An Imagined Military Police Platoon in 2040

By Captain Abigail E. Drew and Captain Tyler J. Shimandle

"There they are, just on the other side of that ridge," exclaimed First Lieutenant Koppland, pointing to a nearby hill through the front window of a Joint, Light, Tactical Vehicle, Version 2 (JLTV2). With his naked eye, he saw the elevated terrain and wet, unpaved road. Visible on his visor display, the identification marker for the 2d Squad lay beyond. The blinking dots indicated that one of his squad leaders, Staff Sergeant Ruff, was on the move—presumably, thought First Lieutenant Koppland, verifying that his troops at the traffic control post were ready to direct the next logistics convoy.

Cramped in the truck commander's seat of a second JLTV2, platoon sergeant Sergeant First Class Joseph reviewed a complete, live-action overlay from his tablet. The comprehensive monitoring-of-the-battlefield workbook, affectionately known as "Combat Waze," displayed unit action, movements, and reports from the division area of operation. A predictive analysis tool at the bottom of the screen allows the user to view a running estimate of what is "supposed" to happen on the battlefield. The platoon sergeant chuckled to himself at the artificial-intelligence prediction. Over the internal communications link, Sergeant First Class Joseph's voice boomed and then dropped off in First Lieutenant Koppland's ears: " 'Ey, Sir. Looks like a convoy went through Staff Sergeant Ruff's traffic control post just about an hour ago. Let's stop and chat with 'em to see how it went 'n that."

First Lieutenant Koppland grinned and tapped his visor display. Perhaps there was signal interference, or perhaps it was Sergeant First Class Joseph's thick Pittsburgh accent—but the closed-caption display on the visor didn't quite catch that last transmission.

The two-vehicle convoy crested the ridge and was warmly greeted by 2d Squad. Happy to see familiar faces, Staff Sergeant Ruff trekked through the ankle-deep mud, which was getting progressively worse with the light drizzle, toward his leaders. His lightweight environmental-adjusting camouflage was currently made up of a mix of browns, blacks, and dark greens. "Good morning, gentlemen. Where are you headed this fine day? We can direct you to any location in this entire Polish countryside," he said.

Sergeant First Class Joseph rolled his eyes and said, "Knock it off, Ruff. We're here to check on yinz [plural for 'you' in Pittsburgh]. How are the troops doing out here? Staying warm?"

The noncommissioned officers (NCOs) then conversed about current discipline and morale, logistics status reporting, and the past 8 hours of mobility support. Staff Sergeant Ruff pulled his tablet (with Combat Waze) out of a cargo pocket and reviewed his logistics and personnel status report projection for the next 3 days with Sergeant First Class Joseph. Staff Sergeant Ruff noted that the Class I (food and water) field was highlighted in red, indicating that resupply was required within the next 18 hours; that Private Strib was projected to return to duty from the ROLE II (brigade aid station) in the next 3 days; and that the work/rest cycle for last 2 days had been suboptimal, as indicated by the amber status bar. Swiping to the next screen, Staff Sergeant Ruff showed his leaders a video of the drone swarm that one of his gunners had eliminated the previous day.

"Wow! Y'all shot down every chicken and child in that swarm," said First Lieutenant Koppland (whose rural Texas analogies sometimes couldn't be translated by even the most advanced artificial intelligence), "Who's the sharpshooter who did that?" "That would be Szymanski, Sir," replied Staff Sergeant Ruff, "He's in Sergeant Draw's truck. They're providing overwatch just up the road."

Deciding to check on Sergeant Draw and Private First Class Szymanski, First Lieutenant Koppland left the two NCOs to finish their conversation. As he approached Sergeant Draw's overwatch position, First Lieutenant Koppland noticed that she was sitting next to the truck, feverishly tapping away in Combat Waze, oblivious to the rest of her surroundings. He cleared his throat. Startled, Sergeant Draw jumped and said, "Holy sh--! Oh! Sorry, Sir! You scared me! You can't go sneaking up on people like that!" First Lieutenant Koppland laughed, "Sneaking up? You could have seen me walking from a kilometer away in this terrain. What's so interesting on your tablet anyway?"

"Well, it's frozen Sir", explained Sergeant Draw, "unless everyone in the division decided to stop moving at the exact same time. I was just previewing the artificial intelligence prediction for the 1-8 Cavalry hasty attack tonight. It analyzed that we should expect 124 more detainees, and then it just froze." First Lieutenant Koppland sighed and said, "Let's hope that's another prediction the artificial intelligence gets wrong. I don't think we can handle that many more detainees. 1st Platoon can barely feed the 80 we have already. And it looks like your battery is low. You know, ever since this global steel shortage, they've been skimping on the quality of that stuff."

A few years back, when First Lieutenant Koppland and Sergeant Draw had first joined the Service, no one could have predicted that China would seize Indian steel production. However, the impacts of that seizure were tangible—even here, on the other side of the globe.

"Well, hey—on another note, where is Szymanski?" asked First Lieutenant Koppland, "I want to compliment him on his fine shooting the other day." As if on cue, the armored back window of the JLTV2 was rolled down and there was Private First Class Szymanski, sitting in the swiveling gunner's seat, still wearing his Visual Immersion Synchronized Individual Optic Navigator (VISION) helmet. The VISION helmet synchronizes the gunner's movements with the weapons systems on the truck. By simply turning his head, the gunner can identify targets and slew to cue fires with lethal precision. The whole get-up—which was glossy black, covered the Soldier's entire head, and had three antennas protruding from the forehead area—looked alien to First Lieutenant Koppland.

"Well, *dzien dobry*, Sir!" came Private First Class Szymanski's surprisingly clear voice through the helmet. The visor that

First Lieutenant Koppland was wearing translated the Polish to "good morning." "You know, Szymanski—if tomorrow we lose all this technology, at least we have you to help us understand our Polish buddies," said First Lieutenant Koppland.

While telling their story, with the vehicle weaponry set to auto-scan, the three military police Soldiers conversed for several minutes. Sergeant Draw and Private First Class Szymanski described the drone swarm for First Lieutenant Koppland. Sergeant Draw continued to monitor the cameras in the top left section of her visor. Suddenly, an alert popped up on the screen and they heard, "Warrior 2-2, this is Bayonet 1-2 . . . we're 5 minutes and . . . seconds out from your location . . . bringing another LOGPAC of . . . vehicles . . . special asset codename SPELL in convoy . . . how copy, over?" The lieutenant was beginning to think that there might be something messing with the communications since they hadn't been this degraded lately.

First Lieutenant Koppland thanked the team one more time and then returned to his vehicle to observe the approaching convoy. As Sergeant Draw and Private First Class Szymanski watched the lieutenant leave, Sergeant Draw commented, "They must be securing something pretty important in this convoy to have a SPELL with them."

"What the heck is a SPELL, Sergeant? asked Private First Class Szymanski, "I've never heard of it." "It's a Self-Propelled, Event-Limiting Locator," Sergeant Draw replied, "Basically, it's a self-driving robotic trailer, maybe the size of a dinner table, that creates a protective dome around an asset. It can shoot down artillery and drone swarms and will even detect incoming jamming signals and frequency-hop the entire convoy's communications to a different bandwidth without missing a beat! I still remember when Tesla© was campaigning to sell it to the Army . . . 'Protect your assets with a SPELL; it's like magic!' " The gunner rolled his eyes as he put his VISION helmet back on.

Following a few minutes of silence after they got back in the truck, Private First Class Szymanski asked, "Wait—then why would they need a military police squad to provide convoy security if they have one of those? And how do you know so much about it anyway?" "Well, SPELL is great at protecting the convoy, but who is going to protect it?" Sergeant Draw replied. That made sense, nodded Private First Class Szymanski, "But what about my other question?" "Oh, right. Well, I used to be in a logistics unit that had one—and let's just say we did a lot of equipment layouts," laughed Sergeant Draw, grimacing at the memory of inventories.

Meanwhile, as First Lieutenant Koppland and Sergeant First Class Joseph were preparing to leave the rest of 2d Squad and move on to the next traffic control post, Staff Sergeant Ruff waved at them to stop. Sergeant First Class Joseph asked what he wanted through the communications link, but Staff Sergeant Ruff kept pointing to his helmet and shaking his head. "What the hell?" said Sergeant First Class Joseph as he opened his truck commander door. "Hey, Big Sarge—we just lost everything. All my trucks did. Absolutely none of the communications are working. Are yours?" said Staff Sergeant Ruff. Sergeant First Class Joseph glanced at his tablet on the dashboard; it was completely frozen. He looked back at Staff Sergeant Ruff and then noticed that First Lieutenant Koppland had gotten out of his truck and was looking skyward while approaching. His tablet was displaying a blue screen of error messages.

All three of the Soldiers looked up; and after a few seconds, Sergeant First Class Joseph noticed the trail of a fighter jet in the clouds. All of the indicators were there; this jamming was deliberate. The intelligence officer had mentioned something like this in one of her threat updates a while back. She had called the phenomenon a precision electromagnetic pulse. It was capable of completely frying almost any electronic device with little to no warning. While the potential situation was interesting to think about, Sergeant First Class Joseph hadn't lost any sleep over it. Realistically, what would he be able to do about it anyway?

Luckily, Sergeant First Class Joseph had planned as much as he could have. He said, "Sergeant Ruff, you know the battle drill. Get those [frequency modulation] radios out of the hardened containers in the trucks. Sir, go get yours up and running too. Make sure it's on low power for now. I only want those that need to hear us to be able to."

The battle drill of loading an Advanced System Improvement Program Radio and conducting a radio check reminded Sergeant First Class Joseph of when he had first enlisted and had attended one-station unit training way back in 2023. Back then, as a young trainee, he never would have guessed that 17 years later he would still be doing the exact same thing—just under different circumstances.

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