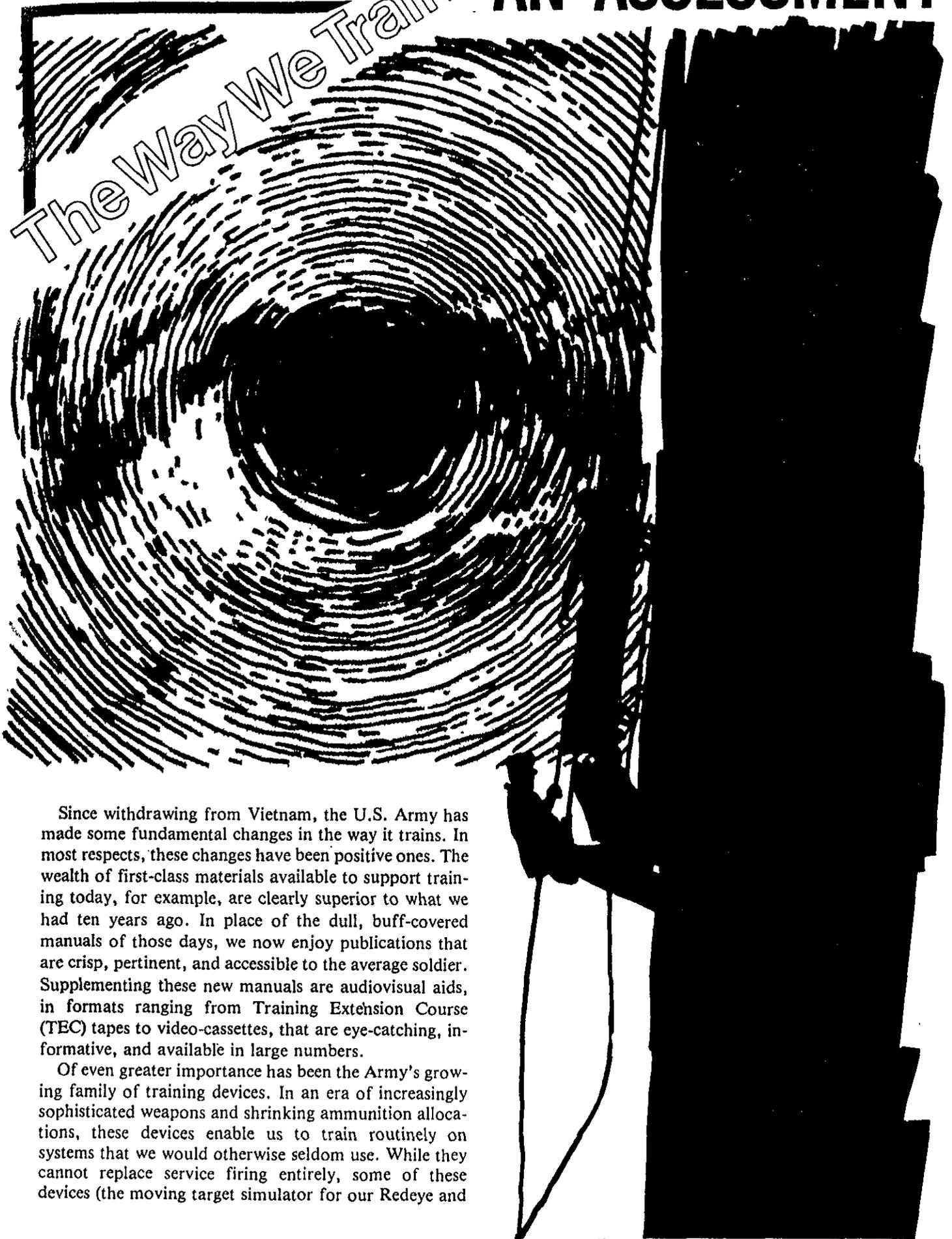


# AN ASSESSMENT

The Way We Train:



Since withdrawing from Vietnam, the U.S. Army has made some fundamental changes in the way it trains. In most respects, these changes have been positive ones. The wealth of first-class materials available to support training today, for example, are clearly superior to what we had ten years ago. In place of the dull, buff-covered manuals of those days, we now enjoy publications that are crisp, pertinent, and accessible to the average soldier. Supplementing these new manuals are audiovisual aids, in formats ranging from Training Extension Course (TEC) tapes to video-cassettes, that are eye-catching, informative, and available in large numbers.

Of even greater importance has been the Army's growing family of training devices. In an era of increasingly sophisticated weapons and shrinking ammunition allocations, these devices enable us to train routinely on systems that we would otherwise seldom use. While they cannot replace service firing entirely, some of these devices (the moving target simulator for our Redeye and

Stinger gunners; ATGM trainers such as the Launch Effects Trainer (LET) and the M70; and call-for-fire trainers such as the Marconi device) have inestimable training value. And standing in a class by itself is MILES (multiple integrated laser engagement system), a training tool that has revolutionized maneuver training.

Although these improvements in training resources have been impressive, they shrink in importance when compared to what has happened to our conceptual approach to training. Here, the past decade has seen profound changes: the whole notion of "train to fight," in which a unit's training schedule derives from its wartime missions; the emphasis on specific conditions and standards to define proficiency for any given task; and, above all, performance-oriented training with its recognition that soldiers learn a skill best by doing it, not by being told how to do it.

Ample resources, sound training principles, and a generation of leaders who believe that training must rank first among a host of competing priorities — all of these add up to formidable improvements. Yet despite these advances — despite, moreover, our good fortune in having soldiers who are talented, eager, and highly motivated — the training actually taking place in our units is often no better than it was when BTMS, ARTEP, and T&EOs were exotic-sounding acronyms rather than everyday practices. Indeed, some old hands will contend that the tactical and technical proficiency that is the proof of good training has actually declined. That is a harsh judgment, and one not easily proved.

Deficiencies in our current training system are more readily felt or experienced than proved. One senses it in the frustration of the young commander who never quite "gets it all together." One reads about it in the "lessons learned" at the National Training Center. One sees it in the performance of units, whether in major exercises or in routine daily training. Somehow we have fallen short in our efforts to translate the improvements in our training resources and the changes in our training concepts into better training and better units.

## OBSERVATIONS

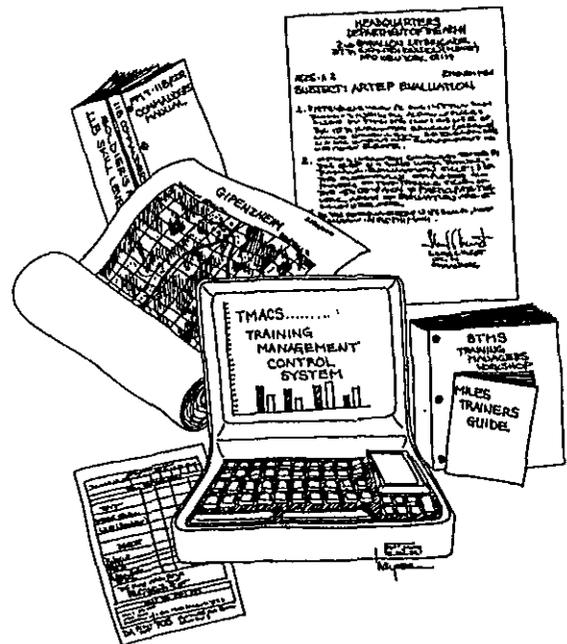
Here are a few observations as to why that is the case:

We have misconstrued the Battalion Training Management System (BTMS). A basic premise of BTMS is that training occurs in a continuing cycle of planning, resourcing, execution, and evaluation. Each phase of the cycle is essential, and each deserves attention, but execution must still be the most important of the four. It is only in the conduct of training that soldiers improve their proficiency. In practice, though, we tend to focus on evaluation as the crux of the process. We have become infatuated, in fact, with formal evaluations. As a result, our training has suffered.

BTMS tells us that evaluations ought to be part of all good training. Yet if good training can always accom-

modate some useful form of evaluation, the reverse is seldom the case. When one of those events that we know as "formal evaluations" is scheduled, you can bet that its training value will be questionable.

The tendency today is to call evaluations "tests," and rightly so. "Test" is a good term, one that captures the essential difference between training and evaluation.



Training, after all, is teaching. It is a deliberate process; it moves at a pace determined by the progress of the individual or the unit being trained; it permits us to do over whatever we fail to get right the first time.

Testing, on the other hand, is quite different. Fast paced and tightly scheduled, it allows no time for doing things over. A well-designed test puts us through our paces under intense pressure, assigns us a grade of pass or fail, and sends us packing back to garrison. And more often than not, once we get there, we start gearing up for the next test.

This emphasis on formal evaluation is destructive for a couple of reasons. First, it misleads our commanders, particularly at the battalion or brigade level. Like the rest of us, commanders have only a limited amount of energy. Unlike the rest of us, they often have more to do than a single human being can reasonably accomplish. One aspect of the art of command surely must be knowing how to use with greatest effect the personal energy and talent a commander has.

Whatever his wishes might be, no commander can devote more than a portion of his time to training. And when external evaluations dominate the training calendar, the commander puts his emphasis *there* — on those evaluations. His interest and usually his presence ensure that the evaluations are conducted professionally. But it also means that, during much of the time he can devote to training, the commander's role is essentially a passive one. The battalion commander who faithfully accom-

panies his platoons or companies through their tests is hardly more than an observer. By restricting himself to this role, he deprives his units of the teaching and coaching that he is so qualified to give.

Reducing the emphasis on evaluations, on the other hand, would allow our commanders a more active role in actually conducting training. Instead of being perennial senior evaluators, our field-grade commanders would become chief trainers. Their units would be the better for it.

Over-emphasizing evaluations also leads us to allocate resources improperly. We all operate under constrained resources. In the continental United States, the problem might be money. In Europe, it might be access to major training areas such as Grafenwoehr or Hohenfels. Whatever the cause, the result is that we have precious few days in the field or on the range. The rarer these days are, the more valuable they become. They allow us to fire our weapons, to maneuver without restrictions, perhaps even to integrate live-fire and maneuver into a single exercise. In short, they allow us to do all the things that we are prohibited from doing in garrison or at local training areas. Such days provide the best *learning* opportunities a unit has.

The problem is that, all too often, we don't use them that way. Our tendency to overrate evaluations causes us to set aside the best *learning* opportunities for *testing*. Whatever is left over goes to training. Even with the latest in training devices, these leftovers are usually inadequate. In designing our training programs, how much more sense it would make if we first set aside the prime resources we needed to achieve proficiency and only then earmarked whatever was left for evaluating our progress toward achieving that proficiency. As a result, we would have fewer "tests" on the calendar and would be able to devote more time and better resources to the training itself.

If *evaluation* is one word whose de-emphasis would benefit training, *management* is another. We have to admit, however, that as our Army has become more "business-like," management has become a concept that we cannot completely ignore. At certain echelons, in fact, managerial skills are essential to success. But the important thing is that we must not let our enthusiasm for management techniques override our common-sense understanding of what leaders owe their soldiers.

## DOERS

At the battalion and company levels, leaders must be primarily *doers*, not *managers*. Indeed, too much emphasis on management actually detracts from training, because it teaches our leaders bad habits.

Management entails defining objectives, setting policies, making plans, and allocating resources. The manager's duty station is his desk. There, he receives reports, analyzes data, and immerses himself in the paperwork that is the manager's operational medium.

Yet the successful battalion or company commander can no more train his unit from behind his desk than he can fight it from inside a command post. In both cases, relying on someone else's impressions will mislead him. In both cases, too, he must operate out front if he expects to understand fully and to influence effectively what his unit is doing.

How, then, do we keep the requirements to manage training in proper perspective? We begin by seeing that the signals we send to our subordinates are the right ones. Years ago, General Bruce Clarke taught us that a unit does well only those things that the boss checks. But there is a corollary to that familiar axiom: people give the boss what they think he wants. Commanders who put great stock in all the paraphernalia of training management — the statistics, charts, reports, and briefings — will have subordinates who emphasize those same things. The battalion commander who doesn't want his commanders to be statisticians must show by his actions what he does expect them to be. What is rewarded, what is tolerated, what is punished — these are the cues that shape their behavior.

Ultimately, defining the proper role of training management in units comes down to a question of efficiency versus effectiveness. The Training Management Control System (TMACS) provides an ideal illustration. TMACS is the fulfillment of a training manager's fantasy. Imagine! A computer at the fingertips of every battalion S3! Its advocates claim that TMACS enables units to manage their resources down to the last gallon of fuel, the last round of ammunition, and the last minute of a battalion training day. Such efficient use of resources is commendable. Yet the apparent economy of such careful management is really transparent. It may produce reams of data, but it cannot produce a single combat-ready soldier. Only the back-breaking, repetitive, frequently inexact process of teaching can do that.

The only effective use of training resources is the one that pays off in improved soldier proficiency. When we try to convince our leaders that grinding out computer data fulfills their responsibility as trainers, we do them a disservice. Rather, we need to convince them that teaching — organizing it, conducting it, and supervising it — is what training is really all about.

The 1981 edition of FM 100-5, Operations, offers some fascinating reading. Among its more intriguing aspects is the emphasis it places on using mission orders to govern tactical operations. Called by the Germans *Auftragstaktik*, the concept of mission tactics signifies the ultimate in decentralization. It assumes that so long as a soldier understands his commander's overall intent, he can direct the efforts of his unit to support that intent. Detailed guidance, complicated overlays, or hefty operations orders are unnecessary. Knowing what the boss wants to accomplish, the soldier can go to work.

Reliance on mission orders has an honorable tradition in our Army. Like many equally honorable traditions, however, it did not survive the Vietnam War. Whether or

not efforts by the authors of FM 100-5 will be enough to revive the use of mission tactics remains to be seen. But the continuing emphasis on centralization in training does not bode well for the outcome.

The point needs to be made: We cannot plan to govern combat operations according to one set of principles while conducting day-to-day affairs according to a contradictory set. Centralization continues to be the order of the day in the way we train, but this tendency is inconsistent with the spirit of AirLand Battle doctrine. Moreover, it does not provide an effective solution to long-term training deficiencies.

Most often, the centralization of training reflects a frustrated commander's quick-fix, last-ditch attempt to deal with a specific problem that won't go away. Tired of watching his company commanders wrestle unsuccessfully with the intricacies of Dragon training, for example, the weary battalion commander says, "#\*!!#, I'll do it myself." Doing it himself means taking the best-qualified NCOs from throughout the battalion and forming them into a Dragon committee to conduct a rotating training program for each company. Result? Dragon proficiency increases for a while. Yet such centralization also yields other results, though they may be less apparent at first:

- Since the committee's brief visit cannot create a cadre of trainers in each unit, the companies still lack the infrastructure they need to maintain Dragon proficiency. Since the Dragon committee can hardly operate on a permanent footing, any apparent gains rapidly waste away.

- The company commanders now understand that they are no longer held to account for Dragon training; it has become a battalion issue and will remain one. The battalion commander has thus inadvertently undermined his unit commander's overall sense of responsibility for training their crews, sections, and platoons.

This hypothetical Dragon problem is probably only one of twenty issues of comparable urgency. The battalion commander can't centralize everything and control it directly, training his battalion as if it were an oversized platoon. Nor should he want to, since doing so would destroy the chain of command and reduce the unit's overall effectiveness.

The payoff from good training varies inversely with the echelon at which it is conducted. The lower the echelon, the greater the benefit. Yet conducting productive training at the lower levels — where young leaders deal with soldiers from day to day — ranks among our greatest challenges. Two prerequisites come immediately to mind: We need to resist the allure of centralization — no easy task in an environment where the demands for immediate results are often compelling; and we need to pay more than lip service to training our leaders. For it is only after we have helped our sergeants and lieutenants become good trainers themselves that we can expect unit-level training to be meaningful and effective.

Although the Army's basic approach to training has generally improved over the past ten years, two excep-

tions to that statement are worth noting. One is sustainment training — a good idea that may well be impractical. The other is individual training. Here, ironically, the wheels of change have brought back, in modified form, a concept that training reformers once rejected.

## EXCEPTIONS

As a concept, sustainment training *sounds* good. It begins by recognizing — correctly — that busy units cannot train with equal fervor on all skills all the time. Whenever possible, commanders should differentiate between areas in which their units have achieved proficiency and those in which weaknesses remain. The wise commander then should concentrate his effort on corrective training in those weak areas. Yet even the best unit can ill afford to ignore entirely the skills in which they are already proficient. Common sense tells us that if soldiers don't practice skills they already know well, their proficiency in those skills will decay. To minimize that decay, therefore, we schedule enough practice to sustain an acceptable level of proficiency.

As an approach to making the most of our limited training resources, sustainment seems to make sense. But applying this notion assumes a condition that seldom holds in our units — personnel stability. To sustain the proficiency of a tank crew between gunnery qualification periods, for example, requires that the same people stay in the same crew positions. Yet our units commonly experience personnel turnover rates of 50 to 60 percent per year. The resulting turbulence within companies and platoons is even greater as crews and squads are reshuffled further because of schools, promotions, disciplinary actions, or seemingly essential internal changes. It thus becomes all but impossible for units to establish the foundation of proficiency that should be the object of sustainment efforts. Therefore, our training focuses instead primarily on incorporating a continuous flow of new arrivals into the unit.

This requirement extends far beyond the obvious task of completing the training of young AIT graduates. "Rookies" in a unit come in all shapes and sizes: a middle-grade NCO who is joining a unit that has equipment he has never encountered before (ITVs or M60A3s or TACFIRE); a pilot who is trading a humdrum aviation battalion for air cavalry; a senior NCO who is returning to troops after years as a recruiter or a reserve advisor. As pros, all of these people have the potential to contribute effectively to their unit, but first, they must get extensive training. In units suffering from severe turbulence, this process of integrating new members into the team dominates the training program, and the very notion of sustainment becomes a fantasy.

Finally, as we survey the Army's overall approach to training, surely individual training is the most disappointing. Our recently implemented Individual Training and Evaluation Program (ITEP) is a notable example.

ITEP is disturbing on several counts. First, in spite of the word "training" in its name, ITEP does not train — it tests. We are fooling ourselves, in fact, if we imagine that supporting this program meets our obligation to train individual soldiers.

Most disturbing is the importance ITEP attaches to written tests. This directly violates our professed commitment to performance-oriented, hands-on training. Worse still is the motivation behind this testing. Virtually no one believes that written examinations improve or even adequately measure a soldier's proficiency. But test scores do give distant personnel managers a convenient tool to use in deciding which soldiers to retain and which to separate from the service.

Besides, using written tests to decide who stays in the Army and who leaves shows a fundamental misunderstanding of what it takes to be a good soldier. Granted, all other things being equal, the smart soldier is preferable to the soldier who is not so smart. But the premise doesn't wash. Other things seldom *are* equal. And it's the "other things" — enthusiasm, initiative, loyalty, a willingness to learn, a knack for operating the machines of war — that make some soldiers great. Written tests measure none of these qualities.

Last of all, one gets the uneasy feeling that ITEP comes perilously close to betraying the soldier's trust in his leaders. We, the leaders, are pledged to the soldier's welfare. But are we fulfilling that pledge when we subject him to a selection process that we know does not and cannot properly measure his value?

## SOLUTIONS

What can we do to compensate for the existing deficiencies in our training programs? To some degree, the solutions lie beyond the troop leader's power to influence. Some of the things we need — such as a meaningful and substantive program of individual training — must await policy changes at the highest levels. Yet, however welcome such initiatives would be, we must do more in the meantime than grouse about how cruel the fates have been to us.

Field commanders retain the ability to determine the training climate within their units. Each of them can do several things to make that climate a healthy one:

- He can give first priority in resources and in his own energies to training instead of to evaluating. (Our aim

should be to improve proficiency first, and only then to measure it.)

- He can operate on a small scale with emphasis on the fundamentals of gunnery and maneuver, avoiding grandiose schemes that absorb more in planning, coordination, and execution than they are worth in training benefit. (Bigger is not necessarily better.)

- He can make every leader a trainer, including himself. To do that, he must show his subordinates by his personal example the quality of training that he expects from them.

- He can train his junior leaders. (Only by insuring proficiency among our captains, lieutenants, and sergeants can he guarantee that good training will "trickle down" to his squads and crews. Centralization is no panacea. And leaders who know how to train are the only alternative to centralization.)

- He can reduce the overhead of training management by taking a hard look at what reports or briefings his subordinates really need to give him. Instead of requiring them to report on what they're doing, he should see for himself what they're up to. The result could be vastly more enlightening.

- He can avoid mistaking events themselves for a training plan. Instead, he should identify the needs of his unit and be realistic in plotting the path to that goal. (No leader will get there all at once — he may not get there at all — but the aim is worth the effort.)

As the saying goes, "Training is the Battle-Link." Training as preparation for battle must remain the principal focus of our peacetime activities. The complexities of our profession are such that we will never get everything right. But few of us really find that discouraging. Most of us optimistically push on, striving for some achievable perfection. Taking a detached look at where we are today is a prerequisite to moving ahead. Self-criticism is seldom easy, but the willingness of trainers to take that detached look at themselves may well be their primary obligation to the soldiers they will lead in battle tomorrow.



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