

The OSUT Platoon Leader Experience

2LT DAVID RICHARDS

I was a few weeks away from conducting my permanent change of station (PCS) move out of the Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course (IBOLC) at Fort Benning, GA, when the 2nd Battalion, 11th Infantry Regiment team notified us about the opportunity to serve as One Station Unit Training (OSUT) platoon leaders. My initial reactions were the same as everyone else's: negative. I came across an *Army Times* article articulating the reasoning behind integrating platoon leaders into OSUT.¹ While my opinion of this assignment was not dramatically changed, the article did pique my interest and curiosity about the role of a platoon leader in the OSUT environment. After some consideration, I decided I couldn't pass up this unique opportunity to shape a new duty position in the Army.

Initial Reactions

One of the most frustrating aspects of becoming a platoon leader at OSUT was trying to discern rumor from fact. From the start, Human Resources Command notified our IBOLC class that some of us would be "voluntold" to come to the 198th Infantry Brigade. Fellow lieutenants barraged us daily with a new set of rumors. Some of the most common rumors were also the most concerning: "Basic training is a mess." "All you will do every day is sit in an office as a glorified assistant S3 and do paperwork." "You will not get nearly as much tactical experience or deployments as your peers." In my experiences here as a platoon leader, I have found that these rumors are embellished, biased, or just plain untrue.

Throughout the Army, there seems to be a perception that OSUT units are generally a mess and should be avoided by all means necessary. I have found the drill sergeants I work alongside every day are distinguished Soldiers and professionals. They show care, dignity, and respect to our trainees. Everyone on Sand Hill understands the importance of building the world's best Infantrymen and takes that charge with the utmost seriousness and diligence.

Daily Operations

I found the rumors of being stuck in the office all day were not particularly concerning. I was still hesitant about my new position because I wanted to get in front of a formation to lead Soldiers and knew I could not do that from behind a desk. At



Photos courtesy of author

2LT Matthew Uchiyama (center) of Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 54th Infantry Regiment, conducts the obstacle course with his platoon.

first, my role as a leader was to establish a presence with my platoon. Standing guidance for OSUT platoon leaders is to lead from the front in every event. The intent is to provide the trainees exposure to platoon leaders to mirror the line and better prepare them for their first duty station. If they were at a range all day in the sun, so was I. If they were bivouacking in the field overnight, I was in the center of the patrol base. If my platoon was performing corrective action for failing a task, I joined in every repetition. Although I do spend a fair amount of time fulfilling administrative tasks in the office, I know from my peers on the line that I do not spend more time behind my desk than they do. Many lieutenants coming out of BOLC fail to understand that a large part of being an officer is administration, planning, and coordination. My time here has helped me gain familiarity and competence in many tasks that platoon leaders come to the line not knowing. Outside of the expected time spent completing routine administrative tasks, I spend more time in the field executing individual and small-unit collective tasks than most of my U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) peers. Nine total weeks out of the 22-week cycle consist of live-fire training: qualification ranges, team live-fire exercises, and live urban operations. In a calendar year, I will spend a total of 18 weeks executing live-fire ranges and another 10 weeks conducting Infantry training in the field. It is extremely rare to find that amount of dedicated field time on the line; the numbers speak for themselves.

Although I will not deploy with my current unit, this position has still afforded the opportunity to ensure I maintain operational readiness. At OSUT, we execute individual tasks and small-unit collective tasks six days a week for 22 weeks. The advantage of executing tasks at the team and squad level is that I can identify what right and wrong looks like when it comes to my squad leaders and team leaders. Most lieutenants go to the line without that perspective. In some cases, OSUT training has supplemented gaps in my officer training, such as throwing live hand grenades or utilizing the M320 grenade launcher.

Development

The relationship between the drill sergeants and platoon leaders is one of mentorship, teaching, and learning. The NCOs here come from a diverse background of experiences and duty stations. They understand that the OSUT platoon leader role is partially a role meant to prepare lieutenants for service in line units. They take this opportunity to develop me on a regular basis so that I don't repeat mistakes their platoon leaders did, setting me up for success.

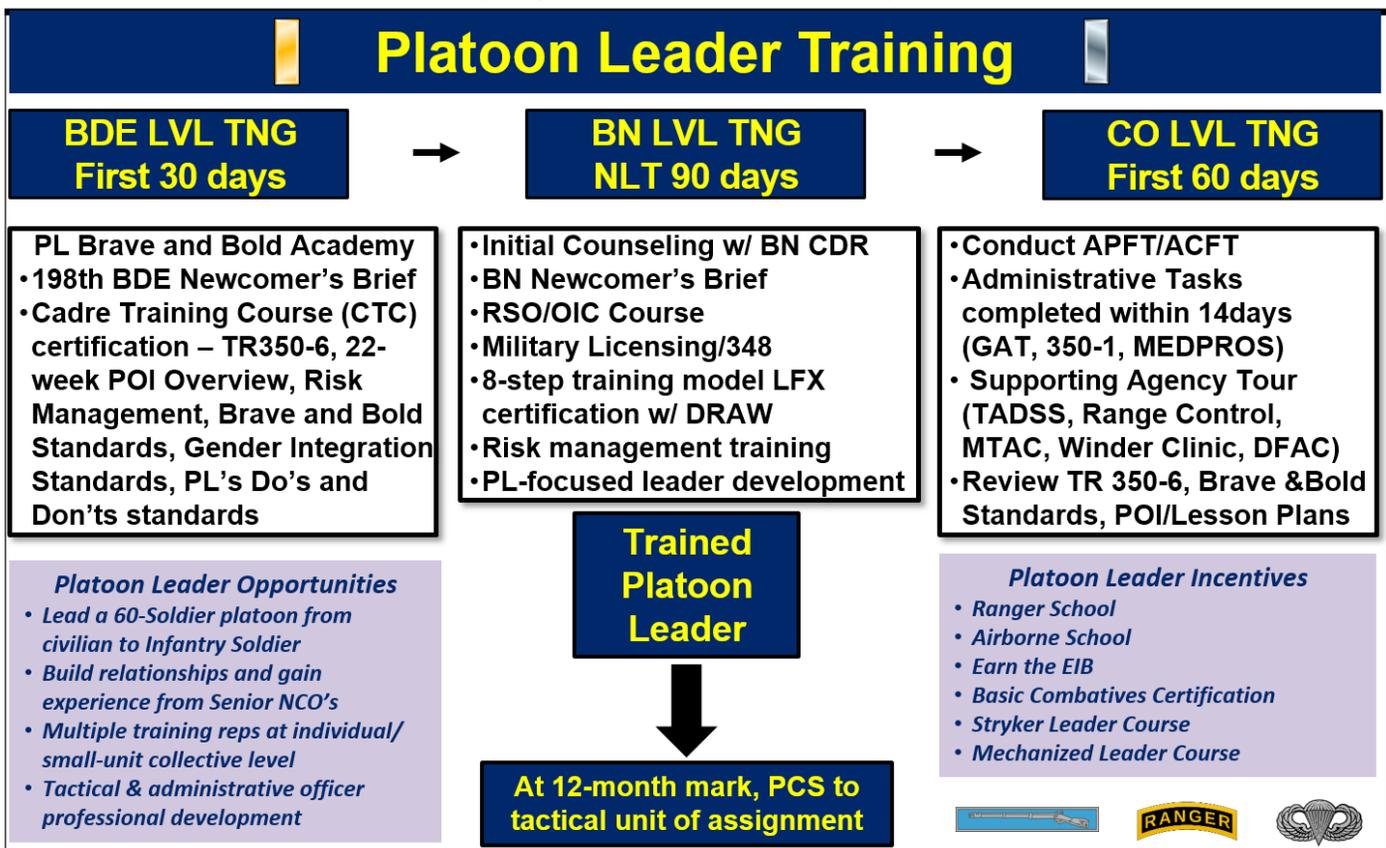
When I began my work here as a platoon leader, I stepped into my role with the attitude that I was a resource. I wanted to ensure I helped — not hindered — the organization. I took over numerous tasks that kept drill sergeants from coaching, teaching, and mentoring trainees. After learning as much about the organization as I could, I took over tasks in planning, personnel actions, and coordination for training.

By taking more resourcing and planning off their plates, drill sergeants were able to maximize time training Soldiers.

Maintaining this balance with my NCOs has been the most rewarding experience at OSUT. The differences between learning from my senior and junior drill is no different than the learning dynamic I would have on the line with my platoon sergeant and squad leaders. I believe the lessons my NCOs have imparted on me here will pay dividends on the line when I arrive to my unit more knowledgeable, confident, and competent in tactics than my fellow platoon leaders coming straight from IBOLC. The cadre here have consistently proven to be the most hardworking, dependable, and knowledgeable teachers one could find in a profession.

During my initial counselings, both my battalion commander and my company commander told me it was acceptable to “fail forward” and learn from my mistakes here. FORSCOM units can be understandably less forgiving because the risks and stakes are higher on the line. OSUT is an organization built to excellence because of past mistakes. Here I have the opportunity to learn from my failures and ensure I get tasks correct on the line. My command climate has provided me the confidence as a new leader to take on heavier workloads outside my daily duties. I have been assigned more important tasks, such as building an enhanced team live-fire range and have gained confidence in assuming and mitigating risk. This was instilled in me through continuous cycles of execution, assessment, and implementation of lessons learned to encourage constant improvement. I have gained operational

198th Infantry Brigade OSUT Platoon Leader Preparation Model



flexibility and now push boundaries to better gauge my own limits and the limits of my formation, so when I get to the line I will be a bolder, more aggressive leader than my peers.

Closing Remarks

Although rumors still persist, I believe being an OSUT platoon leader is an unbelievably beneficial opportunity. With our proximity to the Infantry School and Maneuver Center of Excellence, being a member of the cadre presents me with the opportunity to get after many schools and programs to augment my skills as an individual Soldier. Here, I have the opportunity to return to Ranger School, as well as the opportunity to earn my Expert Infantryman Badge. I even have rare opportunities to attend additional schools like Airborne or Air Assault School. From a career perspective, my position has put me in contact with fellow branch-detailed officers who offer great networking opportunities. Most officers within my battalion, to include my company commander and the battalion commander, are proactive about developing me for success in future careers. (See Figure 1 for the 198th Infantry Brigade OSUT platoon leader preparation model.) For a second lieutenant relatively brand new to the Army, this community has proven to be a bank of knowledge that will make a pivotal difference in my career. Despite the rumors that circulated about this assignment, I have found that being an OSUT platoon leader is one of the best decisions I've made as a leader and a Soldier.

Notes

¹ Meghann Myers, "Lieutenants, Appearing Soon at an Army Basic Training Platoon Near You," *Army Times*, 8 March 2019, accessed from <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/03/08/lieutenants-appearing-soon-at-an-army-basic-training-platoon-near-you/>.

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Courage:

Why Fostering Relationships Today Is Critical for Tomorrow

MAJ GEORGE J. FUST

The C-130 banks hard to the left and then levels out. The barren landscape races beneath its grey hulk. Moments later the sky is filled with paratroopers. These men are "Sky Soldiers;" they come from a proud lineage of airborne Infantrymen who made their mark fighting in battles from World War II's Pacific Theater to Vietnam to present-day Afghanistan. The paratroopers of the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Battalion (The Rock), 173rd Airborne Brigade, do not know the meaning of "cannot." They are Soldiers of action who take on the toughest assignments in the most remote locations on earth. On this day, they find themselves conducting an airborne operation in the African country of Cameroon.

Their task is to partner with the Cameroonian army and its recently established airborne infantry battalion in order to facilitate multi-national operations. Merely conducting a link-up would have been cause enough to define success. Sky Soldiers never just meet the standard and that is why on a warm spring afternoon they find themselves falling from the sky.

For decades the American flag has graced the right shoulder of Soldiers serving overseas. At the ground level, it is partnership at its best. The exchange of mementos is as frequent as ideas. Shared understanding and mutual respect can only be attained through joint hardship and execution. Sky Soldiers are no stranger to this idea and have embraced the Army's culture of partnership.

Cameroonian paratroopers may not speak English as a primary language, but they do speak another universal language — that of courage. The battle-hardened veterans of both countries have found common ground in the notion

Paratroopers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade jump into Koutaba, Cameroon, alongside Cameroonian paratroopers on 15 March 2014 as part of Exercise Central Accord 14.

Photo by MAJ Michael Weisman





Photo courtesy of author

U.S. and Cameroonian Paratroopers conduct physical training during an exercise in Cameroon.

of strength under fire. The willingness to push through pain and the journey of continual self-improvement is respected by both groups from vastly different backgrounds.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the predawn hours along a well-worn trail. Before the sun rises over the central highlands, eager men from multiple nations knock the morning dew off their running shoes. They stretch the sleep from their lean bodies and prepare for the challenge that awaits. No words are spoken. Only the movements required to prepare are made. Somewhere in the distance a rooster breaks the silence of the savannah and as if on cue the men begin their run.

One group runs largely because it is required. The other group knows no other way of life. An outsider might think the groups are homogenous with a single nation.

Running has the unique ability to transcend cultural and ethnic differences. As the paratroopers beat a steady course across the open plateau, they are greeted by the occasional ancient village or stray goat. They continue their movement in silence. This act requires no communication for understanding. All involved understand why they run. They share the warmth of the sun that just broke across the horizon. They feel the unevenness of the water-formed trail beneath their feet. Alone with their thoughts but united as a brotherhood they continue. They all know the pride of their country is at stake, for each man judges the other.

It is not an adversarial judgment but one that has been formed over years of training and fighting. Weakness is easy to spot and must be dealt with for the good of this group. Their competitive spirit and demanding intolerance of defeat pushes them onward. As the world around them begins to wake from the stupor of night, the men are greeted not with “bon jour” or “hall-o” but instead they hear “coo-raj.”

The term is universally stated by the young and old and continues to carry the men towards their end. Simply put, the French word means courage. It is doubtful that anything could motivate this group more.

As they near their destination the pace quickens, and the sound of labored breathing now accompanies the soft patter of moving feet. For Cameroonian and American alike the morning run was more than an aerobic exercise. It was a moment of quiet solitude — a break from the chaos that is never far from them. It allows each man the opportunity for self-reflection and personal growth. The finish line for this group is actually their start point. Having run together they have broken the barriers to mutual understanding and have forged a bond. Having never said a word, they have said a great deal. It is courage that brought them together. Courage that allows them to fall from the sky. Courage that will enable them to endure hardship to ensure the prosperity of others. Let courage forever ring in their collective minds. For with it, nothing can stop them.

The above vignette demonstrates interactions that occur around the world daily. It is imperative that Soldiers who travel abroad understand their role in developing strategic partnerships. The United States must leverage its allies and partners to defeat or deter adversaries. Rhetoric can never replicate or strengthen an alliance or partnership as much as two soldiers from different countries working together. Every personal interaction should be viewed as an opportunity to build confidence and establish trust. These relationships will be critical in the opening stages of future conflict when time or conditions prevent team-building exercises.

From rotations in Eastern Europe, security force assistance missions in Africa, and patrols along the DMZ in the Republic of Korea, the occasions to represent the United States’ values and capabilities are available. Given the frequent rotation of service members to these locations and others, units must prioritize building relationships and bridging cultural gaps. Technical deficiencies can be overcome with technical solutions. Trust must be earned. It must be continually reaffirmed. But once it is forged, it can serve as a powerful deterrent.

Our adversaries know U.S. Soldiers can run fast. They know other nations are also capable. They will attempt to breed resentment and competition because they fear facing a united front. At the individual level, every Soldier must have the courage to place collective security above their own needs. Allies and partners must believe the group will run together. That one will not leave the other behind. Let courage be the rallying cry for those who believe in a liberal world order. Let each of us have the courage to fight for a cause larger than ourselves. Courage is only the beginning, and yet, it is also the end.

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