

# Bringing LSCO to Leaders: *Stryker Leader Course Update*

CPT WILLIAM JOHNSON  
SFC ADAM LOPEZ



On 24 February 2022, the armed forces of the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine. The largest military campaign in Europe since World War 2, the invasion consisted of multiple simultaneous assaults from land, sea, and air. The initial invasion was an unmitigated failure, and one year into the war Russia has reportedly lost more than 100,000 personnel in addition to thousands of tanks, armored personnel carriers (APCs), and aircraft.<sup>1</sup> The events in Ukraine have demonstrated the difficulties of conducting and sustaining large-scale combat operations (LSCO). After focusing on counterinsurgency operations for 20 years, the Army must now adapt to the modern battlefield to prevail in future wars.

In the last year, instructors of the Stryker Leader Course (SLC) have worked to revise the course's program of instruction (POI) to focus on LSCO. SLC is a three-week course designed to prepare junior officers and NCOs for leadership positions in Stryker-equipped formations.<sup>2</sup> Operating under the U.S. Army Infantry School (USAIS), most SLC students are recent Infantry Officer Basic Leader Course (IBOLC) graduates preparing to lead rifle platoons in Stryker brigade combat teams (SBCTs). In recent years, the course has expanded to train officers and NCOs from other branches such as Armor, Engineer, Field Artillery, and Air Defense Artillery.

To better prepare these students for future battlefields, the SLC instructor team first reviewed current Army doctrine. Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Operations*, defines LSCO as "extensive joint combat operations in terms of scope and size of forces committed, conducted as a campaign aimed at achieving operational and strategic objectives."<sup>3</sup> It also describes the dangers of modern peer threats, as well as the need for success across multiple battlefield domains (land, air, maritime, space, cyberspace). The SLC instructors created a strategy for the POI rewrite based on three principles. First, all lesson plans had to tie back to supporting combined arms maneuver. Second, SLC's tactical content would reflect peer threats pulled from the Army's decisive action training environment (DATE).<sup>4</sup> And third, SLC's POI had to address the other battlefield domains, with a strong emphasis on preparing for the air threat posed by small unmanned aircraft systems (SUAS). The result of this strategy was SLC version 6.0, a POI that enables leaders in Stryker formations to prevail in large-scale ground combat.



**Students in the Stryker Leader Course prepare to conduct a live-fire familiarization of the Stryker Infantry Carrier Vehicle's Remote Weapon Station (RWS) at Ruth Range. During the exercise, students engage a variety of targets with RWS-mounted M2A1 .50 caliber machine guns and MK19 40mm automatic grenade launchers. (Photo courtesy of SLC)**

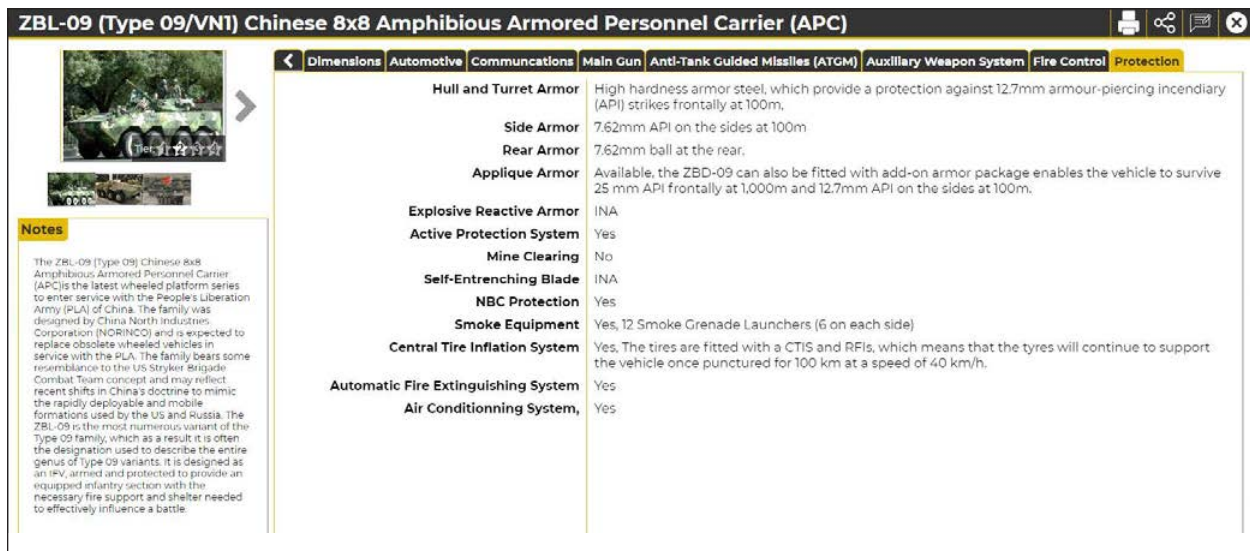
### **Orienting on Combined Arms Maneuver**

Combined arms maneuver is defined as “the synchronized and simultaneous application of arms” which creates an effect greater than the sum of its parts.<sup>5</sup> Russia’s struggle with combined arms maneuver in Ukraine is evident. In one day, Russia lost most of a battalion tactical group attempting a wet gap crossing of the Siverskyi Donets River.<sup>6</sup> Russian infantry, armor, engineers, and fire support were not able to coordinate effectively against Ukrainian defenders.

One of the most significant changes to SLC has been the renewed emphasis on combined arms operations. SLC naturally focuses on the Infantry’s role in an SBCT, but new instruction aims to educate students on the wider capabilities of the SBCT. Stryker organizations are unique in that one common platform is utilized across numerous warfighting functions. Across the SBCT, riflemen, cavalry scouts, sappers, forward observers, medics, and more all utilize variants of the Stryker to achieve their mission. The Army’s recent adoption of the Maneuver Short Range Air Defense (M-SHORAD) Stryker demonstrates the utility of the platform in combined arms maneuver.

Students at SLC learn every variant of the Stryker and their role in combined arms maneuver. As most SLC students are new Infantry lieutenants, their practical knowledge of combined arms operations can be limited. To close this gap, instructors leverage the knowledge of students coming from other branches. In some cycles, students volunteer to teach small segments of their subject area expertise to the rest of the class. As the Infantry students learn about other branches, the reverse is also true with non-Infantry students gaining a deeper understanding of infantry operations from their peers. This student-led learning model greatly enhances the quality of the POI and prepares these Stryker leaders to work together in the operational force.

With the increased emphasis on combined arms maneuver, Stryker leaders must execute planned, responsive, and anticipatory sustainment.<sup>7</sup> Sustainment is one of the major outcomes of the course, encompassing topics such as maintenance, resupply operations, and casualty evacuation (CASEVAC). These lessons cover both the immediate impact of sustainment on company-level operations as well as the wider implications at higher echelons. The maintenance lesson covers the basics of preventive maintenance checks and



**Figure 1 — Entry for ZBL-09 Chinese 8x8 Armored Personnel Carrier from the OE Data Integration Network**

services as well as two-level maintenance, parts flow across an SBCT, and the role of various specialty maintainers at the battalion and brigade levels.<sup>8</sup> In the resupply lesson, students calculate fuel consumption for an SBCT infantry rifle company conducting high-tempo combat operations. SLC instructors break down the path of a logistical package from the brigade sustainment area all the way to the forward line of troops. The medical support lesson outlines an SBCT's ground CASEVAC plan from the point of injury through the various "Roles" of medical care. Students leave SLC with a firm understanding of an SBCT's logistical support systems and how they can sustain the depth and duration of the fight.

### Presenting Students with Peer Threats

Across all three weeks of the course, SLC students are presented with multiple tactical decision exercises (TDEs) that test their ability to plan offensive and defensive platoon operations using the Stryker platform. When creating LSCO-oriented TDEs, the SLC instructor team looked for DATE resources that reflected current U.S. adversary tactics and equipment. The scenarios incorporate threats from the fictional Olvana (employing Chinese equipment and tactics) and the fictional North Torbia (employing Russian equipment and tactics). The Operational Environment Data Integration Network (ODIN) provided the instructor team with detailed information as well as pre-built force structures. By staying in the DATE Pacific Theater, SLC instructors could ensure the scenarios had a continuous flow and simulated a true large-scale conflict.

The most dramatic change to the TDE scenarios was the introduction of vehicular threats. Previously, most SLC TDEs arrayed students against a light infantry threat, but after reviewing Russian and Chinese doctrine as well as lessons learned from Ukraine, it became apparent training against a light infantry threat was no longer sufficient or realistic. Most Chinese and Russian formations rely on mechanized support to fight in combined arms formations. SLC TDE scenarios now feature Olvanan and North Torbian formations that utilize Stryker-equivalent vehicles (high-mobility APCs). In each scenario the enemy is supported by SUAS, indirect fire support, engineers, and air defense. These variables, while initially overwhelming to some students, emphasize the true dangers and realities of LSCO.

Stryker leaders must understand these threats and how to leverage Stryker formations against them. Unlike the M2A3 Bradley, the Stryker platform is not a fighting vehicle. The introduction of the 30mm Medium Caliber Weapon System (MCWS) and Common Remotely Operated Weapon Station-Javelin (CROWS-J) have dramatically increased the lethality of Stryker infantry formations. SLC's TDEs challenge students to leverage their dismounted infantry to close with and destroy these combined arms threats while at the same time set the conditions to pull their Strykers forward in support.





**Students in the Stryker Leader Course practice self-recovery operations during Week 1 of the three-week course.**

### **Breaking Into Multidomain Operations**

The modern battlefield is becoming increasingly complex and interconnected. LSCO will occur simultaneously across every battlefield domain. Over the last year in Ukraine, the air domain has become hotly contested battle space. Despite vastly outnumbering the defending forces, Russia has been unable to achieve air superiority with conventional fixed- and rotary-wing assets.<sup>9</sup> Both sides utilize reconnaissance and munition-carrying SUAS to disrupt operations. SLC students must be prepared to fight under contested airspace. Throughout the course, students learn to analyze the operational environment and plan across multiple domains, and every SLC TDE features some form of enemy UAS or attack aviation asset. To plan against these threats, students are taught passive and active defensive measures.<sup>10</sup>

Passive defensive measures protect friendly forces by deceiving enemy observers and providing early warning to the main body. Maneuver forces at every level can employ passive defensive measures by properly utilizing cover, concealment, and noise and light discipline. These measures are difficult for Stryker-equipped formations. Students are taught simple survivability techniques such as properly employing camouflage netting over vehicles, dispersing vehicles over a wide area, and cycling engines off when the formation is set in the defense. During training events in the field, students are taught how to incorporate air guards, which enhance situational awareness of what is on the ground and in the air. These passive air defense techniques are vital to preserving lives in future conflicts.

Active defensive measures require leaders to train, integrate, and employ air defense measures to neutralize or destroy air threats within the area of operations. SBCT infantry rifle companies employ Stinger man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), which are designed to counter low-level fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, as well as UAS.<sup>11</sup> SLC students learn how to integrate these teams into their schemes of maneuver and identify MANPADS battle positions, develop sensor plans, and design Red Air rehearsals for both Stryker crews and dismounts. SLC continues to integrate new counter-UAS solutions into the course.



**Soldiers in SLC Class 24-001 listen as an instructor discusses the MK19 grenade machine gun. Students learned how to clear, disassemble, reassemble, and conduct functions checks on MK19 and M2 .50 caliber machine guns prior to their mounting on a Stryker Infantry Carrier Vehicle Remote Weapon Station.**

## **Conclusion**

While SLC has made strides towards a LSCO-centric POI, the instructor team continues to refine and improve the course. Future projects in consideration include incorporating MCWS and CROWS-J variants into live-fire events, integrating SUAS assets into the tactical exercise without troops, and spending more time in the field reinforcing tactical lessons. These proposed projects, while important for the long-term health of the course, take time and money to fully implement. The goal of SLC's new POI was to transition the course into LSCO without expanding time and resource requirements, and the SLC instructor team has met this goal. The SBCTs and M-SHORAD batteries that make up the Army's Stryker Community require strong, adaptable leaders.<sup>12</sup> SLC will continue to produce Stryker leaders ready to join the operational force and prevail in large-scale ground combat.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Phil Stewart and Idrees Ali, "More Than 100,000 Russian Military Casualties in Ukraine, Top U.S. General Says," Reuters (9 November 2022), <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/more-than-100000-russian-military-casualties-ukraine-top-us-general-2022-11-10/>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on Stryker Leader Course and how to attend, please visit the SLC website: <https://www.moore.army.mil/Armor/316thCav/Stryker-LC/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Army Doctrine Publication 3-0, *Operations*, July 2019.

<sup>4</sup> ODIN can be accessed at <https://odin.tradoc.army.mil/>.

<sup>5</sup> ADP 3-0, 3-52.

<sup>6</sup> Oleksandr Stashevski and David Keyton, "Russia Takes Losses in Failed River Crossing, Officials Say," AP News (13 May 2022), <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-finland-a21a06ac0235bb-89c9e8368e0ffca2c9>.

<sup>7</sup> ADP 3-0, 3-75.

<sup>8</sup> Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 4-33, *Maintenance Operations*, July 2019.

<sup>9</sup> David Axe, "After Losing an Eighth of Their Helicopters, Russian Attack Regiments Are Switching Up Their Tactics," *Forbes* (14 February 2023), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2023/02/14/after-losing-an-eighth-of-their-helicopters-russian-attack-regiments-are-switching-up-their-tactics/?sh=6154260a4de9>.

<sup>10</sup> ATP 3-01.81, *Counter-Unmanned Aircraft System Techniques*, April 2017.

<sup>11</sup> ATP 3-21.11, *SBCT Infantry Rifle Company*, November 2020, Appendix C: Man-Portable Air Defense Systems.

<sup>12</sup> Stryker leaders in the operational force seeking resources on the platform can visit the SLC MilSuite at <https://www.milsuite.mil/book/groups/stryker-leader-course>. They should also visit StrykerNet on SharePoint at <https://armyeitaas.sharepoint-mil.us/teams/strykernet>. StrykerNet is a new resource designed by I Corps and the Stryker Warfighters' Forum to bring together the Stryker community.

**CPT William Johnson** is currently assigned as an instructor in D Company, 1st Battalion, 29th Infantry Regiment, at Fort Moore, GA. He has previously served as a mechanized rifle platoon leader and company executive officer in 1st Battalion, 37th Armored Regiment at Fort Bliss, TX.

**SFC Adam Lopez** is currently assigned as an observer coach/trainer on the Timberwolves Team at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Hohenfels, Germany. He has previously served as the branch chief of the Stryker Leader Course at Fort Moore and in various roles across Stryker formations at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA, and at Fort Carson, CO.

**Figure 2 — Example Tactical Decision Exercise**  
The SLC MilSuite site features a collection of squad, platoon, and company TDEs. These exercises can enhance leader professional development programs and prepare units for major training events.

