

Cohesion in a Non-COHORT Company

CAPTAIN MIKE HUGHES

Army leaders have long been interested in promoting cohesion at company level. Recently this interest has led to the Cohesion Operational Readiness and Training (COHORT) system, which keeps a group of combat arms soldiers together for a complete unit "life cycle" of three years. This COHORT effort is truly commendable, but the fact is that most combat arms officers will never be lucky enough to serve in or command a COHORT company. We therefore need to examine closely ways to develop close-knit teams in all company-sized units. There are several practical ways a commander can build a cohesive, proud, combat ready company that has many of the desirable characteristics of a COHORT company.

Obviously, a company commander is responsible for establishing goals, setting priorities, and charting the long-term direction for his men. Accordingly, he must cultivate a command climate in which each soldier will know he is part of a TEAM. The essence of effective leadership is building *winning teams* in our companies so they can be prepared to fight outnumbered and win. The commander must remind himself and his chain of command that all efforts must focus on reinforcing the value of teamwork, because it is a very important combat multiplier.

The way the daily business of a company is conducted has a tremendous effect on unit cohesion, even in such daily tasks as cleaning the motor pool or conducting "police call." Often an entire platoon or company can be observed simply going through the motions and wasting countless hours do-

ing such jobs. A far better approach might be to assign motor pool clean-up or police call to a specific squad each week. This would enable a squad leader to employ his squad to accomplish a mission in which the results are obvious to everyone. An innovative platoon sergeant could add a touch of competition by determining which squad had improved the company or motor pool area the most during its week of clean-up duty. This is a simple, inexpensive way of building small-unit pride.

SMALL-UNIT INTEGRITY

In fact, I believe a company should always assign details and taskings in accordance with small-unit integrity. Setting up camouflage nets around a field mess site, operating a booth at a division's carnival, and building a barbeque pit are just a few examples of things I have seen small units do to develop pride and teamwork. A commander should look for these opportunities and should not always pick his best unit to do the job. The weak unit will grow stronger with exercise, just as a muscle will. And with proper coaching from the chain of command, the worst squad in a platoon may soon challenge all the others.

In addressing his subordinate leaders, a commander should use "we" and "our" instead of "I" and "my." In a truly close-knit unit, the soldiers, too, feel a sense of ownership; they are proud of their unit and they will refer to it as "ours."

The leadership style of a company's first sergeant, platoon leaders, and platoon sergeants is worthy of close

attention. Team building is their business, too, and its success depends on their enthusiastic support. A cynical platoon sergeant, for example, must not be allowed to stifle a commander's efforts by tasking his soldiers piecemeal to do things or by constantly reorganizing his platoon just to keep his squads exactly the same size.

A commander might use meetings and classes to observe the degree of cohesion in his company: Do the platoon leaders seek input and feedback from their squad leaders? Do squad members sit together in class? Do they make an effort to help each other accomplish the task being taught? Is the chain of command *with* the soldiers? Indicators such as these may tell a commander something about the effectiveness of his team-building efforts. It also may be beneficial for him to know how his soldiers spend their off-duty hours. Do squads do things together or does everyone go his own separate way?

Without question, training is the most important thing any company does and commanders must strive to promote cohesion in both the planning and the execution phases of all training events. First, in the planning phase, a commander might ask himself how much the platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, squad leaders, and team leaders really contribute to the weekly training schedule. All too often the company commander lets himself be overwhelmed by events and ends up writing the company's training schedule at the last minute to meet a suspense to the S-3 or the battalion commander. (I know, because I have done it myself!) Including the chain of

command in the process is vital if training efforts are to be focused on team-building. Everyone in the chain must be made to feel like part of the team.

In the actual conduct of training, a commander might notice how many soldiers in the unit (squad, platoon, team) are actually present for the training. Is unit integrity being maintained, or are the soldiers being conveniently grouped into "orders" or "stations"? We must not let the small-unit team be dissolved for the sake of convenience.

The critique phase of training is also important. This is where the "coach" or trainer provides the team with valuable feedback. Indeed, a thorough, professionally done critique is the key to the mastery of tactical concepts at the small-unit level. The following are some suggestions for con-

ducting a successful critique that will promote teamwork:

- Have the team members participate. Let them talk through the events and discover the teaching points for themselves.
- Do not rush. Let each soldier or subordinate leader speak his mind. Each must feel he is an important part of the team.
- Try to conduct the critique from a vantage point where you can observe the ground on which the action took place. If possible, walk back over the ground while discussing the specific teaching points. Try to relate the concepts to the terrain and let the soldiers see how it all works.
- Let the small-unit team practice it again until they do it right. This will help ensure that they really have learned the skill. (If the Green Bay Packers perfected the sweep through

repetition, 1st Squad can excel in the movement to contact!)

Of course, there are countless other ways to promote pride and cohesion in a company. A smart company commander realizes that his company will be no better than its small-unit teams — his machinegun teams, fire teams, mortar gun squads, and squads. He must direct every effort toward developing the bonds that establish, train, and sustain cohesive small-unit teams.

COHORT companies do not have exclusive claim on cohesion. In the end, no formal program will ensure success in small-unit team building. Cohesion in *our* Army is up to *us!*

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First Class: An Attitude

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Some time ago, Captain Michael T. McEwen proposed in *INFANTRY* magazine that the Army establish a combat fitness badge (CFB). The badge would be awarded to soldiers who achieved certain high scores on each of the events of the Army Physical Readiness Test (APRT), and who also passed a combat water survival test, qualified sharpshooter or better with their individual weapons, and completed a five-mile endurance run within a certain time limit. The badge would then have to be recertified annually. (See "A Fitness Badge," July-August 1983, p. 9.)

I haven't heard any more about this proposal, but it may be a good idea; it may provide the change of attitude necessary for soldiers to excel at physical fitness. I found out how important attitude can be a few years ago when I

attended the U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College Course.

In this course, the students from the Marine Corps must take the USMC Physical Fitness Test (PFT), which consists of the pullup or chinup (20 is maximum score), the situp (80 is maximum), and the three-mile run (18 minutes or less). The overall PFT ratings are Fail, Third Class, Second Class, or First Class.

Each "sister service" student has the option of taking the USMC PFT or his own service's test. The dozen or so Army officers in the class usually choose to take the PFT instead of the APRT for reasons of interservice "cooperation" and peer pressure (you guess which dominates). In my class, many of the Army officers had come from Special Forces, Ranger, and airborne duty and expected to pass the

PFT easily. Even though I hadn't done a pullup in more than ten years, I didn't expect much trouble passing it either. As commander of a company in an Army Reserve Special Forces group before attending the College, I had kept myself in condition to meet the same higher APRT standards my soliders had to meet to qualify for airborne or Special Forces training. On the day of the test, therefore, I did almost twice the minimum number of pullups for my age group and was pleased that my pushups and three-mile run time put me about halfway into the Second Class range.

Overall, we Army officers felt we had done well. Some even scored First Class (we had a couple of marathon runners and a recent Ranger Course graduate). Our attitude, for the most part, had been geared toward *passing*