

Squad Training

A Squad Leader's Thoughts

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To win in combat, an infantry unit must be proficient in its tactics and the employment of its weapons, and squad level is the place where it all starts. Many times, though, the collective or individual training of a squad is cancelled or reduced because of a lack of time or resources.

What can be done to improve squad training? First, all leaders must strive to develop a training plan that will enable a squad to build on the tasks it already knows, as well as to maintain its proficiency in those tasks. Any successful training plan must include a building block scheme to meet these goals, and the plan must start with the individual. Each squad member must be proficient at his job, from the squad leader on down to the last rifleman, or collective training will suffer.

There are many things to consider in developing a plan for squad training. The following are only a few of them:

- **What has the squad done recently in its training?** It doesn't make much sense to train a squad again this week on the same tasks as last week. If that training was done properly, the squad has already achieved proficiency at those tasks.
- **What is coming in the way of field time?** Knowing this, the chain of command can plan for squad training in the field to make the most of the available time and resources.
- **What tasks in the mission essential task list (METL) have not been worked on recently (or at all)?** Each unit's METL is different, of course, depending on its organization, but each METL is set up so that a particular unit's most likely

missions are high on its list and the least likely are low on its list. But a squad should be trained even in its least likely missions.

To have an effective training plan, all leaders need to communicate ideas and information among themselves, both up and down the chain of command, so that the proper resources can be allocated for each task. One of the best ways to do this is to look at the method of training that is to be used in training each task.

BATTLE DRILLS

To establish a standard method of handling various situations, the Army has developed battle drills. A battle drill provides the basis on which a squad reacts to a given situation, and it is widely accepted that the *crawl*, *walk* and *run* method of training is the best way to teach a battle drill.

In the *crawl* phase, the squad leader may use a chalkboard or sand table to help his soldiers visualize a drill as he explains it. This phase of the training gives the soldiers the basic idea of how a particular drill works and what each individual's job is in that drill. It also prepares them for the next phase of training.

The *walk* phase is just that—a walk-through of the whole drill. This allows the soldiers to do the drill and still ask questions about it. It also allows the trainer to clear up any misunderstandings about the drill and its execution. Because this is the phase that really trains the squad in a drill, the walk-through should

be done as many times as necessary to make the squad understand.

Once it is clear that the squad members understand the drill, it is time to put it all together in the *run* phase—a full-blown execution of the battle drill with no stops, no questions. The squad members go through the entire drill and at the end receive a critique of their performance. The critique should include the things they did right, the things they did wrong, and the ways in which they can improve upon their execution of the drill next time. The trainer, who now acts as the evaluator, needs to keep in mind that he is evaluating principle, not technique. So long as the squad adheres to the principles of the drill, the technique is secondary. Various techniques can be discussed, of course, and even incorporated into the drill so long as the principles are not altered.

The *run* phase should be as realistic as possible. The use of an opposing force (OPFOR), blank ammunition, and the MILES system, when they are available, is ideal for this purpose. Too, the terrain chosen should meet the needs of the drill and should be the most favorable on which to execute it. Once the squad achieves proficiency on this terrain, it will be better prepared to adapt the drill to other situations and other terrain.

When the squad is proficient in a number of drills, the complexity of its training should be increased. A good way to do this is to combine these drills into a situational training exercise (STX), which gives leaders a way to evaluate the squad's proficiency in a series of battle drills without all the planning and sup-

port required to set up an ARTEP.

An STX should be planned so that the battle drills relate logically to each other and flow easily from one drill to the next. Again, the use of a good OPFOR and the MILES system will contribute to realism. Even though an STX is not as comprehensive or complex as an ARTEP, it is an effective way for squad and platoon leaders to determine a squad's weak areas and plan to correct those weaknesses.

An STX can be more challenging if it is made into a live fire exercise, which is one of the best training sessions any squad can have. It not only includes the execution of battle drills, but also gives the squad members confidence in their weapons and in their ability to work as a team and win.

In bringing together the time and resources for quality training, planning is the key. One idea used in the 1st Armored Division in Europe was to dedicate one day a week to collective squad training. The hours from 0700 to

1200 were used to train each squad in the battle drills it needed to work on. Since this training was scheduled for the same day each week, it was easy for a company XO to plan the training and provide the necessary support.

The whole chain of command, however, had to work together. The squad leaders, platoon sergeant, and platoon leader, for example, would have a training meeting and plan the training for at least the following month and sometimes as far ahead as three months. They worked out every possible detail in these meetings, and since the training was a regular item on the schedule, the leaders could build upon each training session. Although some of the designated days had to be used for platoon training, most of them were devoted entirely to squad training.

Since the *crawl, walk, and run* method takes time, a squad could train in only one drill at a time on any given training day. After three or four of these sessions,

though, one day was dedicated to an STX that combined all of this training. Even with FTXs, ARTEPs, and other commitments, a good 30 to 45 days of training could be done in a year. What commander would not grab at the opportunity to get that much squad training time?

This kind of scheduling may not work in every unit because of differing missions, but the idea of regular dedicated collective squad training time does have enough merit to warrant further study by all commanders, especially at the company and battalion level.

Battle is the ultimate test of a unit's training, and battles are won or lost at the small unit level. For anyone who is trying to form a winning unit, the squad is the place to start.

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A Physical Training SOP

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A high level of fitness is basic to the armed forces, especially to the soldiers in infantry units. Unfortunately, though, our PT on the whole is not very good and does not fulfill its purpose of keeping us in condition to go to war. In fact, in some units it barely sustains our soldiers at a minimum level of fitness.

One of the problems with PT is that it is not only boring but also fails to challenge our soldiers, many of whom want to be challenged and stressed. With some attention to these problems, PT can be made better.

The following, a portion of a PT SOP that I wrote for an infantry company, is

offered in the hope that it will stimulate thought on the subject and lead other commanders to develop even better programs for their own units. The particulars of a program are secondary, though, to the principles of doing good PT, making it interesting, offering a little variety, and providing a forum for leadership development within a unit.

Company SOP for PT

General Procedures:

- Each platoon will be responsible for the company's physical training for a week at a time. A rotating schedule will be kept by the first sergeant.

- The assigned platoon will be entirely responsible for conducting PT during its week. This includes establishing routes, setting the pace, coordinating all the required support and safety measures, and completely leading the PT session. This platoon will also lead the remedial PT session at the end of its week.

- The basic schedule is only a guide for the basic PT program; deviation is authorized and encouraged. The only requirement is that the PT be productive, challenging, and safe. Any changes to the basic schedule will be briefed to the company commander the preceding week and the necessary information will be posted