

Commandant's Note

BRIGADIER GENERAL BENJAMIN C. FREAKLEY

The Experimental Force (EXFOR)

LINKING DOCTRINE, TRAINING, AND TECHNOLOGY

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt first spoke of the “great arsenal of democracy” in his Fireside Chat of 29 December 1940, and that enormous industrial and technological base is even more vital today that it was when he described it. In 1940 we were not yet at war, but in that radio broadcast he warned of war’s imminence and exhorted Americans to gird themselves for combat. Today, we are a nation at war, and our men and women in uniform are in the heat of battle, carrying the fight to the enemy and restoring hope to the oppressed. While our



intelligence and public safety agencies are working tirelessly to ferret out and otherwise thwart enemies of the Republic, America’s enormous scientific and manufacturing base is introducing weapons and equipment whose quality cannot be equaled by any other nation. But producing the tools of war is not enough; we must evaluate their effectiveness within the constructs of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leader development, personnel and facilities (DOTMLPF). We now have an organization designed and structured to do just that.

Early this year, the 29th Infantry Regiment stood up a new experimental force (EXFOR) platoon which will work in conjunction with the Soldier Battle Lab to assess new concepts, equipment, organizations, and TTP’s prior to fielding or implementation. EXFOR will provide the Army with proponent feedback and fielding assistance. New equipment training teams (NETT) and the rapid equipping force (REF) will continue to support the fielding of materiel, but some items need to be fully evaluated before the items are fielded, to ensure their reliability in combat. Our intent is not to slow down the fielding process, but to augment it. All lessons

learned from the assessments will be provided to the materiel developer. Some feedback might require redesign, while others will receive our support in the way of training assistance, manpower, and sponsorship. This will include our deployment of personnel to Theater to augment the REF during initial fielding and subsequent handover.

Historically, assessment and evaluations of new equipment were done in operational units with requirements, but with low priority in the Army’s fielding plan. Today we cannot risk

delay in fielding new weapons and equipment. OPTEMPO for our deployable Army is high and units are unable to assess new equipment by themselves. As their representative, TRADOC will step in to assist. While the support of our tenant units may still be necessary to meet some requirements, the EXFOR platoon — which is intended to eventually expand into a 160-Soldier fully equipped company — will provide a reliable, experienced means of executing the assessments and evaluations that innovation and progress demand. They will be manned and equipped to assess Bradley, Stryker, Motorized, UA, and air assault units. When the new organization is up to speed, we will be able to execute live, virtual, and constructive experiments to complement Army initiatives. The Soldiers and leaders of EXFOR will be familiar with the assessment process and their training level with the process will mean that no inordinate time need be lost training up units to evaluate equipment. In short, the Soldiers of EXFOR will soon become proficient at what they do, and will do it more accurately and expeditiously than ever before.

The Army’s first EXFOR platoon hit the ground running. Its first mission was to participate in the Chief of Staff of the

Army's Leader to Led study and it is now preparing to take part in the Land Warrior Analysis of Alternatives, supporting the program manager for Land Warrior. This initiative will evaluate the performance and progress of the Land Warrior system, while assessing alternatives to the system. An examination of these options will compare the cost effectiveness of fielding the Land Warrior System versus that of its alternatives. Future projects for EXFOR include an assessment of a new Air Assault Expeditionary Force

(AAEF). The AAEF evaluation will also assess the critical issues of Soldier lethality and survivability, and the extent to which networking can best support them.

The EXFOR and Soldier Battle Laboratory will draw upon a wide array of internal and external assets in carrying out their missions. The experimental assets at their disposal include the Army Research Institute, Army research Laboratory, Human Research and Engineering Directorate, Army Test and Experimentation Command, and the instrumented McKenna MOUT site. The Squad Synthetic Environment, the Close Combat Tactical Trainer, the Joint Conflict and Tactical Simulation program, and JANUS are all some of the robust simulations capabilities EXFOR can call upon. We can also transition from electronic media to on-the-ground training at our three Ranger training facilities at Camps Darby, Merrill, and Rudder. Fort Benning has range complexes that accommodate individual weapons from the 9mm pistol and M16A1 rifle up to 155mm howitzers. Army and Air Force aircraft can operate out of Lawson Army Airfield, a flight landing strip adjacent to the McKenna MOUT site, and insert Soldiers into numerous LZ's and DZ's, while waterborne operations take place on the Chattahoochee River and selected ponds on post.

Proponents for infantry-related programs can rapidly develop and implement emerging doctrine by tapping into the infantry noncommissioned officer education system, the officer

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education system, and subject matter experts organic to Fort Benning in the areas of mortar, small arms, light and heavy machine gun, sniper, Bradley, Stryker, land navigation, antitank, Ranger, Pathfinder, Airborne and Air Assault, and urban operations. Tenant units and agencies such as the 75th Ranger Regiment; 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division; the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation; the United States Army Marksmanship Unit; and the three TRADOC Systems Managers all stand ready to lend their

own specialized expertise to this watershed initiative. Finally, Fort Benning is ideally situated to draw upon assets of other key installations. Fort Stewart; Fort Gordon; Fort Rucker; Dobbins, Moody, Eglin, and Robins Air Force Bases; Fort McClellan, Camp Lejeune, Hurlbert Field, and the Port of Jacksonville all lie within reasonable proximity to the Home of the Infantry.

The Experimental Force is a timely initiative whose cost effectiveness will pay off in the immediate future and in the years to come. EXFOR will enable us to assess and evaluate emerging initiatives as we continue the transformation of the Army. Many of us will recall the Fort Benning of the Vietnam era, when timely feedback from the Southeast Asian Theater found resonance in the doctrinal, tactical, and weapons products under development and evaluation. Today we once again find ourselves at war, but our data processing capabilities are light years ahead of those of the Vietnam era; feedback on Al Qaeda and Iraqi tactics, weapons, and improvised explosive devices — to name but a few — are flooding computer screens and are in turn being transformed into products useful to those superb Soldiers who are relentlessly tracking down an enemy halfway around the world. The arsenal of democracy is alive and well, and doing its job. We are proud to point to the 29th Infantry Regiment's experimental force as an innovative and vital part of America's war effort.

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