



The WFX Dilemma: Mixed COMPOs

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Executive Summary:

This report presents the perspective of First Army, Division East observer coach trainers (OC/Ts) on the recent warfighter exercise (WFX) highlighting the challenges and successes experienced by a reserve component (RC) engineer brigade as it integrated with an active duty (AD) division.

Summary of Key Observations:

- a. Inadequate planning time for RC Units: The compressed planning timeline inherent in WFXs disadvantages RC units with limited training days.
- b. Communication and coordination gaps: Friction points arose from insufficient communication and coordination between the RC brigade, the AD division, and supporting elements.
- c. Training value despite challenges: The WFX provided valuable lessons for both the RC brigade and the AD division, highlighting areas for improvement in future exercises and deployments.

Key Recommendations:

- a. Early Integration of RC Units: Begin planning processes at least six months in advance, supported by liaison officers and virtual collaboration tools.
- b. Early Integration of RC Units: Begin planning processes at least six months in advance,
- c. Embed Deputy Commanding Officers (DCOs): Assign DCOs to RC units during WFXs to enhance integration during reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI).

The following sections provide a detailed discussion of the observed issues, their potential causes, and specific recommendations for improvement, organized according to the stages of the WFX.

I. Pre-execution Preparation: This section explores the challenges encountered during planning, such as the tight timeline, communication gaps, and differing planning assumptions between AD and RC units. Examining these issues and considering the proposed recommendations may allow the Army to cultivate a more inclusive and effective WFX environment. This, in turn, could maximize the training value for both AD and RC units, ultimately strengthening overall readiness and interoperability.

Issue: RC units are disadvantaged by the current 75-day WFX planning horizon due to limited annual training days, hindering their full participation in the planning process.

Discussion: The division's typical 75-day planning horizon for a WFX, while suitable for active-duty units with approximately 261 training days annually, equates to a significantly shorter timeframe for RC units. Limited by their 39 annual training days, this disparity can put RC units at a disadvantage, forcing them to "catch up" rather than contribute substantially to the planning process. While current practice encourages RC units to proactively seek inclusion, the active

component (COMPO 1), as the leader of the planning process, is arguably better positioned to facilitate their early and effective integration.

Recommendation: The corps, as the higher headquarters, should implement a tiered planning process that encourages early and continuous collaboration with subordinate RC units. This process might involve the Corps initiating planning for WFXs six months in advance, proactively engaging with RC units to incorporate their perspectives and constraints. Two months prior to the WFX, RC units could then formally join the planning process, building upon the groundwork already established by the Corps. Throughout the process, the corps could focus on maintaining clear communication channels, including designated LNOs and shared digital platforms, to facilitate seamless information flow between active and reserve components.

Issue: WFX scheduling immediately after the fiscal year start creates logistical and financial challenges.

Discussion: The timing of the WFX, commencing on October 9th directly after the start of the new fiscal year, presented avoidable logistical and financial challenges. The absence of a finalized budget at that time, coupled with the requirement for additional approvals for early arrival (W-5 per MCTP doctrine)¹, introduced avoidable pressure on units. This ultimately shifted focus away from crucial training objectives.

Recommendation: To mitigate potential logistical and budgetary disruptions, the Army should schedule WFXs to circumvent overlap with the fiscal year transition. Incorporating a buffer period of one to two weeks after the fiscal year start could prove to be beneficial. In situations where early arrival is unavoidable due to existing WFX scheduling constraints, ensuring seamless logistical support for all participating units becomes paramount. This could involve guaranteeing provisions for billeting, meals, transportation, and training resources. Moreover, providing clear guidance, designated points of contact, and pre-approved templates for funding requests could contribute to a smoother, disruption-free WFX experience.

Issue: A lack of clear, early communication from FORSCOM regarding roles and responsibilities hinders the effective preparation of RC units for WFX participation.

Discussion: While the existing MCTP glide path outlines a phased approach to WFX preparation, it appears to primarily reflect AD unit schedules. This can create disparities in preparation opportunities for RC units, a challenge exacerbated by the absence of clear, early communication regarding their specific roles, responsibilities, and anticipated tasks.

Recommendation: Given the potential incompatibility of the current MCTP glide path with RC training schedules and operational realities, the Army might explore the development and implementation of a distinct, RC specific WFX preparation framework. This framework could acknowledge the compressed training calendar of RC units, providing them with more realistic lead times and preparation milestones. Additionally, proactively communicating clear guidance

¹ MCTP (2023) TRADOC Regulation 350-50-3. In Mission Command Training Program. Fort Leavenworth: Headquarters, Department of the Army

to RC units regarding their specific roles, responsibilities, and anticipated tasks early in the planning process – ideally well before a formal OPOD is available – could be beneficial. This proactive communication might also include sharing potential mission sets based on unit capabilities. To evaluate the effectiveness of such a framework, piloting it with select RC units could provide valuable data. A comprehensive evaluation following the pilot could then assess the outcomes and inform any necessary adjustments.

Issue: Inadequate information management impacts RC unit readiness.

Discussion: RC units encountered avoidable challenges due to a lack of crucial information regarding their operational location, C4I requirements, and the necessary setup of their tactical command post (TAC) and main command post (MCP). While improvements could be made in the information flow from the division, this situation also highlights potential missed opportunities for RC units to seek clarification and support.

Recommendation: To mitigate friction arising from information gaps, fostering a robust and bilateral exchange process between divisions and supporting RC units could be beneficial. Divisions could consider proactively disseminating critical information regarding operational locations, C4I requirements, and TAC/MCP setup expectations. Utilizing multiple channels like pre-deployment briefs, digital platforms, and dedicated points of contact could maximize reach. Simultaneously, RC units could prioritize proactive information gathering. This might involve conducting comprehensive pre-deployment site surveys (PDSS) with division headquarters, directly engaging relevant staff sections. Additionally, embedding representatives in all relevant MCTP site visits and utilizing virtual meetings and online platforms could facilitate continuous communication. In situations where a full PDSS is infeasible, prioritizing abbreviated site visits could still yield essential information.

Issue: Insufficient pre-deployment integration and preparation delayed initial EN brigade operational effectiveness.

Discussion: The EN brigade faced significant challenges during the first three days of the WFX due to limited preparation and integration with the division. This resulted in a delayed operational tempo, indecision, and difficulty maintaining situational awareness. The brigade struggled to adapt to the dynamic operational environment, align intelligence products with the evolving situation, and effectively allocate resources for the demanding mission set. This experience highlights the risks that inadequate planning and preparation pose to overall force effectiveness.

Recommendation: To overcome initial operational challenges, the engineer brigade and receiving division could explore collaborative, adaptive, and mission-focused training that incorporates realistic friction, uncertainty, and contingencies. This exploration might include exercises focused on rapid integration and adapting to dynamic environments, proactive pre-mobilization engagement to clarify mission requirements and address potential integration challenges, and refining internal processes for rapid decision-making, intelligence analysis, and resource allocation within the mission context.

II. RSOI at WFX: This section examines the friction encountered during the reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) phase, highlighting the importance of clear communication, logistical preparation, and building trust between units.

Issue: Inadequate reception and staging support impede RC unit readiness.

Discussion: Despite early arrival, the RC unit faced significant challenges due to inadequate reception and staging support from the division, which was observing a day of no scheduled activity (DONSA). The designated unit footprint was not adequately prepared, requiring extensive cleaning and lacking running water. This hampered the unit's ability to achieve full operational capability (FOC) before STARTEX. Furthermore, a misunderstanding regarding upper telecommunications infrastructure (TI) communications equipment resulted in a capability gap, necessitating support and equipment loans from a COMPO 1 unit.

Recommendation: Verify footprint readiness before unit arrival. Use dedicated communication channels and oversight from OC/Ts to ensure logistical support.

Issue: Insufficient liaison and coordination mechanisms hinder COMPO 2/3-unit integration.

Discussion: Integrating COMPO 2/3 units presents unique challenges. These units, often operating with different priorities and reporting chains, can experience delays in receiving critical information, struggle to adapt to the division's tempo, and require significant oversight to ensure alignment with the overall mission. Current staff-to-staff communication, while necessary, has proven insufficient to overcome these hurdles quickly enough to maintain operational momentum. The division commander's decision to embed a deputy commanding officer (DCO) within the engineer brigade proved highly effective. The DCO, often possessing battalion command experience and familiarity with the division's culture and commander's intent, acted as a dedicated point of contact, proactively identifying and resolving integration friction points. This facilitated timely course correction, effective decision-making, and accelerated the engineer brigade's learning curve within the division's operational context.

Recommendation To promote seamless integration of COMPO 2/3 units into division-level operations, divisions should consider embedding a division-appointed deputy commanding officer (DCO) within the supporting unit, particularly when dealing with complex operations or less experienced COMPO 2/3 units; this DCO should possess battalion command experience or higher and be thoroughly familiar with the division's culture, tempo, and commander's intent, and crucially, be granted the authority to prioritize information flow to the unit, facilitate access to essential division assets, and resolve minor integration conflicts at the tactical level. While the DCO will facilitate communication, enhanced staff-to-staff communication, potentially guided by the DCO, should also be explored to manage routine tasks, creating a balanced approach that leverages dedicated leadership for critical issues and empowered staff collaboration for day-to-day operations, ultimately facilitating timely course correction, streamlining decisions, and

accelerating the COMPO 2/3 unit's learning curve to strengthen overall operational effectiveness.

III. Operations: This section analyzes the operational impacts of the identified challenges, focusing on the RC brigade's ability to adapt to the dynamic battlefield, communicate effectively, and integrate into the division's planning cycle.

Issue: Inconsistent command post structure and communication protocols hindered EN brigade effectiveness during large scale combat operations (LSCO).

Discussion: Transitioning back into LSCO operations revealed friction points related to personnel placement, role clarity, and communication within the EN brigade's command structure. The division's episodic use of a TAC, while potentially effective for specific operations, led to inconsistent communication channels, hindered information flow, and created confusion regarding roles and responsibilities.

Recommendations: To mitigate friction stemming from unclear command structures and communication breakdowns, EN Brigades will need to analyze and refine their internal SOPs and TTPs for large-scale combat operations. This includes clearly defining and documenting roles, responsibilities, and communication protocols within the brigade's command post structure, specifically addressing the episodic use of a TAC in conjunction with the MCP. These SOPs and TTPs will need to emphasize reliable and redundant communication systems, establish regular engineer synchronization meetings led by the senior engineer, and be consistently implemented and routinely exercised to ensure clarity, enhance coordination, and enable effective decision-making across all levels of the formation.

Issue: Over-reliance on the TAC during short-term operations creates a vulnerability in long-term planning and expertise.

Discussion: While deploying the TAC during the initial WGX provided immediate tactical benefits, it led to the consolidation of expertise, creating a potential single point of failure and limiting the EN brigade's ability to maintain long-term planning horizons.

Recommendation: To mitigate the risk of consolidating expertise during short-term operations, the EN brigade should cross-train staff members, establish clear succession plans, and ensure redundant communication capabilities within the TAC.

Issue: Lack of metrics to assess TAC effectiveness.

Discussion: The decision to maintain a robust TAC for an extended period requires a thorough assessment of its impact on overall operational effectiveness. Evaluating measures of performance (MOPs) and measures of effectiveness (MOEs) is crucial to determine if this approach optimizes decision-making and mission accomplishment or if adjustments are necessary.

Recommendation: To ensure sustained effectiveness of maintaining a robust TAC, the EN brigade must define and monitor clear MOPs and MOEs. This data will facilitate a continuous

feedback loop, driven by MOP/MOE tracking and after-action reviews, to refine processes, address shortcomings, and ultimately enhance future operations.

Issue: Within the CPX, insufficient protection planning and integration processes create risk for engineer brigade assets.

Discussion: The engineer brigade, accustomed to operating as a corps enabler, encountered challenges adapting to a new mission under division command. While the protection and sustainment rehearsal and combined arms rehearsal provided valuable insights, communication surrounding engineer equipment protection remained limited. Despite prioritizing bridge protection on the PPL, the vulnerability of these assets during execution suggests insufficient planning and a lack of understanding regarding the engineer unit's protection needs.

Recommendation: Overcoming integration and protection planning challenges requires continuous and collaborative dialogue between the brigade and the division commanders and staff. Apply protection planning principles from ADP 3-37 Chapter 3ii. Replace wishful thinking with realistic assessments of assigned combat power. Training units could conduct thorough analyses of their capabilities, factoring in time, space, and resource constraints, to develop feasible protection plans. Maneuver units could prioritize understanding the capabilities and limitations of subordinate National Guard and Reserve units, such as engineer brigades, to inform effective mission planning and recommendations. Above all, maintaining transparent communication with commanders is crucial. Clearly articulating risks, capability gaps, and potential mission impacts allows for informed decision-making.

Conclusion: This report has highlighted key challenges and successes related to integrating RC engineer brigades into WFXs. The analysis underscores the need for early and continuous integration, enhanced communication, tailored training, and robust AAR processes. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this report, the Army can foster a more effective and inclusive training environment that maximizes the value of WFXs for both AD and RC units, ultimately strengthening overall readiness and interoperability for future operations.

References

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