



42ND INFANTRY DIVISION PROTECTION CELL

Breaking the Reactive Cycle

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During Warfighter Exercise (WFX) 25-3, the 42nd Infantry Division (ID) protection cell became consumed by immediate threats—a common pitfall known as the “current fight.” This reactive posture, driven by the need to address emerging threats, hindered effective future operations (FUOPs) planning and limited the cell’s ability to anticipate and mitigate risks. Army doctrine publication (ADP) 3-37 underscores that protection is not merely a reactive task; it is a continuous process integrated across all aspects of military operations.^[1] The cell’s initial 24-hour focus, reflected in its protection prioritization list (PPL) illustrated the extent of this reactive posture.

To address this issue, the division adopted a 96-hour, tiered protection planning schedule. This change required a proactive mindset and deeper integration with other operational elements. The protection cell had to insert

itself into key planning events—rather than waiting to be invited—most notably the Targeting Working Group (TWG). This integration enabled the protection team to contribute to the targeting process by nominating targets aligned with defensive priorities, including space-related vulnerabilities and Information Operations (IO). It also highlighted how offensive actions, such as artillery fires, could reinforce the overall protection plan.

Similarly, the Protection Working Group (PWG) should contribute to targeting by identifying protection-driven nominations—particularly space-based and IO-related—and by articulating how fires can reinforce protection objectives. Equally important, deeper coordination with the G-35 (FUOPs) section ensured that protection considerations were incorporated into the division’s operational plan from the outset. The PPL development process must both inform and

New York Army National Guard soldiers assigned to the 42nd Infantry Division exit a UH-60 Blackhawk Helicopter on Fort Indiantown Gap, PA, Feb. 4, 2025. 42nd ID Soldiers were being given a familiarization class and flight on Blackhawk helicopters. (N.Y. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Andrew Valenza)

be informed by this plan, embedding protection effects early in the planning cycle.

The PPL serves as the primary planning document for identifying and resourcing protection requirements. The 42nd ID initially used a PPL format that ranked critical assets numerically, with “1” representing the most important (see **Figure 1**). Although this approach drew on assessment data, it did not give commanders a clear understanding of asset criticality or the rationale for prioritizing protection resources.

By mid-exercise, the division transitioned to a more flexible, tiered PPL system (see **Figure 2**). This method grouped assets into tiers (A, B, and C) based on their relevance to a specific operation. Assets within a tier were not ranked

against one another, giving planners the agility to shift focus as conditions changed. For example, the multirole bridging companies (MRBCs) initially fell into a lower tier (C-Tier) because they were not required early in the operation. However, as the division prepared for the wet-gap crossing, the MRBCs became essential to mission success and were elevated to the A-Tier—signifying that their loss would result in mission failure.

PWG: Shifting the Focus to the Future

The PWG is central to the division’s protection planning. However, WFX 25-3 revealed that its initial focus on current and near-term operations—the next 24 hours—was unsustainable and undermined proactive protection. This

Figure 1. 42nd Infantry Division’s Initial PPL

Appendix 12 (Protection Prioritization List) to Annex E (Protection) To 42ID OPORD XX-XX

42ID PROTECTION PRIORITIZATION LIST (PPL)									
Phase II ADV the GAP (ATO BCU BB H-14-18)									
	Asset	Supported Force	Criticality	Location	AMD	Ground	Threat	Mitigation	Notes
1	Q53s	197 FAB & ABCTs	Counter-Fire Radar	5–10 km Behind FLOT (PAA 1/2)	4-60 ADA	BCTs Secure	ENY Air, UAS, IDF, SPF, EW Jamming	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD	Corps PPL #7
2	MLRS & HIMARS	197 FAB	Long Range Fires	5–10 km Behind FLOT (PAA 1/2)	4-60 ADA	BCTs Secure	IDF, UAS, SPF, ENY Air	Dispersion, Survivability Moves, ADA, AD	Corps PPL #13
3	Air Defense Platforms (B 3/4th ADA Patriots)	XVIII ABC-3d Battalion, 4th ADA RGT	Key ADA	42 ID Rear Area	4-60 ADA	26 MEB	ENY Air, UAS, IDF, SPF, EW Jamming	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD, NL Fires	Corps PPL #3
4	GLOC (MSRs)	42 ID	Maneuver / Sustainment	PL BILLS to PL CHIEFS	4-60 ADA	26 MEB	SPF, IDPs, Bypassed Forces, ENY Air, Chemical Attack	Clearance, AD, MP CO, Messaging, CBRN Route Recon	Corps PPL #22
5	Div Main CP	42 ID	C2 Node	Attack Point 2	4-60 ADA	26 MEB	SPF, ENY Air, UAS, Chem Attack	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, CBRN Co	Corps PPL #8
6	CL III (B) & CL V Storage	369 SB	Key Sustain Node	Attack Point 2	4-60 ADA	26 MEB	SPF, IDF, ENY Air	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD	Corps PPL #56
7	Air Defense Platforms (i.e. Avengers and M-SHORAD)	4-60 ADA / 42 ID	Key ADA	IVO FLOT	4-60 ADA	Supported BDE	ENY Air, UAS, IDF, SPF, EW Jamming	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD, NL Fires	Corps PPL #7
8	DSA / RCP / Med R3	42 ID	C2 Node	42 ID Rear Area	4-60 ADA	26 MEB	SPF, IDF, ENY Air, UAS, Chem Attack	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, CBRN Co	Corps PPL #15
9	MRBCs (IRBs)	42 ID / 368th EN BN	GAP Crossing	42 ID Rear Area	4-60 ADA	26 MEB	SPF, IDF, ENY Air, UAS, Chem Attack	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, CBRN Co	Corps PPL #13
10	Sentinel Radars	4-60 ADA	ADA Radar	10 km Behind FLOT	4-60 ADA	Supported BDE	ENY Air, UAS, IDF, SPF, EW Jamming	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD	
11	42 ID ATK AVN	185 CAB	ATK AVN	42 ID Rear Area	4-60 ADA	26 MEB	ENY Air, UAS, IDF, SPF, EW Jamming	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD	
12	FARP	42 ID	Key Sustain Node	BDE AO	4-60 ADA	26 MEB	SPF, IDF, ENY Air, UAS, Chem Attack	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD, CBRN Co	Corps PPL #15
13	FLE 1/2	369 SB	Key Sustain Node	BDE AO	4-60 ADA	Supported BDE / 26 MEB	SPF, IDF, ENY Air	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD	Corps PPL #56
14	ROM	369 SB	Key Sustain Node	BDE AO	4-60 ADA	Supported BDE	SPF, IDF, ENY Air	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD	Corps PPL #56

42ID Protection Prioritization List (PPL)									
Phase XX- ATO XX									
Tier	Asset	Supported Force	Criticality	Location	AMD	Ground	Threat	Mitigation	Notes
A	Patriots	XVIII ABC	Key ADA	Rear Area	ADA BN	XVIII ABC	ENY Air, UAS, IDF, SPF, EW Jamming	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD	Corp PPL #3
	Q-53	197 FAB	LRF	PAA ##	ADA BN	197 FAB / 438 MP Co	IDF, UAS, SPF, ENY Air	Dispersion, Survivability Moves, ADA, AD	Corp PPL #13
	MLRS / HIMARS	197 FAB	LRF	PAA ##	ADA BN	197 FAB / 438 MP Co	ENY Air, UAS, DF, SPF, EW Jamming	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD, NL Fires	Corp PPL #19
	LOC-B Bridge	42ID	WGX	Rear Area	ADA BN	26 MEB	SPF, DPs, Bypassed Forces, ENY Air, Chemical Attack	Clearance, AD, MP CO, Messaging, CBRN Route Recon	Corp PPL #19
	WGX Site	42ID	M2	WGX	ADA BN	26 MEB	SPF, ENY Air, UAS, Chem Attack	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, CBRN Co	Corp PPL #10
	FARPs	42ID	Key Sustain Node	BDE AO	ADA BN	26 MEB	SPF, DF, ENY Air	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD	Corp PPL #15
	Critical Sustainment Convoys	369 SB	Key Sustain / Reconstitution	DSA to BSA	ADA BN	26 MEB	ENY Air, UAS, DF, SPF, EW Jamming	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD, NL Fires	Corp PPL #56
B	GLOC	42ID	Maneuver / Sustainment	PL to PL	ADA BN	26 MEB	SPF, DF, ENY Air, UAS, Chem Attack	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD, CBRN Co	Corp PPL #22
	DIV MCP	42ID	C2 Node	AP 2	ADA BN	26 MEB	SPF, DF, ENY Air, UAS, Chem Attack	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD, CBRN Co	Corp PPL #8
	CL III (B) & V Storage	369 SB	Key Sustain Node	AP 2	ADA BN	26 MEB	ENY Air, UAS, DF, SPF, EW Jamming	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD	Corp PPL #56
	Avengers / M-SHORAD	4-60 ADA	Key ADA	IVO FLOT	ADA BN	MSCs	ENY Air, UAS, DF, SPF, EW Jamming	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA	Corp PPL #7
	42ID ATK AVN	42 CAB	ATK AVN	Rear Area	ADA BN	26 MEB	ENY Air, UAS, DF, SPF, EW Jamming	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA	
C	MRBC	42ID / 369th EN BN	GAP Crossing	Rear Area	ADA BN	26 MEB	SPF, DF, ENY Air, UAS, Chem Attack	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA, AD, CBRN Co	Corp PPL #13
	DSA/RCP/Med R3	42ID	C2 Node	Rear Area	ADA BN	26 MEB	SPF, DF, ENY Air	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA	Corp PPL #15
	MPQ-64s	4-60 ADA	ADA Radar	10 km Behind FLOT	ADA BN	MSCs	SPF, DF, ENY Air	Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA	
	FLE 1/2/3	369 AB	Key Sustain Node	BDE AO	ADA BN	MSCs		Survivability Positions, Local Security, ADA	Corp PPL #56

Figure 2. 42nd Infantry Division's Tiered PPL

Appendix 12 (Protection Prioritization List) to Annex E (Protection) To 42ID OPORD XX-XX

reactive posture ran counter to the guidance in ADP 3-37, which stresses the importance of anticipatory measures, noting that “protection measures should be designed to anticipate and prevent threats, rather than simply reacting to them.”^[2] The PWG’s initial approach was a clear example of being caught in the “current fight” at the expense of long-term security.

The updated PWG structure—centered on a 72–96-hour planning window—marked a significant improvement. Its outputs are now oriented toward informing tactical decisions and enabling proactive security measures. These outputs should include recommendations to the Deputy Commanding General–Support (DCG-S) for changes to the PPL; TWG nominations for targets beyond +72 hours; force protection condition (FPCON) change recommendations; updated threat assessments; identification of risks and

vulnerabilities; recommendations for protection equipment and technology distribution; proposed task-organization changes; responses to variances in plans; and fragmentary order (FRAGO) inputs for execution beyond +72 hours.

A successful PWG relies on high-quality information drawn from a wide range of sources. To produce effective long-range plans, it requires robust input from nearly every staff section as well as from subordinate units. This comprehensive input enables the staff to collaborate effectively and focus on where

Key	
A	Loss results in mission failure
B	Loss results in severely degraded mission
C	Loss results in degraded mission

the division needs to be 72 to 96 hours in the future, rather than on its current position.

During WFX 25-3, nearly every staff section contributed to the PWG: FUOPs (G-35) provided planning horizons out to +96 hours; the Division Engineer (DIVENG) assessed critical equipment and survivability; the Medical Officer (MEDO) supplied force health protection trends; the G-4 reported route status and critical logistics pushes beyond +72 hours; Air and Missile Defense (AMD) assessed air defense effectiveness; chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN), provost marshal office (PMO), and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) provided troop-to-task updates; space, cyber electromagnetic activities (CEMA), and IO sections contributed nonkinetic effectiveness assessments and nominations beyond +72 hours; and major subordinate commands (MSCs) provided essential ground truth through their Brigade Protection Working Groups (BPWGs). This breadth of inputs allowed the staff to collaborate more effectively and maintain a forward-looking focus on where the division *will* be beyond the 72-hour mark.

The resulting improved collaboration enabled the staff to make better-informed decisions about adjusting priorities

within the PPL's tiered system. Because these decisions were based on FUOPs, subordinate commands gained the lead time necessary to plan and execute their protection efforts effectively. This framework ensures that, by the time an order is issued, the units responsible have had sufficient time to prepare and posture their forces accordingly.

To simplify this for the Commanding General (CG), the daily protection update included a chart (see **Figure 3**) that offered an at-a-glance summary of the protection plan. The chart identified which subordinate command was responsible for each key asset and visually depicted the planning cycle.

The Role of Protection and the Targeting Decision Cycle

A key output of the PWG, as previously discussed, was the development of nominations for the TWG. In practice, the PWG helped identify potential threats and recommend appropriate actions to address them. During WFX 25-3, the 42nd ID protection specialists reinforced this approach by prioritizing the security of FUOPs and planning more than 72 hours in advance.

A critical improvement was the inclusion of FUOPs planners (G-35) in PWG meetings. Their insight into upcoming

Figure 3. 42nd ID Protection PPL Running Estimate

Planning	Action	Who is Responsible
(ATO+3)	Decision: The final decision on protection priorities is made.	Deputy Commanding General–Support (DCG-S)
(ATO+2)	Planning: Subordinate commands develop their specific plans to protect the prioritized assets.	Major Subordinate Commands (MSCs)
(ATO+1)	Preparation: Subordinate commands gather resources and prepare their forces for the mission.	Major Subordinate Commands (MSCs)
(ATO-day)	Execution: The protection plan is carried out.	Major Subordinate Commands (MSCs)

ATO			ATO+1			ATO+2			ATO+3		
Execute (<24 hours)			MSCR Planning (24 hours)			MSCR Planning (48-72 hours)			MSCR Planning (72-96 hours)		
Tier	Asset	Protected by	Tier	Asset	Protected by	Tier	Asset	Protected by	Tier	Asset	Protected by
A	Patriots	ABC	A	Patriots	ABC	A	Patriots	ABC	A	Patriots	ABC
	Q-53	FAB		Q-53	FAB		Q-53	FAB		Q-53	FAB
	MLRS / HIMARS	FAB		MLRS / HIMARS	FAB		MLRS / HIMARS	FAB		MLRS / HIMARS	FAB
	MRBC	MEB		MRBC	MEB		Sustainment Convoy	MEB/MSCs		FARPs	MSCs
B	GLOC	MEB	B	GLOC	MEB	B	GLOC	MEB	B	GLOC	MEB
	DIV MCP	MEB		DIV MCP	MEB		DIV MCP	MEB		DIV MCP	MEB
	CL III (B) & V	MEB		CL III (B) & V	MEB		CL III (B) & V	MEB		CL III (B) & V	MEB
	LOC B Bridge	MEB		LOC B Bridge	MEB		FARP	MSCs		LOC B Bridge	MEB
C	DSA	MEB	C	DSA	MEB	C	DSA	MEB	C	DSA	MEB
	Sentinel	MSCs		Sentinel	MSCs		Sentinel	MSCs		Sentinel	MSCs
	FLE 1	MEB		FLE 1	MEB		FLE 1	MEB		FLE 1	MEB
	FLE 2	MEB		FLE 2	MEB		MRBC	MEB		MRBC	MEB

missions allowed the group to develop a more effective protection plan, incorporating both lethal and nonlethal measures for nomination in the TWG. For example, in preparing for the WFX (+72 hours), the cell conducted a detailed review of the protection plan and proactively addressed potential vulnerabilities. This enabled the team to better integrate nonlethal effects and generate more effective target nominations for the TWG. By establishing clear PWG outputs that directly informed other working groups, the division strengthened staff coordination and enhanced planning across the protection warfighting function.

The Role of Intelligence and Proactive Reprioritization

A key lesson from WFX 25-3 was the need for the intelligence officer (G-2) within the PWG to shift focus. Rather than limiting their input to current enemy activity, the G-2 must anticipate how the enemy is likely to react to friendly plans 72 to 96 hours into the future. This forward-looking approach aligns directly with ADP 3-37's emphasis on understanding the adversary and anticipating their actions.

The purpose of this analysis is to enable proactive defense. It allows the protection team to shift its priorities and allocate defensive resources based on anticipated threats. By identifying enemy patterns, the division can position its defenses to counter the enemy's likely next move. This proactive stance gives subordinate commanders the time

they need to plan and prepare—far preferable to reacting under the pressure of emerging crises.

Conclusion

WFX 25-3 underscored a critical lesson: effective protection requires proactive planning, not merely reacting to immediate threats. Early in the exercise, the division struggled because it remained trapped in a cycle of responding to enemy actions rather than shaping future conditions.

To break this cycle and improve overall effectiveness, protection teams should adopt three key changes:

- 1. Extend the Planning Horizon:** Shift from short-term reactions to planning at least 96 hours in advance.
- 2. Integrate with Other Teams:** Work closely with other planning groups—especially FUOPs (G-35) and the TWG—to ensure that protection considerations are embedded in every plan.
- 3. Use Predictive Intelligence:** Refocus intelligence (G-2) efforts from reporting current enemy activity to anticipating how the enemy will respond to FUOPs.

The bottom line is that by adopting these changes, divisions can better anticipate and neutralize threats, improve their resilience, and maintain battlefield superiority. The purpose of a protection cell is not merely to respond to danger—it is to anticipate it, shape the environment, minimize risk, and ensure mission success. 🇺🇸

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References

- ¹ U.S. Army, *Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-37: Protection* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2023), 2-2.
- ² *Ibid.* 3-3.