

MEB/BSTB Precommand Course

Maneuver support operations – integrate the complementary and reinforcing capabilities of key protection, movement and maneuver, and sustainment functions, tasks, and systems to enhance freedom of action for the supported force.¹

—FMI 3-90.31

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As the proponent for the maneuver enhancement brigade (MEB) and the brigade special troops battalion (BSTB), the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence (COE) at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, is responsible for developing and implementing the precommand course (PCC) for the current and future leadership of these critical support organizations. As of 1 July 2008, the Maneuver Support Center (MANSCEN) has conducted six PCCs. All six incorporated BSTB commanders and three included MEB commanders. Currently, MANSCEN schedules four PCCs per year for BSTB commanders, with two of these—in March and July—incorporating MEB commanders.

While both of these organizations are fairly new, they are currently operating throughout the Army. The BSTB is organic to the heavy brigade combat team (HBCT) and the infantry brigade combat team (IBCT). It is organized “to provide the BCT with command and control of the brigade’s

companies and smaller attachments that formerly operated under the direct supervision of the BCT. It uses its own organic assets to provide command and control (C2), administrative, and sustainment support to organic and attached combat support units.”² The BSTB organic units provide the BCT commander with capabilities and expertise that can be found at MANSCEN, which includes chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosives (CBRNE); engineer (IBCT only); and military police. Additional capabilities include military intelligence and communications support.

Command of the BSTB is coded as 01A, meaning that any qualified officer can command it. While this opens up command opportunities for those qualified officers, it brings with it the requirement to fully understand the capabilities of the BSTB organic elements and of those units that may be attached or assigned to the BSTB for specific missions.



Graduation photo from the MEB/BSTB Precommand Course, Class 004-08

The ability to integrate these diverse capabilities and the inherent responsibility of providing the leadership for this type of organization requires a commander with a skill set that isn't provided through normal branch channels. The requirement for the PCC is to provide these commanders with the most current information available at MANSCEN concerning the BSTB and to coordinate with other COEs to provide subject matter expertise that MANSCEN does not possess.

The MEB is designed primarily as a C2 headquarters with a robust multifunctional staff. The current plan will see the creation of 23 MEBs by fiscal year 2012. Of the 23 MEBs, 4 will reside in the Active Army and 19 in the Reserve Component (3 in the United States Army Reserve [USAR] and 16 in the Army National Guard [ARNG]). *"As one of the five multifunctional support brigades, the MEB is designed first to support division operations, but also echelon above division operations within Army, joint, and multifunctional C2 structures, as well as responding to state or federal authorities as part of civil support operations."*³

Although primarily designed as a C2 organization, the MEB does possess organic units that include a headquarters and headquarters company (HHC), a network support company (NSC), and a brigade support battalion (BSB). Key to its staff organization is its functional operations and planning cells. These include CBRNE, engineer, and military police cells. It has additional capabilities among its staff that are critical for mission accomplishment. The fires cell, area operations section, and airspace management section provide the MEB with an increased capability that allows it to be assigned an area of operations. The MEB is task-organized to perform assigned missions. Those missions will vary by theater and are subject to the requirements of the organization it is tasked to support.

Command of the MEB is coded as 01C, meaning that command is limited to CBRN, engineer, and military police officers. Other critical positions within the MEB reserved for 01C officers are deputy commander (LTC), executive officer (LTC), S-3 (LTC), and operations officer (MAJ). These officers are provided with a large staff that varies in its capabilities and skills. As with the BSTB, but to a much greater extent, the ability of the MEB to accomplish its mission rests with the commanders and their ability to lead, integrate, and synchronize the various assets available. The MEB commanders must fully understand not only the tactical level fight they are supporting but also how its execution at the operational level contributes to the theater commander's intent to accomplish the strategic mission assigned.

MANSCEN's responsibility to arm the MEB commander with the knowledge required to succeed in the current fight is not limited to its in-house expertise. Whereas MANSCEN can and does provide these commanders with the latest doctrine and branch expertise available, it also goes beyond the Maneuver Support COE to bring in the additional expertise required. This is a nonstop effort that continues to harvest subject matter expertise from across the Army, its COEs, and combat training centers (CTCs).

The current MANSCEN BSTB/MEB PCC is a two-week resident course that requires the students to do preparatory work via an existing, but still developing, distributed learning (dL) phase website. The MANSCEN BSTB/MEB Community of Practice website not only provides PCC students with preparatory materials but also provides them with a reachback capability once they depart. Those seeking information regarding the website may contact the PCC manager at (573) 563-5502 or <frank.e.webb@us.army.mil>. The dL phase includes viewing various videos that include former BSTB commanders discussing their tenure as commanders, reviewing the latest BSTB and MEB doctrinal manuals, reviewing articles related to maneuver support, and other relevant information specific to the BSTB and MEB.

The two-week resident phase consists of a series of seminars, focused presentations, and round-table discussions that are designed to provide the students with the most current information available on the BSTB and MEB, as well as the functional brigades with which they integrate. It includes presentations by the MANSCEN school commandants, the Combined Arms Center (CAC), CTCs, other COEs, and former BSTB/MEB commanders and also includes various tours and demonstrations of MANSCEN branch capabilities.

MANSCEN continues to build and enhance its PCC program, based on the feedback it receives from the students, to ensure that it is meeting their expectations and requirements. Former students are asked to stay engaged via the MANSCEN BSTB/MEB Community of Practice website that is available to them and provide their counterparts and successors with their own lessons learned and insights into command of the MEB and BSTB.



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Endnotes

¹FM 3-90.31, *Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Operations* (estimated publishing date: October 2008).

²FM 3-90.61, *The Brigade Special Troops Battalion*, 22 December 2006.

³FM 3-90.31.