



COBRA GOLD '17 READINESS EXSUM

This paper outlines Task Force Tomahawk's initial analysis of the combat readiness gained during EXERCISE COBRA GOLD '17, conducted in Korat, Thailand, from 10 to 24 February, 2017, while deployed in support of Pacific Pathways 17-01. The task force conducted three exclusive training events as part of the exercise: a platoon live fire at the Phu Lum Yai range, a Combined-Joint CALFX at the Phu Lum Yai LFX complex, and round robin TTP exchanges at Camp Sarathompitak. United States Army Soldiers partnered with Royal Thai Army (RTA) forces throughout all three events, man-for-man, all the way up to the battalion echelon. The following summary captures the combat readiness gains garnered through OBJ-T certifications, additive OBJ-T experiences, and subjective readiness factors. In the end, the Task Force accomplished squad certifications while accomplishing several additive and subjective training tasks, proving that combat readiness is more than the sum of its OBJ-T parts.

OBJ-T Combat Readiness Certification

This paper defines *certification* as the process of exercising a unit at one or more of its METL or Supporting Collective Tasks (SCTs) with the intent to conclusively assess the unit's readiness on a scale from Trained to Untrained, per Army doctrinal T&EOs and Objective Task Evaluation Criteria.

The Platoon LFX served as the only certifying event. It assessed a rifle platoon's ability to conduct a movement to contact and attack in a **complex** environment, during **daylight**, against an **irregular** threat in a **LFX** training environment. The platoons used only small arms, heavy machine guns and light mortars, yet this LFX was **complex** due to the integration of Thai and U.S. squads to create composite multinational platoons. **>85%** of Leaders were present. Our average platoon strength was **62.7%**. The event was **externally evaluated** by the Battalion Commander, Company Commander, and/or Battalion S3. **All** leader and critical performance measures were met and **>90%** of other performance measures were met. **Therefore, the COBRA GOLD Platoon LFX certified that seven Platoons trained to a P in Platoon Movement to Contact and Attack, while two platoons trained to a P-.** The Battalion Commander subjectively upgraded all assessments due to the unique environmental and cultural factors that will be described in the subjective assessment of the EXSUM. Manning determined the low assessments.¹

More importantly, we assessed 25 of our existing rifle or weapons squads (of 36 authorized on MTOE) at their supporting collective tasks, e.g., react to contact, maneuver as a Stryker-integrated squad, conduct squad attack. **We certified that 18 squads achieved a T, 2 squads achieved a T-, and 5 achieved a P.** Maximizing the training proficiency of our squads was our true goal during COBRA GOLD, whereas platoon certifications will be conducted in a more complex environment during FOAL EAGLE. Additionally, all company FSTs certified as a T at the task of Conduct a Precision Registration of Artillery and Mortars (Task 061-283-2101).

OBJ-T Additive Gains in Combat Readiness

This paper defines *additive* gains as any training output that does not constitute certification, but nonetheless accomplishes measurable training proficiency that is necessary to progress to certification of specified METL or SCTs in the future. This section describes the most significant additive gains by task. It is not exhaustive.

Conduct an Air Assault (Battalion-Brigade), Task 07-6-1262: The Battalion TAC conducted its first AASLT operation since its NEO at NTC in the summer of 2015. Though this was not an externally evaluated certification, the rigorous planning and execution of many supporting tasks warrants a subjective upgrade above the current assessment of our unit as “untrained” in this task. After participating in a combined-joint air planning conference, the TAC executed numerous tasks in a static and simple CALFX. These include integration of multinational CAS, CCA, and multinational indirect fires to both destroy the enemy and suppress enemy air defense for an air assault. All rifle companies conducted air-load planning, rehearsed on/off loading, and one of these Rifle Companies air-assaulted a multinational platoon during the CALFX. The Battalion has not conducted airspace management and synchronization of joint (USMC) and multinational ground units to this degree since combat in 2012. And, we did this four times with progressive complexity! The differences in mission command cultures in each army became obvious during execution, with the U.S. TAC conducting conditions based synchronization and the RTA staff conducting a highly centralized execution of a timeline (see photo 1).

Conduct Area Security (Battalion-Brigade), Task 07-6-1262: The Battalion has deprioritized this task compared to combined arms maneuver tasks in recent years, though we have routinely evaluated the conduct of company cordon and search operations and exercised some area security tasks indiscriminately during NTC rotations. COBRA GOLD provided the most deliberate investment of training and education of supporting tasks for squads and platoons, particularly in regards to mobility / C-IED education and practical exercises, and the exchange of COIN TTPs based on U.S. experience in the GWOT and the RTA’s experience in Thailand’s Yala Province (see photo 2). Inadvertently, platoons also had to Secure Civilians during Operations (Platoon-Company), Task 07-2-4054 to a minor degree during live fire operations, as local villagers encroached on training to pilfer dunnage.

Conduct Expeditionary Deployment Operations at the Battalion Level in Support of the Offense, Defense, Stability and defense support of civil authorities (DSCA), Task 55-1-4800: The Battalion has sustained a T in this task for almost 18 months, thanks to two NTC deployments. However, the novelty and complexity of conducting all supporting tasks, e.g., preparing personnel for deployment (Task 12-6-0004) and conducting deployment activities (Task 55-9-4804), created new lessons learned. We attribute the novelty to having to deploy the many attachments that constitute our task force, the integration with numerous joint logistics HQs at echelons above brigade, the distribution of deployment activities in space, and the interaction with contracted TCN support during all of the above. Furthermore, many competing requirements of the Thai hosts complicated this process to the point of seeming more like we were PCSing the Battalion rather than deploying. An example includes the USNS Fisher’s docking date being bumped to the right by cruise ships, which belied any potential to simulate a port opening. The leader development aspects of this will be addressed in the subjective assessment.

Conduct the Mission Command Operations Process for Battalions, Task 71-1-5100: Though this is an SCT found in all battalion METL Tasks, its importance during Pacific Pathways merits a separate discussion. We assess this area was well rehearsed with regards to FM, TACSAT, JCR, and all TOC based data systems that gain

their bandwidth from the TCN/STT. Communicating with the USMC was simple....on FM. We did not rehearse the use of WIN-T INC2 systems in our KLVs for reasons not germane to this paper. We reinforced our TOC – TACA – TACB footprint thanks to atypical demand for command and control, such as the requirement to fulfill the role normally assumed by Range Control in a U.S. Army garrison training environment. The quickness of our ability to establish TCN communications needs improvement. Previous literature regarding Pacific Pathways boasted that units achieved FOC within 72 hours of arrival. During COBRA GOLD '17, this held true assuming the clock starts when the equipment arrives at the location of the C2 node. However, due to logistics flow, the necessary C2 equipment did not arrive until > 24-48 hours after the arrival of the critical mass of the task force's personnel and key leaders, and the requirement to conduct the operations process. The TAMPA interim solution experienced delayed service due to bandwidth allocations controlled in Guam. The first CUB conducted with outstations BLOS over an Army voice system, in this case VOIP, occurred after 48 hours of the formal beginning of the exercise but >72 hours after the need to have such a capability. This compelled the task force to conduct all interim C2 using government and personally procured cell phones, hotspots or SIM cards and open source apps. This taught the Battalion to rehearse analog COP management and advocate for Army solutions and funding for secure-GSM during theater opening or RSOI operations. Finally, our field grade officers demonstrated alacrity in transitioning the operations process from the manic bureaucratic knife-fight that often emerges during unit transitions, to a stable and systematic process by implementing a battle rhythm, assigning CUOPs functions, and designing a functional workspace. This begged the chicken-or-the-egg question – does C2 infrastructure drive TOC functionality, or does TOC functionality drive C2 infrastructure? Regardless of the conclusion, we agreed that the sooner a unit established both, the better.

METL and SCTs Additive Gains at the Company/Battery Echelon and Below: The round robin TTP exchanges and other concurrent events accomplished respectable additive gains.

Our most productive collective training included the conduct of **all** SCTs in our Forward Support Company's METL – i.e., food service support, distribution of POL, support maintenance, LOGPAC, and TLPs – in an expeditionary environment while also conducting pre-marksmanship instruction for their Convoy LFX in Korea.

Our HHC conducted extended reconnaissance OP operations in mountainous terrain, requiring aerial resupply, improvised communications, and camouflage TTPs. Its mortar platoon fired over 212 of 120mm and 81mm rounds in support of partnered and FST training, and the Combined-Joint CALFX. Its sapper platoon trained Thai and U.S. squads mechanical breaching while also conducting their own squad live fires.

Our Field Artillery Battery (-) fired 180 155mm rounds in a quasi-Table XII exercise. This exercise lacked the offensive and defensive displacements of a true Table XII evaluation, but it also included the added complexity of running clearance and processing of fires at the battery FDC/CP, coordinating with an adjacent RTA Battery, while its FST element conducted air-ground integration with combine-joint CAS and CCA.

Our rifle company collective training also included Battle Drill 6 training, treatment of casualties, and CCP operations. CCP Operations included combined evacuations (training and real world) to Role 1 through 3 treatment facilities. Individual infantry training included advanced rifle marksmanship, squad designated marksmen training, and portions of the Combat Life Saver POI.

All of this training contributed greatly to the individual and supporting collective tasks that underpin the Battalion METL Tasks of Conduct an Area Defense (Task 07-6-1028), Conduct a Movement to Contact (Task 07-6-1072), and Conduct Attack (Task 07-6-1092).

Subjective Combat Readiness Gains

This paper defines *subjective readiness gains* as those that cannot necessarily be measured using the OBJ-T or USR constructs, but clearly contribute to combat readiness. In some cases, the relevance of such subjective contributions to readiness eclipses those that can be objectively measured.

The rate and novelty of problem solving experienced during COBRA GOLD '17 created a leader development crucible we have not come close to replicating in CONUS based training domains and closely replicated the future operating environment. The combat build that takes place in the RUBA at the beginning of an NTC rotation comes closest, but still falls short of the standard set during Pacific Pathways. The conduct of RSOI stretched a limited supply of talented leaders from the Port at Laem Chabang, to the APOD at Utapao, PAA near Ban Nong Samong, to the three training venues at Phu Lum Yai, Sarathampitak, and Lop Buri. This forced a necessary power-down of leadership and decision making to staff lieutenants and platoon level leaders. These leaders often operated in a degraded communications environment and were utterly alone with their problem solving calculus. Add to this the complexity of interacting with TCNs, while managing high stakes logistics throughput problems. An infantry lieutenant who has served in our unit for less than 6 months was the MVP of our logistics operations for several days. And, we've only discussed unit movement & RSOI. This same rate and novelty of problem solving continued during combat training where everything was subject to negotiation between junior leaders across language barriers at all times. Negotiations could settle something as simple as what time training should start, to something as complicated as how a Thai squad intends to signal a shift of fire to an American squad under LFX conditions. A merry band of interpreters with varying skill mediated this constant dialectic and because of this, Task Force leaders were forced to learn how to choose their words wisely, when to stop talking, and when it was easier to just demonstrate a concept than discuss it – lessons better learned now than in combat. Finally, conducting LFX operations outside of DOD installations provided the perfect opportunity to educate maneuver leaders on the importance of AR/DA PAM 385-63 Range Safety, that maneuver officers are the master gunners of their units, and how the reality of range safety readily relates to combat ballistics.

The Korat Plateau, though wooded, hilled and irrigated, is Stryker country, and reinforced how much terrain matters. The Phu Lum Yai maneuver LFX range presented a density of vegetation seldom seen on DOD MPRCs and maneuver ranges, where years of live firing and environmental rules reduced vegetation to almost nothing. The maneuver box contained three distinct groves of trees within intermittent open areas that challenged maneuver leaders to expand, contract or change their formations, audible deviations from the plan, maintain contact with adjacent units, avoid ricochet hazards, and experiment with the physical locations of key leaders. Our LFX AARs routinely covered tempo as the terrain and vegetation caused aggressive leaders to lose control and methodical leaders to bog down. Culture provided its own terrain. RTA forces generally practiced similar battle drills and TTPs; however, their officer centric culture and the fledgling state of their NCO Corps manifested itself in lockstep execution, and long squad-leader led bounds in most iterations. The lock step nature of movement slowed tempo, while the long squad bounds increased tempo. With that said, our leaders worked around these concerns. The seam between squads was ameliorated by U.S. Soldiers learning to yell "*Kon Soo Tai*" after each bound, while Thai Soldiers yelled "last man." Off the range, whether transiting between training areas or participating in cultural visits, we challenged leaders to view the environment through the lens of a tactician – to see impacts of the narrowness of roads, the low hanging power lines, the limitations of bridges, and density of urban centers.

Being constantly immersed in an expeditionary-OCONUS environment brings mystique and focus to what may otherwise be routine training, but it also invites preventive-med and discipline challenges. Density of berthing, quality of water, sanitation, and convenience of hygiene stations could have broken the force had leaders not enforced strict common sense preventive med standards and discipline. Junior leaders also learned how quickly such standards could slip if the NCO chain of command does not take advantage of the leadership opportunity of running a tight ship on deployment. Additionally, local Thai society offered plenty of distractions for our team during free time – some wholesome, some not. This presented an opportunity to empower and trust our junior leaders and Soldiers to take full advantage of visiting a land rich in culture. We were mostly not disappointed, and in the few cases where we were, we learned.

Operating in an expeditionary environment doesn't mean you cannot live the performance triad, in fact it is easier in some cases. COBRA GOLD '17 offered plenty of opportunities for physical fitness training thanks to two USO provided BWAP-box gyms and depending on the training, adequate time to do PT and play sports. Company Commanders were masters of their timeline in Thailand, and therefore they are masters of their sleep time. 8 hours of sleep per night was easily achievable, though the quality of those hours was diminished by the use of cots and high temperatures in non-climate controlled berthing. Our diets improved significantly. The non-availability of typical American junk food, the portion size of meals, and the 24-7 NCO supervision made high-performance diets easy to enforce. In a subjective vote among five company commanders, all agree that we are losing weight. Four voted that we are merely sustaining fitness by increasing core stability and cardiorespiratory endurance, while losing strength and power. One commander felt we are making gains across all areas of fitness. All agreed that sleep hours will be more beneficial in Korea where we will enjoy mattresses and climate control.

- Best, T6

Photo Context



Juxtaposing & Exposing Mission Command Culture: Though talented and worthy allies, the command and control cultures of the RTA stood in near stark contrast to our own. Here, four U.S. Leaders (OPSO, Commander, JTAC, FSO) mission command the CALFX using conditions based synchronization, while eighteen RTA officers centralize command of the same CALFX using strict adherence to a timeline. Naturally, the event defied the timeline during all four iterations.



NCO-NCO Exchange: The RTA's NCO corps is clearly still developing. Its empowerment shined when given the opportunity to exchange TTPs during round robin training, especially when RTA NCOs were exchanging skills gained in the junior leader crucible of combat. We saw this during our C-IED exchange. Here, RTA & U.S. NCOs, and a PL use pattern analysis to plan a C-IED patrol. C-IED training remains an organic source of mil-mil cooperation.



Preventive Med Nightmare or Junior Leader Challenge: Living spartan and crowded created the perfect environment to test the mettle of the unit, the discipline of the Soldiers, and the leadership of junior NCOs. The task force experienced no endemic preventive-med related issues, though the environment was ripe for them.



Physical and Cultural Terrain Matters: Here, both armies engage in an all-ranks hot wash of the platoon LFX on the objective with their interpreters. Such AARs took twice as long due to language barriers, an AAR point in itself. They also gave us a great opportunity to put our NCO Corps on a pedestal in front of the RTA. Many of these AARs focused on the impact of terrain on tempo. Similar to combat, the language barrier slowed the rate of learning. As an example, it took until the fourth day of live firing to determine for sure that the Thai squads did in fact have team leaders. (The Phu Lum Yai ridge and vegetation are noticeable in the background.)



This Photo was not Staged: Thai squads taught U.S. squads to move through urban terrain in diamond formations, while U.S. squads taught them to use bounding over watch. Thai squads taught U.S. squads to clear rooms with six soldiers, while ours taught them to clear with four. This iterative exchange typified the round robin TTP training at Camp Friendship / Surthompithok. We also taught them that you can wear whatever camouflage pattern you own 😊



Combined-Joint at the Company Grade Level: Thai and U.S. Company Commanders discussing the proper integration of the attached USMC LAV platoon for the CALFX with the Marine Platoon Commander. CPT Mek from the RTA is a MCCC and Ranger School graduate, thereby making the Marine the most difficult person with whom to communicate.



Terrain Matters: The Korat Plateau is Stryker-country, but it presents enough natural and manmade obstacles to validate the addition of the Conduct Air Assault (Battalion – Brigade) task to a Stryker Infantry Battalion’s METL. TF Tomahawk successfully tested AASLT planning, air-ground integration and SEAD with TF Hammerhead (3-25 AV, 25th ID).



It Just Doesn’t Get Any Better Than This: This TF Tomahawk Soldier is living the dream. The novelty of living and operating in an expeditionary environment and partnering with a foreign military make building combat readiness more than the sum of its OBJ-T parts.

COBRA GOLD PLATOON LIVE FIRE OBJ T

Plan and Prepare				Execute						Assess
Operational Environment		L U X	Training Environment (L/N/C/G)	% Leaders Present at Training / Authorized	% Present at Training / Authorized	External Eval	Performance Measures	Critical Performance Measures	Leader Performance Measures	Task Assessment
Dynamic & Complex	Night	Yes	Proponent Establishes Training Environment Standards (FTX, STX, CPX, STAFFEX, TEWT, etc)	>85%	>80%	Yes	>90% GO	All	>90%	T
				75-84%			80-89% GO		80-89%	T-
Static And Simple	Day	No		65-74%	75-79%	No	65-79% GO	<All	<80%	P 7 PLTs
				60-64%	60-74%		51-64% GO			P- 2 PLTs
				<60%	60-74%		<50% GO			U

Task Dependent
Task Independent

Commanders can subjectively upgrade / downgrade proficiency level for mission essential tasks.

This rubric highlights the conditions under which we conducted our Platoon Live Fire exercises. Of note, delays in rolling stock and ammunition delivery by two vessels condensed the training schedule to the point that we canceled separate squad LFXs. This reduces the total number of Pacific Pathways training repetitions from twelve to eleven.