

FORUM & FEATURES



The Best Kept Secret

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Some dramatic changes have been made in the Infantry Officer Basic Course (IOBC) in the past ten years — and with them also some changes in the role of the officers who are assigned to conduct that training. Still, too few Infantry officers fully understand what is involved in training newly commissioned lieutenants to take their places in the Army.

As a result, we at the School Brigade of the Infantry School must spend considerable time explaining it to everyone involved. This includes the majors and captains who are being considered (or have been nominated) for jobs as company commanders and platoon trainers in the Brigade's 2d Training Battalion. More important, it also includes the personnel managers and assignment officers at MILPERCEN who manage the careers of these officers and also the senior officers who must advise them and make critical decisions about their futures.

Today's IOBC is not the course many infantry officers will recall. Gone are the days when IOBC students were given most of their instruction in classrooms in Infantry Hall with a 1:100 or 1:200 teacher-student ratio, or in a bleacher-type environment on a range someplace on Fort Benning. The current course is a 16-week, hands-on, hard-skill, field-oriented program of instruction. Eighty percent of the training is conducted in the field by the IOBC company commanders and platoon

trainers, with the platoon trainers being the cornerstones of this drill-based training program.

The 2d Training Battalion (IOBC) is a TDA battalion consisting of five companies; each company has five platoons. During a training cycle, a company is assigned 180 to 200 newly commissioned Infantry officers to train. The company commander, an Infantry major, is expected to set the leadership tone and conduct part of the training. More important, to ensure that high standards are attained and maintained, he spends the bulk of his time supervising the five platoon trainers and the ten NCOs (two per platoon) who actually conduct most of the training. In his 18 months of company command, he will train more than 600 newly commissioned Infantry officers for the Active Army, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard.

PLATOON TRAINER

A platoon trainer is an Infantry captain who trains and branch certifies approximately 40 lieutenants per cycle, or about 120 per year. He conducts more than 80 percent of the training for these lieutenants, the bulk of which is in the field, oriented on basic combat skills and tactics from fire team through platoon level.

The 16-week course of instruction in-

cludes six different field training exercises. (Only about nine days of the course are nontraining days, although we are looking at ways to further reduce week-end training.) The exercises begin with individual and crew-served weapons, individual skills, and movement techniques, and graduate through team, squad, platoon, and company operations. The platoon trainer must be an expert in all of these. He must have a grasp of the full range of weapons, drills, and tactics that platoon leaders might use in any of a multitude of missions or situations.

The student officers are introduced to a field environment during the second and third weeks of the course when they take part in numerous day and night navigational exercises and individual and fire team movements. These are followed by a series of practical certifications, qualifications, or familiarizations with Infantry platoon weapons. During the sixth and seventh weeks of the program, the training is devoted to NBC, communications, and indirect fire.

At the course's midpoint, the student officers themselves begin to feel the weight of their leadership responsibilities. The tactical leadership course, which consists of a series of 20 drills conducted over a period of seven days, gives each officer an opportunity to conduct tactical training in front of his peers. Given a tactical situation, a student officer instructs a

group of his peers in a combat-type drill, rehearses them on the drill, and finally executes the drill with that same group. Each student officer receives immediate feedback on his performance. During these seven days, a lieutenant is taught how to train, lead and fight, and how to build a cohesive team.

Up to this point a platoon trainer's role is primarily that of instructor. For the remainder of the course he serves as a mentor to his students. The four remaining field exercises are designed to train and challenge each Infantry lieutenant in offensive and defensive operations from squad to company level. Each is exposed to various situations and terrain, including urban, and operates as light infantry, air assault, infantry, and mechanized infantry. The exercises include a doctrinal overview, tactical exercises without troops, terrain walks, and some free-play.

The platoon trainer's job is to stimulate each lieutenant's tactical thought process, a job made more challenging because of the great differences in the students' experience and military knowledge. (Infantry officers are commissioned from more than 370 different institutions and programs including the U.S. Military Academy, the Active Army officer candidate school (OCS) program, several state National Guard OCS programs, and a wide range of Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) programs. The ROTC programs, while similar in many respects, vary from school to school.) Although the students start from these different points, it is the job of the platoon trainers to see that when they graduate the students all have the competence and the confidence to take charge.

It should come as no great surprise to anyone that the Infantry School emphasizes physical fitness in its IOBC program, and this is another aspect of leadership development in which the company commander and the platoon trainers are deeply involved. The recent emphasis on having Infantry lieutenants attend Ranger School has helped to focus and intensify the physical training program. (All Active Duty lieutenants completing IOBC are given a chance to attend the Ranger School before leaving Fort Benning.) Thus, the PT goal in IOBC is the same as the PT requirement for entering Ranger School. In



short, IOBC students get in shape, and stay that way.

In addition to intensive training, the course also offers some fun and relaxation. For example, company commanders, trainers, and their wives spend many duty and nonduty hours conducting a wide variety of social activities. These activities are designed to afford the student officers and their wives an opportunity to gain an understanding and appreciation for the Army's customs, courtesies, and traditions. We believe these activities enable the young wives to be much more at ease in the Army environment.

It is obvious, then, that IOBC company commanders and trainers are busy men. In fact, the intensity of effort, especially training, equals or exceeds that of any TOE battalion I have ever seen. For the Infantry captain, a tour as a platoon trainer is an excellent *springboard for serving as a company commander, or a battalion S-3 or XO, or a brigade S-3.* For the Infantry major, an IOBC company offers command in a dynamic, challenging training and leadership environment and is a wonderful opportunity to have a positive effect on the lives of some of our best young men. In my view, there are few positions in the Army that better prepare a major for battalion command.

Together, an IOBC company commander and his platoon trainers are responsible for developing combat Infantry platoon leaders who are tactically, technically, and personally competent; professional in appearance and behavior; physically fit; and confident of their abilities. By the very nature of their duties and re-

sponsibilities, and of their close relationship with young and impressionable officers, their influence is felt throughout the Total Army. In addition, these men are the true groundbreakers in the Army's new mentoring concept of training and development.

A captain who wants the challenge of learning while he develops newly commissioned Infantry officers may be a good candidate for the job of platoon trainer. (He must be an IOAC graduate competitive in his year group and must have commanded a company and preferably attended Ranger School.)

An Infantry major who is seeking the challenge of leading, training, and developing young officers; who wants to stay physically fit and keep abreast of new concepts of training doctrine; and who relishes the joy of training and leading may be a good candidate for the job of IOBC company commander. (He must be a graduate of a staff college.)

Any officer who is interested and meets these qualifications should give us a call. If he is accepted, I can assure him it will be one of the most challenging and rewarding jobs he will ever have.



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