

Exercise Bayonet Shield 2017: United States, NATO Allies Train Together to Present Credible Deterrent to Aggression

by MAJ Craig J. Nelson, CPT John T. Williams and CPT Mackenzie Sims

Units across the U.S. Army train for combined-arms operations alongside their North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies to be ready for a potential complex, high-intensity conflict on short notice. This demonstrated readiness that results from the training helps present a credible deterrent against aggression in Eastern and Central Europe.

With that in mind, U.S. forces, along with combined air and land forces from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, conducted Exercise Bayonet Shield Sept. 1-Oct. 7, 2017, at multiple locations across the Baltic region. About 600 Soldiers from 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment (Airborne), 173rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) (Airborne), participated in the U.S.-led exercise.

Bayonet Shield 2017 was a force-posturing deployment exercise conducted with NATO allies in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve. It consisted of a series of troop-level live-fire training events and exercises with allied defense forces to increase unit proficiency and preparedness to respond to any threat or crisis.

For the Soldiers of 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment, who executed live-fire objective training (OBJ-T) with NATO allies, the training conducted during Bayonet Shield sought to meet the demands of the OBJ-T progression while forward-deployed in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. These Soldiers learned that proficiency, preparedness and ultimately deterrence to aggression requires months of detailed cooperative planning alongside host-nation and multinational allies.

Overview of training

The exercise culminated with a troop-level, multinational, mounted combined-arms live-fire exercise (CALFEX). The 1-91 Cav Soldiers conducted the CALFEX Oct. 2-3, 2017, within the Adazi Training Area in Latvia. The participants included a motorized-cavalry troop from 1-91 Cav, a platoon of Spanish sappers from the XI Spanish Engineer Battalion and a platoon of PT-91 tanks from the Polish 9th Armored Cavalry Brigade (ACB). Batteries of M777s from the 4th Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, and the 1st Royal Canadian Horse Artillery (RCHA) – as well as a platoon of AH-64 helicopters from 1st Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, 12th Combat Aviation Brigade – provided direct support of each troop.

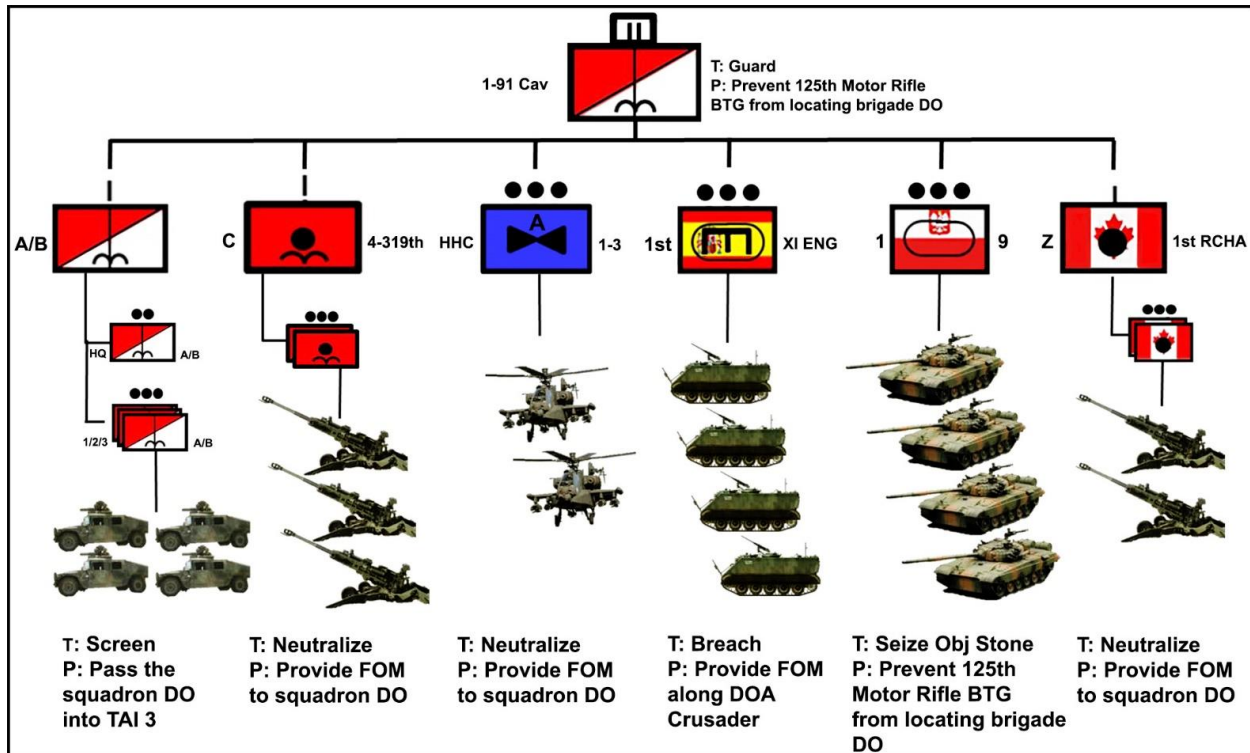


Figure 1. Mounted CALFEX task organization.

Training objectives

The exercise assessed two troop-level mission-essential tasks (MET) in a live-fire environment: “conduct zone reconnaissance” and “conduct a screen.” The troop CALFEX evaluated each troop’s ability to execute rapid and forceful zone reconnaissance while it engaged and destroyed enemy reconnaissance elements with direct fire, indirect fire and attack aviation throughout the entire depth of the enemy’s disruption zone.

Upon identifying the enemy's battle zone, each troop established a screen to observe an enemy obstacle belt, which consisted of a 2-meter-by-2-meter tank ditch and triple-strand concertina wire. The troops passed Spanish sappers forward to breach the enemy’s counter-mobility obstacles by using explosives. Following the breach, the squadron conducted a forward passage of the Polish 9th ACB’s main battle tanks through its lines. This allowed the Polish tanks to engage and destroy lead elements of the enemy’s advance guard.

Planning/friction points

The squadron’s planners learned that attempts to coordinate for land and allied participation in the Baltics using telephones or email wasn’t enough to confirm training venues or events with reasonable certainty. Instead, in-person coordination during a predeployment site survey (PDSS) proved to be more effective, giving resource requests the necessary visibility and immediacy to build a dependable calendar. Each troop sent a representative on the PDSS to facilitate shared understanding and enable parallel planning. As a result, the personal relationships formed during the PDSS provided a foundation to mitigate friction points that emerged later.

Following the PDSS, the squadron also formed a working group to maximize the value of the pre-exercise planning. The working group produced a detailed execution checklist thanks to representatives who participated from every warfighting function within the squadron.

Prior to the PDSS departure, the squadron staff coordinated with host-nation militaries and submitted a detailed summary to host-nation land managers at each range-control complex. This summary described the objectives 1-91 Cav hoped to achieve during the PDSS. Early coordination between 1-91 Cav and host-nation representatives allowed range-control personnel to synchronize access to key sites and facilities. This was particularly helpful during range planning. It allowed 1-91 Cav planners to build range plans based on key local terrain, grid

coordinates and line-of-sight azimuths. The ability to influence decision-makers at range-control facilities across the Baltics – as well as ensure they understood 1-91 Cav’s intention to confirm the suitability and availability of the intended training venues – proved critical to host-nation coordination.

The 1-91 Cav planners communicated consistently with host-nation and NATO allies throughout the preparation and execution of the exercise. Multinational allies were deliberately included in the development of the training plan to ensure they received as much value from the exercise as U.S. forces. This cooperation continued throughout execution. The multinational allies helped finalize the range builds, emplace obstacles, execute combined-arms rehearsals and develop after-action reviews.

The Spanish and Polish participants each used the same platoon from within their organizations for all CALFEX iterations. This was problematic because soldiers from the affected platoons grew fatigued by the midpoint of our CALFEX progression; during two night iterations, they sat out to sleep or eat. If given the opportunity to repeat the exercise, 1-91 Cav representatives recommend against any plan that relies on one platoon or troop to execute all iterations of a squadron CALFEX. Rather, it would have been better if 1-91 Cav’s troops and platoons had aligned with counterpart formations from Polish and Spanish allies early in the deployment to forge personal relationships and familiarity before the CALFEX.



Figure 2. Three Polish Army PT-91 main battle tanks advance toward a linkup with cavalry scouts of Troop B, 1-91 Cav, during a multinational CALFEX held on the Adazi Training Area, Latvia, in October 2017. (U.S. Army photo by LTC John Hall, 173rd IBCT (Airborne) Public Affairs)

The variety of systems available during Bayonet Shield allowed U.S. and NATO commanders to gain experience and expertise in the employment of attack aviation. Troop commanders learned the value of this potent asset as a maneuver element during the exercise, giving the AH-64 Apaches the commander’s intent, task and purpose for every phase of the operation. Beyond using the Apaches solely as a fires asset to destroy targets on the ground, troop commanders also employed the helicopters to observe, adjust and employ indirect fire.

Training progression

To prepare 1-91 Cav Soldiers for the culminating CALFEX, the unit executed a deliberate training progression during the months leading up to Exercise Bayonet Shield. The training progression began at the individual level with marksmanship instruction and weapons qualification. Following qualification, the squadron executed mounted crew gunnery and team, section and platoon live-fire exercises. Throughout the process, 1-91 Cav conducted evaluations using the most recent OBJ-T and evaluation outlines to ensure clear training guidance and objective external evaluation.

Between major live-fire events, 1-91 Cav facilitated maneuver training for the troops at every opportunity, taking maximum advantage of the training space available in the Baltics. In addition to executing mounted and dismounted maneuver training during hours of limited visibility, each troop trained with rotary-wing assets in preparation for the squadron-level MET, “conduct an air assault.”

Deviation packets/symphony of fires

The number of available assets, a diverse array of targets and complexity of situations presented to the troops during the CALFEX offered realism at all levels of training. The realistic training was a direct result of deviation packets submitted through 7th Army Training Command, which adjusted baseline safety restrictions and allowed paratroopers to execute live-fire maneuver training that resembled combat.

Moreover, a deliberate live-fire plan ensured safety danger zones and other restrictions enabled realistic training, such as employing full-range training rounds on the objectives, rather than offset from the objectives.

The commander placed special emphasis on echeloning fires throughout the training, employing all organic weapons systems and aerial sensors, such as organic unmanned aerial vehicles (such as Ravens) and AH-64 Apache attack helicopters. The symphony of destruction included artillery assets, mortars, close-air support, direct-fire weapons systems and allied tank support.

Troop commanders, platoon leaders, troop fire-support officers and forward observers had to consider their choices to synchronize weapons and their effects appropriately. They executed this CALFEX while geographically dispersed, outside of visual contact and with all three platoons simultaneously engaged.



Figure 3. U.S. Army Soldiers with 1-91 Cav deliver mortar rounds during a live-fire exercise at Tapa Training Area, Estonia, Sept. 13, 2017. (U.S. Army photo by PFC Nicholas Vidro, 7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

Conclusion

Months of detailed, cooperative planning alongside host-nation and multinational allies allowed the squadron to improve its ability to accomplish MET training while maintaining a U.S. strategic presence in the Baltics. The 1-91 Cav presented the troop team with a highly realistic, complex CALFEX scenario that tested nearly every individual and collective MET throughout the five-week exercise. The paratroopers learned the importance of fighting to a position of advantage from which a troop can answer its assigned priority intelligence requirements and destroy enemy reconnaissance assets to win the counter-recon fight.

During Exercise Bayonet Shield, 1-91 Cav demonstrated its ability to execute an OBJ-T progression that enhanced the deterrent against aggression while forward deployed within the U.S. Army Europe Theater.

MAJ Craig Nelson is S-3 for 173rd IBCT (Airborne), Vicenza, Italy. His previous assignments include S-3, 1-91 Cav, Grafenwoehr, Germany; commander, Company D, 1st Ranger Battalion, Savannah, GA; troop commander, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, Rose Barracks, Germany; platoon leader, Company C, 1st Ranger Battalion; and platoon leader, 1st Battalion, 10th Aviation Regiment, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry), Fort Drum, NY. MAJ Nelson's military schools include Ranger School and Jumpmaster School. He holds a bachelor's of science degree from the U.S. Military Academy (USMA), West Point, NY, and a master's degree in military art and science from Command and General Staff College.

CPT Jack Williams is the assistant operations officer, 1-91 Cav, Tower Barracks, Grafenwoehr. Previous assignments include tank-company executive officer, Company D, 1st Battalion, 63rd Armored Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), 1st Infantry Division; and tank-platoon leader, Company D, 1-63 AR, 2nd ABCT, 1st Infantry Division. CPT Williams' military schools include Ranger School, Cavalry Leader's Course, Airborne Course, Maneuver Captain's Career Course, Armor Basic Officer Leadership Course and Air-Assault School. CPT Williams hold a bachelor's of science degree in systems engineering from USMA.

CPT Mac Sims is the information-operations officer, 1-91 Cav, Tower Barracks, Grafenwoehr. His previous assignments include airborne-reconnaissance-platoon leader, 1st Platoon, Troop B, 1-91 Cavalry; and tactical intelligence officer, 1-91 Cav. CPT Sims' military schools include the Armor Basic Officer Leader's Course, Army Reconnaissance Course and Airborne School. CPT Sims holds a bachelor's of arts degree in criminal justice from Michigan State University. He also studied Arabic at The Hebrew University, located on Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem, Israel. CPT Sims has deployed for exercises to Norway, Israel and Latvia.

Acronym Quick-Scan

ABCT – armored brigade combat team

ACB – armored cavalry brigade

BTG – brigade tactical group

CALFEX – combined-arms live-fire exercise

DO – decisive operation

DoA – direction of advance

FoM – freedom of maneuver

HHC – headquarters and headquarters company

IBCT – infantry brigade combat team

MET – mission-essential task

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OBJ-T – objective training

PDSS – predeployment site survey

RCHA – Royal Canadian Horse Artillery

TAI – targeted area of interest

USMA – U.S. Military Academy



Figure 4. A cavalry scout assigned to 1-91 Cav mans his .50-caliber machinegun during a blank-fire iteration of joint, multinational CALFEXs at Adazi Training Area, Latvia, in October 2017. (U.S. Army photo by LTC John Hall, 173rd IBCT (Airborne) Public Affairs)



Figure 5. Paratroopers assigned to Anvil Troop, 1-91 Cav, and Spanish sappers of the XI Engineer Battalion conduct a combined-arms rehearsal in preparation for joint, multinational CALFEXs at Adazi Training Area, Latvia, in October 2017. (U.S. Army photo by LTC John Hall, 173rd IBCT (Airborne) Public Affairs)



Figure 6. Paratroopers assigned to Bulldog Troop, 1-91 Cav, and Slovenian chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear specialists rush to board a U.S. Army UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter during training conducted in preparation for joint, multinational CALFEXs at Adazi Training Area, Latvia, in October 2017. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Tony Brown, 1-91 Cavalry (Airborne), 173rd IBCT (Airborne) Public Affairs)



Figure 7. Engineers assigned to the XI Engineer Battalion of the Spanish army execute a breach during joint, multinational CALFEXs at Adazi Training Area, Latvia, in October 2017.



Figure 8. A paratrooper assigned to Bulldog Troop, 1-91 Cav, scans the horizon in search of potential threats during training conducted in preparation for joint, multinational CALFEXs at Adazi Training Area, Latvia, in October 2017.