

21st Century Battle Command Training Is "InField Practice"

By Mr. Joshua L. Hutchison

Information technologies have permeated every echelon of today's United States Army formations. This reality requires a persistent and reliable training methodology on which to build. In 2003, the Army established the concept of the Battle Command Training Center (BCTC). Today, more than thirty BCTCs have established training programs to meet the digital training needs of Army customers. These home station facilities are organized to provide on-demand training via battle command systems, simulations, virtual trainers, and gaming systems.

Anyone who has ever participated in team sports understands the basic tenets of battle command training. Individual skills development and repetitive and specific situational drills comprise the foundation for success. Baseball is fundamentally a team sport, yet it relies on the skill and knowledge of individual players who work to sharpen specific fundamental skills—throwing, catching, fielding the ball, batting, and running. Players then train in team drills to develop an understanding of the game strategy, situational awareness, and precise knowledge of what to do when the

ball is hit to them or to someone else; for example, when should they force? When should they tag? Collective drills, such as infield and outfield practice—as well as situational scrimmages—ensure teamwork based on solid individual player skills. Specificity and repetition are the keys to making those game-winning, split-second decisions. On game day, the team will be confident and ready to play their game.

Today's battle command atmosphere within a digital tactical operations center (TOC) can be very much like baseball. A decision will be made in a split second, and execution of the play will decide the game. Decisions in battle have the same sort of split-second timing. Winning in battle saves lives and can change the course of history. The individual operators of battle command systems—such as Blue Force Tracker (BFT), Command Post of the Future (CPOF), and the Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System (AFATDS)—are the shortstop, second baseman, and first baseman. The TOC battle drills and unit staff processes/reporting are the team play expectations. Operators must train using specificity and repetition in responding to the ever-changing battle as directed by the TOC staff/team.



Photo by CC Lopez

A brigade staff hones battle command systems skills and validates staff processes during a multiechelon CPX in the Fort Bragg BCTC Brigade RTOC.

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Photo by CC Lopez

A platoon element executes small-unit and convoy tactics training in the Fort Bragg BCTC gaming facility.

Operators possessing solid individual skills and TOC staffs/teams must understand what to expect as “the ball is hit.” Battle command, just like baseball, is a collective effort in which winning happens often in the myriad of split-second “plays” executed by staffs who have honed their individual and team skills—which are only achieved through specific drills repeated frequently.

The XVIII Airborne Corps BCTC system includes a hub at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and spokes at Fort Campbell, Kentucky; Fort Drum, New York; Fort Polk, Louisiana; and Fort Stewart, Georgia. The center understands today’s battle command environment and has developed a home-station training solution to support individual Soldiers, teams, unit staffs, and commanders. The BCTC Training Program (BTP) provides a battle command training system that uses specificity and repetition to build a core of fundamental skills on which battle staffs can build their teams and “game strategy.” Staff teams have the opportunity to practice individual and collective tasks many times and with many different scenarios to learn how their split-second decisions affect the outcome of the “game” and how they win or lose battles based on their decisionmaking and their execution of “plays.” In this environment, staffs have the opportunity to see a scenario run in a number of situations and can apply their battle drills to suit the specific situation at hand, using the fundamentals they learned as they worked their way through progressive training levels at the BCTC. The BTP solution bridges the gap in battle command training that has long existed between unit set

fielding (USF) at fielding and mission rehearsal exercises (MRXs) prior to deployment.

The BTP consists of two types of progressive battle command training: the foundation and command post exercise (CPX). This simplified approach is agile enough to rapidly incorporate new technologies and offers training solutions that are flexible and scalable enough to support any type of unit or mission. The BTP is battle command-focused and allows Soldiers, teams, TOC staffs, and commanders to sharpen and sustain their individual and collective digital skills—by tailoring the training program to their specific needs and then affording them the opportunity to practice those skills in a realistic “game environment” on a frequent basis. The Vice Chief of Staff of the Army has emphasized that a “focused approach to training” yields “unit agility and versatility”—and the BCTC executes this mandate.

Building the foundation takes varying forms of training. Operator courses conducted in a classroom environment provide individual Soldiers competencies on current battle command capabilities. The TOC Staff Workshop may be likened to “TOC 101”: Conducted in a reconfigurable tactical operations center (RTOC) environment, it is collective training that consists of fundamental digital staff/team skills and competencies. Small-unit gaming is collective training for platoons and below to practice specific tactics and mission rehearsals.

A CPX builds on the foundation. Through these progressive and iterative training events, the elements are afforded the opportunity to train within the Army’s

long-established crawl-walk-run methodology. This is when “infield practice” occurs as staffs/teams work through standard battle drills, staff processes, and knowledge management practices. These tailored training events may be single or multiple echelons and are supported by the BCTC’s unique set of training enabler capabilities, including the Joint Land Component Constructive Training Capability (JLCCTC), Battle Command Staff Trainer (BCST), and virtual and gaming systems—such as HUMINT (human intelligence) Control Cell (HCC) and Virtual Battlespace System 2 (VBS2™). An example of a highly integrated multiple echelon CPX may include a brigade TOC, several battalion TOCs, and several company command posts/company intelligence support teams (CoIST) executing their mission with a full complement of battle command technologies to provide communications and situational awareness—as well as a platoon or squad performing missions within a VBS2 scenario. These CPX solutions serve to guarantee success of staffs and teams in their culminating training event (CTE) and ultimately in their down-range mission.

The Army’s evolving battle command training requirements are no different than the age-old individual and collective common task training (CTT)—the shortstop needs to know how to field the ball and what play to make, and the team must know what to expect. The BTP developed at the Fort Bragg BCTC provides the training solutions necessary to bridge the current gap in battle command training and serve as the home station nucleus of the Army’s current live, virtual, constructive, and gaming (LVCG) and future integrated training environment (ITE) initiatives. BCTCs are poised to continue leading the way as the Army faces the daunting task of delivering relevant and realistic training for its ever-expanding “digital tool kit” in the 21st century.

It is “game time,” the final phase of an operation: Two of three objectives have been achieved; the enemy is neutralized, and remaining threats are in retreat; a size, activity, location, and time (SALT) report on a possible vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) is received via BFT; and this is a commander’s critical intelligence requirement (CCIR). What does the operator do, and how does he do it? What is the battle drill, and how does the staff execute it? With fundamentals learned through specificity and repetition at a home station BCTC, the team will make the split-second decision, complete the play, and win. 

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More information about the XVIII Airborne Corps BCTC training program may be found at Army Knowledge Online (AKO), <<http://bit.ly/BCTC-on-AKO>>, and by visiting the BCTC on Facebook and Twitter.