

# Designing and Executing a Culminating Training Exercise: Validating a Division Headquarters for Task Force Spartan

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## Introduction

Army Central Command's Task Force Spartan maintains a U.S. military posture in Southwest Asia sufficient to strengthen defense relationships and build partner capacity.<sup>i</sup> Task Force Spartan is a unique, multi-component division sized unit, made up of approximately 500 personnel from active Army and National Guard units, and rounded out by U.S. Army Reserve support units.<sup>ii</sup> In December of 2016, First Army began validating National Guard divisions to assume the intermediate division headquarters for Task Force Spartan.<sup>iii</sup> First Army ensures Task Force Spartan units are trained and ready to assume the mission by evaluating their culminating exercises at the end of training cycles. Additionally, these culminating exercises allow the division staff to get comfortable with their planning processes prior to assuming the Task Force Spartan mission. For a successful exercise evaluation, it is imperative that planners gain an understanding of roles and responsibilities, operational planning teams, commander's training objectives, and operational variables.

## The Culminating Training Exercises Process

The culminating exercise's design and evaluation requires an extensive planning process. Reserve component units are identified for employment approximately twelve months prior to assuming the Task Force Spartan mission. Once identified for the Task Force Spartan mission, the unit then develops and briefs their training plan at a Multi-component Joint Assessment (MCJA). First Army and the unit's commander approves training objectives during the culminating exercise's initial planning conference (IPC), which takes place approximately eight months prior to execution. Exercise planners will reevaluate these training objectives two additional times prior to the culminating training exercise.

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These reevaluations typically take place at the main planning conference (MPC) six months prior to the exercise and again during the final planning conference (FPC) two months prior to the event.

Culminating exercises for Task Force Spartan validation take place at the Mission Command Training Program (MCTP) Complex and the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (35ID) Headquarters located on Fort Leavenworth, KS. Although the culminating exercises take place at the MCTP, they are far different than a typical division warfighter exercise. Culminating exercises focus on replicating Task Force Spartan's current operating environment; however, warfighter exercises prepare units for conceivable decisive action events. Also, unlike a warfighter exercise, the Task Force Spartan culminating exercise validates the unit with mission essential scenarios, a scripted adversarial plan, and no active opposing force (OPFOR). This contrasts with a warfighter exercise, in which the training unit basis its actions on blue and red activities taking place within the Warfighters Simulation (WARSIM). For example, the culminating exercise uses a response cell to provide scripted injects from both higher and subordinate units, while a warfighter exercise uses simulations and a free-thinking OPFOR.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

When building an operational planning team for the validation of an exercise, it is important to understand the roles and responsibilities of the unit commander, Army Forces Command (FORSCOM), and First Army's Multifunctional Training Brigades. Commanders are responsible for training their units to conduct their assigned missions.<sup>iv</sup> To ensure they maintain readiness, commanders are also responsible for exercising their assigned mission essential tasks with external validations.<sup>v</sup> Additionally, FORSCOM has the responsibility to perform the validation of those units unassigned to a combatant command.<sup>vi</sup>

To accomplish validation of Reserve component units, FORSCOM directs First Army as their validating authority.<sup>vii</sup> To do this, First Army utilizes its Multifunctional Training Brigades (MFTBs) to design the Task Force Spartan culminating training exercises. The primary function of the MFTB is to help prepare reserve component units for large scale mobilization operations. The MFTBs provide training observation, coaching, and teaching to reserve component units during steady state operations. MFTBs also validate that the units are prepared for employment in support of HQDA directed requirements.

In order to design the validating exercise for the Task Force Spartan division, the MFTB establishes operational planning teams. The MFTB cannot design exercises without assistance; therefore, it must rely on support from across the Army. For subject matter expertise and support, the MFTB coordinates with various organizations across the Army. The MFTB receives support from First Army's training division and their assigned partner brigade, First Theater Sustainment Command, and Army Central Command.<sup>viii</sup> Additionally, they incorporate personnel from adjacent commands and units currently performing the Task Force Spartan mission.

## **Operational Planning Team Development**

An operational planning team is critical for exercise design when the training unit, senior trainer, exercise director, and exercise planners come from different organizations, as is typically the case with First Army validations. Although Army doctrine suggests the use of operational planning teams, neither Army nor Joint doctrine discuss the development or design of these teams. The only existing framework for creating an operational planning team comes from a focus paper developed by the Joint Staff J7.<sup>ix</sup> While no doctrinal framework exists for a culminating exercise operational team, there is a commonly used model.

Although not codified in doctrine, a design for operational planning teams has developed over time by using exercise lessons learned and best practices. For division validation, the brigade assigns a battalion commander to lead the operational planning team with the assistance of another Lieutenant Colonel Simulations Officer (Functional Area 57A) and staff. Additionally, the operational planning team includes representatives from U.S. Army Central Command's Exercise Design Section, First Theater Sustainment Command, First Army, Division West, the partner brigade, the training audience, and the current Task Force Spartan Exercise Design Section. The expertise of those in the operating environment helps shape the exercise and provide realistic requirements for the validated training unit. After forming the operational planning team, the exercise designer incorporates the strategies of exercise design to develop the culminating training event.

## **Training Objective Development**

Division commanders evaluate their units and their assigned missions to inform recommended training objectives for culminating exercises. In a standard corps, the division commander provides recommended training objectives to the Corps commander. Furthermore, the Corps G7 fills the role of the exercise director, while the G7 Operations Section builds the exercise.<sup>x</sup> Due to a smaller Corps Staff, First Army modifies this structure by having the First Army Commander fill the role of senior trainer and assigns a First Army division commander the role of the exercise director. Additionally, First Army assigns one of its brigades to plan the exercise for the division. The planning brigade works with the Army Service Component Command (ASCC) to confirm that the training objectives meet the requirements of the mission, while also retaining flexibility to transition the unit to another mission should the need arise.

For the Task Force Spartan mission, the commanders of First Army, Army Central Command, and the training division conduct multiple commander-to-commander dialogue sessions. These dialogue sessions assist with developing training objectives by ensuring each commander agrees with the requirements. Planners design the training objectives to have clear tasks, conditions, and standards that limit exercise scope and allow the exercise director and planners to synchronize the operational variables. During the initial planning event conference outbrief, the training unit's division commander confirms that he/she understands and agrees with the training objectives. Once the First

Army commander agrees to the training objectives, the exercise planners begin gathering the tools to establish the operational variables and write the exercise script.

## **Operational Variables**

Operational variables are those aspects of an Operational Environment (OE), both military and non-military, which may differ from one operational area to another and affect operations. Operational variables describe not only the military aspect of an OE but also the population's influence on it.<sup>xi</sup> Exercise planners rely heavily on operational variables, friendly forces, and enemy forces available for their exercise design. This makes determining the exact friendly and enemy troop list the most important step of initial planning.<sup>xii</sup> Exercise planners should use the Global Force Management Allocation Plan (GFMAP) to collect key information about available troops and the mission; planners derive this from the force tracking number and the unit currently conducting the real-world mission. The force tracking number directs the training unit to bring specific capabilities for employment, while the force management team from the current unit provides the structure of the subordinate units. Additional guidance for variables originates from the senior trainer's direction, assessment of the training unit, training objectives, and existing operation orders issued by the service component commander.

The Multifunctional Training Brigade exercise planners use scenario scripts to simulate Task Force Spartan's operational environment. Culminating training exercises used in preparation for Task Force Spartan validation require a script, because the adversarial forces are not dynamic and subordinate units do not conduct all their tasks within the live or simulated environment. To create the script, the exercise planners use the senior trainer's guidance as a baseline. Once planners design a baseline, they then flesh-out the scripts with live, virtual, constructive, and gaming exercise enablers to simulate the unit's future operating environment. After basic scripts are complete, planners will build-in branches and sequels for each event to account for action or inaction by the training audience. These branches and sequels allow the exercise director to increase or decrease the intensity of the action so that the training audience can achieve all the commander's training objectives.

The Multifunctional Training Brigade builds on its simulations and scripts by incorporating variables from the Army Central Command area of responsibility. Current events in the OE play a critical role in the development of variables. Planners use recent OE events to develop scenarios that mirror actual issues encountered by current and past Task Force Spartan division headquarters. These scenarios include peacetime military engagements, limited intervention, and preparation to respond to adversarial events. The operational environment changes rapidly; consequently, for every new exercise, the Multifunctional Training Brigade must re-validate each event in the scenario.

Confirmation briefs run concurrently with the scenarios and daily tasks of a division headquarters to form the overall script of events. First Army simulates the subordinate, higher, and adjacent units in a response cell through virtual communication, as well as live engagements. First Army does this so that the training unit can formulate plans, make

decisions, and request assistance during the exercise. The response cell officer in charge attends daily meetings with the exercise director, deputy exercise director, and the senior observer/coach trainer to ensure the exercise remains on a coherent scripted timeline. This meeting serves as an opportunity for the exercise director to decide if the exercise controllers should execute a branch plan or sequel to any event. If required, the exercise planner stands ready to make dynamic script adjustments to meet training objectives. The operational variables form the background for the script, while the senior trainer's guidance and confirmation briefs direct additional tasks the planners must incorporate.

## **Conclusion**

The Task Force Spartan mission is critical to upholding U.S. defense responsibilities and building partnerships in Southwest Asia. In order to ensure divisions headquarters are prepared for this mission, they must be validated through challenging, realistic, and relevant training. Leaders can only properly validate their units through well designed and executed exercises. To accomplish this, exercise planners must consider roles and responsibilities, create an operational planning team, capture commander's training objectives, and develop operational variables. General Dwight D. Eisenhower best encapsulated the importance of exercise planning when he proclaimed, "if you haven't been planning you can't start to work, intelligently at least."<sup>xiii</sup> With this in mind, understanding the methodology for planning, designing, and executing training exercises is key to the success of Task Force Spartan's mission.

## **About the Author**

Joshua M. Sturgill is the Commander of the 3rd Battalion, 393rd Brigade Engineer Battalion, 120th Infantry Brigade, First Army Division West in Fort Hood, TX. He served on the US Forces Afghanistan J5 staff and as the Operations and Executive Officer for the 7th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 1st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division in Fort Drum, NY. His education includes a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Houston, a master's degree in Engineering Management from Missouri University of Science and Technology, and a master's degree in Operational Art and Science from the US Army Command and General Staff College. His tactical assignments include 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, 130th Engineer Brigade, and 10th Mountain Division with three deployments to Iraq and one to Afghanistan. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army or any other governmental agency.

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<sup>i</sup> Task Force Spartan Homepage, <https://www.usarcent.army.mil/About/Units/Task-Force-Spartan/> (accessed 25 August ,2022).

<sup>ii</sup> Steven Wesolowski, 29th ID gets validated and ready for Operation Spartan Shield <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/399994/29th-id-gets-validated-and-ready-operation-spartan-shield>, (accessed 25 August ,2022).

<sup>iii</sup> Tanjie Daniels, "First Army assists with 29th ID validation as National Guard unit preps for Operation Spartan Shield," 1. U.S. Army, US Army, accessed 23 May 2022,

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[https://www.army.mil/article/247782/first\\_army\\_assists\\_with\\_29th\\_id\\_validation\\_as\\_national\\_guard\\_unit\\_preps\\_for\\_operation\\_spartan\\_shield](https://www.army.mil/article/247782/first_army_assists_with_29th_id_validation_as_national_guard_unit_preps_for_operation_spartan_shield), (accessed 25 August ,2022).

<sup>iv</sup> Army Regulation (AR) 600-20, *Army Command Policy* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2020) 2.

<sup>v</sup> Army Regulation (AR) 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2017) 4.

<sup>vi</sup> HQDA EXORD 042-14, *Certification, Confirmation, and Validation Process For Employing Army Forces (Active Component And Reserve Component)*, 3.

<sup>vii</sup> Commander, FORSCOM DCS G3 Central Tasking Division, *FORSCOM FY22 Pre-Deployment Training Guidance* (Fort Bragg, NC: Forces Command, 2021), 5.

<sup>viii</sup> Tanjie Daniels, "First Army assists with 29th ID validation as National Guard unit preps for Operation Spartan Shield," U.S. Army, US Army, accessed 23 May 2022, [https://www.army.mil/article/247782/first\\_army\\_assists\\_with\\_29th\\_id\\_validation\\_as\\_national\\_guard\\_unit\\_preps\\_for\\_operation\\_spartan\\_shield](https://www.army.mil/article/247782/first_army_assists_with_29th_id_validation_as_national_guard_unit_preps_for_operation_spartan_shield).

<sup>ix</sup> Mike Findlay, Design and Planning. Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper (Suffolk, VA: Deployable Training Division, Deputy Director Joint Staff J7, Joint Training, 2022), 23, [https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/fp/sustainment\\_6ed.pdf?ver=bAfzHvGI4uoVuML424Y77g%3d%3d](https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/fp/sustainment_6ed.pdf?ver=bAfzHvGI4uoVuML424Y77g%3d%3d).

<sup>x</sup> Army Regulation (AR) 350-28, *Army Exercises*, (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1997) 1-1.

<sup>xi</sup> Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, Operations, (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2019) 1-14.

<sup>xii</sup> Army Regulation (AR) 350-28, *Army Exercises*, (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1997)

<sup>xiii</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Remarks at the National Defense Executive Reserve Conference," Transcript of speech delivered at the National Defense Executive Reserve Conference, November 14, 1957, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-national-defense-executive-reserve-conference>. (accessed May 19, 2022).