

# The Platoon LFX at IBOLC

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The platoon live-fire exercise (LFX) is a culminating event for officers attending the Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course (IBOLC). It provides the student officers the opportunity to demonstrate and apply their practical knowledge of infantry and leadership skills during a deliberate attack in a contested environment.

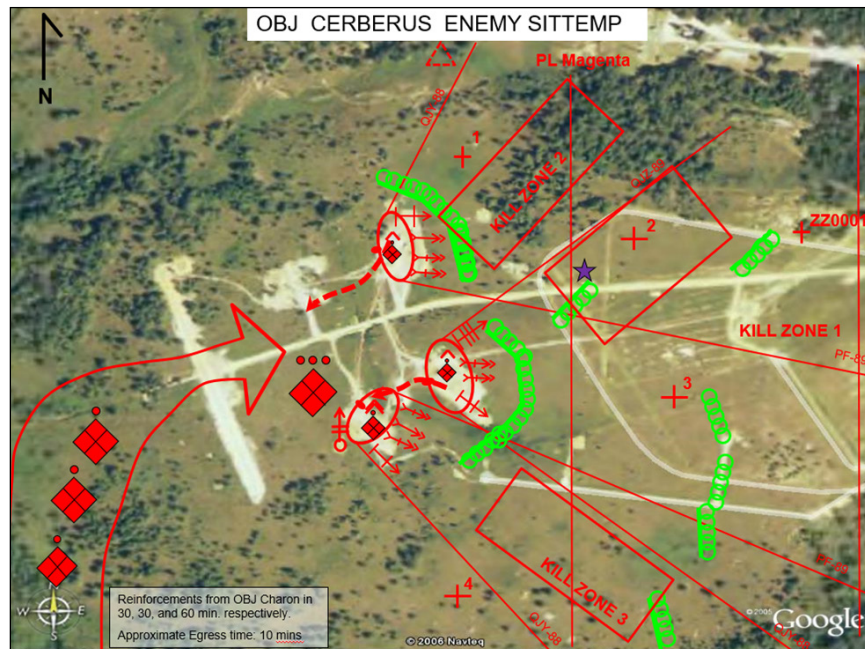
During the LFX, the students are coached and mentored to focus the operation on fundamental battle tasks that must be accomplished to defeat an adversary in direct and close combat action. Students plan using troop leading procedures and confirm their respective plans by conducting a tactical exercise without troops (TEWT). Students then conduct specific rehearsals of small unit assigned tasks and battle drills such as changing out machine-gun barrels, cutting wire for tactical obstacles, laying in support-by-fire (SBF) positions, and entering a trench (Battle Drill 7).

To be prepared to fight in a communication-degraded environment and under electronic warfare (EW) conditions, students establish realistic primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency (PACE) communication plans that limit time on Army radio systems. Prior to the LFX, the PACE plan is distributed among all members of the platoon and rehearsed at scale (farthest distances between elements) to confirm its feasibility. Additionally, the student officers conduct a communication technical rehearsal where all key leaders, over a terrain model, walk through the operation calling out triggers and cues to maintain organization, discipline, and most importantly, tempo.

Tempo is significant to the success of the LFX mission. Tempo, as defined by Army Doctrine Publication 3-90, *Offense and Defense*, is “the rate of speed and rhythm of military operations over time with respect to the enemy.” Because the students are in a contested environment for this training exercise, it is assumed that they are being censored. Once they initiate the attack, the enemy knows exactly where the platoon is (or is moving to) and therefore attempts to find the platoon and fix or destroy it to hinder the offensive success. To this point, every member of the platoon wears a watch and tracks the time. The platoon must be “fast” enough to stay in front of the enemy’s counteractions but “rhythmed” enough to not lose discipline and organization during the attack.

## **IBOLC Platoon Live-Fire Exercise Quick Facts**

- The IBOLC platoon LFX occurs during week 17 of 19 in the course program of instruction (POI).
- It replicates a deliberate attack under large-scale combat operations (LSCO); the objective is a seizure of an enemy trench system.
- The LFX is predicated on tempo and grounded in infantry leadership and battle skills.
- Small unmanned aerial systems are used to support the platoon attack.
- By week 17 in IBOLC, student officers have learned troop leading procedures, battle drills, rehearsals, communication, and holistic fitness; this training and education culminates and is measured during the platoon LFX. At this point in the course, students are two weeks from completing and graduating IBOLC.



## Enemy Situation

In the operation order given to the students, the enemy situation is straight forward and realistic. An enemy squad (plus) is holding the trench utilizing fortified bunkers and has been in place for a minimum of seven days. A named area of interest (NAI) is located to the south and east of the trench with a suspected listening post/observation post (LP/OP). Enemy targets will present themselves to the west of SBF 2 as U.S. forces begin to establish. The enemy is templated to have FM communications capabilities, and the trench is within range of enemy mortars and artillery. The trench is protected by triple-strand concertina wire which the students mechanically breach. Enemy (one level up) is in vicinity of the objective with reinforcements on target within 10 minutes. The trigger for enemy reinforcement is U.S. forces massing on a breach site.

## Firing Positions

The scenario is built around three templated SBF locations tied to four phase lines. SBF 1 is the furthest east position and enables freedom of maneuver for the platoon to begin its clearance of the NAI. Once the student platoon leader calls the fire mission, the lane begins and students cross the first phase line. As the students clear the NAI, they encounter the two-man LP/OP. Once they have cleared it, a casualty is assessed and the platoon continues past the second phase line, triggering the first shift fire. SBF 2 is located directly south and west of the trench and provides isolation for the breach and assault force.

At the third phase line, the breaching squad moves to a position of cover that is created with sandbags, which serves as a rally point for the breach squad to conduct individual movement techniques to the local SBF just outside the breach. Students suppress the trench at close range and conduct their final shift fire off the trench, opening the lane for the breaching team to begin cutting. As soon as local SBF is established, SOSRA (suppress, obscure, secure, reduce, assault) has begun. The final position, SBF 3, is located on the west side of the trench and serves as the western-most position in the hasty defense for the enemy counterattack that is inbound.



**Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course students provide supporting fire during Class 02-24's platoon live-fire exercise. (Photos courtesy of 2nd Battalion, 11th Infantry Regiment)**

### **Mortar Fire Support**

As platoon leaders, the students will be expected to be proficient in the use of indirect fire to enable maneuver. For the exercise, a highly professional mortar platoon from 1st Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment provides realistic feedback, further enabling the instructional purpose of the LFX. During the planning and preparation phase of the operation, the students prepare a target list worksheet comprising various targets templated on and beyond the objective. The mortar section fires all missions into an impact area located roughly 300 meters to the west, allowing student observers to adjust fire in real time. The student platoon leader communicates directly to the fire direction center via FM communication to adjust fire onto preplanned targets and targets of opportunity. The 1-19 IN provides a section of 60mm mortars to serve as the company mortars as well as a section of 81mm mortars to serve as the battalion-level indirect asset. Having these professional NCOs serve as the company fire support officer/NCO allows for student platoon leaders to receive enhanced real-world experience as they complete repetitions communicating exactly as they will when they join the force at their unit.

### **Trench Operations**

Students begin preparing for trench operations during Basic Rifle Marksmanship 2 (week 4 of 19) where they conduct urban rifle marksmanship qualification with their assigned weapon to prepare for close quarters engagements. During "Team/Squad Operations" (week 8), they learn the fundamentals of Battle Drill 7 (enter a trench and secure a foothold) as a squad. Their training progresses during introduction to "Platoon Operations" (week 11) where students conduct Battle Drill 7 as a platoon. This battle drill is trained concurrently with Battle Drill 8 (breach a mined wire obstacle) during this week. During "Urban Operations" (week 16), students are taught Battle Drill 6 (enter and clear a room) as well as how to maneuver through various urban terrain to include hallways, rooftops, and stairs.

The students' culminating "Platoon Live Fire" (week 17) incorporates Battle Drills 7 and 8 together under live-fire conditions. The method of breaching is mechanical via bolt cutters. A key focal point is how the breach point is marked with engineer tape on the left handrail, as well as the entry point to the trench with a VS-17 panel. Students enter the trench by employing two hand grenades at the initial entry point. Once the first team has entered the trench, the lead person extends a "Moses Pole" consisting of a long





**An Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course cadre member follows the lead assault element during the platoon live-fire exercise's trench operations.**

whip antenna with a VS-17 on the top for daytime marking; an infrared chemlight replaces the VS-17 for nighttime marking. This allows the entire platoon to track the frontline trace of friendly elements moving along the trench. Students are taught to conceal the Moses Pole's overt marking to prevent unnecessary exposure before entering the trench.

As the students maneuver through the trench, the assault element is issued 10 grenades to employ one at each dragon tooth (eight total), plus two for the initial entry. While in the trench, there are two drop target engagements along the long axis of the trench. These are constructed using three-dimensional "ivan" targets with 550 cord tied to a balloon. The balloon is in the target center of mass so when the student accurately engages the center of mass, the balloon will deflate. This causes the entire target to drop, thus replicating an incapacitated enemy. To control this engagement, a cadre member is directly behind the lead assault element with the ability to cease fire should an unsafe act occur. Additionally, the blank iteration is used as the criteria to determine if platoons can safely engage targets in the trench. If they cannot execute the battle drill safely, they will not progress to live fire in the trench.

### **Small Unmanned Aerial Systems (sUAS)**

To further enable the platoon, use of sUAS at the platoon level has been introduced. The DJI Mavic 3 drone is provided to the platoon leader as an asset outside of the typical company Raven and battalion Puma. As seen in the Ukrainian conflict, the lethality of small drones has been proven and tested. Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 7-100.1, *Russian Tactics*, highlights the use of Russian sUAS from a "red hat" perspective. IBOLC introduces Battle Drill 15 (react to sUAS) in the training progression prior to the platoon LFX to train red air while patrolling, but we have also found the training value of friendly sUAS greatly outweighs that of simulating red air during the LFX. The student platoon leader communicates via FM with the cadre drone operator who can be located off site at the tower or with the platoon leader on the lane. As company commanders evaluate platoon leaders, they also provide injects for use of the drone, which range from pushing information to higher to coaching the platoon leader to use the drone to clear routes for SBF 1, 2, and 3. The drone is highly mobile and mimics the quadcopters used by Ukrainians and Russians in Europe. Due to its size and mobility, the drone can be used to clear blind corners in the trench and observe indirect fire. Student platoon leaders' ability to communicate to higher and synchronize the



**A drone pilot watches as a fire team maneuvers on an enemy location.**

use of their own internal sUAS (Mavic 3) to coordinate shift and lift direct and indirect fire are the primary points they are graded on in that position.

### **Rehearsals**

The officers are given a substantial amount of time to conduct rehearsals for the LFX. These include battle drill, fire coordination exercise, and communication rehearsals. The battle drill rehearsals include breaching (cutting wire, emplacing smoke, and opening the lane), trench clearing (deliberate and methodically) with M249 placement and grenade preparation, SBF occupation (a tadpole design that lays out by position where each member of the squad/team is on the SBF line), and barrel change outs for all unit machine guns. The fire coordination exercise allows the platoon to synchronize direct and indirect fires in the attack while confirming triggers, shift fires, and cues.

### **Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) Considerations for Consolidation, Reorganization, and Transition to Future Operations**

Earlier, we discussed tempo and the need to establish rhythm to successfully synchronize the attack. One of the main efforts at IBOLC is to prepare the students for future conflict in LSCO. This has changed the mindset of what and how we teach beyond assaulting the objective. Long gone are the days of the high-fives from SBF 1 once they lift fire. With LSCO in mind, we are training the continuous fight while preparing forces for follow-on operations. Our weapons squads are being trained on ammunition conservation with focus beyond their immediate mission. They are part of the platoon operation, not just at the beginning but throughout the entire mission. The Infantry gains and maintains ground while preparing for future missions, and bringing our most casualty-producing weapons at the platoon level to the objective in preparation for what's next is pivotal to the platoon and company's success. The developed scenario requires the platoon leader to focus on all his/her forces during consolidation and reorganization and requires additional planning beyond the objective.

In LSCO, our platoon leaders will need to be trained not only to get to the fight and win but also to focus on the enemy situation and prepare for the next fight. Training during the platoon live fire is a culmination of weeks of emphasis on basic infantry skills while providing a challenging environment where platoon

leaders are forced to think beyond what is presented in front of them. Our goal in IBOLC is to prepare lieutenants to deploy to combat and be successful on Day 1 at their first unit of assignment, and these LSCO adjustments to the platoon live fire are giving them early exposure to decisions they may be required to make in the future.

The platoon live fire has morphed over the years, and we continue to change alongside advancing doctrine. The one thing that remains constant at IBOLC is that the infantry platoon remains at the tip of the spear. It prepares to fight and win the current fight and transitions to preparation for follow-on operations. The platoons never cede ground, and they reinforce their elements to remain in control of hard-fought territory. The IBOLC platoon live fire is a great opportunity for our students to see what right looks like under training conditions to prepare them as they head to their first units, where preparation and training may not be a luxury.

### **Conclusion**

Student officers at IBOLC experience a realistic and tough training scenario during the platoon LFX. They fight under LSCO conditions against an alert and determined enemy and must utilize tempo in the offense and synchronize indirect and direct weapon systems to achieve isolation. The students maximize battle drill rehearsals to eliminate and mitigate risk at points of friction, which helps them understand the rigors of close quarter/ground combat and better prepare them for leading in similar situations as Infantry officers in our Army.

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**Students in IBOLC Class 09-23 conduct a platoon live-fire exercise at Galloway Range.**