



By: Jim Greer

For 55 years after World War II the U.S. VII Corps prepared to defend the rolling hills, forests and villages of Germany against attack by the Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces. Then, in early November of 1990 they were ordered to deploy from Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States to Saudi Arabia to attack across the desert to defeat Iraqi forces defending the terrain they had taken from Kuwait. Over the next three months they would deploy four divisions, cavalry and attack helicopter regiments and corps support troops up to 8,000 miles, draw new equipment, form the corps, move over 250 miles into attack positions, conduct a deliberate breach against Iraqi complex obstacle belts, then attack for over 100 miles across the desert to defeat the Iraqi Republican Guard Corps. Rarely has any large military organization accomplished so much in such a short period of time, and most importantly excelled in an environment and performing missions that were the exact opposite of what they had prepared for.

If you want to prepare to execute the Army doctrine of decisive action then you have to prepare yourself and your unit to do what VII Corps did. You have to be prepared to go somewhere you didn't expect, perform missions you didn't expect, against an enemy you haven't studied, and in an environment different from that in which you spend most of your time. Given the complexities of today's operating environment, the potential enemies, the growth of technologies, and the high operating tempo, that's a tall order - but it can be done. Let's think through how VII Corps achieved what they did from a personal and organizational learning/development perspective.

First, get out on the terrain and learn together. During the Cold War period VII Corps and all the other units stationed in Germany conducted terrain walks and tactical exercises with troops (TEWT) at least quarterly and at the lower levels, company and battalion, at least monthly. This was leaders out on the ground having professional discussions about how they would fight a certain piece of terrain, how to integrate combined arms, how to perform logistics, and how to exercise mission command (or battle command as it was termed then). Lieutenant General Corps Commanders had frank and lengthy professional discussions with company commanders and scout section sergeants. Division G-3s talked over distributing fires with company fire support officers. First Sergeants and Division Support operations officers planned how to execute logistics in support of forward echelons. Lasting at least a week and sometimes involving movement across hundreds of kilometers with stops along the way at decisive points, these leader development periods developed leaders, built trust, and generated a "vulcan mind-meld" of understanding how the Corps would fight that went both ways from company to Corps. Even the leadership of the 1st infantry Division, stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, came over to Germany multiple times a year to participate. So, when the time came to actually move and fight the Corps the leaders knew how to do it - together.

Today that is somewhat harder, since the potential regional contingencies are in the Middle East (desert), Europe (rolling, wooded, urban), Pacific (island, jungle), and Korea (mountain, valley, urban). So, to learn effectively we need to conduct as many terrain walks as possible, at and across echelons, across the broadest variety of terrain possible. If at Fort Hood, a unit can go west an hour to flat, open, desert-like terrain or east an hour to wooded terrain, or south an hour to open, rolling terrain. And of course towns and cities are near most posts to enable urban terrain walks. The key is - get out on the terrain often and don't brief...discuss. Have professional discussions with peers, subordinates and seniors. How would you attack that town? How would you defend this draw? How would you set up a refuel on the move site? Where is the best place for the command post? We can only master decisive action doctrine if we can apply it as a team to terrain and circumstances and that takes practice...practice...practice. Company and battalion Commanders should be out on

the terrain at least once a week with their subordinates. And it costs almost nothing, just some coordination, 2 or 3 HUMMMWVs and the leaders. And meanwhile subordinate and NCO leadership will get valuable time to work with the troops on “blocking and tackling” skills they must master.

Second, if you are going to prepare yourself for decisive action, a good place to start is with potential threats. With the exception of World War II and the Cold War the U.S. military’s track record of predicting where, when and against whom we will fight is not all that great. That being said, in the near future the countries we might fight in large scale decisive action are Russia, China, North Korea and Iran. Unfortunately for us, each of those threats is developing a different and unique approach to warfare, so to be prepared one must learn about each. The good news is that studying four different approaches to warfare will strengthen your own understanding of warfare and how the American military ought to prepare for decisive action in the near future. In Georgia, the Crimea, Ukraine and potentially the Baltics Russia has employed the [Gerasimov Doctrine](#), a hybrid approach to warfare the US terms [New Generation Warfare](#) that employs a strategy the Russians term [reflexive control](#) and [combines modern physical, cyber, and information warfare](#) with more [traditional forms](#). In contrast, the Chinese approach of [Unrestricted Warfare](#) includes [combinations](#) of [economic power](#), [cyber-attacks](#), [anti-access](#) and modernization for [joint operations](#). Meanwhile, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) [Korean People’s Army](#) (KPA) have a more [conventional approach](#) to warfare, based largely on the extensive use of special forces, artillery, rockets and missiles. Lastly, the Iranian military forces center on the [Iranian Revolutionary Guard Forces](#), but include paramilitary and militia forces both internal and external to Iran, such as the Quds and Basij Forces. [Iranian conventional forces](#) are modernizing, particularly through acquisition of [Russian systems](#), and are continuing to develop and improve [asymmetric swarm tactics](#).

As you learn about these specific threats, make sure you “learn how to learn” about any threat. The basic combined arms element of virtually every Nation’s army is the brigade or regiment. If you learn how they fight at that echelon, you can extrapolate up or down, but more importantly you start to learn the way they fight. VII Corps’ enemy, the Red Army, was an artillery-based army. It turned out so was the Iraqi Army. So all the learning and training we had done in fires and counter-fires proved invaluable to rapidly learn about the Iraqi army once they had invaded Kuwait. And, OBTW, the KPA in North Korea is an artillery-based army also. Studying current Iranian organizations and tactics we start to see patterns of swarm tactics on land and at sea, many small elements moving independently, yet loosely coordinated by intent. Understand swarm tactics and the next time you see it, perhaps enemy swarms of UAVs, you’ll know how to defeat the challenge. And, you must learn how

to learn about the culture and military history of each enemy. Each of these potential opponents has a distinct culture and a distinct history. And those cultures and histories, whether authoritative or ideological, Eastern or Western, will help you understand why they fight the way they do. So, seek to understand each of these cultures and when you are confronted with a different enemy, you'll be able to learn about their culture that much quicker.

Third, there is a general narrative that runs as follows; AirLand Battle was great doctrine and won Desert Storm, we spent that last 15 years fighting COIN and have lost the experience and expertise to conduct major combat operations, and therefore if you just relearn AirLand Battle we'll be in great shape. Learning and being able to practice and integrate the combined arms close, deep and rear is absolutely essential for effective decisive action. The best way to learn to integrate combined arms starts with learning to plan that integration. The detailed planning that flows from MDMP and ultimately produces synchronization and decision support matrices is the best way to start learning to integrate all capabilities in a formation against an enemy (Crawl phase). After planning comes map exercises and table top exercises to practice...practice...practice. Don't waste the time and resources to use simulations, just get a map out or draw a sketch on a white board and go through situations over and over. Then, get out on the terrain as per discussion above. Lastly, use STAFFEX to integrate learning horizontally and vertically and to integrate air-missile defense, which we haven't really practiced for over two decades (Walk phase). Finally, use the CTCs, dirt and MCTP, to focus on developing your individual and collective capability to integrate the combined arms (Run phase). My experience is that the toughest combined arms challenges is generating and maintaining effective indirect fires against a moving enemy while you are moving yourself. That merges the art and science of combined arms, requires integration of maneuver, intel, fires and mission command and can be learned elsewhere, but only really achieved at a CTC, full-up, real-time.

But, just relearning AirLand Battle and combined arms integration isn't enough. For decisive action you have to master and keep abreast of the emerging capabilities. Chief among those is cyber. Regardless of your echelon there is an offensive and a defensive aspect to cyber and you have to know how to achieve the effects of both. That means finding the experts and getting them to teach you and your team and then relearning in three months, because it changes that fast. And it means demanding that cyber is used in every training event. If you can't fight through cyber at the National Training Center you won't be able to do it against those four enemies outlined above, or anyone else for that matter. Don't let people use the use that if cyber is used the unit will be brought to a standstill and the important training won't get done. Cyber is equally important training. EW and UAVs must

both be mastered both in using ours and in defending against theirs. We have to relearn air-missile defense, against manned aircraft, UAVs and rockets/missiles. And we cannot forget what we have learned at great price about understanding and defeating non-military militias, terrorists, and insurgents as that may very well be a part of any decisive action scenario.

So to recap. In order to prepare yourself and your organization for decisive action, get out on the terrain and learn together as often as possible. Learn how to learn about an enemy to understand them and find their strengths and weaknesses, starting with how they fight at regiment/brigade level. And learn how to integrate combined arms and new capabilities at your echelon using a crawl-walk-run methodology. Most of this learning can be done with relatively few resources and with a focus on learning together to build trust, cohesion and warfighting expertise. But, it takes setting the example by leaders, an investment of time and prioritization of leader development as the key training in a formation (which again frees up subordinates and NCOs to work the basic individual and collective skills training). So, the next time you are called to move 8,000 miles and fight an enemy you are unfamiliar with in a place you have never been, you'll be ready.

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