers the company's mission and intent for its assigned training area of operations. After receiving the battalion OPORD, company commanders produce a company OPORD issuing specified tasks

for the shaping operations phase of the FTX. The shaping operations phase is the period where company command teams rotate platoons and squads through collective training lanes against an OPFOR in a continually contested environment. Throughout this phase company command teams assess platoon leaders and platoon sergeants on their ability to create and brief fragmentary orders (FRAGOs), as well as how drill sergeants evaluate assigned Soldiers on the individual Soldier skills required for graduation. Shaping operations occur over a five-day period before transitioning into the FTX's final 48 hours, or Bayonet event.

Roughly 48 hours prior to transitioning into the Bayonet, companies receive a FRAGO from battalion directing a platoon raid on a designated enemy objective. This FRAGO provides an additional repetition of the orders process for battalion, company, and platoon-level leadership and



*A platoon leader briefs the Bayonet mission fragmentary order to his platoon.*

presents an updated enemy situation and mission for the final 12-mile foot movement and platoon collective training lane. The battalion commander, command sergeant major, executive officer, operations officer, and operations sergeant major observe, coach, and mentor cadre on their performance of each company and platoon OPORD brief as well as the execution of the Bayonet event. Feedback is given to junior officers and NCOs following each iteration to facilitate leader development. Implementing the orders process into the FTX/Bayonet undoubtedly strengthens junior officers and NCOs to integrate into any operational unit prepared to fight and win in future LSCO.



## Summary

This article outlines enhancements to Infantry OSUT that are improving the development of Infantry Soldiers through applications that simulate LSCO. The 2-58IN made deliberate adjustments to install a LSCO focus with no changes to the current POI by critically analyzing LFX and STX training, OPFOR creation and utilization, and leader development opportunities. This includes increasing the number of targets for lane iterations, developing targets that require multiple hits to go down, and replacing faceless target silhouettes with images of armed foreign soldiers into the LFX progression. With STX progression, 2-58IN improved educating cadre and Soldiers on potential adversaries' military weaponry and its capabilities, and implemented a realistic OPFOR that looks, acts, and fights like a near-peer enemy operating in a continually contested environment on a linear battlefield. Finally, 2-58IN incorporated the orders process for the FTX/Bayonet that places a deliberate focus on the training and development of junior officers and NCOs towards LSCO. The cost associated to resource these applications and training adjustments are nearly negligible both in time and money. However, the payoff is real, tangible, and directly impacts the readiness of training today's Infantry Soldiers for tomorrow's war.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Sorley, *Press On!* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2009), 717.

<sup>2</sup> The White House, "Interim National Security Strategic Guidance," Whitehouse.gov, last modified 3 March 2021, accessed from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/03/interim-national-security-strategic-guidance/>.

<sup>3</sup> MG Patrick Donahoe, "Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Mission Guidance," Fort Benning, GA: Maneuver Center of Excellence, 2021, 3.

<sup>4</sup> GEN James C. McConville, "Army Multi-Domain Transformation: Ready to Win in Competition and Conflict," Headquarters, Department of the Army, 16 March 2021, i.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Army Regulation 600-100, *Army Profession and Leadership Policy*, 2017, 32.

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**MAJ Ross C. Pixler** currently serves as the executive officer (XO) of 2-58IN. He earned a bachelor's degree from the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, NY; a master of art degree from Columbia University; and a master of art and science degree from the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, KS. He has served in various command and staff positions that include the 3rd Infantry Division, 10th Mountain Division, 101st Airborne Division (AASLT), and West Point instructor and tactical officer. He has served multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**CPT James E. Bryson** currently serves as the operations officer for 2-58IN. His previous assignments include serving as a Stryker platoon leader in A Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Battalion; weapons platoon senior observer-coach-trainer (OCT) with Task Force 2; division battle captain in Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion; and commander of Charlie Company, 2-54IN. CPT Bryson earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Arizona State University and a master's degree in business administration from Grand Canyon University.

**CPT Avery W. Littlejohn** commanded Alpha Company, 2-58IN. His previous assignments include serving as a platoon leader with 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Fort Benning, and with 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, Fort Carson, CO. CPT Littlejohn earned a bachelor's degree in systems engineering from USMA.

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**CPT Matthew T. Lunger** currently commands Charlie Company, 2-58IN. He is a former enlisted Infantry Soldier who spent three years in 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, Fort Richardson, AK, which included a 12-month deployment to Afghanistan in 2009-2010. He then served five years as a team member through section leader in a dismounted reconnaissance company in 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, and included additional Afghanistan deployments in 2012 and 2014. After commissioning, CPT Lunger served as an assistant S3 and rifle platoon leader in 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, in Vicenza, Italy; and as company XO in Delta Company, 2-58IN. He earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and public policy from the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs.

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