

‘AARing’ Army War College’s new, exportable Theater Army Staff Course - learning ‘set the theater’ and more

By Carol Kerr, USAWC Public Affairs Office 09 January 2022



@USArmyNorth staff complete the pilot Theater Army Staff Course in late 2021. The new exportable course developed by the Army War College for staff understanding of Army Subordinate Component Commands' strategic mission, organization, and capabilities

The new Theater Army Staff Course is the Army War College’s contribution to educating Theater Army staff officers about what the Theater Army is, what it does, and why. The course is tailored to meet the need of Theater Armies for better educated staff members to meet their mission requirements “It would have saved a lot of pain learning things the hard way,” said one participant of the December 2021 pilot for U.S. Army North, about the course’s value.

Theater Army staff officers must be prepared to lead teams in the development, design, and conduct of campaign plans that align joint, multinational, and interagency capabilities to address trans-regional threats in all domains across the competition continuum.

The Theater Army is the most misunderstood element in the Army... This course can't come soon enough," said Gen. Charles Flynn, U.S. Army Pacific Commanding General. The Theater Army Staff Course for USARPAC is scheduled for July 18-22, kicking off the summer course rotation in support to all five Theater Army Headquarters.

What was supposed to occur?

TASC prepares its graduates to provide holistic and integrated approaches to shape the global environment short of armed conflict, and prevail in war. Therefore, the staff members must understand concepts, doctrines, and capabilities across the Theater Army with an appreciation for how the Theater Army integrates with joint, multinational and interagency capabilities.

In this course, students examine how the various Theater Army entities operate and interact, and how the Theater Army addresses operational level Landpower imperatives for the Joint Force across all warfighting functions in an environment of competition and crisis. This course addresses the gap between understanding at the Division/Corps (CGSC) level and the Strategic (USAWC) level about Theater Army roles, authorities, responsibilities, and missions.

What happened?

Headquarters, ARNORTH asked the Army War College to pilot the exportable curriculum in San Antonio, based on the importance of its Homeland Defense mission and the ability to involve observers from neighboring U.S. Army South.

Commonalities among the Theater armies drive a lot of common course material, but the uniqueness of the plans in each headquarters made the case for customized curriculum and a mobile training team to facilitate the course at each of the headquarters.

The instruction was an exercise in collaboration. ARNORTH Commander Lt. Gen. John Evans opened the course and led a student assessment. Half the lessons were led by experienced ARNORTH staff, with half guided by seasoned Army War College instructors.

"Our commandant is all about supporting the needs of the Army. The Theater Army demand signal was for MTTs, so we packed our bags," said Prof. Mark Haseman who, with Charles Anderson and subject matter experts, developed the new curriculum and facilitated the pilot course.

“The Theater Army Staff Course ... doctrinal instruction and USARNORTH Director guidance has provided the disciplined initiative and confidence for recently arrived ARNORTH staff officers/NCOs in support of the USARNORTH mission,” said Christopher DeLaRosa, ARNORTH Director of Training Support Readiness, G-7.

Coursework ranged from doctrine overview for Unified Command Plan/Theater Strategy to a capstone exercise with former Army North commander, retired Lt. Gen. Jeffrey Buchanan. In between, TASC addressed theater level plans and operations for command and control, setting the theater, intelligence, sustainment, operational contracting support, commanders’ communication strategies, force tailoring, ally/partner considerations, theater security, and much more.

“This course answered what ‘set the theater’ means, and made other doctrine points applicable in a practical way;” said one participant in anonymous course feedback. “Very good course—among the best I’ve ever taken--so much info learned about Theater Army staffs,” said another.

What worked well – to be retained?

“I was hooked after Dr Bonin’s first brief!” said Lt. Col. Alan Schilansky, II, ARNORTH Deputy Surgeon/ Senior Medical Operations Officer about USAWC Prof. John Bonin, who engaged the staff with great energy about the importance of the Theater Army. “This is a staff course you don’t want to bypass,” he said.

Army force structure expert John Bonin was a critical contributor to course design. “Bonin is the Army’s single most informed and skillful expert on Theater Army missions and organization,” said Haseman, USAWC director of both TASC and the Combined/Joint Forces Land Component Commanders Course.

Equally renowned for his expertise in Homeland Defense topics, USAWC Prof. Bert Tussing addressed the staff about Defense Support to Civil Authorities and Homeland Defense.

Critically, two senior mentors injected insights into blocks of instruction. Retired Maj. Gen. David Glaser and retired Maj. Gen. Richard Gallant called on first-person experience to tie lessons together at the end of each day.

Thirty-four ARNORTH staff members attended the course. Their internal guidance was to select 70% new arrivals and 30% experienced staff

officers. This provided a good mix for discussions, said Haseman.

“Students were very engaged, and discussed key issues that cut across staffs, like medical logistics, protection, Canada, etc.,” he said. “We had hoped to encourage this, so that the course was more than an academic experience and delved into practical application. There were many other areas where dialogue helped them see themselves, and facilitated the Headquarters to grow and improve as a whole.”

“This course definitely enhanced my sense of ARNORTH’s mission and priorities—I am better equipped to do my job and coordinate across the staff,” wrote one staff member in a critique.

What should be improved?

The Army War College will continue to refine lesson sequencing, and continue to strive to tie each lesson back to the question, “How does this apply in practical ways to the staff?”

Interest in the Theater Army Staff Course outpaces capacity, at this point. Every ASCC has scheduled a TASC iteration in Summer 2022. Conducting five TASC courses during the summer will be challenging, but the work is worthwhile and appreciated by the theater army staffs being supported, added TASC director Haseman.

“The Theater Army Staff Course provides ... through the pre-course concentrated doctrine review, the in-class doctrine examination [and] through individual Theater Army Staff briefings, invaluable knowledge for Theater Army Staffs to more effectively understand their collective staff roles,” said Schilansky.