

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.



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

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 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

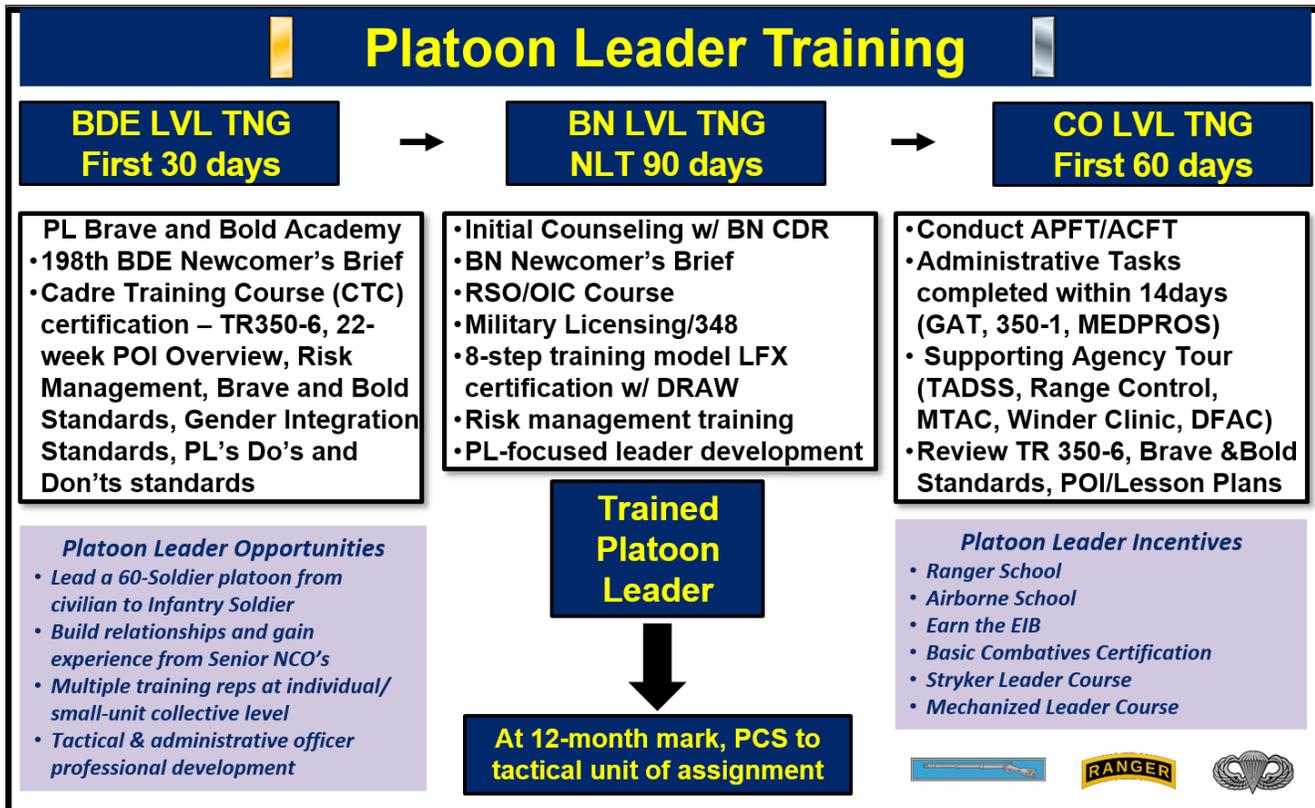
The relationship between the drill sergeants and platoon leaders is one of mentorship, teaching, and learning. The NCOs here come from a diverse background of experiences and duty stations. They understand that the OSUT platoon leader role is partially a role meant to prepare lieutenants for service 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

198th Infantry Brigade OSUT Platoon Leader Preparation Model



operational 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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