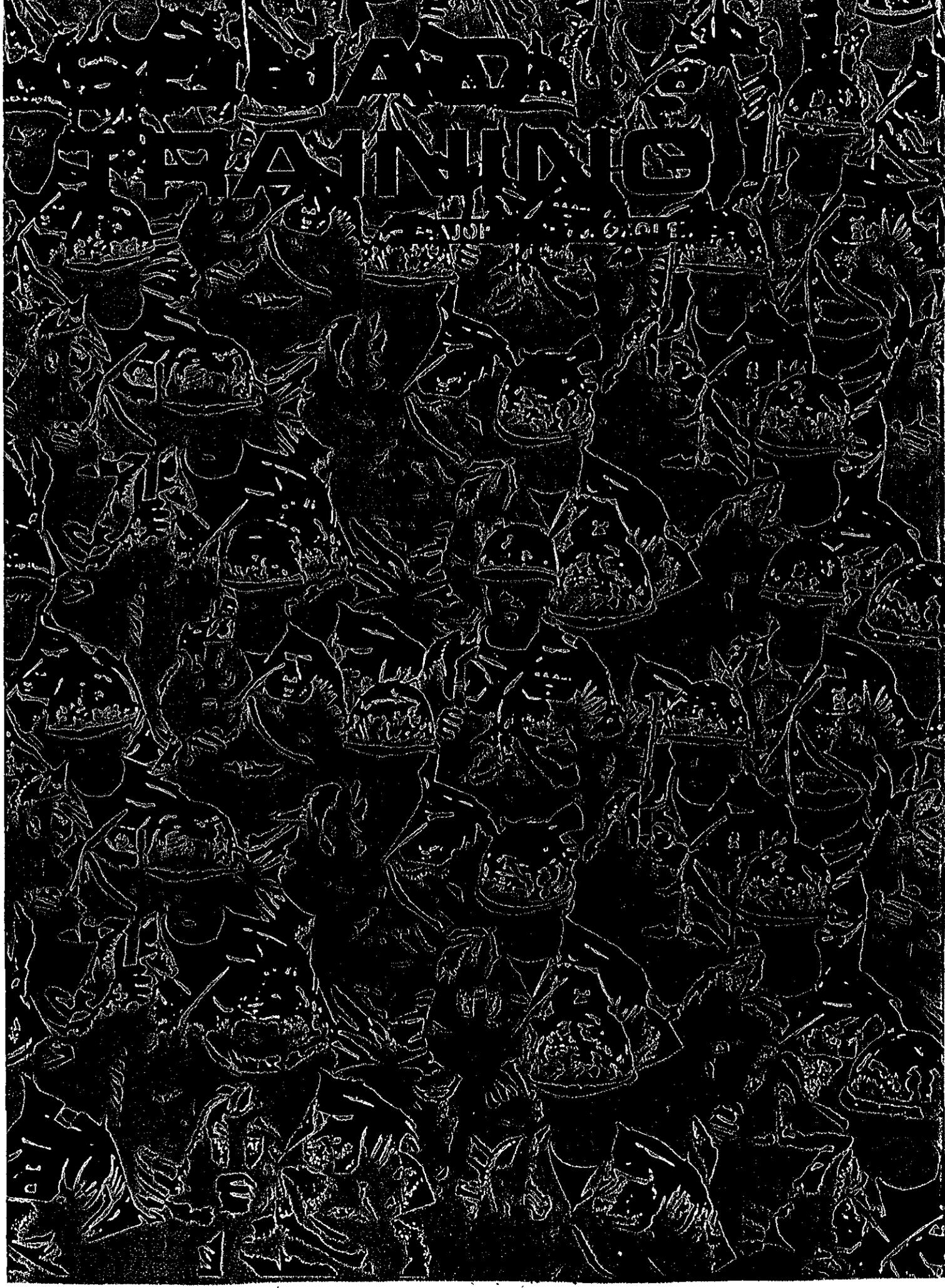


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In an age of increasing specialization, consolidated training conducted at the company or battalion level, or even higher, occupies more and more of the training time available to an infantry unit. In an effort to ensure that the limited number of experienced specialists assigned to his unit will have the greatest effect on training his soldiers in their critical skills, the commander devises a training program in which the best qualified trainers within the unit teach their specialty to as wide an audience as possible.

This approach may appear to solve many of a unit's short-term training problems. But by removing the responsibility for training from the junior leaders in the chain of command, this over-reliance on consolidated training may actually cause more long-range problems than it solves.

Consolidated training ignores two key military leadership maxims: that the leader is responsible for everything his unit does or fails to do, and that any mission is best accomplished at the lowest practical level. These maxims are satisfied best when training is conducted at platoon level, or even better, at squad level. Because such training also offers a unit an opportunity to develop leadership at the lowest and most important levels, the quality of its training improves in the process.

One of the problems with consolidated training is that it demotes the subordinate leader from his position of leadership and makes him a kind of administrative assistant. In that role his primary responsibility is to get his troops to a centralized training location and then to check occasionally to make sure they are at least moderately attentive during the instruction. Sometimes he may be called upon during the practical exercise portion of the instruction to serve as an assistant instructor, supervising part of the class. But even then there may not be any of his own troops in the group. Often he is even further demoted and becomes, like his soldiers, just another student.

RESPONSIBILITY

This demotion can seriously diminish a squad leader's effectiveness, for while the MTOE sees him as a staff sergeant with perhaps six to ten years of experience, he is much more likely to be a junior sergeant, or perhaps even an acting sergeant who recently was just a member of the squad himself. But if he is to function effectively as a true squad leader, in the eyes of his men at least, he must be vested with the authority to lead the squad as well as with the responsibility for leading it. Unless he is given an opportunity to develop and display his leadership talents, he will probably continue to be a peer to them rather than a leader. Besides, denying him the chance to plan and conduct a significant portion of his squad's training also denies him the opportunity to sharpen the leadership skills he needs to become a senior NCO, and it presents an obstacle to the development of the squad as a functioning team.

Another drawback to consolidated training is that it takes away from a squad leader the responsibility for training his squad. If a task is taught at a higher level, it is almost impossible to hold a squad leader accountable for his squad's performance of that task during subsequent applications. A possible danger is that, since he is not likely to be held responsible for that particular task, the squad leader may neglect it to concentrate instead on functions that will directly affect what he sees as his designated responsibility. He may neglect, for example, important technical functions that are often taught at battalion level, such as Dragon gunnery, even though these functions may be essential to the accomplishment of the squad's overall combat mission. After all, the squad leader may reason, they have experts at battalion to handle Dragon training.

The counter-argument here is that the squad leader may indeed lack the necessary training and experience to conduct instruction for his squad on such a technical weapon as the Dragon. But if the battlefield of the next war turns out to be as it is now envisioned — a decentralized one with small units fighting independently — that same squad leader is not going to have an opportunity to consult the battalion's Dragon experts for advice. And if he has not gained the skills necessary to direct the use of all of his weapons in training, he certainly will not be able to develop these skills under the added pressure of combat.

The responsibility of the senior leaders of a company and of a battalion, then, is not just to direct the training of the individual soldier. It is to ensure that their junior leaders develop all the skills they need to conduct the training the squad has to have to accomplish its combat mission. This approach to readiness requires the establishment at the company level of a comprehensive non-commissioned officer development program in which the junior NCO first masters the various squad tasks so that he can later teach them to his men. Within this training structure, the company officers and the battalion experts can most effectively pass on the technical information they have mastered in the schools they have attended by imparting their knowledge to a cadre of leaders who will deliver it in small classes to the individual soldier.

IMMEDIATE RESULT

The immediate result of this approach to training is that the squad leader truly serves as the leader, totally responsible for his squad's performance in every aspect of training. He is given the opportunity to train his own troops and must always be ready to account for their performance. Since he brings to the squad the knowledge he has acquired both through his own experience and through his unit's NCO training, he comes to be regarded as an authority on the subject. Then, as the unit's trainer and leader, he can personally see that his squad meets the standards of performance he and his commander have set for it. He cannot use the familiar excuses for squad

failure, when, for the most part, he and he alone has conducted his squad's training.

A corollary benefit of this approach to training is that a person never masters a subject as thoroughly as when he is required to teach it. In consolidated training this benefit is offered only to the few instructors who do the actual teaching. But in most cases, these instructors are already masters of the task, and most of them have little contact with the soldiers who routinely perform the task. But if each squad leader becomes a proficient instructor in the subject, the unit's expertise is greatly expanded, and a qualified instructor is always available for the soldiers who must perform the skill in which he has been trained.

Another advantage of squad-level training is that it enables a unit to tailor its training to the different levels of training the squads need. Consolidated training assumes that all the students share a common starting point and that all will master the task at the same rate. Further, such training is necessarily oriented toward the lowest level. But the various squads usually do not start with identical training or experience, and nothing is more

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boring to a soldier than to be dragged through training that he has already mastered. Likewise, nothing is more frustrating to a conscientious soldier than undergoing training that assumes he is qualified in a skill he has not yet mastered. The person best able to assess a squad's strengths, weaknesses, and state of readiness is its squad leader. Therefore, he should be the one who ultimately decides, within the limits specified by his unit commander, how much time he should spend on each of the unit's training objectives and what approach will be most effective in training his troops.

This training philosophy does not reduce the role the company commander and the platoon leaders play in directing the unit's training. They must establish the objectives and the standards that the squads must meet, provide the squad leaders with the assets they need to achieve those standards, and see that the standards they

have established are met. Additionally, they must design and conduct the training of the junior NCOs and monitor their effectiveness as trainers and leaders. The squad-level approach to training thus allows the officers and NCOs to return to the traditional relationship in which the officers plan and inspect the unit's activities, and the NCOs implement those plans and prepare the unit for the commander's inspection.

Finally, conducting training at the squad level develops

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a sense of squad identity and teamwork. Too often in the modern Army, the members of a squad live apart and, except for formations and field duty, have little more than an administrative identity as a squad. But when most of their daily activities involve squad exercises under a strong, central leadership figure, a sense of common purpose emerges from the training and carries over into all aspects of unit activities. The squad becomes a functioning body, aware of its strengths and weaknesses, confident in its abilities, and held together by an esprit that is derived from effective small-unit leadership.

For some tasks consolidated training may be a practical approach, and large-scale unit training is logically required for such missions as the rifle company in the assault. But if a commander wants to develop among his junior leaders the leadership necessary to ensure the successful completion of their small-unit missions under all conditions, and if he wants to guarantee the most effective training of his soldiers in their individual skills, he must place his squad leader firmly at the functioning center of his unit's training program.



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