

Growing a Brigade:

Five Lessons Learned from Activating a Next-Generation Combat Force

By MAJ T. Justin Webb



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The shifting geopolitical terrain of Europe underscores the importance for unrivaled air defense capabilities, and the United States Army has taken a significant step to address this need by activating the 52nd Air Defense Artillery (ADA) Brigade. Spearheaded by the leadership of Colonel Bruce Bredlow, the inaugural commander, and Command Sergeant Major Charles Robinson, the brigade's first Command Sergeant Major, this momentous activation exemplifies the United States' steadfast dedication to NATO's defense. It signifies a crucial advancement in bolstering air defense operations throughout the region.

This article examines the nuances of activating the 52nd ADA Brigade in Germany, dissecting the challenges encountered and illuminating the strategies employed to surmount these hurdles. Presented are five essential lessons gleaned from the initial six months of the brigade's activation, offering invaluable perspectives that can inform and enhance future air defense activations. Moreover, we will investigate the ramifications of the 52nd ADA Brigade's activation for Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) in Europe and its pivotal role in cultivating partnerships at the tactical echelons.

Five lessons to empower leaders to navigate the challenges of activating and growing an air defense artillery brigade:

1. **Envisioning the Brigade of Tomorrow: Crafting a 5-Year Masterplan**
2. **Harnessing Cutting-Edge Solutions: Unleashing the Power of Innovation**
3. **Unlocking Hidden Budgets: Tapping into the Army's Financial Reserves**
4. **Cultivating a Winning Culture: Uniting the Brigade through Shared Vision and Values**
5. **Powering Up with People: Leveraging Partners to Fuel Growth**

"Envisioning the Brigade of Tomorrow: Crafting a 5-Year Masterplan"

Lesson: Begin by imagining what your ideal Air Defense Artillery Brigade will look like five years from now, considering advancements in technology, potential adversaries, and new defense strategies. With this vision in mind, prioritize the resources you need and set a clear, yet tolerable roadmap for growth.

In Air Defense Artillery, developing a forward-thinking approach is essential to excel and prepare for the next generation of combat. "It's not just about providing operational capability within year; it's about being the combat multiplier the combatant commander will need in five." To begin this transformative journey, leaders must envision the future with clarity and precision. By allowing themselves the freedom to dream boldly and visualize their ideal unit in five years, they can lay the foundation for their plans. This exercise calls for both ambition and attention to detail, considering potential technological advancements, adversaries, and defense strategies. For instance, a proactive approach to embracing technology might require the project manager to upgrade an AMDPCS to the latest version and provide new equipment training, ensuring that the brigade stays ahead of the curve and is prepared for the challenges ahead.

Once the vision is clear, leaders must identify the essential resources needed to make this vision a reality. They can achieve this by surveying each staff section to determine the essentials listed on their MTOE and additional resources that would make the section more effective. A thorough evaluation may reveal the need for conference room upgrades, establishing an operations center, and additional automation and communication requirements in the garrison and the field. By addressing these needs, the brigade can become a more cohesive and effective force.

Another crucial aspect of this process is fostering pride and unity within the brigade. By implementing elements such as boards, window decals, rugs, awnings, unit swag, and building signs, leaders can create an atmosphere that inspires dedication and commitment among their team members. This sense of unity is vital for maintaining morale and ensuring the brigade's success. With priorities outlined and the team engaged, leaders can create a detailed roadmap by breaking the 5-year plan into manageable milestones. Dividing these milestones into annual, quarterly, and monthly goals helps maintain focus, track progress, and facilitate adjustments as needed.

Finally, leaders need to remain adaptable and open to change. The dynamic world of defense requires agility and responsiveness, as even the

most meticulously crafted plans may require adjustments. By being receptive to new ideas and prepared to adapt to changing circumstances, the brigade can stay ahead of the competition and successfully achieve its long-term objectives. Adopting a proactive and forward-thinking approach is key to crafting a successful 5-year masterplan for an Air Defense Artillery Brigade. By embracing a clear vision, strategic planning, and adaptability, leaders can position their brigade as the combat multiplier the combatant commander will need in five years.

"Harnessing Cutting-Edge Solutions: Unleashing the Power of Innovation"

Lesson: Embrace emerging technologies and innovative approaches to transform your brigade's capabilities and maintain a competitive edge. Constantly evaluate and update your processes, ensuring your team remains ahead of the curve in modern warfare.

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In the ever-evolving landscape of modern warfare, it is essential for leaders to embrace emerging technologies and innovative approaches. "Just because the other divisions, brigades, and battalions have always done it this way, does not mean it is the best or most efficient way to do it." By harnessing the power of innovation, an Air Defense Artillery Brigade can transform its capabilities, maintain a competitive edge, and become the combat multiplier that the combatant commander will need in the future.

A key component of embracing innovation is fostering a culture of curiosity and continuous learning within the brigade. Encourage team members to stay informed about the latest developments in defense technology and provide opportunities for professional development through training, workshops, and conferences. By nurturing a mindset of growth and adaptability, leaders can empower their brigade to stay ahead of the curve in modern warfare.

One practical example of innovation in action is the adoption of Microsoft 365 to build live dashboards for the commander and staff to synchronize in person or across Europe. Building a dashboard that shows live unit data, accessible to a commander or staff member at any time or location, enables more effective situational awareness. This real-time information on the unit's current status, past trip report information, concerns, and projects enhances decision-making and overall operational efficiency.

Another essential aspect of unleashing the power of innovation is the strategic integration of new technologies. This involves not only identifying and acquiring cutting-edge solutions but also ensuring their effective implementation within the brigade. For instance, instead of using a centralized task tracker, the brigade can incorporate MS Teams lists, allowing leaders to assign tasks and deadlines to individuals or teams, check

on their status, and receive notifications. Additionally, tasks can be closed out by the user or supervisor. This tool has proven useful for the S3 Section to maintain track of subordinate unit or team tasks for all published OPORDs.

Collaboration is another vital aspect of harnessing the power of innovation. Units can gain valuable insights into emerging technologies and best practices by fostering strong relationships with industry partners, research institutions, and other military branches. These collaborative efforts can lead to the development of groundbreaking solutions that enhance the brigade's capabilities and contribute to the broader defense community. Embracing emerging technologies and innovative approaches is crucial for transforming an Air Defense Artillery Brigade's capabilities and ensuring its relevance in modern warfare. By fostering a culture of curiosity and continuous learning, strategically integrating cutting-edge solutions, and collaborating with external partners, leaders can unleash the power of innovation and position their brigade as a formidable force in the next generation of combat.

“Cultivating a Winning Culture: Uniting the Brigade through Shared Vision and Values”

Lesson: Before you can build combat capacity, it's crucial to establish a strong organizational culture that unites your brigade. Create a sense of purpose and shared values that foster camaraderie, accountability, and ownership within the ranks. This foundation will serve as the bedrock for your brigade's success in the years to come.

Before embarking on the journey to build combat capacity, it is crucial to establish a strong organizational culture that unites your unit. A winning culture is built on a sense of purpose and shared values that foster camaraderie, accountability, and ownership within the ranks. This foundation will serve as the bedrock for your brigade's success in the years to come.

The brigade's vision focuses on protecting lives and promoting security through air and missile defense. This purpose inspires the brigade to provide world-class air and missile defense expertise, educate joint, allied, and partner forces at the tactical level on air defense employment and weapon systems, and cultivate a culture of continuous learning, all with the ultimate goal of providing air and missile defense protection wherever needed.

In line with the commander's priorities, the first step is focusing on sponsorship and Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration (RSOI). Ensuring a smooth and efficient integration process for incoming personnel is essential for setting the stage for a strong organizational culture. The brigade developed a YouTube page to assist with sponsorship, creating “sponsorship videos” that answer common questions for soldiers and their families moving to the brigade and Germany. Next, leaders must establish core values that align with the brigade's vision and American values. In the 52nd ADA Brigade, these values include Education, Innovation, Adaptability, Trust, and Empathy. These values guide the brigade's actions as they fulfill their purpose of protecting lives and promoting global security through air and missile defense.

With the foundation of sponsorship, RSOI, and culture development in place, the next line of effort is building combat capacity. This involves investing in the professional development of the brigade's personnel, providing opportunities for training, education, and mentorship. By investing in the growth and development of their team members, leaders can enhance the brigade's capabilities and demonstrate their commitment to the well-being and success of the individuals within their ranks. Throughout this process, leaders must lead by example, embodying the brigade's vision and values in their own actions and decisions. By consistently demonstrating a commitment to excellence, integrity, and teamwork, leaders can serve as role models for their team members, inspiring them to adopt and uphold the brigade's cultural values.

Cultivating a winning culture is a vital prerequisite for building combat capacity within an Air Defense Artillery Brigade. By prioritizing sponsorship and RSOI, establishing the brigade's culture based on its vision and shared values, and focusing on building combat capacity, leaders can unite their brigade and lay the foundation for success in the years to come. As the brigade grows and evolves, this strong cultural foundation will serve as the bedrock for its continued success and its role as a combat multiplier for the combatant commander.

“Unlocking Hidden Budgets: Tapping into the Army's Financial Reserves”

Lesson: Don't be limited by current budget constraints. Learn the art of networking and strategically position your brigade to benefit from the Army's thrice-yearly budget adjustments. By communicating your needs effectively and showcasing the value of your brigade, secure the necessary funding for growth and development.

A critical aspect for growing an Air Defense Artillery Brigade is effectively managing financial resources. However, leaders should not be limited by current budget constraints. One rule of thumb we have become accustomed to is, “it is far better to justify why you need 15% more added to your budget than to justify why you underspent by 15%.” The “so what” here is twofold. On one hand, by demonstrating a clear need for additional funds and effectively utilizing resources, leaders can make

a compelling case for budget increases that will enable brigade growth and modernization. This can lead to better-equipped and more capable forces that are ready to face evolving threats. On the other hand, underspending by a significant margin like 15% could raise questions about the brigade's efficiency and ability to manage its financial resources. This might lead to reduced funding in future budgets, as decision-makers may assume that the brigade can fulfill its mission with less financial support. By mastering the art of networking and strategically positioning the brigade, one can tap into the Army's financial reserves and secure the necessary funding for growth and development. This involves striking a balance between justifying additional funds when necessary and ensuring that current resources are used effectively to maintain credibility with decision-makers and stakeholders.

Before embarking on the journey to build combat capacity, it is crucial to establish a strong organizational culture that unites your unit.

Networking plays a crucial role in unlocking hidden funds. Developing strong relationships with key decision-makers within the military and other branches can provide valuable insights into funding opportunities and help build support for the brigade's financial needs. One of the most pivotal moments in securing funding for the brigade's major projects and requests was when the commander met with the USAEUR-AF G8 at the Winter Commander's Conference. There, he learned and shared with the team that the Army will correct its budget three times a year. If requests are submitted correctly and prioritized, funding is more likely to be secured. "Luck is the crossroads between opportunity and preparation."

Therefore, the first step in unlocking hidden budgets is understanding the Army's budgeting process. The Army specifically allocates funding through a system that critically adjusts its budgets thrice-yearly to meet its ever-changing needs. By becoming familiar with this process, leaders can identify special opportunities to request additional resources for their units and capitalize on these financial adjustments. Typically they fall in the months of March, August, and September which correspond with milestones in which 50%, 80%, and 100% of the budget must be attained.

A powerful example of strategically position your brigade to benefit from the Army's thrice-yearly budget adjustments is when the brigade was established in the POM cycle with \$2.4 million designated for its activation. Due to continual delays, there was actually \$0 designated for FY23 after activation since the unit was slated to be activated 2 years earlier. This led to Unfunded Requests (UFRs) being submitted for all the activation and renovation projects within the five-year plan, as discussed in the first lesson. After evaluating the brigade's current capabilities and aligning them with the vision for its future, leaders can create a strategic financial plan that focuses on the brigade's most pressing needs by identifying the most critical resources required for growth and development. Initially, the S4 section and

AAMDC G8 were met with resistance. However, the brigade persisted, leading to an analysis of the risk involved in not funding the requests and writing out the proper justifications.

Another significant example was when funding was granted by precisely articulating the risk to the DCG of the combatant commander's risk if the unit did not receive the proper equipment and funding needed to upgrade the components. By effectively conveying the brigade's needs and values, leaders can build support for their financial requests and secure the necessary resources.

In essence, unlocking hidden budgets is essential for the growth and development of an Air Defense Artillery Brigade. By understanding the Army's budgeting process, prioritizing the brigade's financial needs, communicating effectively, and building a strong network of allies, leaders can strategically position their brigade to benefit from the Army's thrice-yearly budget adjustments. With the necessary funding secured, the brigade can continue to grow and develop, becoming the combat multiplier the combatant commander will need in the future.

“Powering Up with People: Leveraging Partners to Fuel Growth”

Lesson: Recognize that participation in next-generation combat may come at a cost. Forge strategic partnerships and secure sponsorships to provide the financial backing necessary for your brigade’s growth. By aligning with the right partners, you’ll ensure your team is equipped and prepared to face the challenges of modern warfare.

Recognizing that participation in next-generation combat may come at a cost, it’s essential for Air Defense Artillery Brigades to forge strategic partnerships and secure sponsorships to fuel growth. These partnerships can be broadly categorized into three main areas: inter-service collaborations, allied partners, and collaborations with NGOs and private industry partners. By aligning with the right partners, you can ensure that your team is equipped and prepared to face the challenges of modern warfare. In this section, we’ll explore how to leverage sponsorship and partnerships to empower your brigade’s growth and development, with a particular focus on inter-service partnerships, allied partners, and NGOs, in that order.

This extraordinary journey has been enriched by five critical lessons learned, which now serve as the guiding light for the brigade’s continued growth and success.

First, inter-service collaborations are a vital aspect of your brigade’s growth. Organizations such as V-Corps and Armored Brigade Combat Teams (ABCTs) that are rotating on the eastern flank or conducting various missions and exercises can provide valuable resources and expertise. By collaborating with these organizations, you can strengthen your brigade’s capabilities and ensure it remains at the forefront of modern warfare. Prioritize visiting maneuver commanders slated to deploy to Europe this year, and work closely with their staff to inform and educate them about air defense assets and capabilities.

Second, fostering relationships with allied partners is crucial for bolstering your brigade’s capacity and expertise. Examples of such partnerships include collaborations with the 7th UK

Group, which provides Sky Sabre, Rapier, and Starstreak capabilities, and engagements with Sweden during Aurora 23. By forming immediate ties with these allies, you can significantly enhance your brigade’s capabilities and position it as a leader in air and missile defense.

Finally, collaborations with NGOs and private industry partners can offer valuable resources, expertise, and cutting-edge technologies that can further empower your brigade. For instance, a few NGOs have visited the headquarters to demonstrate their capabilities or seek expertise to further develop their services. In May, the brigade is facilitating a Northrop Grumman demonstration of the Integrated Air and Missile Defense Battle Command System (IBCS) capability, inviting NATO allies to participate. Such demonstrations not only showcase advanced technologies but also foster relationships with industry partners, leading to long-term collaboration and mutual benefits.

Subsequently, leveraging sponsorship and forging strategic partnerships is an essential strategy for Air Defense Artillery Brigades

preparing for next-generation combat. By prioritizing inter-service collaborations, building relationships with allied partners, and engaging with NGOs and private industry partners, you can secure the necessary support for your brigade’s growth and development. These partnerships will play a crucial role in your brigade’s continued success and its position as a combat multiplier for the combatant commander.

While the curtain falls on the first six months of the 52nd ADA Brigade’s activation in Germany, the organization stands tall, poised to shape the future of large-scale combat operations (LSCO) in Europe. This extraordinary journey has been enriched by five critical lessons learned, which now serve as the guiding light for the brigade’s continued growth and success. As we reflect upon the incredible journey of the 52nd ADA

Brigade's activation, it becomes clear that the lessons learned from this experience hold the key to unlocking the full potential of air defense in Europe. These five transformative lessons provide a roadmap for the brigade to shape the future of LSCO and become a formidable force in the region.

First, the importance of a comprehensive strategic plan cannot be overstated. By developing a clear vision and charting a course for the brigade's growth, the 52nd ADA Brigade sets the stage for success in an ever-evolving geopolitical landscape. With this plan in place, the brigade is prepared to adapt and thrive in the face of emerging challenges and harness the power of cutting-edge technologies.

Second, innovation lies at the heart of the brigade's ability to support maneuver forces and adapt to the rapidly changing battlefield. By fostering a culture of creativity and continuous learning, the 52nd ADA Brigade is poised to develop groundbreaking tactics and solutions that will redefine the future of air defense in Europe. Third, by skillfully understanding budget processes and building strategic relationships, leaders can unlock hidden resources essential for their unit's growth and modernization. Embracing this approach ensures that the brigade remains prepared and adaptable, fully equipped to face emerging threats and challenges. Fourth, a winning culture unites the brigade and empowers its members to overcome obstacles with unwavering determination. By establishing shared values and fostering open dialogue among experienced professionals, the 52nd ADA Brigade creates an environment in which innovative solutions can flourish. This cohesive culture fuels the brigade's resilience, enabling it to face the challenges of LSCO with confidence and grit. Lastly, strategic partnerships are essential for the brigade's growth and development. By leveraging sponsorship opportunities and forging alliances with inter-service partners, allied forces, and NGOs, the 52nd ADA Brigade can unlock vital resources and build a powerful network of support. These collaborations will be instrumental in equipping the brigade with the tools and knowledge necessary to confront the challenges of modern warfare.

As we look to the future, we can embrace the invaluable lessons learned. Armed with this knowledge, we can energize and inspire activating air defense forces worldwide, drive change and unlock the full potential of air defense capabilities. It's time to seize the moment, turning these lessons into a force for change that will redefine the landscape of air defense and ensure the safety and security of generations to come.

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Photo Credits

Pages 44-45: U.S. Army COL Bruce Bredlow, 52d ADA Brigade Commander, passes the unit's colors to Command SGM Charles L. Robinson III, 52d ADA Brigade senior enlisted advisor, at 52d's first assumption of responsibility ceremony in Sembach, Germany, April 12, 2023. This ceremony also marked the first time that the brigade's new colors were uncased publicly. (U.S. Army Photo by SSG Robert P. Wormley III)

Background photo, pages 46-47:

Patriot Missiles in front of McNair Hall set the scene and mark the start of the Remembrance Run on 9-11-23.

(Photo by Angela Turner, Fort Sill Public Affairs Office)

Background photo, pages 48-49:

Soldiers and civilians pause for a moment of reflection as BG Shane Morgan speaks of his experience on 9-11.

(Photo by Monica Wood, Fort Sill Public Affairs Office)

Background photo, pages 50-51:

The 2nd Battalion, 2nd Field Artillery Salute Battery fire ceremonial cannons in front of McNair Hall during the 9-11 Remembrance Ceremony at Fort Sill.

(Photo by Monica Wood, Fort Sill Public Affairs Office)