

Expectations of Your Maneuver Captain's Career Course – What Army Leaders Need to Know

by LTC Christopher L. Budihas and CPT Thomas Flounders

As the Army has evolved over the last 14 years of war, so has the Maneuver Captain's Career Course (MCCC). We are working to ensure we are producing captains who are prepared to meet the rigors of leading Soldiers and Army formations in an ever-increasingly-complex world.

A 22-week course of instruction, MCCC focuses on the necessary skills captains need to successfully lead within the operational Army, including asking students to build doctrinally and tactically sound plans for all types of operations and units.

The purpose of this article is to inform Army leaders as to what *their* MCCC is teaching our captains to ensure there is common understanding between the operational and institutional Army as to where our captains are currently deficient in their skills and what MCCC is doing to educate them and close this intellectual gap.

As officers arrive at Fort Benning to attend MCCC, our expectations of students has not changed. We expect students to arrive having an understanding of operational terms and graphics, able to properly use doctrinal language and be well-practiced, at a minimum at the platoon-level, in troop-leading procedures (TLPs). These three areas are the necessary foundation from which small-group leaders (SGLs) teach to build successful students. However, a current trend is that all too often students arrive with little to no additional professional development focused on those three areas and cannot develop tactically sound and detailed operations orders.

Through a series of student surveys, MCCC has determined that the profile of an average class has the following experience:

- **A rudimentary understanding of the TLPs.** Surveys reveal that around 50 percent of students have produced fewer than five opords since their Basic Officer Leadership Course (BOLC). Many students have produced concept-of-the-operations briefs, but these typically do not contain details beyond a basic course-of-action (CoA) sketch and statement.
- **A limited understanding of the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) process.** Fewer than 25 percent of students have produced five graphical terrain-analysis overlays/modified combined-obstacle overlays or situational templates since BOLC. The conops will typically display an enemy position but will not include any analysis other than templated, tentative positions.
- **A limited understanding of the military decision-making process (MDMP).** Fewer than 20 percent of students have conducted MDMP five or more times. Students who have served in a staff position – which is less than 20 percent of a typical class size of 130 U.S. students – can demonstrate some general knowledge of the MDMP process to any relevant standard. Most have little understanding in the process from CoA analysis to orders production/rehearsals.
- **A limited understanding of reconnaissance-and-security operations.** Fewer than 50 percent of students have ever conducted a screen, zone and area reconnaissance and/or passage-of-lines to the appropriate tactical standard. Most Armor officers can be expected to have been instructed at Armor BOLC on the basic tenets of these enabling operations but have neither planned nor executed them while in their previous unit.

Understanding where the average student begins as they enter the course allows SGLs to best determine how to get each of their students to reach their fullest potential prior to graduation after 22 weeks of instruction.

The summarized major three course outcomes for MCCC are:

- Mastery of TLPs across armored, infantry, and Stryker brigade combat teams (BCTs) using combined-arms maneuver and wide-area security tactical tasks.
- Proficiency in using MDMP to plan offensive, defensive and stability operations.

- Understanding of the management of Army systems, including unit-training management (UTM), Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), ethics, written communications and a rudimentary understanding of command-supply discipline and company-level administration.

The course accomplishes its goals by organizing into three phases: company phase, in which individuals produce five opords; battalion phase, where groups produce four opords; and command phase, when students receive instruction on training management and unit-oriented electives.

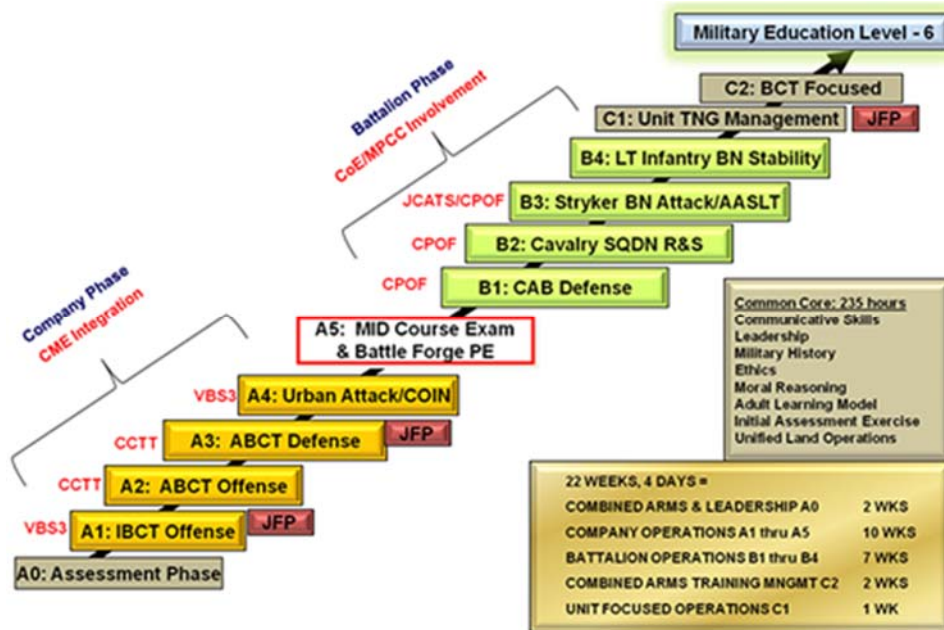


Figure 1. MCCC's Active Component course map, program of instruction for FY 2015.

Company phase

Company phase focuses on students' learning and applying the TLPs and the IPB process to create a tactically sound opord, constructed in accordance with the latest Army doctrine. In the A1 module, students receive instruction on each major step of the TLPs. Captains use critical thinking to understand and apply mission command to build teams, establish shared understanding, issue clear commander's intent, demonstrate disciplined initiative, use mission orders and accept prudent risk. The goal is that they are precise and lethal in planning by employing and synchronizing direct fire, indirect fires, close-combat attack, close air support and other enablers on the battlefield at the company level to meet their commander's endstate.

Students also receive module-specific instruction on the three different BCT types. Students develop opords for an infantry BCT (IBCT) in Module A1, armored BCT (ABCT) in A2 and A3, and Stryker BCT (SBCT) in A4. The culminating exercise for the company phase of the course is a practical examination when students have eight hours to plan prior to formally briefing a SGL in detail for grade.

To expose students to the virtual and gaming dimensions of training, once they have demonstrated a grasp of the material at the end of each module, they then apply their plan in simulation. Virtual Battlespace 2 (VBS2) is used for the IBCT and the SBCT missions, while the Close-Combat Tactical Trainer (CCTT) is used for the two ABCT modules.

VBS2 is a computer-based, first-person shooter-style game that allows students to input graphic-control measures; plan and use indirect fires; and maneuver their squads and platoons to accomplish their mission. While there are limitations to the system, it demonstrates the complicated process of echelonment of fires and the necessity for clear, simple plans that can be quickly and efficiently executed.

The CCTT serves two purposes for students: first, to execute their planned mission, and second, to expose all students to mechanized and armored systems.

For about 58 percent of the students, this is their first exposure to these systems. Each simulation receives an after-action review led by SGLs to focus students on the differences between the plan and the execution of the mission. Beginning in mid-2015, Call-for-Fire Trainer was integrated to provide students a simulation to exercise their indirect fire plan. Joint Conflict and Tactical Simulations Environment (JCATS) and a new system (Linguistic Geometry Real-time Adversarial Intelligence and Decision-making), will be incorporated to allow students real-time feedback for their missions as well.

Lastly, this year more student captains are being incorporated into infantry and Armor BOLC culminating field exercises. This provides valuable experience for MCCC students to interact with lieutenants and provide feedback on their opord. This unique opportunity allows students to physically exercise mission command over a company during a live field exercise.



Figure 2. Students participate in a combined-arms rehearsal.

Battalion phase

Battalion phase also consists of four modules that cover offense, defense and stability operations, which includes an ABCT squadron zone-reconnaissance mission. The course outcome is that captains are practiced in MDMP for battalion operations that seize, retain and exploit initiative across the range of military operations. As in the company phase, students must demonstrate critical thinking to develop comprehensive and complete plans during the battalion phase.

The first module is constructed in a very similar fashion to Module A1, in which students receive instruction on all seven steps of MDMP and their subcomponents. Students assume staff positions, and the SGLs or other senior officers guide them through the modules. These senior mentors are either the seminar's assigned senior mentor, (Fort Benning assigns current or former battalion commanders) or lieutenant colonels who are currently attending Maneuver Pre-Command Course (MPCC) and who simulate the battalion commander for one or more of the battalion modules. This integration provides students with a valuable realistic interaction that allows them to replicate the interface between an actual battalion commander and his staff.

The battalion phase is highlighted by a collaborative exercise among centers of excellence that includes – via Command Post of the Future (CPoF) and Defense Connect On-line – connection with engineer, adjutant general, signal/cyber, fires and aviation captain's career course (CCC) students. The MCCC acts as the S-3 section and provides the student-battalion executive-officer leadership to drive the MDMP process, with input from the other CCCs in their areas of expertise.

The last block of instruction exposes students to the Army Design Methodology, in which students learn and apply the basics of design to develop lines of effort as part of a stability-operation scenario.

Command phase

The final phase, command phase, consists of UTM instruction and electives that focus students on the capabilities of their gaining unit. For example, students bound for airborne units receive instruction on airfield seizure; ABCT- and SBCT-bound captains receive classes on direct-fire gunnery; and all students are exposed to maintenance and other standard operations for a company. UTM students execute an important practical exercise (PE) in which every student constructs an eight-week training plan that moves a company from individual training to conducting a squad-level live-fire exercise (LFX). They plan this LFX using a range from the installation where they will command.



Figure 3. Students participate in staff-planning exercises.

There is a current initiative, to implement in Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, of an increase of 10 days to the MCCC program of instruction (PoI). There will be three additions to the course: a fifth company-phase module, an air-assault component to a battalion-phase module and a combined-arms live-fire exercise planning exercise in the training-management module. In the fifth company module, students will receive troop reconnaissance-and-security instruction and write an opord.

With half the Armor population taking command of Cavalry troops, and about 20 percent of infantry officers commanding a headquarters and headquarters company with an organic scout platoon, providing this valuable instruction will close the education gap that exists in our officer corps conducting reconnaissance-and-security missions.

MCCC is not an all-encompassing course; there is only so much time and many tasks to train in a 22-week PoI. There are many functions of a staff and unit on which students do not receive instruction. Each unit is unique, and the individual tactics, techniques and procedures, standard operating procedures and shared understanding of every BCT and battalion cannot possibly be covered. The PoI does not emphasize the development of non-modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) staff officers. The CPoF is used in battalion phase, but students do not become experts in this system. MDMP is mostly focused on intelligence and operations functions, while the other staff sections and their warfighting functions concentrate on enabling the learning objectives that focus on the maneuver plan and the IPB process.

MCCC places primary emphasis on mission analysis, specifically IPB, and subsequently on CoA development and analysis. Orders production, while important, is oftentimes not reached in every module due to SGLs focusing on achieving the learning objectives and sacrificing the technical aspect of orders production.

MCCC's writ is to produce graduates who are masters of TLPs and familiar with MDMP. They should not be expected to be masters in UCMJ and non-MTOE/non-operations-oriented staff positions. This includes the technical aspects of the Digital Training Management System. There are several reasons for this, but it mostly centers on the amount of time we have to make them tactically and technically proficient in all three formations the Army has – and in only 22 weeks.

MCCC instructors do their best daily to produce for the operational Army captains who are immediately prepared to assume duties on brigade and battalion staffs and to be competent company-level commanders when they assume command. The instructors' efforts, no doubt, provide Army captains who can execute operations on a modern complex battlefield by synchronizing and delivering lethal and precise effects to achieve their commander's intent.

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Acronym Quick-Scan

AASLT – air assault

ABCT – armored brigade combat team

BCT – brigade combat team

BN – battalion

BOLC – Basic Officer Leader's Course

CAB – combined-arms battalion

CCC – captain's career course

CCTT – Close-Combat Tactical Trainer

CME – competitive maneuver (field) exercise

CoA – course of action

CoE – center of excellence

COIN – counterinsurgency

CPoF – Command Post of the Future

FY – fiscal year

IBCT – infantry brigade combat team

IPB – intelligence preparation of the battlefield

JCATS – Joint Conflicts and Tactical Simulations

JFP – joint firepower

LFX – live-fire exercise

LT – light

MCCC – Maneuver Captain's Career Course

MDMP – military decision-making process

MNGMT – management

MPCC – Maneuver Pre-Command Course

MTOE – modified table of equipment and organization

PE – practical exercise

Pol – program of instruction

R&S – reconnaissance and security

SAMS – School for Advanced Military Studies

SBCT – Stryker brigade combat team

SGL – small-group leader

SQDN – squadron

TLP – troop-leading procedures
TNG – training
UCMJ – Uniform Code of Military Justice
UTM – unit-training management
VBS2 – Virtual Battlespace 2
VBS3 – Virtual Battlespace 3
WK(s) – week(s)