

by a *NO GO* answer.

The NGMTU suggests that additional copies of the checklist be made so that, once the training has been completed, the information can be transferred to a "hard copy" for the unit's training files. Any

problems that were encountered, along with their solutions, will then be available for reference the next time the unit conducts range firing.

Anyone who would like to obtain a copy of the checklist for his unit may

write to the National Guard Marksmanship Unit, ATTN: Major Jim Henderson, P.O. Box 17904, Nashville, TN 37217-0904 or call Major Henderson at (615) 361-4600, Extension 386 or AUTOVON 446-6386.

The Platoon Leader

Keys to Success

LIEUTENANT DANIEL F. SULLIVAN

When he receives his first assignment as a platoon leader, a new lieutenant also receives a great opportunity. Preparing to lead 30 or more soldiers into the heat of battle is exciting, demanding, and challenging.

The qualities necessary to become a good leader develop from an officer's education, personality, and willingness to learn. To accept the responsibility for his mission and his soldiers, a platoon leader has to force himself to mature quickly. It takes a high level of self-discipline for a platoon leader to work with noncommissioned officers who have five to ten years of service and to gain the confidence of his soldiers.

In my years as a lieutenant, I have discovered several proven leadership traits that are important to the process of becoming a good platoon leader. This is not a school-book solution; it is only a tool to help a new lieutenant get started. In addition, it is a tool that a company commander might use in training his lieutenants.

Taking the Initiative. Our current doctrine emphasizes the commander's intent so that junior officers and leaders are expected to continue the mission in the absence of orders. To a platoon leader, this means taking the initiative.

Developing the ability to take the initiative is a continuing process in which

a leader learns how to improve both the platoon and himself. To do this, he must concentrate on one main effort—making his platoon the best in the Army. This means refusing to allow training distractions to control his training. This is not easy, because there are some things a platoon leader cannot control. But he can take his platoon out to a local training area to work on battle drills, SOPs, and general weaknesses, for example, instead of sitting in his office waiting for his company commander to tell him to train. He should ask the commander for guidance first, tell the commander which tasks he will be working on, and then get out and do it.

Leading By Example. There is no more important leadership trait than being an example for his soldiers and NCOs to follow.

One way he can do this is by scoring 300 points on the physical fitness test. This shows his soldiers that fitness is important, encourages them to achieve the standard he has set, and builds their confidence in his abilities.

Another way for a platoon leader to develop his soldiers' confidence is to be the first to volunteer to do tasks that require physical courage, such as rappelling off a 200-foot cliff or going down the slide-for-life. And he can show moral courage by being willing to admit it when

he has made a mistake.

What all of this leads to eventually is having all his men willing to follow him into battle because they believe in him. This is not always easy. Often, a leader may have a weakness in a certain area. What he should do then is to acknowledge the weakness and show his soldiers that he is making an extra effort to overcome it. He shouldn't try to hide the weakness or make excuses. Soldiers are too smart for that.

Delegating Authority. A platoon leader should use the experience of his noncommissioned officers, especially his platoon sergeant.

The platoon sergeant is the platoon leader's right arm and the most experienced soldier in the platoon. When planning training, a lieutenant would have to be a fool not to use that soldier's tactical experience and advice. At the same time, the platoon leader should be aware of the need to clarify their separate roles and avoid banging heads.

In the field, the platoon sergeant should be the enforcer, making sure the standards are followed and the platoon is functioning properly. His role is to advise the platoon leader on problems and give suggestions to help plan the next mission.

A platoon leader should handle his junior NCOs with care and avoid micro-



managing. But he should also make sure they understand who is in charge, and should make sure they follow the standards.

He should counsel them privately on both their good and bad performances. If he has a problem with an NCO that he and his platoon sergeant cannot solve, he should ask the first sergeant for advice.

Finally, a platoon leader should remember that he can delegate authority but he cannot delegate responsibility.

Taking Care of Soldiers. Some platoon leaders seem to think that taking care of soldiers means making them happy and comfortable. But taking care of soldiers means training them to become seasoned soldiers who could survive on a battlefield because they are technically, physically, and mentally proficient. Showing sympathy to a soldier who is hot or tired, for instance, will only weaken him for facing the real challenges in combat. At the same time, though, the leader must be able to recognize cases in which a soldier may be overheated or suffering from heat exhaustion.

Taking care of soldiers means enforcing standards such as security, personal hygiene, noise and light discipline, wearing helmets, cleaning weapons, and the like. In garrison, it means making sure the soldiers obey the rules of conduct, and taking care of their families.

Upholding Morals and Values. This is a broad topic that can be interpreted

in many ways. As a professional and a leader, the platoon leader is held responsible for his own actions. For example, he may see other officers coming in late, leaving early to play golf, or taking advantage of a situation for their own personal gain. But as an officer, the platoon leader must realize that his own behavior and actions will be a direct reflection on the way he is perceived and how well his platoon performs.

He cannot be in it for himself. He must be a team player and think of everything in the "we" sense instead of the "I" sense. He should never let his personal habits interfere with his job performance.

Exhibiting Loyalty and Integrity. As an officer and a professional, a platoon leader must be loyal to his unit, his soldiers, and his leaders. Many times, he will find himself in disagreement with other officers. His only option is to voice his opinion in a professional manner. By doing this, he shows that he can stick to his guns, and he may be able to provide constructive comments that will influence the decision.

On the other hand, he often has to accept a decision he does not agree with and follow through unconditionally with the orders he is given. This "unconditional obedience" is, for the most part, necessary to make the chain of command function.

Loyalty is a two-way street. If the platoon leader expects his NCOs and sol-

diers to be loyal to him, he has to be loyal to them, just as his commander has a responsibility to be loyal to him. Most important, the platoon leader must be loyal to his commander, or there will be a serious breakdown in leadership within the organization.

A leader does not speak critically of another leader in front of troops. When there is a loss of integrity among his leaders, the soldiers observe the breakdown and lose their faith in the unit's leadership. Also, a lieutenant should give orders in his own name, instead of saying, "Men, the commander says we have to. . . ." Once an order is given to him, it becomes *his* order.

In short, a platoon leader's success depends on his ability and desire to be the best. The ability can be learned, but the desire must come from within.

As leaders, we owe it to our country and our soldiers to train them to be the best fighting force in the world. This should be our ultimate goal. The qualities mentioned here, combined with a platoon leader's personal attributes and his style of leadership, will make him a successful leader.

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