

Preparing for the Next Fight: *The Final FTX at Infantry OSUT*

CPT CHARLES J. GULOTTA
LTC MICHAEL B. MOORE

As the U.S. Army shifts its focus from counterinsurgency operations to large-scale combat operations (LSCO), the U.S. Army Infantry School at Fort Benning, GA, has taken deliberate steps to reshape initial entry training. At the center of this transformation is the Infantry One Station Unit Training (OSUT) pipeline — a 22-week course designed to forge fit, disciplined, lethal, and resilient Infantry Soldiers. The culminating event of this transformation is the field training exercise (FTX), a rigorous, multi-day, immersive event that evaluates each trainee's tactical competence, leadership potential, and mental fortitude under conditions that replicate the demands of LSCO.

From a battalion-level perspective, the FTX represents the capstone evaluation in the transformation from civilian to Infantry Soldier. From the company commander's viewpoint,

it is the final opportunity to pressure-test each Soldier in the crucible of combat simulation — while instilling confidence in their training, leadership, and lethality. The FTX offers a critical proving ground, allowing trainees to demonstrate the skills they've acquired while facing the physical and psychological stresses of simulated LSCO environments.

Building the Fight: LSCO as the Training Standard

It is a common shortfall in military training to prepare for the last war rather than the next. At 2nd Battalion, 58th Infantry Regiment, we challenge this tendency. For our companies, the FTX is designed as a scaled-down combat training center (CTC) rotation, built with minimal administrative pauses to sustain tactical immersion. The company's operations begin



A first lieutenant assigned to Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 58th Infantry Regiment, briefs an operation order off a terrain model during a field training exercise during Infantry One Station Unit Training at Fort Benning, GA. (Photo by CPT Stephanie Snyder)



Trainees assigned to 2-58 IN are dug into their fighting positions during their final training exercise. (Photo by CPT Stephanie Snyder)

with a deliberate defense and evolve through a variety of offensive and reconnaissance-based missions — all under the umbrella of LSCO realism, within our capabilities.

Scenario development begins with the operation order (OPORD). From the company level down, leaders brief their formations in accordance with doctrinal troop leading procedures. The situation paragraph includes notional friendly units, enemy capabilities that reflect near-peer doctrine, and well-defined boundaries that shape the battlefield. The opposing force (OPFOR) is equipped with inert weapons and tactics that replicate modern adversaries, ensuring trainees must respond to realistic, dynamic threats.

The Company Fight: Executing the FTX on the Ground

As an OSUT company commander, I approach the FTX not just as an evaluation, but as the final opportunity to mold my trainees into Infantry Soldiers capable of surviving and thriving in LSCO conditions. Per the Infantry OSUT program of instruction (POI), the first objective is the development of the company's defense. From day one, Soldiers dig fighting positions with overhead cover, camouflage their locations, and prepare for both direct and aerial threats. When available, Class IV materials — such as sandbags and lumber — are used to enhance the realism of a deliberate fighting position.

The use of small unmanned aerial systems (sUAS) is integrated into the scenario based on lessons learned from Ukraine and other contemporary conflicts. Two days of sUAS instruction are directed by the OSUT POI. We typically dedicate one day to friendly drone use and one day to enemy use, employing a company-owned, U.S. software-hardened mini-drone.

Enemy drones conduct overflights of both patrol routes and static positions, forcing trainees to react using new doctrinal drills and to validate their fighting position construction. Friendly drone use is leveraged for reconnaissance, giving our Soldiers intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance

(ISR) exposure they will almost certainly need in future combat. With help from a drill sergeant, trainees fly the drone over the final objective to identify enemy presence and equipment. The leadership then uses this information to adjust the plan and execute the mission.

Missions throughout the FTX scale in complexity and size based on class performance. A high-performing company may execute platoon-level attacks, ambushes, and movements to contact. A struggling class might remain focused on squad-level operations. The culminating mission — typically the final 48 hours of the FTX — includes a 12-mile movement and often involves an attack to seize an objective, immediately followed by a hasty defense in urban terrain. This scenario simulates combat in dense, complex environments. Over the course of these 48 hours, trainees will have moved more than 16 miles, operating on minimal rest under continuous pressure. This final test demands not only tactical proficiency but immense physical endurance and mental toughness.

Leadership Development and Role Modeling

Our battalion makes intentional efforts to integrate leadership into the exercise in ways that build credibility and provide mentorship. We often recruit Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course (IBOLC) graduates to serve as platoon leaders during the FTX. This provides invaluable repetitions for the



A mini-drone operated by Bravo Company, 2-58 IN observes opposing force soldiers on the objective during the company's final field training exercise. (Photo courtesy of author)

lieutenants and gives trainees realistic experience with junior officer leadership before arriving at their operational units. It also allows lieutenants the chance to lead Soldiers they may serve with in their next unit of assignment.

Within the squads, drill sergeants serve as squad leaders. Their diverse experience across all infantry formations provides a doctrinally grounded model of what “right” looks like at the small-unit level. This builds leadership credibility with the trainees, reinforcing standards through presence and examples.

Orders and Communication: Enforcing Discipline and Doctrine

To maximize realism, all operations follow doctrinal troop leading procedures. Company OPORDs are delivered by the commander, followed by platoon-level terrain model briefs and rehearsals. The goal is shared understanding, practiced execution, and rapid decision-making. This allows trainees to gain valuable experience by hearing an order from an Army leader and seeing a terrain model — often for the first time.

Daily fragmentary orders are delivered via radio to simulate battlefield communication constraints. Trainees must receive, digest, and execute orders quickly — without face-to-face clarification. This builds confidence in their leaders and enforces disciplined communication, which is essential in the chaos of LSCO.

The company tactical operations center conducts battle tracking, receives reports, and issues sustainment through doctrinal processes. Trainees must radio in 9-line medical evacuation requests, SALUTE (size, activity, location, unit, time, equipment) reports, situation updates, and logistics requirements. They are expected to request food, water, and ammunition over the radio, minimizing administrative pauses in training. This interaction reinforces the necessity of effective reporting and decentralized execution in a distributed, high-tempo fight.

Training for Tomorrow’s Fight

The FTX is more than just a capstone event — it’s the crucible that forges civilians into Infantry Soldiers prepared for tomorrow’s fight. By simulating LSCO with realism, integrating leadership, reinforcing the orders process, and incorporating modern threats like sUAS, the FTX ensures OSUT graduates enter the operational force with the

COMMANDER’S PLANNING GUIDANCE

‘Love of Country’ 2nd Battalion, 58th Infantry Regiment

Field Training Exercise (FTX) and “Bayonet”

Purpose: Deploy into a tactical field environment and certify trainees and leaders on all individual, collective, and leader tasks trained throughout OSUT.

Key Tasks:

- Company commanders conduct offensive and defensive operations as defined by ATP 3-21.8 or 3-21.10
- Commanders utilize the orders process (company-platoon) to drive training (issue a minimum 2x company and 2x platoon operation orders)
- Platoon leader/platoon sergeant led – trainee executed (trainees will rotate through squad leader/team leader positions)
- Environment should replicate near-peer competitor (e.g., day/night operations, opposing force tactics/uniforms, pyrotechnics, etc.)
- Cadre/trainees maintain tactical field environment (camouflage, noise/light/litter discipline, construct fighting positions, patrol base activities, anti-armor weapons systems, mass casualty, etc.)
- Commanders designate internal rotation to resource OPFOR requirements
- Maintain standards and discipline and continuously assess the environment, ensuring training is Tough-Realistic-Consistent-Safe
- Create a continuously contested environment
- Five-day FTX with two-day Bayonet (final 48 hours)
- Collective training at the squad level and below

“Bayonet”: The culmination of Infantry OSUT, this two-day event should be physically and mentally demanding and serve as the right of passage into Honor Hill

- Complete a 16-mile foot movement over 48 hours – distance under load can be divided into multiple legs based on METT-TC
- Conduct company decisive operation – each platoon executes a platoon attack against an enemy objective; drill sergeants and platoon leaders serve in leadership positions as PL/PSG
- Collective training at the platoon level
- Led by platoon leader/platoon sergeant (drill sergeants serve in these positions), trainees serve in squad and team leader positions
- Conduct the Warrior’s Breakfast in the Warrior Restaurant, maximize cadre support

End state: Trainees and leaders operate tactically in a field environment. Trainees are certified on individual, fire team, and squad collective tasks; enhanced self-confidence and personal ability to operate under stressful conditions during both day and limited visibility operations in tactical field environment.

Figure 1 — Commander’s Planning Guidance

foundational skills and mental resilience required to win in combat.

From the battalion to the company level, our shared goal is clear: prepare Infantry Soldiers to thrive in the demands of large-scale combat. The FTX provides the proving ground to ensure that goal is met.

GEN Gary M. Brito, commanding general of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, summarized it best: “We need to train the most lethal warfighting Soldiers and develop competent leaders. ... That’s the core mission.”¹

At 2-58 IN, we take that mission seriously — knowing that every iteration of OSUT shapes the strength, discipline, and lethality of the force that will fight and win our nation’s future battles.

Notes

¹ GEN Gary Brito, “Brito Calls on Leaders, Soldiers to Master the Basics,” Association of the United States Army (AUSA), 27 September 2024, <https://www.ausea.org/news/brito-calls-leaders-soldiers-master-basics>.

CPT Charles J. Gulotta commanded Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 58th Infantry Regiment, 198th Infantry Training Brigade, Fort Benning GA. His previous assignments include serving as a heavy weapons platoon leader in Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, NC; scout platoon leader in Charlie Troop, 5th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment, 3rd BCT, 82nd Airborne Division; and executive officer in Charlie Troop, 5-73 CAV. CPT Gulotta earned a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY, and a master’s degree in organizational leadership from Columbus State University.

LTC Mike Moore recently commanded 2-58 IN. He has proudly led many of our Army’s greatest Soldiers in Airborne, Stryker, and Infantry training formations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and home stations. He received his undergraduate degree in mass communication at Miami University and a master’s in aeronautical science at Embry Riddle Aeronautical University.