

# Training Notes



## CONTEXTUAL TRAINING FOR JUNIOR LEADERS

CPT CHARLES W. WOOD

I hadn't heard the sound of incoming small arms fire zipping overhead in a few years and definitely didn't expect it on the second week of a deployment to Jordan. SFC Vincent Duenas and I were assigned by the Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade (ARTB) to work with the Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG) by observing and advising the Jordanian Special Operations Command's (JORSOCOM) Ranger School. We weren't in an insurgent ambush, but on the opposite side of a hill that served as the crew-served weapons range for a unit training to support the United Nations in Africa.

"We go behind the truck," my Jordanian counterpart wisely suggested. It made me think of all the times I complained about the restrictions put on live-fire ranges. Perhaps those surface danger zones and maneuver lanes held some value. From our new vantage point, we were able to discuss with

the Jordanians the tactical problems with using both sides of the hill as a range, how their army and culture was willing to accept more risk than ours, and also how the higher level decision to schedule simultaneous training affected us on the tactical level.

During the two months that SFC Duenas and I spent in Jordan, we learned invaluable lessons about Arab culture, advising foreign armies, and most importantly, thinking about the strategic effects of our actions. While the experience gained from this type of assignment is very valuable for us, it has incredible potential as an investment for the technical, cultural, and professional development of Army junior officers and NCOs in a future without combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Assignments like these will develop tactical proficiency, cultural awareness, and foster understanding of strategic initiatives.



*SFC Vincent Duenas shows Jordanian Ranger instructors (RIs) techniques for a squad react-to-contact battle drill. The Jordanian RIs were eager to compare tactics, techniques, and procedures.*

Photos courtesy of author

Our mission in Jordan was to foster relationships, enhance future partnerships, and to build cultural and tactical interoperability between ARTB and the JORSOCOM Ranger School. We conducted key leader engagements (KLEs) with Jordanian leadership, observed and advised the JORSOCOM Ranger instructors (RIs), and briefed the Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) commander on our accomplishments and proposed way ahead. Throughout the deployment, we worked with two operational advisors (OAs)

from AWG, who provided us with guidance and continuity. At the beginning of our time in Jordan, we spoke with both SOCCENT and JORSOCOM leadership to confirm the intent from both organizations. JORSOCOM wanted for us to be more hands-on with training and teach classes to the students while SOCCENT was leaning towards mentoring the instructors and setting conditions for an exchange program between JORSOCOM and ARTB. We decided to spend most of our time mentoring and observing the JORSOCOM RIs during their blocks of instruction while also teaching a few classes in order to meet the intent of both parties. Observing the RIs facilitated our assessment of what they needed to improve while teaching classes gave us a chance to show them techniques for planning, preparation, and execution of training.

Jordanian Ranger School is conducted roughly in three phases: individual skills, followed by collective tasks, and finally mountaineering and patrolling. Those phases blend together, and the class does not necessarily follow a set program of instruction (POI) from class to class due to several reasons, to include conflicting land reservations, visits by high-level commanders, and a recently implemented overhaul of the course. Their basic training program is not very robust (basic trainees may fire as few as three rounds through an M16A1 rifle), so the Ranger School POI is forced to focus on training the students on tasks that we consider very basic, such as loading and clearing a rifle. That being said, the RIs were very knowledgeable, and between them had a good understanding of battle drills, the orders process, and mountaineering techniques.

We quickly discovered our biggest challenges were going to be adapting to the Jordanians' culture. There was the obvious language barrier as well as a shorter work day. However, SFC Duenas and I found that the Jordanians were disciplined and eager to hear what we thought of their training. With that knowledge we saw the potential for significant improvements, but they would have to be based on conditions and not grounded in a time schedule. Throughout our time training with the JORSOCOM, we modified our plan — with the help



*Jordanian Ranger students perform a hand-to-hand combat demonstration in preparation for graduation.*

of the AWG OAs — according to the changes they made to the POI. However, in the end we knew that our goal was to move towards the strategic-level change stated in our mission to build relationships, partnerships, and interoperability. With that in mind, we spent the majority of our time evaluating the focus of their school, laying the foundation for an exchange program, and preparing suggested changes for the JORSOCOM schoolhouse commander and SOCCENT.

During our two months in Jordan, we spent a relatively small amount of time advising the Jordanian RIs on tactics. However, that is not to say that we did not prepare to do so. SFC Duenas and I created and rehearsed classes on battle drills, movement techniques, and other basics. Sharing tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) was also one of the best ways for us to build trust and spark interaction between us and the Jordanians. At the same time, it allowed us another chance to review and confirm our knowledge of the basics of small unit tactics. The Jordanian RIs had a high level of knowledge when it came to small unit tactics, which helped allow us to focus on improving the course within the context of the Jordanian culture.

Through our interaction with the JORSOCOM Ranger School leadership, we created a weekly report that detailed our observations and made one or two recommendations for them to consider. Those recommendations were then consolidated into a report that contained all of our observations, both positive and negative, and were given to the JORSOCOM schoolhouse commander. That may have been the most visible assistance that we gave, and we tried to give general ways to improve with a few specific possible courses of action. In the end, we were trying to avoid telling them what to do and instead suggesting ways for them to address issues that we had identified. There was personal value in creating the reports for me, as I endeavored to phrase suggestions in such a way that they did not portray the Jordanians negatively. They weren't doing anything specifically wrong; there was simply potential to improve the school. An example of this was shifting the focus of the course toward leadership. As Americans, we frequently tend to jump

to the conclusion that the host-nation forces are incorrect or are making bad decisions instead of assuming that there is a reason why they operate differently. In stepping back from that notion and trying to stand in their shoes to look at any given situation, we were able to create suggestions in the reports that were courteous, honest, and easy or inexpensive to implement.

Along with tactical advice and recommendations for the JORSOCOM Ranger School, we were given the opportunity to be involved in implementing change in the big picture. Part of our mission was to set the conditions for an exchange between the JORSOCOM Ranger School and ARTB. The program would potentially create a system for Jordanian RIs to come to the United States to seek education and on-the-job training with American RIs. The foundation for the program had already been laid by AWG and required us to provide recommendations as the subject matter experts as to why the program would be beneficial and why it is needed. If we report effectively on those issues, there is potential for a large step forward in the military relationship between the U.S. and Jordan, in the eyes of senior Jordanian commanders and SOCCENT leadership. Creating this report required us to brief officials at the embassy as well as the SOCCENT commander. Through this process, we learned valuable lessons about how to consolidate the information that we had learned over 50 days into a clear, concise report. I discovered how to tell the difference between issues that were only of tactical importance and those that were effective on strategic levels. It was difficult at first to focus on the big picture as SFC

*If we, as an Army, are truly interested in preserving our lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan, then deployments that mirror our experience are a way that we can continue to maintain our ability to tailor plans to local cultures. This ability has taken us years to learn and could potentially be lost in only a few generations.*

Duenas and I had been measuring our success in the ability of our Ranger students to execute a raid or an ambush. Once we shifted focus from how many Jordanian Rangers could clear a malfunction to the relationship between the Jordanian and U.S. militaries, it became clearer what kind of observations and recommendations to include in our report.

Looking back at this experience, I realize that I gained experience that would be a valuable substitute for a young officer or NCO who may not deploy to a combat zone. As the Army will soon be populated predominantly by young officers and NCOs with

no experience working with foreign militaries, short-term deployments of this nature have the potential to mitigate the knowledge gap in three distinct ways. First, Soldiers deploying to foreign countries will be forced to become masters of small unit tactics. It may not be necessary to teach those tactics to the host-nation militaries, but this expertise creates credibility. As American RIs often discover, preparing for and teaching small unit tactics is the best way to learn and master them. With that in mind, not only will the host nation benefit, but the deploying Soldier can take that knowledge back to his unit.

The second value that this type of deployment presents is the ability to learn about and integrate with a foreign culture in a low-threat environment. Creating an understanding among young officers and NCOs about the cultural differences of foreign countries will help to posture the Army as a whole for future operations. Exposure to allied foreign nations allows these Soldiers to learn and grow with less serious consequences in the event a mistake is made. For instance, more often than not, a Jordanian is understanding of an American who makes a potentially offensive cultural or religious error, but it may be damning to a young platoon leader while trying to win over an Afghan tribal leader. Even with SFC Duenas and me, it was eye-opening to see a moderate Muslim culture while in a relatively low-threat environment. Short-term advisor deployments like these can prepare our young leaders to better learn and understand the cultural and religious customs of wherever they are sent. It will also help to promote the Chief of Staff of the Army's (CSA's) goal of producing adaptive leaders for a complex world, as well as contributing to building a globally-responsive and regionally-engaged Army. If we, as an Army, are truly interested in preserving our



SFC Vincent Duenas observes the Jordanian Ranger students during desert camouflage training.



*The author, CPT Charles Wood, observes an Australian rappel lane at the Jordanian mountaineering training camp. Mountaineering has a crucial role in building confidence in each of their Ranger students.*

lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan, then deployments that mirror our experience are a way that we can continue to maintain our ability to tailor plans to local cultures. This ability has taken us years to learn and could potentially be lost in only a few generations.

Finally, the ability to think about the strategic effects of our actions is vital in both our ability to create plans and to explain why we are executing them. As defined in the CSA's Army Leader Development Strategy (ALDS), "strategic leader development includes opportunities to understand political-military relationships beyond the Army, to understand the global environment, to interact with high-level leaders and influential people, and to understand the context of defense policy making." Advising JORSOCOM and interacting with SOCCENT leadership allowed us such an opportunity. The OAs from AWG had extensive experience in thinking on a strategic level and tailoring reporting to influence the big picture, and were able to mentor SFC Duenas and me on how to influence strategic change. As RIs, we had a tendency to focus on how to improve the tactical proficiency of the Jordanian students. What we learned was that in order to create real change, we had to try to affect strategic-level goals. For example, teaching one Jordanian Ranger class how to conduct a raid would have had very little influence on the overall schoolhouse, whereas implementing the exchange program to further educate Jordanian RIs and encouraging the school to focus on leader development could have an impact on every Ranger who attends the course in the future. It helped us to realize why at times we must make sacrifices on the tactical level in order to effect strategic change. We were also able to see how the relationship between the United States and Jordan had an impact on how we could influence

and conduct training. Learning these lessons helped us to not only think on how to improve the situation in Jordan, but also how to best effect positive change in our own units. In some cases, with this mindset we may even be able to create positive change on a greater scale beyond our company and battalion. With the right mentorship, being exposed to strategic leadership has the ability to create strategic-level thinking in our young officers and NCOs. Not only will they be able to explain to their Soldiers the effects of their decisions and the reasoning behind strategic-level initiatives, they will also be able to assist in creating solutions to complex problems, in addition to their influence on the tactical situation directly around them.

Both SFC Duenas and I received a tremendous amount of professional development from this deployment. I discovered that what I assumed to be a few months of work for the sole benefit of the Jordanian Army was actually far more beneficial to me. We were able to confirm our knowledge of small unit tactics, learn about a foreign culture in a controlled environment, and learn how to think about the strategic impacts of our decisions. Short-term advisor deployments for young officers and NCOs paired with strategically-experienced mentors will benefit our Army in the future and will preserve some of the hard-learned lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan. We need to have tactically proficient leaders in order to make sound plans. Also, in accordance with the strategic context for unified land operations, political, economic, and social variables all must be considered in gaining knowledge of the operational environment. If we are to fight by this doctrine, we need to have officers and NCOs who are not only socially aware, but also skilled in tailoring plans to work within the environment of a foreign culture. Finally, we need officers and NCOs who can contribute more to our strategies and understand the strategic implications of their decisions.

Our short deployment to observe and advise the JORSOCOM Ranger School may serve as a blueprint for building these skills in the years following the eventual end of our actions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

---

At the time this article was written, **CPT Charles W. Wood** was a platoon tactical trainer in B Company, 5th Ranger Training Battalion at Camp Frank D. Merrill, Ga. He previously deployed as a platoon leader and executive officer with the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) XI. He is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., with a bachelor's degree in systems management.

---