

# TRAINING NOTES



## Training Principles and Practices For Company Level Leaders

CAPTAIN JOHN L. POTHIN

Training units for war is the principal charge for leaders in a peacetime army. The age-old slogan that "Training is everything, and everything is training" communicates the significance of any leader's daily challenge. Yet even with the recent emergence of Field Manual 25-101, *Battle Focused Training*, small-unit leaders still express dissatisfaction with their ability to control and resource their training plans. In fact, many junior officers naively assume they will train their platoons or companies without any guidance from their commanders.

Where have we gone wrong? Are we reading the training doctrine? If so, are we understanding it?

Junior leaders enter the Army with little or no theoretical frame of reference for training. Many leaders eventually develop a training philosophy that grounds much of their experience in a set of principles; others simply practice habits that have proved successful in previous assignments. It is important for leaders to understand the principles of training. Such a framework of principles will make the habit deliberate and give the organization a common understanding of a very comprehensive plan.

Here is a selection of training principles and some specific comments about

the training process that may be helpful to those of you who are also trying to make the doctrine work in your units:

**Train to standard, not to time; retrain as required.** Training to standard instead of to time means we don't clean weapons in the company area for three hours just because that is the time the training schedule has provided for the task. We perform the task to a standard that is universally understood in the unit. And if it is not completed to the designated standard, we retrain until it is completed to that standard.

**Practice.** A unit, crew, or individual soldier must talk through the task, *crawl* through the task, *walk* through the task, and then *run* through the task. This simple process must be routine. It applies at every level in the organization, from individual soldier to the staff or line unit.

**Use the mission training plan (MTP) as the standard, and evaluate all training.** Collective performance standards in the MTP clearly identify the standards that units must work to achieve. These non-negotiable standards are based upon the experience of units in combat. While some may debate the degree to which they apply in every situation, they do give units a common standard for evaluation.

**Use situational training exercises**

**(STXs), lane training to create realistic combat conditions for training, and multiple iterations of each lane.** This training requires that leaders at every level of the organization use their heads and prepare challenging scenarios that reflect the full range of conditions that might exist while executing their contingency plans.

**Develop and use systems that give soldiers feedback.** This principle is a subset of the fourth principle. Feedback to the individual soldier comes from employing MILES to the greatest extent possible. Targeting devices should always give feedback, whether it is a \$3 million computerized range complex or a set of balloon-filled dummies on an ambush lane. Don't wait for Range Control to hand you the ideas. Develop systems that accomplish the mission.

**Incorporate "Fall-out One and Two" drills into every exercise.** Units are seldom able to operate with 100 percent of their authorized personnel. Leaders rarely have the luxury of putting their best soldiers in every operation. The logical training mandate requires us to pull key personnel out of operations at inconvenient times. Not only will this test a unit's ability to function, but it will also prepare units for the mental and psycho-

logical conditions they will inevitably face in time of war.

**Squad leaders train their squads.** This seemingly obvious training maxim is probably the most often violated. Somehow the notion of efficiency or incompetence spawned the "committee group" training philosophy. Leaders must give the squad leader the time and assets he needs to train his squad and must make sure he is prepared to conduct the training to standard.

**Training time on the schedule is either a "clean hole" or a "dirty hole."** The battalion or company commander may have time blocked out on the training schedule for a collective task, but this does not mean the platoon leader or squad leader loses time. This is a dirty hole. For example, a commander may specify that a unit perform deliberate attack as a company during a given training day. The platoon leader must then be smart enough to assess the platoon's strengths and weaknesses and volunteer to perform the appropriate task for the platoon. The 1st Platoon might need work on the tasks of Assault and Move Tactically, while 2d Platoon might need additional work on the task of Defend. At squad level much of the constructive training time comes from the smart squad leader who knows how to take advantage of dirty-hole time. A clean hole is open time for the leader to plan training related to his unit's mission essential task list (METL).

As clean and dirty holes fill at every level, the concept of multi-echelon training naturally occurs. In essence, soldiers, crews, staffs, and units at every level are training on tasks appropriate to their levels. But a unit will not do this collectively at every level all the time. Occasionally, a unit will get external evaluators to check the battalion, or even brigade, systems that operate in concert. A more common case is a battalion whose staff conducts staff planning while companies conduct squad and platoon lane training, resupplied by internal support assets operating with preplanned support STXs for resupply, casualty evacuation, and medical and maintenance services.

**Preparation for training must be a**

**training prerequisite.** This seemingly obvious statement is violated more often than any of us would care to admit. Training preparation requires priority from the commander. The training schedule must include preparation time. Objectives must be defined, tasks reviewed, and scenarios resourced. This is time-consuming but well worth the effort.

At this point, it may be useful to review the training process prescribed in FM 25-101 and shown here. This management cycle must not be perceived in the vacuum of a particular squad, platoon, or company. These leaders all work for superiors in the chain of command. In fact, their task is to ensure that this process remains pure at their level while they work within the parameters established at higher levels. A unit METL is derived from the METL of the higher commander, and the training and organizational assessments at the lowest level serve as the basis for the assessments at the highest level. A unit's long-range plan must account for the divisional training cycles that serve to control and regulate training resources. Short-range and near-term plans are based upon the plans developed at brigade, battalion, and company levels. This entire cycle serves as a common management tool for commanders at every level. It is not an arbitrary system designed to usurp a junior leader's time; in fact, it helps him use the limited time he has to the best advantage.

Trainers and leaders must be able to understand the intent and procedures of evaluation and assessment processes so they can conduct both properly.

Every training event must undergo some form of evaluation. Leaders evaluate everything, from the unit's ability to march in parade to the staff estimate and decision making processes commanders use during operations at a combat training center. Evaluations come in every shape and size, including formal after-action reports (AARs) or simply on-the-spot corrections between a staff sergeant and a private learning to clear a trench. Evaluations force us to think about our actions and take the necessary steps to refine procedures and thought processes, or to practice important skills.

An effective unit evaluates individual,

crew, collective, and leader tasks during every collective training event. The MTP prescribes tasks, conditions, and standards for almost all collective tasks. Additionally, it provides task integration matrices that list the applicable tasks for an event at each level of training. These matrices serve as points of reference when leaders are preparing STX task lists. Leaders must take a personal interest in planning both formal and informal evaluations during training events.

Specifically, the after-action review is a training event that will be done properly at all levels only with command emphasis and leader training. FM 25-101 presents some excellent ideas for preparing and conducting AARs. In addition, AARs must be conducted at every level from squad to company or battalion task force. At the squad and platoon level, AARs work well when conducted on the objective immediately following a training action. Commanders must build time for this AAR process into training events. Leaders should take some time to organize their thoughts so they not only talk about collective action but also elicit feedback on the individual, leader, and crew tasks performed. This information will help focus unit organizational and training assessments.

An organizational assessment is a detailed picture of a unit's readiness at any given time. Conducting an organizational assessment is a complex management process, to say the least. Nonetheless, commanders at every level must build a system or make this procedure routine. A unit status report is a formal assessment system or management tool at Department of the Army level. At the company level, a commander must create a forum for information gathering. Collecting written AAR comments from units after field operations is a start, but there must also be more routine discussions in which company leaders share evaluations on performance at the individual, crew, collective, and leader task levels.

A training meeting each week is the logical solution. A leader can structure this meeting by adding the weekly training assessment to the agenda. Again, commanders can make the assessment

a priority; the logical fallout will be the discussion of the training process (or lack of it) that led to the platoon or squad training results. If a leader can create this dialogue in a training meeting, he will make great strides toward improving his unit training program. He should talk about the types of objectives he identified and whether they were realistic. Did the squad leaders have a common understanding of how to conduct bunker or trench drills? What could we do as leaders during a tactical exercise without troops (TEWT) to make unit training more productive? The training program assessment will stimulate thinking that can then be reflected in future plans.

While a large part of every unit training plan should come from the assessment process, it may also be appropriate to discuss the effect of the commander's guidance and the role of the training meeting in determining a unit training program.

Many young leaders are frustrated by "required" training. In fact, any directed training event can sour a unit's morale unless the leaders show that they wholeheartedly support it. But training guidance is a simple fact of life that leaders must understand and accept. Commanders at every level review assess-

ments and build training programs on the basis of the assessments and sustainment training imperatives. A company commander can expect annual, quarterly, and semi-annual guidance from the division, brigade, and battalion commanders. Each of these guidance documents provides some direction and serves as the basis for training resources in units throughout the division. More important, they establish training priorities. If a company commander is lucky, his battalion commander will provide weekly training event priorities to help him, but he must still build a plan and prioritize his own tasks. A company commander or a platoon leader must also do this at his level and if he briefs his boss in advance he will be off to a good start.

The training and training support meetings can be very productive for any organization. At the same time, if they are not carefully planned and organized, they can easily degenerate into directive sessions. The battalion training meeting is an important event in any unit. Many battalions have a parallel training support meeting to iron out staff planning issues in support of the line organizations' plans. The same set of weekly meetings should be held at company and platoon levels. Time for these events should be

annotated on the training schedule. The company commander may elect to combine the training support and training meetings on the basis of time constraints, but the functional support requirements remain. Some sample agendas from battalion, company, and platoon meetings are shown here.

Doctrinally, training preparation falls under the *planning* step of the training process, but I believe preparations for the conduct of training are more encompassing than many leaders choose to understand or accept. Soldiers often arrive in the field to find themselves in a perimeter pulling security while their leaders are conducting reconnaissance or talking over strategies for conducting a drill. These same leaders are usually the first to gripe about the lack of the necessary resources or time to train their platoons or squads.

I would like to review some critical steps in the preparation process that can help make training more productive:

**Task review and selection.** A critical component of any training plan is the selection of tasks. Leaders sometimes generalize this process to the point of losing focus and training direction. Often, a leader can be seen training a unit on a drill or collective task that does not

#### SAMPLE MEETING AGENDAS

##### BATTALION MEETING 0900-1030

Attendees: Battalion commander, battalion XO, company commanders, S-3, Assistant S-3, S-4, operations NCO, CSM, all specialty platoon leaders, and the battalion chaplain. Chaired by the battalion S-3.

0900-0905: Each company commander turns in training schedule for six weeks out. Battalion S-3 provides the seven-week shell schedule to company commanders along with the five-week training schedule. Company commanders and S-3 discuss the five-week and six-week schedules to resolve any conflicts and unscheduled issues.

0905-0915: Battalion commander comments.

0915-1015: Company commanders brief six-week training schedule on overhead projector in detail, the five-week and four-week schedules from draft calendar boards, and any changes from Week 3 (including a complete review of all ranges

and maneuver areas to be used). Week 2, and Week 1 (upcoming week). 15 minutes allowed per company.

1015-1025: S-3 discusses seven-week shell and any other training issues he deems necessary.

1025-1030: Battalion commander wrap-up.

##### COMPANY MEETING 0900-1000 (DIFFERENT DAY)

Attendees: Company commander, XO, platoon leaders, first sergeant, antitank section leader, mortar section leader, and NBC, communications, supply, and training sergeants.

0900-0920: Platoon and section leaders brief key highlights of lessons learned from last week's training.

0920-0940: Commander comments. Review of next week's training, including

final task list confirmation, resources, primary trainers, identification of unscheduled individual and leader tasks to add, and a final review of the commander's weekly priorities.

0940-0950: Commander review of the long range training schedule (Weeks 3 through 7).

0950-1000: The XO collects platoon input for the six-week training schedule.

##### PLATOON MEETING 1300-1400 (SAME DAY AS COMPANY MEETING)

Attendees: Platoon leader, platoon sergeant, squad leaders, and selected team leaders on a rotating basis.

The agenda mirrors the company meeting but with more specifics on the assessments, instructor assignments, lesson plans, and final orders and movement instructions.



address a METL deficiency. And an observer-controller trying to facilitate an AAR finds that the platoon leaders and squad leaders are confused on which collective tasks define a movement to contact.

Leaders at all levels tend to be overly ambitious when producing task lists, particularly for field training exercises. External evaluations with five major missions (including a deliberate defense) over a three-or-four-day period tend to dilute the training benefit. This form of task overload will be a sure-fire method of achieving mediocrity if leaders fail to schedule retraining time. So how do we select appropriate training tasks?

First, a leader must look back to recent training evaluations and organizational assessments. If these were done properly, he has a number of specific collective, individual, leader, and crew tasks to put into the training calendar and schedule. Fast-roping and rappelling are always fun tasks to train, but do they address METL deficiencies? A leader must be selective in choosing specific tasks that need focus and attention.

The company mission training plan (ARTEP 7-10 MTP) is helpful in the task selection process. The manual cross-references collective tasks, task standards, critical tasks, and supporting in-

dividual, leader, and crew tasks. The manual serves as a task menu for the leader, and it logically divides tasks into their component parts. Additionally, the manual specifies the training time for each task and suggests a host of supporting resources that leaders can integrate into their exercise plans.

**Objective preparation.** The preparation of objectives and training lanes is an essential part of any unit training plan. Before any collective training event, the company commander must allocate the time and resources for it on the training schedule. Imagination and ingenuity are vital, especially with the Army's present constrained resources. Training in military operations on urban terrain (MOUT) is easy to conduct without a hard site, but an objective area must be prepared in advance of unit training. Target cloth (or plastic) and two-by-four frames can be obtained through normal unit supply channels. Soldiers can produce different floor and room arrangements and relocate the temporary shelter to new terrain with organic support vehicles. The supporting engineer company can train small emplacement excavator (SEE) operators while preparing bunker and trench complexes. Engineer squads and infantrymen can train together in laying wire, emplacing obstacles, and setting booby traps.

All of these advance actions are training events that support the collective unit effort. In fact, if a battalion occupies a large maneuver area over a period of time, each company can prepare sets of lanes that units share and rotate through. This creates variety and a set of conditions that no one squad or platoon could possibly replicate during any one exercise. All of this activity requires dedicated and thoroughly coordinated resources at battalion and company level.

**Chalk talks, training area reconnaissances, TEWTs, and rehearsals.** Any good coach reviews plays on a medium the players can see such as a locker room chalkboard. A company commander or platoon leader also uses similar devices in going over what his unit has done before another exercise. To form a cohesive and synchronized operation, each team member must understand the techniques and the approach to tactics that the other uses. The key players in the combined arms team are not just the platoon leaders and the executive officer (XO). The fire support officer, engineer squad leader, ground surveillance radar element leader, and mortar and Dragon leaders are a few of the other players who must understand and share a common approach to small-unit tactics.

The initial area reconnaissance—by the battalion commander, S-3, command sergeant major (CSM), and company commanders—may be conducted weeks ahead of time. These leaders select terrain that is suitable for lane construction and preparation. Commanders outline objectives and record locations and positions of bunkers, trenches, obstacles, or buildings. A company TEWT, however, should be conducted only a few days before the unit deploys for the collective training exercise. On the company TEWT, the commander, XO, platoon leaders, and senior NCOs talk about training strategies on the same ground they will use for the training. These leaders orient themselves to the terrain and select suitable assembly areas, resupply points, and other areas that a map reconnaissance might not reveal. Additionally, company leaders can talk through strategies for drills, rehearse techniques, and describe outcomes in terms that are

familiar to everyone present.

**Rehearsals and briefbacks.** Unit rehearsals and briefbacks are important in every phase of the training. The following are some specific rehearsal and briefback techniques:

The "Human Chess Set" rehearsal is a great opportunity to practice the command and control measures a battalion, company, or platoon will use during operations. On a well-marked parade field, key leaders, support element leaders, staff leaders (such as the tactical operations center and NCOs in charge of the trains), and radio telephone operators can walk from the intermediate staging base through the assembly area across the line of departure and on to the intermediate and final objectives. This kind of rehearsal is easy to standardize and should be included in every tactical standing operating procedure. The leaders and critical communicators at unit level can quickly synchronize an operation during a short practice period.

Before any collective exercise, squads and platoons should also conduct rehearsals (usually actions on an objective or drills) directed at specific training shortcomings. The rehearsals start with a leader talk-through, followed by members of the unit moving through each phase of the

drill or operation at slow speed. The pace of the rehearsal then increases as the unit again runs through it this time at combat speed. This rehearsal should be echeloned to allow for successful completion of the task at team, squad, and platoon levels.

Unit briefbacks serve as a verbal rehearsal of sorts. These should occur with all key leaders at the start of any operational planning phase in training or war. This important leader task can follow a specified format that mirrors the estimate process and reflects the specific needs of a unit. Commanders should conduct a briefback exercise at every available planning opportunity and institutionalize the procedure so that each key unit leader is also present for the briefback of a flanking or supporting unit. Again, this forum allows for a common operational understanding between units and adds to the overall unit training effect.

Putting the entire training process together warrants some discussion. The proper assessment, evaluation, planning, and preparation set the conditions for a successful training event. The notion of multi-echelon training, or the training of different tasks at different levels, becomes reality in the preparation and execution phases of training. The key to this

success is operating under a variety of tough conditions, with continual repetition.

Units can plan to operate day or night during hot, wet, or cold periods and under conditions of poor communications. A unit that can perform basic tasks well in all of these conditions will be successful in combat. The success of a unit training under difficult conditions helps foster trust and confidence between seniors and their subordinates, allay fears of the unknown, and establish a foundation or training legacy that the organization can perpetuate.

As leaders, we are fundamentally responsible for training our units for war. Any hope of success requires our commitment to a set of principles and practices that guides our approach. I offer these thoughts in the hope that they may help leaders and units be even better than they already are.

---

**Captain John L. Pothin** has served in company command and battalion S-3 assignments in the 5th Battalion, 14th Infantry, and as a brigade assistant S-3, all in the 25th Infantry Division. He is a 1983 graduate of the United States Military Academy and recently completed a master's degree at the Academy where he will be a special assistant to the commandant. He has had previous articles published in *INFANTRY* and other military publications.

---

# Marksanship Training

## A Better Way

MAJOR MICHAEL C. OKITA

As the United States Army continues to reshape itself for the 21st century, "train as you fight" is still a common theme in units. In this era of change, leaders and soldiers are challenged to train creatively, always searching for innovative ways to make the most of the

available resources and still operate under the most realistic combat conditions.

Recently, a simple but progressive concept of marksmanship training was introduced at Fort Lewis, Washington. This concept ties the individual soldier task of engaging targets with an M16 ri-

file (STP 21-1—SMCT, *Soldier's Manual of Common Tasks*, task 071-311-2007) to a requirement for him to engage targets from a fully prepared fighting position. Although the task does not include the construction of the fighting position, it does include the ability to detect, en-