
Putting the ‘C’ Back in BCT:

Creating Change Agents Through Initiative Ownership

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In a message to our Army team on 26 October 2023, GEN Randy A. George, the 41st Army Chief of Staff, reinforced that our enduring purpose as a force is to fight and win our nation’s wars. He further stated that to do this we must stay grounded and dedicate our energy in four focus areas: warfighting, delivering combat-ready formations, continuous transformation, and strengthening the profession.

As of 2022, Basic Combat Training (BCT) lacked a focus on sustained ground combat and failed to prepare new Soldiers for large-scale combat operations (LSCO). It was challenging but concentrated on events rather than tactical-based training which better prepares new Soldiers to fight and survive on the modern battlefield. As the character of war changes, so must our training strategies, leader development, and resulting culture. Change is a difficult process, as “it’s the way we have always done it” clouds the thoughts of some practitioners and creates roadblocks. By giving subordinate elements and external entities significant initiatives to own, develop, and create solutions for, change becomes less about the new idea from “them” and more about how “we” make things the absolute best that they can be.

Throughout 2023, the 193rd Infantry Brigade at Fort Jackson, SC, focused heavily on creating a warfighting mindset and culture within our trainees and cadre. This transition aligned with GEN George’s vision of bringing warfighting back to the forefront of our profession and was already in motion within Initial Military Training (IMT) when he became the Army Chief of Staff. Due to the changing character of war, MG John D. Kline, the commanding general (CG) of the U.S. Army’s Center for Initial Military Training (CIMT), envisioned a BCT environment that immersed cadre and trainees within a scenario-driven LSCO environment. This vision was further discussed with IMT senior leaders for several months before MG Jason E. Kelly, the CG of Army Training Center and Fort Jackson (ATCFJ), tasked the 193rd Infantry Brigade to develop a BCT training concept that better prepared new Soldiers for LSCO. MG Kelly’s guidance focused on increasing individual survivability and ensuring that the nation’s largest BCT enterprise was not only “Making American Soldiers” but “Making Our American Soldiers Better.” This evolution, envisioned by MG Kline, embraced by MG Kelly, and operationalized as Forge 2.5 by the 193rd Infantry Brigade, focused on warrior tasks and battle drills (with a primacy on marks-



manship), tactical discipline, grit, physical fitness, and teamwork. This field training exercise (FTX) is executed within a 72-hour, scenario-driven format and led by drill sergeants.¹ We aimed to produce not just Soldiers but incredibly proud warfighters who were ready and able to be value added to our profession’s purpose and ready to fight and win our nation’s wars. As recently attested to by a battalion command sergeant major in the 193rd, “We’re now running continuous operations in austere conditions, and you can almost see a company of light Infantrymen by the time we get them back to Hilton Field.

They’re tired, dirty, hungry — and most importantly, proud of what they were able to accomplish over those 72 hours. I include our drill sergeants in that pool of people as well. You can clearly see the amount of pride they have during the Soldier Induction Ceremony when they’re slapping ‘Star’ patches on new Soldiers.” Forge 2.5 is not about a change to the program of instruction (POI). It’s about a change in mindset, through which we are creating a warfighting culture among trainees and cadre. Simply put, Forge 2.5 puts the “C” back in BCT!

Refocusing on Warfighting

The process within the 193rd Infantry Brigade began in early April 2023 with a brigade commander/command sergeant major (CSM) whiteboard session and the establishment of the Forge 2.5 operational planning team (OPT). This council was made up of senior drill sergeants from each of the five BCT battalions in the brigade and led by a company commander from the 2nd Battalion, 13th Infantry Regiment. This group of experienced professionals met throughout that month, operating with initial guidance from the brigade commander to embed a tactical focus, defined as noise and light discipline, personal and positional camouflage, to-standard fighting positions, security, and situational awareness within the Forge with drill sergeants, fulfilling the roles of squad leaders and platoon sergeants, leading trainees through. Battalion staffs were to deploy to the field to establish tactical operations centers and perform their duties in a quasi-wartime manner. Every Forge iteration was to be evaluated utilizing training and evaluation outlines (T&EOs) by a brigade-level evaluation team to enable continued refinement through each battalion-level execution. The Forge was to remain 72 hours in duration and all POI tasks were to be completed, but significant work was needed to transition the existing event-driven administrative exercise into a true tactical FTX built around a LSCO scenario.

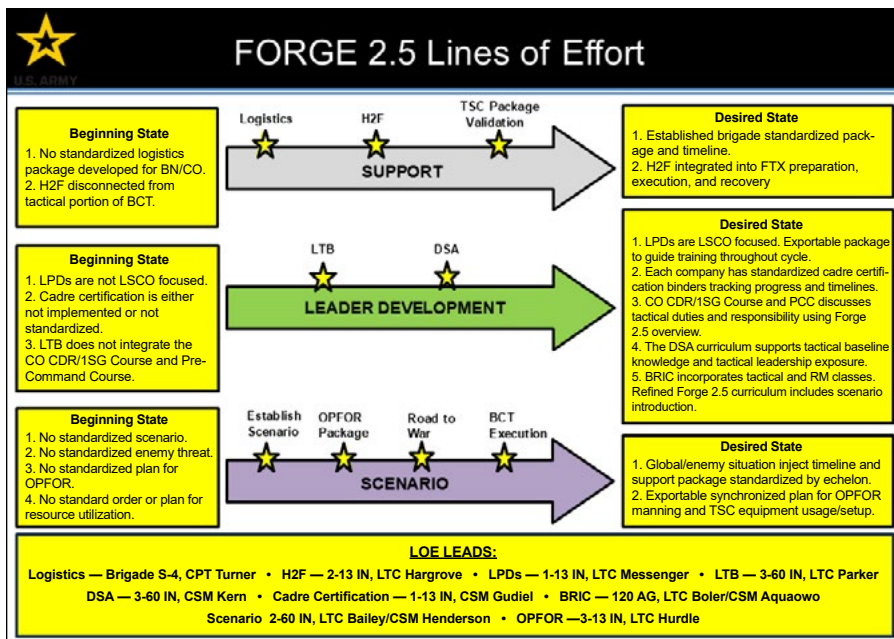


Figure 1 — Forge 2.5 Lines of Effort

The OPT developed a viable plan and briefed it to the brigade commander and CSM on 27 April 2023. The important work conducted by the OPT's NCOs started to steer the aircraft carrier into the necessary direction. The first and second iterations of the transitional Forge were conducted by 2-13 IN and 2nd Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment from 15-18 May and 10-13 July 2023 respectively. They were not without serious setbacks though; the most significant of which were the identification of structural shortcomings within the brigade and a realization of major deficiencies in the basic tactical knowledge of our cadre. We addressed these by developing lines of effort (LOEs) focused on increasing structural support to the battalions and the tactical competence of the cadre.

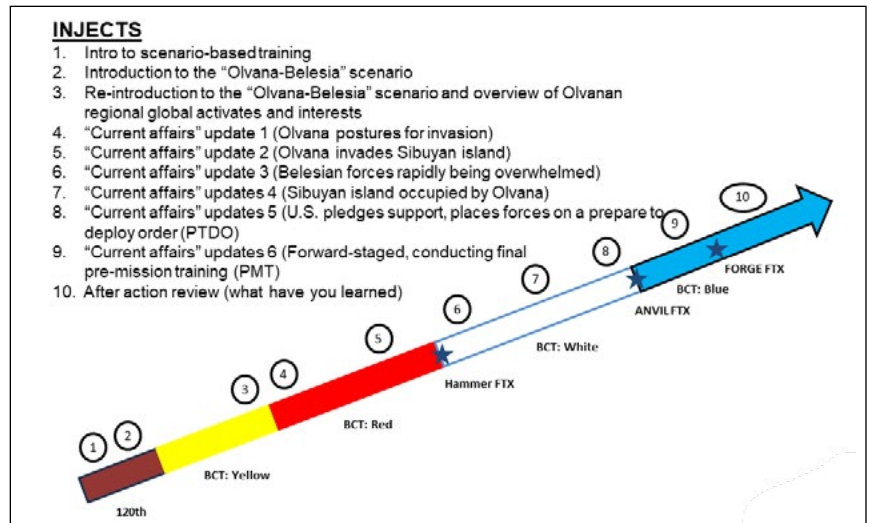
The brigade executive officer led the staff in the development of three broad LOEs that were identified as essential in moving forward with the Forge 2.5 process. (See Figure 1). The LOEs served two major roles: to push the brigade from current state to desired state and to design an improved Forge with input from as many stakeholders as possible while using as many of our mission-enhancing resources as practical. This process, although cumbersome at times, gave every battalion within the brigade (as well as key stakeholders external to the brigade) an active role in the transformation process. The result of this approach was increased understanding, a sense of extreme ownership, and a culture that encouraged and incentivized creativity and proactive solutions. What began as the vision of the CIMT CG was operationalized with input from six battalions and many entities external to the brigade, and thus the initiative became transformational vice transactional.

As the brigade iterated through executions of the Forge with each battalion, the lack of an overarching LSCO-focused scenario proved to be problematic. It prevented the creation of realism and detracted from the purpose of the enhanced FTX. The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) G-2 became the brigade's main effort for enabling the achievement of training realism and scenario immersion. Coordination between the 2-60 IN command team and the TRADOC G-2 led to the development of an overarching global scenario, informed by the National Defense Strategy, that provided the operational framework, through the backdrop of a series of nine scenario injects that added training realism and tactical purpose to every BCT event, starting with reception (see Figure 2).

In addition to the important LSCO scenario contributions, 2-60 IN developed the brigade's overarching friendly situation and the battalion linear defense concept. This was not without debate within the brigade, but a standardized execution enabled a quicker organizational transition and provided for more accurate and consistent evaluations. Henceforth, every 193rd unit conducting the Forge, except for 3-60 IN, would establish a battalion linear defense.

From the outset, MG Kelly was laser focused on ensuring the exportability of the Forge 2.5 concept. Out of the three major BCT installations (Fort Jackson; Fort Leonard Wood, MO; and Fort Sill, OK) only Fort Jackson operationalizes BCT at the battalion level. This makes Fort Jackson's throughput much greater but also puts a battalion commander, CSM, and the requisite support staff on top of every Soldier's initial military training experience. The differences between levels of command involved created some skepticism to this initiative at first. The 3-13 and 3-60 IN commanders

Figure 2 — Overview of Forge 2.5 Scenario Injects



conducted site surveys at Fort Leonard Wood and Fort Sill respectively to better understand their operating conditions and procedures. From their visits, the brigade acquired a wealth of knowledge that enabled them to meet the exportability intent. Accordingly, over the course of two BCT cycles, 3-60 IN developed and implemented a concept by which four companies operated detached from the battalion throughout the execution of the Forge and its preparatory tactical FTXs. This important initiative proved that the support received by the battalion headquarters could be provided at echelon by the company, and that the level of command in control of the exercise had no measurable impact on the focus, training value, or supportability of Forge 2.5.

The 120th Adjutant General (AG) Battalion is charged with receiving and in-processing upwards of 30,000 civilians annually who are destined for both the 193rd and 165th Infantry Brigades. Under the legacy BCT culture, the 120th AG was where Fort Jackson welcomed civilians into the Army. As the warfighting culture within BCT began to root and develop, the battalion identified an opportunity to introduce the newly arrived civilians into the concept of scenario-based training, begin the LSCO scenario immersion, and more appropriately welcome these new trainees into their future warfighting profession. Scenario injects, battle-focused discussions, and physical training were easily threaded into the standard reception tasks to immediately provide a stronger sense of purpose and increased excitement and pride about what these trainees had committed to accomplish over the next 10 weeks.

While working to transform how we welcome civilians into our warfighting profession, the 120th AG also refocused the brigade's permanent party onboarding mechanism, the Bayonet Reception and Integration Course (BRIC). It took a multi-day event that served as an administrative onboarding of new cadre members and completely revised it by adding blocks of instruction on rifle marksmanship, holistic health and fitness (H2F), and the Forge 2.5 scenario and expectations. This effort, coupled with the refined reception initiative, began to plant the warfighting mindset in trainees and cadre before even arriving to BCT.

The 120th's renewed focus on onboarding warfighters created a desire to revisit our standardized handoff mechanism — structured and disciplined pickup. The handoff between reception and the BCT battalions has morphed through the years, but the standard at ATCFJ developed into an extremely professional event focused on Army and unit history, discipline, and Army Combat Fitness Test demonstrations. With the newly found emphasis on warfighting, this event again changed, but this time with the addition of instilling our Army's

warfighting purpose. The Army and unit histories were maintained as a means of ensuring ongoing education on the important feats accomplished by those who had previously filled the ranks of BCT while also applying these important lessons learned to the present and connecting the new crop of trainees to the Army's future. Adding a LSCO-driven scenario into the disciplined pickup affords drill sergeants an early opportunity to introduce the unit's history and lead trainees through physically demanding tactical tasks. The early inculcation enables their absolute connection to the Army's past and future. Through the introduction to the tactical scenario and our warfighting profession in reception, built upon through a refined structured and disciplined pickup, and then codified throughout BCT, realism, purpose, and pride emerged to replace anxiety and confusion.

As in any tactical FTX, the presence and realistic use of opposing forces (OPFOR) within Forge 2.5 became essential. The enemy concept, created by the TRADOC G-2, called for a Southeast Asia-focused threat situation with a fictitious country named Olvana. With the assistance of the Fort Jackson Training Support Center (TSC), 3-13 IN developed and sourced a complete package of OPFOR support items: tiger stripe uniforms, pneumatic guns, improvised explosive device (IED) simulators, and a full complement of Kalashnikov assault rifles (AK-47s), Soviet-type light machine guns (RPKs), and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) launchers. With the equipment packages sourced and built, the team developed what became the brigade's tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) for OPFOR utilization, including element size, where they are sourced from, tactical control, scenario control, and day-by-day OPFOR mission sets to ensure the training objectives were achieved. Scenario immersion was further solidified by 3-13 IN's creation of more than 20 World War II-inspired propaganda posters (see Figure 3). These were devised and designed by the battalion, produced by TSC at Fort Eustis, VA, and posted around the BCT battalion and company areas on Fort Jackson to immerse trainees in

a realistic and well-sourced scenario that provides added benefit to, and purpose for, every training event within BCT.

Strengthening the Profession

The quest to better prepare our cadre focused internally through the development of a LSCO-focused leader professional development (LPD) program, led by 1-13 IN. They developed a holistic plan that progressed weekly throughout cycle reset and the weeks of BCT leading up to the Forge. This LPD plan provided cadre the education necessary to break the mold produced by 20 years of the global war on terrorism (GWOT). It enabled them to think and act in preparation for the next war instead of being anchored to the lessons learned from the GWOT. Simultaneously, 1-13 IN worked diligently

Figure 3 — Example Propaganda Poster Developed for Forge 2.5














 HOLISTIC HEALTH AND FITNESS Blue Phase: FORGE 2.5 	
 <p>Nutrition Objective: Ensure proper fueling during physical demanding tasks, such as foot marches or FTX Skill: Increase energy intake through Modular Operation Ration Enhancement (MORE) Educate: MOREs are used for fueling between meals, offering energy + electrolytes. Before: caffeinated/carbohydrate-containing items: pudding, First Strike Bar, carb-electrolyte beverage During: carbohydrate-containing foods sustain us: dried fruit, First Strike Bar, applesauce, carb-electrolyte beverage After: protein, carbs and fats replenish the body: fruit & nut mix, toasted corn kernels, filled pretzels, nuts</p>	 <p>Imagery Objective: Similar to the way dynamic stretching primes your nerves and muscles for exercise, performance imagery primes your brain to be ready for mental challenges. Performance imagery rehearses every step of a task, including reactions to potential obstacles. This preventive action can increase confidence and improve outcomes in a performance. Skill: Imagery Apply: Try this for RM: I look at my target. I am confident and in control. Range operator gives the command. I load the magazine, switch from safe to semi, and take a deep breath. I align my target and breathe in, exhale, hold, and deliberately, smoothly squeeze the trigger."</p>
 <p>Injury Prevention Objective: Reduce likelihood of overuse injuries during week eight of BCT Skill: World's Greatest Stretch: Hold positions A, B, C, and D as pictured below for a period of 10 seconds each for 3 total repetitions. Alternate legs and repeat. Apply: When you have down time or used as an activation technique during warmup prior to running or marching</p> 	 <p>Grasp the Thorns Objective: Increase ability to endure emotional pain and disappointment. Improved spiritual coping skills and Soldier perception of emotional pain reduced. Skill: Coping strategy Apply: Forge week. This is the Super Bowl, the World Series... the "fill in the blank sports metaphor" of Basic Combat Training. Everything you've trained up until this point will be tested this week. There's a good chance that this week will be your hardest yet. With trials or hardships, you can build endurance and perspective. Paul, an Apostle in the New Testament counseled us to, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." Spend time this week during your ruck, or the STX lanes, or the night infiltration course thinking about how trials have strengthened you.</p>
 <p>Sleep Facts Objective: Sleep is so important to performance. Researchers found that 5 nights with less than 5 hours of sleep creates a 20% cognitive deficiency; the equivalent of a 0.08 blood alcohol level (5 alcoholic drinks in a 180 lb. male). Skill: Sleep Apply: Whenever you are offered the opportunity, take advantage of sleep. Don't stay up at night talking, your performance will suffer.</p>	  

Figure 4 — H2F Training Strategy

to identify the key tasks that were imperative for cadre to master. This resulted in the creation of a certification process that succeeded in enabling all cadre, no matter their military occupational specialty (MOS), to embody competence and confidence as tactical leaders.

Although the leadership within the brigade developed effective solutions to the immediate concerns uncovered from our initial iterations of Forge 2.5, lasting change would require education of new cadre members before they were to fill their important roles within BCT. LPDs and cadre certification were enough to get us back on track, but foundational change in our future cadre, instituted through the Leader Training Brigade (LTB) and the U.S. Army Drill Sergeant Academy (USADSA), was necessary to create the "competence to be confident" across every IMT installation. These efforts were spearheaded by 3-60 IN.

Drill sergeants are masters of training the POI and have been finely honed by the USADSA to expertly train basic Soldier skills. However, without a focus on tactical leadership and survivability in LSCO, we had asked our drill sergeants (and company command teams) to enter a realm where they weren't competent enough to be confident. There existed a grave delta between what our cadre knew and understood about tactical leadership and where we were demanding that they go during Forge 2.5. Tactical leadership across the cadre spectrum was integral to bringing realism and relevance into training, and the brigade's initial Forge 2.5 iterations uncovered a need for significant cadre investment.

The 3-60 IN worked hard refining and establishing the means to fully prepare the battalion's cadre to excel as tactical drill sergeants (as squad leaders and platoon sergeants leading trainees in simulated combat). Their experiences were enthusiastically received by the USADSA. With 3-60 IN's

assistance, USADSA staff members immediately identified where they could evolve training and education to produce not only a better drill sergeant but a better NCO who was ready to lead trainees in a tactical environment. Similarly, 3-60 IN Soldiers worked with LTB to investigate their portfolio and identify where they could assist with the endeavor. LTB's offerings, the TRADOC Company Commander and First Sergeant Course and the TRADOC Pre-Command Course, provided other essential venues to educate on and market the growing tactical focus in BCT. LTB developed and refined blocks of instruction to better prepare incoming command teams for the new training environment. The efforts with the USADSA and LTB, led by 3-60 IN, resulted in institutional change that ensured cadre and leader training evolved at pace with the changing character of war.

H2F is a powerful weapon in the Soldier's arsenal, the application of which makes them the absolute best versions of themselves possible. As the brigade sought to create irreversible change in the mindset of those within the unit, it became apparent that cadre/trainee investment in each of the five H2F domains (Mental, Sleep, Nutritional, Physical, and Spiritual) was necessary to reach peak performance due to the stress created by 72 hours of simulated combat. Not only would this prepare them for Forge 2.5 and empower them throughout execution, it would also facilitate post-execution recovery. The 2-13 IN, in conjunction with the 193rd's H2F Team, led the operationalization of H2F as a mission-enhancing element of our Forge 2.5 transition. This effort started by immersing our H2F team within the BCT environment throughout the cycle while simultaneously instituting full five-domain assessments on the brigade's entire cadre population. The assessments educated cadre on their performance blind spots, while the immersion enabled the H2F team to assess the physical and mental demands on both trainees and BCT cadre. Once the

subject matter experts understood the stressors on both cadre and trainees, they were able to devise a training strategy to increase performance, not just in Forge 2.5 but throughout BCT (see Figure 4). This led to many supporting H2F initiatives, all geared towards increasing individual and collective performance, developing a strong sense of a warfighting purpose, increasing confidence through competence, and strengthening the sense of team at every echelon.

Continuous Transformation

After nearly nine months and almost 15 iterations of Forge 2.5, the 193rd Infantry Brigade had achieved a complete transition. Throughout the process, leaders at every echelon within the brigade laid a substantial foundation of tactical knowledge and capability within their cadre. The combination of the BRIC, LPDs, cadre certification, and USADSA and LTB instructional modifications, assessments, and battalion/company-level training improvements laid the groundwork for the added complexity that was necessary to complete the LSCO-focused transition and incorporate lessons learned from the ongoing war in Ukraine such as the use of small unmanned aerial systems (sUAS).

Since their first usage in the GWOT, sUAS have continued to become ever more present throughout global conflicts. From Syria to Ukraine, sUAS have proven to be a normal aspect within modern warfare, and with that, they have reinforced the need for the basic tactical skills that Forge 2.5 produces as part of the foundation of our warfighters. The inclusion of sUAS in BCT provided a means by which cadre could train and reinforce foundational tactical skills, using real-world threat scenarios to provide the “why” behind tasks inherent to individual survival on the modern battlefield. Reacting to

sUAS is as important to the individual Soldier today as the GWOT’s signature “5s & 25s” were to individual avoidance of IEDs in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The 193rd’s quest for realism and relevance through the inclusion of sUAS began with cross talking and visits with the 197th and 198th Infantry Brigades, as well as cadre from the U.S. Army Sniper Course, all under the Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Moore, GA. The 197th and 198th conduct Infantry One Station Unit Training (OSUT) and have spearheaded sUAS usage within their training evolutions for almost a year. The OSUT brigades shared valuable lessons learned with reference to gaining approval for sUAS in the airspace, training of operators, and the implementation of sUAS in training. Additionally, they developed and implemented the first react to sUAS battle drill for usage in OSUT, which sparked further refinement and development for usage at BCT. Furthermore, they trained and certified ATCFJ’s first operators (one from each brigade). The U.S. Army Sniper School assisted 193rd leadership with understanding how best to defeat detection through the application of basic tactical skills, such as personal and positional camouflage, noise and light discipline, cover/concealment, situational awareness, security, and proper tactical movement (all important basic tasks to be trained in BCT).

Open-source lessons learned from Ukraine illustrate sUAS being used primarily in two ways: to identify adversary formations and to drop munitions or spot for artillery. The 193rd’s use of sUAS within Forge 2.5 followed these two tactical applications, and hence, our mitigation techniques focused towards diminishing a sUAS’s ability to identify forces to target. This was conducted primarily through reinforcing the foundational tactical standards called for initially

in Forge 2.5: noise and light discipline, personal and positional camouflage, to-standard fighting positions (including overhead concealment), security, and situational awareness (SA). The brigade developed two reactions to sUAS that were passive in nature, did not call for engaging the platforms, and required no specialized equipment or skills. These reactions address the types of sUAS contact in the individual Soldier task framework that is essential in BCT (see Figure 5). In a defensive scenario, the emphasis was put on overhead concealment using natural vegetation. While patrolling or stationary in the open, vertically aligning oneself against a tree trunk enabled the usage of the tree’s branches to conceal the Soldier from observation. While “seeking cover” oftentimes involves laying prone, in a sUAS scenario a horizontal body is much easier to observe from the air than a vertical one.

Figure 5 — Photos from sUAS of Trainees during Forge 2.5





Trainees in the 193rd Infantry Brigade man a fighting position at Fort Jackson, SC. (Photo courtesy of the 3rd Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment)

Delivering Combat Ready Soldiers

By incorporating a LSCO scenario and continuous tactical operations, the Forge became purposeful, realistic, and more challenging; ensured a firmer foundation of basic skills within our trainees; and empowered our cadre and staffs to develop as leaders. By focusing on the foundational tactical skills of noise and light discipline, personal and positional camouflage, to-standard fighting positions, security, and situational awareness (including SA of aerial threats), it creates an entry-level Soldier with the skills inherent to survive on the modern battlefield.

As the process began, it was evident that change within a TRADOC BCT brigade materialized like the turn of an aircraft carrier. But serious change needed to happen, and it needed to take place on a compressed timeline much more like the turn of a speed boat. Every BCT cycle that graduated before we could accomplish it was another 800-1,200 new Soldiers that were not prepared for the wars that might lie ahead. They would be disciplined and fit yet would lack the tactical foundation necessary to survive in LSCO. A team comprised of these Soldiers would be sub-optimal on the modern battlefield, regardless of their combat mission.

As illustrated throughout the preceding text, creating a warfighting mindset in BCT was a whole of brigade effort. Every battalion had an essential piece of the initiative. Change started with guidance from a few but was planned for, refined, and operationalized by a brigade staff, six incredibly talented battalion command teams and their respective formations, as well as a few key external stake holders (USADSA, LTB, TSC).

These types of initiatives are difficult and not without

resistance from cadre who operated under the antiquated and process-driven FTXs. A clear vision and initiative ownership at the lowest echelons are essential to transformational change, both increasing relevancies now and in the future. This process has created incredibly proud warfighters who are ready, able, and capable of taking on the responsibility of our Profession of Arms to fight and win our nation's wars.

Notes

¹ Emphasis added to highlight a major shift in how drill sergeants operate. A key aspect of this warfighting focus is drill sergeants leading as squad leaders and platoon sergeants. As they transition from trainers to leaders, they show trainees true NCO leadership and what it can accomplish.

At the time this article was written, **COL Scott C. White** served as the commander of the 193rd Infantry Brigade at Fort Jackson, SC. He currently serves as the U.S. Army Special Operations Command G-3. His former assignments include serving as the assistant chief of staff, G-3 for the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School; commander of 6th Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne); operations officer for 2nd Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (A); commander of Delta Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (A); and commander of Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (A). COL White holds a Bachelor of Arts in political science from The Citadel, a Master of Science in defense analysis (irregular warfare) from the Naval Post-Graduate School, and a Master of Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College.

CSM Jonathan M. Duncan currently serves as the command sergeant major of the 193rd Infantry Brigade. His former assignments include serving as command sergeant major of 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment; operations sergeant major in 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment; operations sergeant major in 3rd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment; first sergeant of Iron Troop, 3-2 CR; and first sergeant of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 29th Infantry Regiment. CSM Duncan holds a Bachelor of Science in organizational leadership from the University of Louisville and a Master of Science in human resources and organization development.