

# The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Lessons Learned From the Army's First Field Feeding Company

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A few years ago, the Total Army Analysis determined that years of ordered force reductions caused an Army-wide shortage of 4,000 culinarians (1,300 in the active component). In response, the Combined Arms Support Command began working to add field feeding companies (FFCs) to the force. Now, two FFCs have already been activated in the active component, and the Army has scheduled for activation 15 more active component FFCs, eight National Guard FFCs, and three Army Reserve FFCs.

FFCs are intended to create an expeditionary force posture for the military occupational specialty (MOS) 92G (culinary specialist) community. With a traditional company force structure but modular capabilities, the FFC modernizes an often overlooked Army capability. The FFC allows higher headquarters commands to order customizable subsistence packages, majorly improving sustainment force structure.

## The 25th Quartermaster Company

The Army's first FFC, the 25th Quartermaster Company, was activated on January 17th, 2018. The company is assigned to the 264th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB), 3rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command (ESC), and is one of two XVIII Airborne Corps FFCs located at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

The FFC consists of 143 personnel and three platoons and is led by a company commander and first sergeant. The headquarters platoon

consists of 19 personnel that conduct mission command, maintenance, supply, and orderly room functions. The two field feeding platoons consist of 124 personnel within eight teams.

The company was built to have cohesive and deployable field feeding teams (FFTs) capable of synchronizing and integrating their efforts with the supported warfighters. This unit has been an overwhelming success, as evidenced by increased readiness statistics and positive feedback from its supported units.

## Starting From Scratch

When the company commander arrived at Fort Bragg in July 2016, the provisional 25th Quartermaster Company consisted of a first sergeant, a warrant officer, and fewer than a dozen MOS 92Gs. The 264th CSSB found the FFC a temporary office space and a few computers to begin building a headquarters. The next nine months were filled with discovery learning as the company built a \$19 million property book and grew to 178 assigned personnel.

The lessons learned from activating this FFC are best categorized as the good, the bad, and the ugly.

## The Good

Most of the 25th Quartermaster Company's lessons learned have been positive, particularly in the areas of leadership, equipment readiness, and training.

**Leadership.** The Army culinary community has historically operated without much leadership in-

volvement. While other Soldiers are saluting the flag during the morning reveille, the 92Gs are preparing breakfast in the dining facilities. While other Soldiers run and call cadence with their commanders and first sergeants, the 92Gs are answering solely to their sergeants first class, who in some cases have very little oversight from their assigned units.

The result is that 92Gs are denied developmental experiences that instill pride, discipline, and Army standards. The Army has had several senior culinary noncommissioned officers (NCOs) move through the ranks with absolutely no field experience. That's all changing with the implementation of FFCs. The companies present many benefits, including improved Soldier standards and discipline (or "total Soldier concept"), increased equipment operational readiness, and better support for the warfighter.

The new FFC force structure includes 92G leadership positions, such as first sergeant, platoon sergeant, and team leader. These NCOs closely manage their Soldiers to balance mission requirements with the Soldiers' developmental needs. Physical training is conducted daily. Those who work the breakfast shift conduct physical training in the afternoon. The result is that many Soldiers have increased their Army physical fitness test scores by an average of 20 points in just six months.

In addition to the new authorizations on the modified table of organization and equipment, the FFC has other leadership opportunities. Many

culinary NCOs enjoy the opportunity to learn new skills through additional duty positions. FFC Soldiers train to become orderly room NCOs-in-charge, armorers, communications representatives, unit movement officers, equal opportunity advisers, and for many other positions that are not typically held by culinarians. These leadership opportunities energize the Soldiers, and they seem to take pride in their new responsibilities.

Company-level promotions and Chef of the Quarter boards foster both the improved total Soldier concept and the success of junior leaders in higher headquarters boards. Since August 2017, a 25th Quartermaster Company Soldier has won every Fort Bragg Chef of the Quarter board.

Soldiers are also better prepared for battalion-level promotion boards

and experience a high promotion rate. Company-level boards are the direct result of engaged senior NCOs and enable junior leaders to build the confidence required to advance in rank.

**Equipment readiness.** The most striking benefit of the FFC is improved equipment readiness. While conducting lateral transfers, the company discovered that very little oversight is placed on field feeding equipment. Most equipment sets were reported as fully mission capable with no faults found.

However, after conducting its own preventive maintenance checks and services, the FFC realized that major faults and shortages rendered the equipment unserviceable. Some larger units had multiple mobile kitchen trailers, but only one would be ser-

viceable to deploy for field exercises.

So, the XVIII Airborne Corps created disposition orders for donor units to transfer equipment to the 25th Quartermaster Company at the Army maintenance standard. This standard was reemphasized by the ESC and CSSB commanders, which has made it possible for the FFC to build its capabilities.

When equipment was unserviceable, it was sent back to the donor units. Once the deficiencies were corrected, the FFC rescheduled the transfer and accepted the equipment. This allowed the FFC to build capabilities that it could immediately employ in support of the warfighter.

**Training.** Diversified training is another area in which the FFC improves the antiquated 92G force structure. To ensure that equipment

*The 25th Quartermaster Company represented the XVIII Airborne Corps in a containerized kitchen during the 51st Philip A. Connelly Awards Program evaluation on June 21, 2018. (Photo by Jody Benz)*





standards were maintained across its teams, the FFC created a quarterly equipment validation exercise and pitched it to the Soldiers as a cook-off. This event included an alert, marshal, and deploy exercise for all eight teams, followed by a cooking competition with training rations and a judges' table. It provided a platform for platoons and teams to exercise their mission-essential tasks while building morale and fostering competition.

Every quarter, the FFC has adjusted the rations and the conditions. It hosted a team from the 82nd Airborne Division that competed alongside it. This type of training event allows the FFC to stay technically proficient and keep its equipment serviceable.

In addition to operating two dining facilities, the FFC pursued a variety of training opportunities, including local and regional field feeding missions, missions outside the continental United States, culinary arts competitions, and partnerships within the sustainment enterprise.

The goal is to create a dynamic culinary and tactical skill set among the Soldiers, which translates to a better field and garrison dining experience for the warfighter. In achieving this, the FFC has established relevance as an organization.

The best way to improve support is through practice, so the FFC conducted multiple field feeding operations. During the XVIII Airborne Corps' Warfighter Exercise 18-4, the company supported 2,600 per-

sonnel from six feeding sites across Fort Bragg. This was the largest centrally-managed field feeding operation conducted to date and was not without challenges.

In addition to training missions, the FFC competes in several culinary competitions, to include the Philip A. Connelly Program and the Joint Culinary Training Exercise at Fort Lee, Virginia. These competitions give Soldiers the opportunity to develop expert culinary skills and improve team cohesion. Soldiers return from competitions with advanced skills in cooking, pastry baking, carving, and nutritional menu planning.

### The Bad

No change is without friction, and

*The 25th Quartermaster Company prepared a variety of fresh food for the Forces Command-level Philip A. Connelly Field Kitchen Evaluation on June 21, 2018. (Photos by Jody Benz)*





there were plenty of struggles associated with breaking ground for this new company. The major challenges experienced while activating the Army's first FFC involved personnel assignments, training, reliance on supported units, and readiness systems.

**Personnel.** Over the first few months, the FFC received most of its 92G personnel as donor units were projecting to lose their fiscal year 2018 field feeding authorizations. However, the company did not immediately receive other critical MOSs in areas such as supply, maintenance, administration, or chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosives. These were personnel shortages across the battalion, which would take months to fill.

As a provisional company, the FFC did not receive any new Sol-

dier assignments from the Human Resources Command. It delayed lateral transfers for the first three months until it received critical support personnel to facilitate lateral transfers and take responsibility for MOS-specific equipment.

**Training.** There have also been some unique training challenges along the way. Most FFCs have a garrison dining facility mission, so it is not practical to do many company-level training exercises. The FFC realized this early and decided to divide training by platoons, teams, and shifts.

The unit mission-essential task list is primarily trained by platoon leaders, and two to four teams participate at one time. Training requirements outlined in Army Regulation 350-1, Army Training and Leader Development, are conducted between shifts in the dining

facility. There are always makeup days for those who have missions elsewhere.

**Reliance on supported units.** Another challenge is the reliance on supported units for cleaning supplies, gray water containers, handwashing stations, garbage dumpsters, lodging, and refrigeration support. These external requirements are essential for FFTs to accomplish their mission, but they are coordinated and funded by the supported units.

Although the supported units have divested their 92Gs, their MOS 922A, food service technician, warrant officers remain behind as the brigade food advisers. Their remaining responsibilities are to facilitate field feeding requests and coordinate for field feeding requirements. The problem is that if these requirements are not met, then the FFC cannot support the warfighter.



There are two possible solutions: the Army could create a funding code for FFCs to coordinate for their own support, which would reduce the reliance on the brigade food adviser, or the requesting units could be tasked through an XVIII Airborne Corps order for brigade food advisers to complete their required tasks.

The FFC was established with a unique force structure, consisting of an “AA” unit identification code (UIC) and 12 derivative UICs, similar to a battalion task force.

K. Carla Wade, a Forces Command readiness systems analyst, explained that this was done to “facilitate rapid deployment of FFTs and prepare the unit for the future Army-wide implementation of Global Force Management–Data Initiative, a system that will give the Army down trace visibility of individual billets and equipment serial numbers, so all Army capabilities are easily and accurately identified.”

However, it created a very challenging situation within the FFC command supply discipline program. Every FFT leader maintains his or her own property book and conducts monthly and quarterly inventories.

Every piece of equipment that is moved from one FFT to another requires an internal lateral transfer. This structure increases overall deployment readiness but requires a very experienced supply sergeant and lots of monthly reports.

**Readiness systems.** Army readiness systems took almost a year to become operational for the FFC. The Medical Protection System and the Commander Portal were not pulling information for FFC personnel from the Electronic Military Personnel Office, so the FFC relied on the ESC’s surgeon cell to pull profiles from the donor UICs and provide updates.

The Digital Training Management System had a similar issue in which no Soldiers were slotted under the FFC’s UICs. These systems

are vital for managing unit readiness, and their absence likely initially reduced the FFC’s effectiveness as a command.

### The Ugly

The FFC is an incredible concept, and it may revolutionize the way the Army looks at culinarians, but it is clearly not for everyone. The FFC requires disciplined Army culinarians, as opposed to just cooks. Not everyone embraces this change.

The 25th Quartermaster Company experiences an unusually high volume of Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) violations, which directly affects its combat power. As a provisional unit, the FFC encountered two large legal hurdles: the lack of counseling packets and UCMJ authority.

The lack of counseling packets was a clear sign that leaders were not documenting misconduct. This was evident when team leaders would complain about continually disrespectful subordinates but would never actually address these behaviors through written counseling. It took a few weeks to establish a healthy counseling system, which was the first step.

Initially, the FFC relied on donor organizations to adjudicate the Article 15 packets that it created. The process required time and constant communication between both commands in order to execute actions properly.

The lack of counseling packets and UCMJ authority hindered the company’s ability to establish good order and discipline within its ranks. This has been corrected.

The FFC has struggled with Soldier misconduct from the beginning, and the fact that it has become proficient in processing legal actions has not completely changed unwelcome behavior. Nearly 20 percent of its personnel are being processed for adverse action or legal separation, which accounts for nearly 50 percent of the CSSB’s total legal actions. This has diverted leaders’ time from the FFC mission.

While Soldier misconduct is trending down for this FFC, it will present a challenge for future FFCs.

The FFC offers many benefits to the antiquated 92G force structure, including an improved total Soldier concept, increased equipment operational readiness, and excellent support to the warfighter. While there are challenges in activating these new units, the pros largely outweigh the cons.

These companies allow for diverse training opportunities that create a dynamic culinary and tactical skill set among the 92G community. Physical fitness scores are improving across the board. New leadership positions are available. Company-level boards are promoting junior leader development. FFC equipment is maintained at the Army maintenance standard and is ready to deploy at a moment’s notice.

When properly executed, the FFC translates to a better field and garrison dining experience for the warfighters. As more field feeding companies are activated and deployed, the concept will continue to evolve.

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