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JOINT BATTLE STAFF TRAINING

by

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History shows that the success of modern military operations is directly dependent on the effectiveness of the commander and battle staff team. Crises in the new world environment requiring the use of military force will see the employment of multi-service Joint Task Forces (JTF). Trained command and joint battle staff teams will be needed to lead them. Impromptu staffs for JTFs are not cohesive teams. They are not as adept as trained and drilled staffs at time-sensitive planning and execution. Current training and exercises for joint battle staffs is deficient. A training program, based on the Army's Battle Command Training Program, is needed to fill the void.

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## INTRODUCTION

"...No plan survives the first engagement..."

- LTG Tom Kelly, Dir. of Opns.,  
J-3, Joint Staff, Jan 1991.

Current Joint battle staff training does not focus on the development of cohesive and effective teams. We are somewhat adept planners and have learned the value of integrated and joint operations. We are not, however, adroit executors of our plans. Our Joint battle staff training does not sufficiently develop imagination and flexibility under conditions of stress. If these traits are not adequately developed, commanders will not have confidence in their staff's ability to support and staffs will lack confidence in themselves. Joint battle staff training must be refocused to emphasize imagination, flexibility, cohesiveness and team building. If we do not, we will continue to muddle through the execution of critical national security operations.

### The Battle for Buna

US military history is replete with examples of ill-trained and mediocre battle staffs. In November, 1942, the 32d Infantry Division, under the Allied New Guinea Force (ANGF), was committed against portions of the Japanese 18th Army at Buna, New Guinea. In its first battle of World War II, the 32d won, but at a terrible cost. When the fighting ended, the division was incapable of further combat. Almost 3,000 soldiers were dead or wounded. Another 8,500 contracted disease or serious infection in the jungles of New Guinea. The 32d achieved final victory only when augmented by the 19th Australian Brigade.

LTG Robert L. Eichelberger believed the 32d was the best trained of his divisions in I Corps when he sent them to the ANGF. During the conduct of the campaign for Buna, he was ordered to the scene to personally sort out the mess that had been created. The 32d's commander and staff had failed to synchronize division level operations in the face of a dynamic Japanese defense. Regimental combat teams were lost for several critical days because march routes were improperly planned and coordinated. Tactical Air Support (TACAIR) was ineffective throughout the entire campaign because of poor coordination. The dismal performance of the division's command and staff culminated in a total collapse of command and control which stalled the attack for two days. Eichelberger was forced to replace most of the division's senior leadership and staff. (Harrison, p. 12)

The 32d's battle staff was not trained to execute and it was green. That combination was almost disastrous; certainly disastrous for those who suffered and died because of the staff's ineptitude. Has the US military learned its lesson? Does it realize the critical importance of a well-trained, cohesive battle staff? Or, does it pay lip service to the realities of a complex and fluid operational environment where outline contingency plans greatly outnumber fully developed ones.

#### The Grenada Rescue Operation

Examination of how our combatant commands are now organized day to day points out a distressing fact. The joint task force (JTF) and its associated battle staff is a transient.

"Even when it is occasionally brought together, the JTF commander is insulated from

his forces (and staff) by service component walls. The influence of battle leadership is at best fleeting...Joint operations come across as a bloodless process utterly lacking in vitality--a management problem. (Cushman, p. 26)

Luckily, when the nation sought to use a true all-service force to carry out its policy during the October 1983 Grenada rescue operation, the situation was, in relative terms, not terribly demanding. The operation was a success. However, even Vice Admiral Joseph Metcalf III, Commander of JTF 120, the rescue task force, acknowledged that, "...many decisions just happened...", and that the decision-making process was disoriented. Metcalf applauds the Grenada operation as "...an excellent example of operational decision making." (Metcalf, p. 277) I believe it is an example of haphazard decision making supported by an impromptu battle staff which was often overcome by events. Had it not been for the dynamic individualism of Vice Admiral Metcalf and Major General Norman Schwarzkopf, the deficiencies in the JTF 120 battle staff might not have been overcome.

When Admiral Wesley L. McDonald, USCINCLANT, was given the order to execute a multi-service force landing on Grenada, he had the option of using either the Commander, US Forces Caribbean (USFORCARIB) or the Commander of the Second Fleet to command JTF 120. (Cole, p. 12) Vice Admiral Metcalf, Commander, Second Fleet and his staff were chosen to lead JTF 120. Reasons for this selection differ. Admiral McDonald acknowledged the need for a staff with a mix of officers from each service. The USFORCARIB had this mix, but, McDonald, citing coordination and operational security considerations caused by the

physical separation of the USFORCARIB and LANTCOM staffs, chose Metcalf and his staff. (Cole, p. 85) Vice Admiral Metcalf reasoned that USFORCARIB was merely a headquarters: a paper organization that only exercised biannually during exercise "Solid Shield". (Metcalf, p. 280). He preferred his own "blue water" staff from second Fleet.

It is not my intention to remonstrate Admirals McDonald and Metcalf or the then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), General John Vessey, for the use of the Second Fleet staff as the core of the JTF 120 battle staff. My purpose is to point out that none of these officers had confidence in the abilities of the existing Joint staff (USFORCARIB Staff) to conduct an operation which it was supposedly trained and organized to execute. Rather, they chose a pick-up staff with a Navy core and a few Army and Air Force officers to round out the team. Although the operation was overall successful, closer scrutiny reveals actions indicative of a battle staff which lacked the ground and air expertise needed to assure true unity of command. The result was initial uncoordinated ground operations and lacking air support (Cole, p. 85)

Future wars and crises may not be as forgiving to ill-prepared or inadequate staffs as they were in the previous examples. Poorly trained staffs can cost lives. They cannot always count on dynamic individualism to make up for shortcomings in the staff. They can lose wars. Future joint staffs must be prepared to meet the challenges of an unpredictable, fast-paced, and unforgiving world.

## The Environment And The Threat

"Separate ground, sea, and air warfare is gone forever. If ever again we should be involved in war, we will fight it in all elements, with all services, as one single concentrated effort."

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

The theory which proposes that the probability of a specific type of conflict is inversely proportional to its level of violence or destructive potential remains valid. The movement away from US-Soviet bipolarity to global interdependence and multipolarity greatly reduces the likelihood of a global super-power confrontation. It raises, however, the potential for regional mid and low intensity conflicts not necessarily limited to conventional weapons. These are the conflicts for which we must train. We cannot ignore the possibility of a larger, world encompassing conflict. But, we must yield to the reality of a changing world. Third World conflicts may no longer take place against the backdrop of superpower competition, yet, they will continue to threaten US interests. (White House, p. 6) Even the most remote conflict may require a US response because of increasing global interdependence and the need to maintain world stability.

The major issue we must face in the new dynamic world environment is the adaptation of our military forces to meet the range of contingencies presented to us. Americans are looking for a 'Peace Dividend' because of lessened US-Soviet tensions. Rightly or wrongly, we will be tasked to retain our full range of military capabilities. However, we will have to execute them with smaller, more globally

oriented forces which are "agile, ready, and sustainable appropriate to the demands of likely conflicts". (White House, p. 25)

Those likely conflicts will demand a quick, multi-service response: perhaps with less than overwhelming force due to political restrictions. They may demand considerable staying power or rapid termination with minimum casualties. They will ultimately demand extreme flexibility due to the volatile and evolutionary political cauldron in which they brew.

Our opponents in these actions will be technologically sophisticated. We must avoid the racist attitudes which initially plagued the Soviets in Afghanistan. Even mountain herdsmen are capable of effectively employing shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles. The arsenals of Third World countries include

"...anti-mortar radars, sensors, sophisticated mines, rotary-wing aircraft for mobility and ground attack, jet aircraft with air-to-air and air-to-ground attack capability, modern naval vessels (including submarines), tanks and mechanized infantry, long-range surface-to-surface missiles, binary chemical weapons, perhaps even a few deliverable nuclear weapons, and everything else that money, credit, or promises of affiliation can buy."  
(Szafranski, p. 41)

In addition to being armed to the teeth, our adversaries will be well led. Their officers will be as likely as ours to have been educated in reputable universities. They may have been trained by the Soviets, other Third World nations, or even the US. They will be familiar with the terrain and probably infused with national pride and/or an overwhelming hatred of Americans. What may have begun as a simple show of force could lead to combat with a multi-faceted, vicious enemy. (Szafranski, p. 42)

Commanders and their joint battle staffs will have to do more with less. They will need to anticipate, act and remain completely flexible. Time and confusion will be their enemies. "Strategic warning of an imminent conflict will very often not be available, since intelligence collection assets may not be optimized for the area where conflict is likely." (Szafranski, p. 42) Synchronization, their most precious weapon, has grown infinitely more complex and infinitely more important. Joint battle staffs need to be razor sharp, cohesive teams; responsive to the needs of the commander. Unless we devote sufficient time and effort to their battle staff training, the less likely they will be prepared to meet the challenges of a lethal, new world environment.

## JOINT STAFF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

"We learn how to do things by doing the things we are learning how to do."

- Aristotle

The creation of an effective joint battle staff has its roots in the educational and training systems of each military service. The basic elements of those systems are self-development, formal schooling, and in-unit-training. Each of these elements focuses to a greater or lesser degree on individual or collective training. Self-development and formal schooling focus on development of individual skills; the knowledge and mechanics which form the foundation of the profession. In-unit-training focuses primarily, but not exclusively on collective training; the development of cohesive, integrated, and disciplined teams.

While discussing lessons learned from the Grenada operation, Admiral Metcalf related that:

"In Grenada, we demonstrated...that the joint command (and staff) system works. But we have not yet succeeded in driving home my main point, namely, that if the system is going to work, you must have a trained staff that has previously worked together, one that can make operational decisions, and one that can make them quickly. These staff characteristics are key to success, in all short-notice, fast-reaction situations." (Metcalf, p. 294)

We have yet to incorporate Admiral Metcalf's findings and continue to relearn old lessons. When Vice Admiral James C. Irwin, then Commander of JTF Four, the Caribbean Drug Interdiction TF, was asked about his staff, he indicated that 60-70% were temporarily assigned. Said Irwin,

"That doesn't mean that they're not good, but it does mean that they are always changing. It takes people a long time to get up to speed in this business". (Irwin, p. 64) Transience in joint battle staffs is an organizational and personnel problem. However, without a coherent and stable staff organization, the development of effective staffs can never begin.

#### Joint Professional Military Education (JPME)

In the aftermath of Grenada and other joint service operations, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) Chairman, Les Aspin (D-WI), ordered a study of intermediate and senior war colleges. The findings, released in May 1989, pointed out that the current military educational system "does not provide a clear coherent educational framework for officers from all four Services to broaden their joint-service perspectives in preparation for high-level military service". (Morrow, p. 16) The conclusions of this report followed on the heels of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Reorganization Act which legislated a requirement for an increase in the number and experience level of joint assignment officers. The Act also created the Joint Specialty Officer (JSO): officers groomed for joint command and staff assignments.

The HASC study panel recommended a nine-point plan to accomplish the Goldwater-Nichols JPME goals. The effect on JPME was the proposed establishment of a two-phased process beginning with the services Senior War and Intermediate Staff Colleges (JPME I) and ending with a three-month joint operational Armed Forces Staff College (AFSC) program (JPME II). (Morrow, p. 16) The product was to be a qualified JSO.

Despite some initial resistance, the Department of Defense instituted the HASC recommended JPME. Phase I, taught at the service schools, provides a basic orientation concerning each service's mission, doctrine, and capabilities. Phase II taught at the AFSC, focuses on team building and Joint perspectives of an operational Joint staff. The system to provide JSOs with an effective educational base is now in place. (Tice, p. 8) Graduating officers have the individual skills necessary to function on a Joint battle staff.

### Team Training

The development of collective team building skills compliments the development of individual skills in the creation of a Joint battle staff. Schools and self-development cannot replicate the integration and synchronization lessons learned while training in a unit. Only through actual rehearsal of battle staff procedures during realistic exercises, with your actual counterparts, can you develop the cohesion and mutual trust required in an effectively functioning battle staff. If there is no unit training program to develop collective team building skills, even the knowledge base developed in JPME will begin to deteriorate. Officers will gravitate back to doing those things they know how to do best, instead of those things they are required to master. The synergism of a cohesive staff is lost to misguided individualism.

Commanders and supervisors have the responsibility to develop their subordinates through a rigorous battle staff training program. That program must be focused on the development of bold and innovative

leaders and team players. It must engender self-confidence and confidence in contemporaries. Unfortunately there are very few joint battle staffs where this type of comprehensive training takes place.

#### **Impediments to Team Training**

Although there is an obvious need for rigorous, realistic joint battle staff training in units, there are institutional impediments which severely limit it. LTC Thomas V. Morley describes three impediments in an article on Field Grade Officer training in the US Army.

The first impediment is the belief that units are too busy to conduct substantive staff officer training. That belief was reinforced by a former Commanding General of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command who claimed that "officers cannot receive a first rate military education (training) while attending to unit responsibilities". (Morley, p. 53) This was a clear invitation to Army commanders to take a large portion off an already full plate of responsibilities. The same worn excuse is used in all other services to some degree. The penchant to 'wait 'till it reaches a higher noise level' is pervasive in the military system and may have to be broken by a top down demand to make time for battle staff training.

The school of thought that staff officer training is superfluous and a waste of time is a second impediment to unit battle staff training. This theory infers that senior staff officers are set in their ways and incapable of further growth. It also assumes that since senior officers have run the gauntlet of promotion and certification

boards they are automatically competent and not in need of further training. (Morely, p. 54) What this theory fails to acknowledge is the recent transition most of these officers have made; the transition from the tactical to the operational level, from a single or dual-service environment to a multi-service environment. Boards look at past performance and promote on potential. JSO's may have the potential to function effectively but they still need the experience of training as a member of a joint battle staff in order to become effective team players.

The third impediment to unit battle staff training involves the senior-subordinate relationship. This is perhaps the deeper problem. The other two theories being a reflection of it. The expectations and perceptions of commanders and subordinates create an environment which hinders effective staff training. When longevity is used as a measure of an officer's level of knowledge, a problem is created. The difference in longevity at senior staff levels is not nearly as great as between a ship captain and his department heads or a battalion commander and his staff. If the senior believes there is only a slight experience difference between him and his subordinates, he might not feel the urge to aggressively train them. (Morely, p. 54)

The perception of their roles creates an even stronger barrier. The senior believes the subordinate must have total confidence in his, the senior's, competence. The senior may be reluctant to embark on a training program fearing that some deficiency in his technical proficiency or professional knowledge might be exposed, thus lowering his subordinates confidence. The perceived expectation of absolute

proficiency by the commander or supervisor makes him reticent to learn about a subject at the same time as his subordinates. He becomes fearful that he may jeopardize his leadership position. (Morely, p. 55)

The subordinate also has a great uneasiness about permitting his boss to find out about any weaknesses in his knowledge base or abilities. Fearing his senior will find him less worthy than his contemporaries, he is reluctant to expose weak areas which might find mention in evaluations or consideration for upward mobility within the organization. (Morely, p. 56) As a result of all these misconceptions, biases and fears, the repetition, reflection, and critique that are key to the development of battle staffs are neglected.

Collective battle staff training is essential. Initiative and flexibility rest on a staff's ability to act within a cohesive framework of mutual understanding of concepts and language. Commanders must be able to gauge strengths and weaknesses; recognize styles and propensities. Rigorous training of stabilized staffs makes these things possible. We must break down the barriers of misconception, bias and fear and make battle staff training a reality.

Admiral Trost in a review of Maritime Strategy for the 1990's said, "Sending units that are poorly trained, undermanned or equipped with inadequately maintained, obsolete equipment is an invitation to disaster". (Trost, p. 98) An even greater travesty is sending superbly trained and equipped units into combat with a command and staff team that is deficient because of a lack of training. Critics will argue that anything more is too time intensive for realistic execution. It will be just one more priority to add to a list of burgeoning

requirements. However, the cost of failure to train battle staff officers beyond the requirements of JPME I and II may well be more than we can afford to bear.

## Exercising the Joint Battle Staff

"Within the confines of safety and common sense, leaders must be willing to accept less than perfect results initially and demand realism in training."

- US Army Training Philosophy, FM 25-100

The methods we employ to train Joint battle staffs must be extremely efficient and effective if the critics and nay sayers are to be held at bay. The objectives of the training cannot be compromised. Staffs should emerge from training able to plan and coordinate time-sensitive joint operations within the framework established by their commander. They should be able to anticipate and decisively react to new situations in an environment of confusion and stress. Mechanical procedural skills alone will not meet the standard. Staffs must train as they plan to fight. "To hide the nature of the environment where (they) must ultimately operate is to deny any hope of mastering the chaos and stress that is battle." (Timmerman, p. 14)

### Traditional Methods

Battle staff training is not a new idea. Prussian staffs trained using Kriegsspiel; literally translated, 'War Game'. During the game, players were constantly confronted by misleading information and poor subordinate unit performance generated by an older, more experienced referee. Victory usually came to the side who anticipated shortcomings and bad information and was flexible enough to wrestle the initiative from the enemy. (Smith, p. 52)

In-unit joint battle staff training for US forces is currently confined almost exclusively to the planning and execution of large scale

Joint exercises. These exercises do have training value. However, they also have significant deficiencies. REFORGER, Bright Star, PACEX, WINTEX and a host of other Joint exercises are extremely large and complex productions. Staffs prepare for months; planning and rehearsing for the exercise. Because they are so large and complex, their cost and associated political and public interest is quite high. Their size and complexity force a scripted execution. Situations are developed from a Master Events List which restricts the dynamic free play of participants. Deviation from the script can cause enormous perturbations throughout the exercise. Therefore, the objective is to maintain a practiced and predictable sequence of events. Creativity and innovative thought, although not suppressed, are not required. The primary function of the battle staff is completed before the battle begins.

The reason for less than sterling training effectiveness during these costly exercises is the broad scope of training objectives that are packed into them. Everyone from the individual crewman to the overall commander has a training objective. Attempting to accommodate every objective dilutes the effectiveness of training overall. The training of the masses outweighs the training of the few. Because the training becomes so diluted at the joint battle staff level, commanders and principal staff sometime leave everything to subordinates and sally forth to inspect training at lower echelons. Staffs are left to train themselves. This is not satiric commentary. It has been, until recently, the standard mode of operation in Army, and most likely other services as well.

Fortunately, costs, logistics, safety, and environmental concerns strongly argue against full-scale field maneuvers. Training at all levels is becoming more focused and segregated. The trend is to train no more than three echelons of command simultaneously. No longer will a tank crew sit idly for hours on a road waiting to move another 500 meters. Nor will joint battle staffs be allowed to solve exercise battle contingencies in advance with complicated and frail work arounds that would not withstand the rigors of real combat.

#### Alternatives to Live-Fire: Simulation

The impact of training costs is felt at every level of the military. As the costs of operation and maintenance increase, the opportunities for 'live-fire' training decrease. The military recognized this problem years ago and has used simulators extensively. Until the late 1980's, technology limited simulator usage to mock-up physical models of aircraft and other expensive weapons systems. Production costs were high and availability was low. Today simulators are not only more available, they are more dynamic and challenging. Tank crews in Germany can, through a distributed simulation network, fight tank crews in the United States. The level of realism is high enough that in live-fire competition, crews trained exclusively on simulators can perform as well as crews trained using live ammunition. Simulations and simulators will never replace 'live-fire' training, nor will they be able to train every aspect of operations. They can, however, help avoid large costs, reduce safety hazards and save time.

The training of staffs using simulation techniques dates back further than the previously mentioned Prussian Kriegsspiel. Staff rides, sand box drills and complex board games were the precursors of modern automated systems. New command and staff training simulations are only parts of larger command and staff training programs which use the versatility of the computer to create challenging environments for command and staff teams.

#### **Battle Command Training Program (BCTP)**

BCTP is the Army's premier training vehicle for corps and division staffs. Introduced in 1987, its aim is to provide a standardized, carefully evaluated training experience under stressful, near-combat conditions. The aim is achieved by using dedicated and skilled opposing forces (OPFOR), controller cells, and exercise periods long and intense enough to force extended 24 hour operations. Advanced technology, in the form of the Joint Exercise Support System (JESS), is used to simulate realistic combat conditions across all functional areas (maneuver, logistics, air-defense, mobility/counter-mobility, fire support, intelligence, and command and control). The goal of BCTP is to provide as realistic a combat experience as possible in a positive training atmosphere which encourages creativity and aggressiveness without fear of failure. (Harrison, p. 13)

BCTC is a two-phased program. Phase I is an educational, technique development phase. It begins with an extensive reading program covering doctrine from the tactical to the strategic level of war. It concludes with a 5-day commander's conference at FT Leavenworth, KS, where the

BCTP training staff assists the commander and selected subordinates in the honing of planning and communications skills in preparation for Phase II, the War Fighter exercise.

The War Fighter exercise is a Command Post Exercise (CPX) supported by a battle simulation center where the computers and workstations of the OPFOR and controllers are located. To the unit in the field, the simulation is transparent. Using organic communications means, they are provided battle resolution by controllers at the simulation center. There are no joysticks or computer terminals for the commander and staff, only the amazingly realistic and exceedingly stressful atmosphere generated by the comprehensive JESS simulation. Decisions can no longer be made in isolation or simply not made at all. The dynamics of the simulation quickly overcome those who choose to react instead of anticipate. Time-sensitive decision making is critical.

Command participation and keen staff cooperation are essential for successful BCTP execution. Without them there is no program. The War Fighter exercise does not just happen. Plans and terrain must be selected; task lists developed; campaigns designed. The commander must explain his intent for the operation. The staff must work out the details in consonance with that intent. They must both then make it work in the 'Fog of War'. Only in a non-judgmental and supportive environment can such a program be effective.

BCTP is an unqualified success. The concept was used on a grand scale during REFORGER '90, Exercise Centurion Shield and continued to uphold its tradition of excellence. General Crosbie Saint, CINC US Army Europe, was determined to "train the head not the feet" during Centurion

Shield. With the help of the JESS simulation, he was able to effectively train two corps staffs and numerous American and allied division staffs with 57% fewer people and 72% fewer armored vehicles at a cost of \$84M compared to the \$107M cost of REFORGER '88. (Hyde, p. 23)

No training program can fully prepare large units to control and synchronize large operations before their first dose of combat. (Harrison, p. 18) For this reason critics will bemoan shortfalls in realism. Nothing short of conflict is absolutely real. However, if the level of realism and the degree of participation is high enough, simulation can accomplish the training objective needed to support effective joint battle staff training.

## Challenges and Opportunities

"The complexity of the future appears, as it has before, to be overwhelming, but bright, energetic action officers always rise to the fore."

- Armed Forces Staff College PUB 1

The need for effective Joint battle staff training is obvious. A recurrent theme in the after-action reports of recent Joint operations is that Joint exercises do not prepare battle staffs for time-sensitive crisis action planning and execution. Unfortunately, crises requiring time-sensitive planning and execution are becoming even more common in the new multi-polar, uncertain world. The use of force as an element of the national strategy is not the pariah it had become in the aftermath of Vietnam and the Iranian Hostage Rescue attempt. When all other means fail, the national leadership feels confident in the use of military forces.

It is not my intention to block all future crises into the Grenada, Panama, small island mold. The operation in the Mid-East is a persuasive argument against that. But, the requirement to develop cohesive Joint battle staff teams is independent of the area of operations. The lethality and complexities of future battle demand highly trained command and staff teams.

We are spending millions of dollars to develop automated decision support systems. These integrated planning and command and control systems are necessary to distill the volumes of information and help develop coordinated plans. They do not, however, make decisions. That function is still the realm of the commander and his staff.

Integral to the new generation of decision support systems are simulations which can wargame and analyze battles and campaigns. But, wargaming and analysis are analytical operations. They are helpful and complement battle staff training. They are not substitutes for realistic, stressful, coordination exercises which train command and staff teams.

The Battle Command Training Program is a proven battle staff training concept. It is, however, only a ground trainer, although, JESS has been integrated with Air Force simulations. It is within the realm of possibility, through the Advanced Distributed Simulation Initiative, to combine service simulations into a true multi-service simulation that is free from the geographical restrictions of previous systems. The most important point is that whatever simulation system is used to support Joint battle staff training, it must be part of an integrated, command supported and led training effort. BCTP is a program of training not just a simulation. A Joint BCTP requires command, staff and unit participation. It requires time. It requires the military to make a choice between congressional mandate, as in the case of JPME, and a professional inter-service initiative.

If we expect our Joint battle staffs to rise to the fore in the face of overwhelming complexity and stress, we must provide them with the training that makes them fit to win.

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