

What's It Like?

A View from the Forward Line of Own Troops

1st Infantry Division's Office of the Staff Judge Advocate at the Warfighter Exercise

By Major Uilisone F. Tua and Members of the 1st Infantry Division Office of the Staff Judge Advocate

In March 2024, the Office of the Staff Judge Advocate (OSJA) for the 1st Infantry Division (1ID) participated in its Warfighter Exercise (WFX 24-3), a crucial training event that units complete to meet their demand readiness objectives. The Department of the Army merged 1ID's WFX 24-3 with Austere Challenge 24 (AC 24) to create a multi-echelon exercise with U.S. Army Europe-Africa, V Corps, and 3d Infantry Division (3ID).

A group of first-term judge advocates (JAs) and paralegals from the 1ID OSJA participated in WFX 24-3/AC 24. For most of the participants, this was their first exposure to Army operations. Terms such as "coordinated firing line" or "shaping operations" were unfamiliar to them. However, with adequate preparation and access to the necessary resources, they efficiently manned all three command posts: division main, tactical command post, and rear command post.

Prior to the exercise, participants received a mission analysis brief from the 1ID National Security Law (NSL) team as well as briefs on the pertinent rules of engagement (ROE) and the division operational framework—a key operational aspect in division operations. They also participated in the 1ID Danger Ready command post exercises (CPXs). The CPXs enabled them to rehearse their battle drills and test their processes and systems before the warfighter. During the CPXs, they trained with their legal teammates from V Corps and

3ID. As a result, they were prepared to engage in the fight and achieve the following training objectives:

- 1. Become acquainted with the roles of the various staff sections:** Understand and appreciate each staff section's role in analyzing and facilitating decision-making.
- 2. Identify the legal support required for each warfighting function (WfF):** Gain an understanding of the roles of each WfF during the fight. Facilitate coordination across the division staff to ensure legal support is provided efficiently and in a timely manner.
- 3. Develop the ability to understand and follow the fight:** Synchronize with the staff and legal tech channels to ensure a shared understanding of the fight.

The 1ID Staff Judge Advocate, Colonel Lisa Satterfield-Scott, and the Chief of NSL, Major Uilisone Tua, joined the JAs and paralegals in the exercise. Each participant followed the fight and provided exceptional legal support to every WfF. Indeed, the team achieved mission success with the right attitude, a positive demeanor, and a willingness to train with and learn from the division staff.

Below are the participants' insights from the forward line of own troops (FLOT)¹ during their time at WFX 24-3/AC 24.



SSG Lavernne Johnson. (Photo courtesy of author)

Staff Sergeant Lavernne Johnson

Paralegal Specialist
Division Main Command Post

"With the right resources and opportunities, paralegals are unstoppable in division exercises."

In this exercise, the key to success was understanding the fight and each brigade's role in it. Where they will be on the map during each phase is important. Our NSL mission analysis brief provided that knowledge. It allowed us to understand any transition points during the operation. During the fight, I used the *Operational Law Handbook*² to research a potential law of armed conflict (LOAC) violation by the enemy. The attorney used my analysis as part of the report to higher headquarters.

I also drafted the legal reviews for the attorneys so they could focus on their additional responsibilities. For example, utilizing our legal review templates, I prepared legal reviews for military information support operations concepts of operations, which the attorney reviewed and ultimately approved. In addition, I had the opportunity to attend the seven-minute drills, where I recorded all the emerging legal issues and relayed them to the attorney on shift and all three command posts. I recorded them in my shift change report. The shift change report enabled synchronization within our team across each shift. With the right resources and opportunities, paralegals are unstoppable in division exercises. It was a pleasure collaborating with my Judge Advocate General's (JAG) Corps teammates.



SPC Victor Sanchez. (Photo courtesy of author)

Specialist Victor Sanchez

Paralegal Specialist
Rear Command Post

"I felt confident asking questions during the mission analysis brief since a JA gave it."

As a paralegal, if something were to happen to any of my teammates, I need to be ready to step up. Access to resources and understanding the division's mission prior to the exercise are critical to being able to do so. Understanding the flow charts in our battle drills and the ROE matrix helped. Also, receiving a briefing from our OSJA personnel on the mission analysis enabled me to grasp the division's objectives and legal considerations. I felt confident asking questions during the mission analysis brief since a JA gave it. Understanding the operational concept is fundamental in providing legal support to the staff. Knowing the specific tasks for each brigade combat team (BCT) in the division's mission was awesome. This was particularly important to understanding how the fight changes and where the priority of effort will be once the commander indicates a change in mission for one of the BCTs. Overall, the WFX 24-3/AC 24 exercise increased my confidence in interacting with other command and staff members, many of whom are more senior than me.



CPT Laura Bernier-Colon. (Photo courtesy of author)

Captain Laura Bernier-Colon

Joint Air-Ground Integration Center Legal Advisor
Division Main Command Post

"This experience provided me with a profound insight into the interconnectedness of the division staff in Army operations."

Upon arriving at Fort Riley, I swiftly became engaged in fieldwork during the WFX 24-3/AC 24 exercise. This exercise imparted numerous invaluable lessons. The utilization of hand warmers to withstand cold temperatures emerged as a crucial factor. Access to important resources like deskbooks, the ROE matrix, and battle drills was critical to improving my understanding of Army operations.

I must say that without the OSJA mission analysis brief and legal resources, my survival during the exercise would have been doubtful. My legal colleagues showed exceptional camaraderie by embracing me as part of the team, even though I had limited knowledge and experience in Army operations. Their unwavering support and willingness to answer my questions bolstered my confidence to execute my tasks. The paralegals were efficient in gathering information and offering valuable insights. This experience provided me with a profound insight into the interconnectedness of the division staff in Army operations. I am eager to reunite with my teammates in a similar setting.



CPT Luke Martin. (Photo courtesy of author)

Captain Luke Martin

Fires Cell Legal Advisor
Division Main Command Post

"In a pivotal moment, I provided guidance on a targeting issue, an experience that underscored our role in military operations."

This exercise was a valuable opportunity to interact with command and staff and better understand the division's operational strategies. It also allowed me to brief a senior officer on the ROE, a task I never imagined myself undertaking in my initial assignment.

Through training and strategic planning, we honed our skills for success on the battlefield. Integrating with the division staff during planning stages, familiarizing myself with their WfFs and actively participating during combat proved crucial to achieving victory. In a pivotal moment, I provided guidance on a targeting issue, an experience that underscored our role in military operations. The division staff relied on us for prompt and accurate legal counsel, seeking advice on risk assessment and mitigation to ensure a successful outcome. Embracing both triumphs and setbacks, our team is committed to leveraging these experiences to better understand our role in large-scale combat operations (LSCO), executing our duties with proficiency and assurance.



CPT Jared Sprague. (Photo courtesy of author)

Captain Jared Sprague

Legal Advisor
Division Tactical Command Post

“Even when my current assignment is not in NSL, I must be prepared to serve as a legal advisor in military operations at any given moment.”

They often say immersion is the most effective way to learn a new language. As a legal assistance attorney, I was initially focused on the client services side of legal practice within a military setting. Then, the field exercise arrived and introduced me to a realm brimming with Army terminology.

Each day seemed like a whirlwind of battle rhythm activities. Through interactions with staff and my JAG Corps colleagues, I began to grasp the operational lexicon with guidance and support from mentors and peers, which pushed my growth. When called upon to offer a legal analysis on a specific target, I found myself confidently stepping up to the challenge. This experience illuminated the necessity of being well-rounded—even when my current assignment is not in NSL, I must be prepared to serve as a legal advisor in military operations at any given moment. Through this experience, I gained confidence and a newfound appreciation for the work of the command and staff and the intricacies of operations. In sum, I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and found it immensely rewarding.



CPT Francis Halloran. (Photo courtesy of author)

Captain Francis Halloran

Legal Advisor
Division Main Command Post

“Training the warfighter prepares them to perform their duties effectively and legally during combat.”

This is my first assignment in the JAG Corps, and I have already learned so much about Army operations. First, providing guidance on the ROE to the G5 planners during the military decision-making process (MDMP) is essential for operational success. Minimizing legal involvement, unless required by the ROE or other policy, by training the warfighter on LOAC is critical. Training the warfighters prepares them to perform their duties effectively and legally during combat. Our objective as the NSL team prior to and during the WFX 24-3/AC 24 is to empower the warfighter to accomplish their mission in alignment with the commander’s intent.

The division assets—attack aviation and fires—are critical in the maneuverability of down trace units. Assisting the brigades in their close fight requires a clear understanding of the ROE and the operational framework outlining the boundaries of fires. Coordination with partner forces and high command is critical in synchronizing efforts in time and space. Therefore, the division legal team must maintain constant communications with the legal teams at the BCTs and corps to ensure a shared understanding of the fight. It is always a great thing when the higher command enables the division’s fight.



CPT Michael Marcela. (Photo courtesy of author)

Captain Michael Marcela

Legal Advisor
Rear Command Post

“Ultimately, the exercise reinforced my initial observation that some of the most substantial and demanding legal work is encountered at the RCP.”

In general, I have found that the rear command post (RCP) has some of the most substantive and intensive legal issues, even though it may sound less appealing than the legal analysis in targeting or main command post operations.

Legal issues at the RCP frequently involved nonlethal targeting, effects, and operations. With approval from the chief of operations, my team gave the ROE brief during the RCP Update Brief every morning, providing crucial information on the main command’s firing boundaries. Notably, the RCP commander depends on legal for advice on detention operations. We developed a concise one-slider on legal requirements pertaining to the detention of civilians. The battle drills for chemical attacks facilitated the completion of our assigned tasks and the seamless reporting of LOAC violations to higher headquarters.

The concept of self-defense emerged as a significant aspect of the exercise, with national self-defense being a prerogative at the national level. ROE restricting cross-border fires are structured to safeguard this right based on policy considerations aimed at preventing conflict escalation.

Ultimately, the exercise reinforced my initial observation that some of the most substantial and demanding legal work is encountered at the RCP. This exercise provided our team with a valuable opportunity to engage in comprehensive training on legal support required in LSCO.



CPT Jesse Burbank. (Photo courtesy of author)

Captain Jesse Burbank

Joint Air-Ground Integration Center Legal Advisor
Division Main Command Post

“Without question, the exercise—over the course of two weeks—developed me into a better Soldier, a better attorney, and a better teammate.”

The WFX 24-3/AC 24 provided me with my first in-depth look at how a division tactical operations center (TOC) operates in a combat environment: the integration of 11D’s WfFs to support the operation, the component parts of MDMP that enable 11D to dynamically prosecute a mission, and the role of the JA in facilitating the division’s warfighting capabilities. As a new JA, the exercise showed me the striking level of expertise 11D brings to bear in a combat setting and taught me how JAs can best contribute to combat operations. Whether through providing counsel on ROE, performing LOAC analysis of prospective targets, or engaging proactively with core authorities to adapt the ROE to needs on the ground, the exercise highlighted the necessity of a knowledgeable and integrated JA to the mission’s success.

The Fort Riley OSJA team prepared thoroughly and executed skillfully. The team underwent mission analysis briefs before the exercise, participated in Danger Ready field exercises (a LSCO combat simulation), followed the fight closely as it unfolded, and thoroughly integrated with 11D’s WfFs to provide maximum value to the exercise. Each JA and paralegal was crucial to the success of the effort, and the team bonded closely over our shared mission. Without question, the exercise—over the course of two weeks—developed me into a better Soldier, a better attorney, and a better teammate.



Ultimately, the WFX 24-3/AC 24 trained and prepared these JAG Corps teammates for division operations. They are motivated and passionate to be involved in the next fight. Their determination and can-do spirits bound them as a cohesive unit. With adequate preparation and training, they evolved into seasoned consultants and essential personnel within division operations. These JAG Corps teammates stand primed and poised to leap into action and support the division in any LSCO.

Keep reaching for the stars, 11D OSJA.
Duty First! TAL

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Notes

1. The forward line of own troops (FLOT) “is a line that indicates the most forward positions of friendly forces during linear operations at a specific time.” JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, JOINT PUB. 3-03, JOINT INTERDICTION ch. V, para. 2(c)(2) (26 May 2022).
2. NAT’L SEC. L. DEP’T, THE JUDGE ADVOC. GEN.’S LEGAL CTR. & SCH., U.S. ARMY, OPERATIONAL LAW HANDBOOK (2024).