



A COMPANY COMMANDER'S KEYS TO SUCCESS AT THE NTC

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Success at the National Training Center (NTC) should not be measured in victories against the opposing force, although a few wins can do wonders for a unit's confidence and morale. Success should be based on overall improvement during the NTC experience. The opposing force (OPFOR) is probably tougher than any real enemy most units will ever face, and that is to their advantage.

On the basis of our combined experience of more than 100 NTC rotations—as OPFOR, observer controller (OC), or Blue Force—we offer the following observations and advice to those of you who will face the challenges of this training. These lessons also served us well as mechanized infantry team commanders during Operations DESERT STORM and DESERT SHIELD.

For simplicity, we have broken our comments down by battlefield operating system (BOS):

Maneuver

Looking first at offensive maneuver, it is important to control the tempo of the attack. A slow, deliberate, creeping attack gives the defender time to counter your strength. Speed, properly regulated, allows you to deny the enemy the ability to mass his fires. You are calling the shots initially and should maintain this advantage by regulating your speed to portray things to the enemy that will trigger or retard the employment of his reserve.

Remember that tempo is not just speed; you have to know when to proceed and when to pause to make a hasty plan. A hasty attack, poorly planned, risks the loss of mass, fire support, and command and control. An unduly long delay costs you the element of surprise and may invite the enemy to “spoil” your attack.

Controlling your pace by phase line is an excellent tech-

nique. The OPFOR does it all the time. At first, move slowly and deliberately toward the target you want the enemy to think of as your objective. Then you'll find the gap you're looking for and disrupt the enemy's decision making process.

The desert seems to favor speed. It reduces your exposure time and the enemy's decision time. There is no real need to bound in the open. Where the terrain allows, by all means, do it, but bounding usually broadcasts your intentions and leads you into a piecemeal assault.

Decide whether your attack is terrain-oriented or enemy-oriented. Terrain orientation seems to work best in the desert. The OPFOR will routinely try to dominate your lines of communication by seizing key terrain that cuts you off from your support, and you can do the same to him. Once you've taken the key terrain, you can wait for him to come to you.

Enemy orientation forces you into taking out the enemy, hole by hole. The defender's preparation will cost you in this scenario; all he has to do is wait for you to come into his fire sack.

Know your tactical terms as defined in Field Manual (FM) 101-5-1, *Operational Terms and Symbols*. A common tactical lexicon will prevent disaster and ensure that everyone understands. For example, everyone must know what is meant by *seize*, *secure*, *clear*, or *destroy*. *Seize* versus *destroy*, for example, will also tell you whether you are ter-

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rain-oriented or enemy-oriented. Encourage initiative in everything except the understanding of tasks; there is no room here for interpretation.

Companies should operate as company teams, and tanks should generally lead in the desert. Agility is important. The team can be hit by tanks, antitank systems, or anything else, from any direction at any time. It takes a team to respond to these multiple and diverse threats. Because you are vulnerable at long ranges, tanks should lead the way. Tanks are more survivable and have a lethal rapid-fire response that can kill any enemy armor. The tank engagement will give the Bradley fighting vehicles (BFVs) time to set up their TOWs and deploy their infantry.

Stop your assault beyond the objective, not on it, and clear back to the objective with infantry. The enemy will target your new gains with artillery, chemicals, and counterattacks.

Dispersion is good, particularly in the desert, and it should probably increase as you close on the enemy. You don't need to mass vehicles to mass fires. Initially, travel in a tight formation for good command and control, then disperse for protection.

Don't tie your unit to the plan, but build in flexibility. Clearly depict your desired "end state," your intent, and allow initiative to reign. Accept chaos and confusion, and train

your leaders to expect it. Then the fog of war should not be all that unexpected or unsettling. Identify the indicators that tip off a course of action, and look for them amid the confusion. If your subordinates know what you're looking for, they may find it first and must be ready to act on their own to exploit the opportunity.

Identify and focus on a weak point. If you try to hit everywhere, you will fail. Reconnoiter the potential weak point, or ask battalion headquarters to do it, then attack it. Don't fool around too much with supporting attacks against strong points.

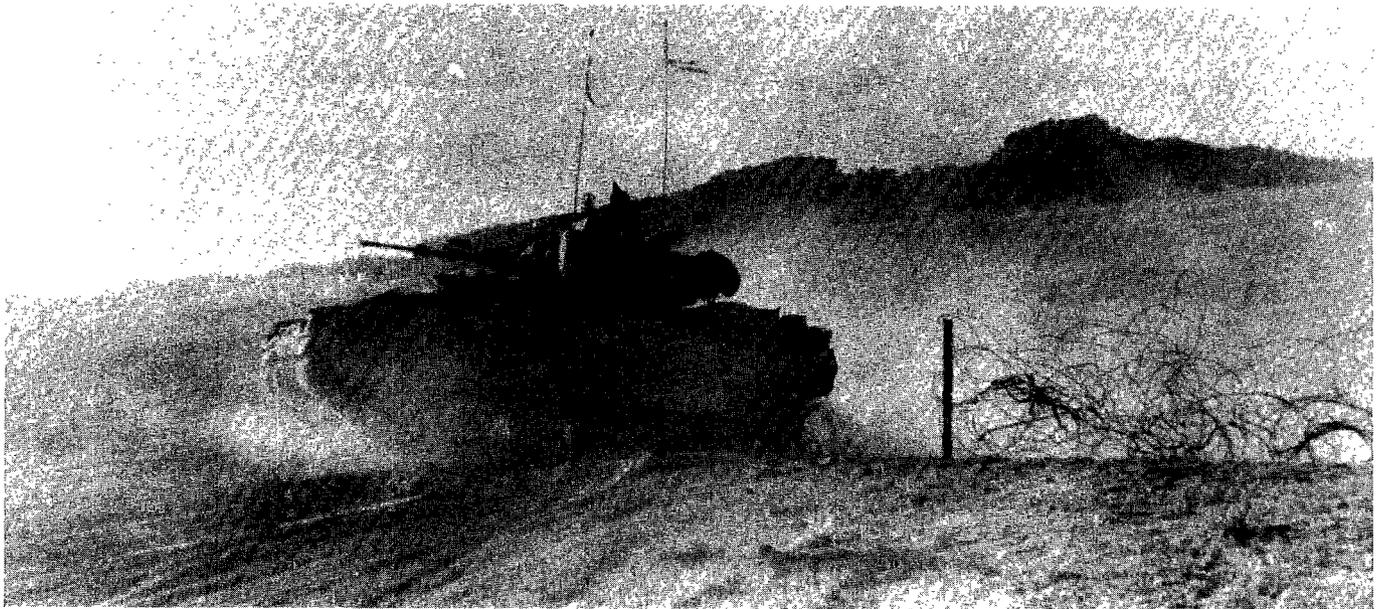
Overwatch when you can gain firepower superiority. If you can't gain the ground or firepower advantage, don't waste time trying to set up overwatch on the enemy. Many units have been destroyed in poor overwatch positions because of inferior firepower. A BFV task force has standoff on most opposing systems, and an intelligent overwatch position—occupied with overwhelming firepower—will dominate the situation. This ties into unnecessary bounding; many unit attacks suffer a serious loss of speed and momentum due to poorly planned bounding.

Always know your strengths and weaknesses, especially while in the attack. Don't neglect the "own troops" assessment during your analysis of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time). The right lieutenant needs to be the main effort, but he shouldn't carry the burden all the time. Not only will he burn out, but the others will never have an opportunity to develop. Give your attached platoon leader a good workout, and let him assume an appropriate share of responsibility from time to time; he may surprise you.

Defensive maneuver is next on the list. There are a few good rules of thumb for building engagement areas. In the desert, you have a big engagement area (EA) and a big battle position (BP). In the woods, you have a little EA and a big BP. Again, you don't need to mass vehicles to mass fires. A team BP in Saudi Arabia could easily exceed 2,000 meters and still mass two-thirds of its fires anywhere in the EA. A big BP gives you more options and more protection. A big EA in the desert is a must. Why restrict your ability to kill? Simply draw a range fan for each position on the basis of weapon capabilities, stake them in, and rehearse fires to each range. If you can't fire there consistently, move your trigger line in until you can easily hit with most of the available weapons. If you're outnumbered or the enemy has standoff, consider using reverse slope positions to shorten the EA and protect your force from enemy observation and indirect fire. Whatever method you use, make sure two-thirds of your combat power can kill anywhere in the engagement area.

Consider BPs on the desert floor, where digging in is usually easier and enemy target acquisition is difficult. Enemy reconnaissance elements have a hard time pinning you down there; they can't really close on your positions because of all the open desert that surrounds you. The enemy will therefore have to guess at the grids to holes and spoil he observes from high points.

Aggressively hunt the enemy's deep reconnaissance teams; if you don't find them, your success is in jeopardy.



Thorough planning, detailed rehearsals, and aggressive execution are key ingredients of success at the National Training Center.

You won't be able to prevent their insertion, so act accordingly to deceive them until you can find them. The use of helicopters with their FM homing devices can be very effective in identifying general locations. Even with directional antennas, under cover, you may fix locations well enough for infantry to find and kill them.

Rehearse your direct fire plan. Use a global positioning system (GPS) initially to map out your EA. If a target is lost to two or more platoon positions, you can plot artillery targets. A MILES kill rehearsal will do wonders. Each vehicle should verify kills at maximum range at each trigger line; then a combat speed rehearsal can be conducted to test exposure time and ability to engage. Make sure you can mass your fires at the critical place and time.

Delegate tasks during defensive preparations. You can't be everywhere at once, and if you try, you'll fail. Your team will also fail, and your subordinates will think you don't trust them.

Understand the threat. Know your doctrine. Apply the principles of intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) at all levels, and ensure that your leaders understand what the enemy will look like, what his capabilities are, and what you think his course of action will be. State the indicators that will tip you off as to the enemy's commitment to a given course of action. Know when, how, and why he will deploy.

Manage your preparation time. Every minute you waste is a minute the attacker gains. Prioritize your tasks, and get them done. Improvement should continue up until you hit readiness condition (REDCON) 1.

Track the preparations in your company command post. Know the percentage of completion on obstacles, holes, and rehearsals. Reporting and inspections will guarantee that things get done.

Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse! Do it in the daytime, at night, in protective masks, and under any other adverse conditions you foresee. Go from hole to hole and backbrief each crew on its portion of the EA. Make sure all target reference

points and trigger lines are clearly marked so everyone can see them.

Intelligence

Boil the IPB product down to company level. Don't rehash the product of the higher unit. You need individual vehicle positions, trench lines, obstacles, and fire sacks. Plan projected range fans for enemy indirect fire weapons and predict the likely counterattack avenues and the size of force expected.

Do your own IPB and compare it to that of the next higher unit. You need not agree, but you must clarify any disagreement. Remember that the IPB process is continuous, and update as reports come in. Also remember that the template is just that—not necessarily the enemy's plan—so don't get tied to it as if it were gospel.

Understand where the security zone is, what's in it, and how the enemy will fight. Know what the division reconnaissance elements look like and how many of them there are. Know the composition and timing of the enemy assets that will be used. Distinguish between a combat reconnaissance patrol and a forward patrol. Know how to recognize the forward support element and the advanced guard.

Do a time-space analysis, and use doctrinal movement rates. Getting close air support (CAS) and artillery to land on a certain enemy formation at a given time requires an understanding of these movement rates.

Don't confuse doctrinal templates with situational templates. In the desert, frontages expand; in dense terrain, they contract. A doctrinal template is the enemy course of action in a perfect world, unconstrained by terrain and weather. A situational template applies the actual situation to the enemy's schoolbook solution.

Use observation posts (OPs) whenever you are stationary; you're always being watched and can't let your guard down. Give the OPs a mission and some specific guidelines for observation. Require regular reports from them. Whether

they have anything to report or not, you need to know that each OP is still operational, and you need to stress that the absence of activity is as important as its presence.

To prevent fratricide, all maps must show the locations of the scouts. Post these locations on all of your maps, and track any changes.

Fire Support

Give your purpose, priority, allocation, and restrictions for all indirect fires. Define the effects you want to achieve with them, including special munitions such as smoke. Give your guidance to the fire support officer (FSO), and let him, the expert, prepare the Fires paragraph of your order. Also see that he gets your input into the battalion fire plan.

Plan where the FSO will move. He doesn't need to be glued to you if you're moving. He may do a better job from a support position where he can remain stationary. Plan and rehearse a jump vehicle for him.

Register—or, more correctly, adjust—your fire plan. Make sure rounds will land where you've planned for them. At the NTC, your OC will have to help you do this. Match your fires overlay with your operations and intelligence overlays. They must support each other.

Plan illumination and smoke; they help in identification and obscuration and can also be used as navigational aids. Be careful with smoke. If it is fired too early or too late, you may endanger your entire unit. As with all fires, plan for smoke before, on, and beyond the objective.

Remember that preplanned FASCAM (family of scatterable mines) takes 20 minutes and unplanned takes 40 minutes. Since FASCAM diverts a lot of artillery tubes from other missions, it should be fired when other indirect fires are not critical.

Artillery is the biggest killer of OPFOR infantry, especially at night, and it doesn't give your positions away. When you designate priority of fires, designate when they are to shift and what will trigger the shifts so all your leaders will know. The first shots you take should always be artillery. If CAS can help, ask for it.

Take your FSO to all operations orders (OPORDs). Include him in the development of your course of action, so that he fully understands your intent.

Mobility and Survivability

Have a combat leader site in all of your obstacles. Your people know the plan better than anyone else. Patrol your obstacles, and close any gaps. Cover disruption obstacles with artillery at least, and fix and block closer obstacles with direct fires.

Don't design obstacle plans that will keep the enemy out of the EA. Funnel him in, and hold him there. All obstacles can and will be breached, and they won't win battles without complementary effects.

Have a plan for digging survivability positions. Assign a dozer chief, and ensure that handoffs are on time and under the positive control of a combat leader who can get the equipment to the sites in order of priority. Take care of the dozer

operators, and see that they get food and rest.

Dig standard two-step fighting positions, and have each proofed by a combat leader, the one who will fight it if possible. A poor position is worthless.

When you approach an obstacle, decide on a course of action quickly or die. It's there for a purpose. Tanks and BFVs can easily drive through wire; there is no need to stop unless mines are present. If you use a BFV to run through wire, make sure the skirts are bolted up so the wire won't get caught in the tracks.

Mark breaches, and make sure all your soldiers know your marking scheme. Pyrotechnics are always a good hasty marking technique; formal markings for follow-on forces can be emplaced later when the situation has stabilized.

Position vehicles and obstacles on the basis of the EA where you want to kill the enemy, not the other way around.

Nuclear, Biological, Chemical (NBC)

The NBC noncommissioned officer (NCO) must be forward. He can't do his job from the combat or field trains. Now that the executive officer has a BFV, that's a great place for the NBC NCO as well.

Remember that the company doesn't make decisions on MOPP (mission oriented protective posture) level but makes recommendations and requests to battalion, where they know the overall situation.

Brief all attachments on your NBC standing operating procedures (SOPs). Plan and rehearse for the exchange and hasty decontamination of MOPP gear.

Report contamination as soon as possible so that someone else will not run through the same area and themselves become contaminated.

Expect 15 to 30 minutes of nonpersistent chemicals before an OPFOR attack and upon seizure of an objective, just before the counterattack. Expect persistent chemicals to be used like an obstacle, fired on uncovered avenues of approach.

Automatic masking for artillery is a dangerous habit. In making your decision, evaluate the timing, the proximity of the enemy, and the location.

Combat Service Support

Poor precombat inspections (PCIs) lead to serious maintenance problems. Designate command directed spot checks every day. A good time for these is during resupply operations, and you should be present if you can.

Suspension equals combat power. A functioning turret is useless if it's on an immobile chassis. Suspension is easy to check, seldom fails, but is generally overlooked. Air induction is another big killer in the desert, as are fan towers and fuel filters.

Fix forward no matter how much it hurts. The battalion motor officer may fight you on this; BMOs usually want to pull things back to the trains for repair, where parts are more readily available and the mechanics can work in a more secure area, free of distractions. Bureaucracy and red tape can cause you to lose the vehicle for a long time. Make them

pack up and come to you. When you're in prepared defenses, keep your prescribed load list (PLL) and tool trucks. This will solve innumerable small problems and improve preventive maintenance. You'll need to enlist the support of the battalion motor officer, the headquarters company commander, and the battalion executive officer (XO); you're the commander, you own the combat power, and you're responsible for the success or failure of the unit.

Dig in your defensive prestocks or lose them to OPFOR artillery.

Use MILES-damaged vehicles to haul MILES casualties, since both will be out of action for some time.

Plan your resupply operations. Make sure they are orderly uploads of Classes I, III, IV, V, and VIII, with maintenance checks and DA 2404 turn-ins. Eat in your position, not at the LOGPAC. Vary the times to prevent OPFOR disruption or interdiction of your logistics flow.

Cross-level tow bars, tow cables, and slave cables so that each section and platoon is covered. Mark their locations on your map, and ensure that everyone knows where they are. Make sure everyone has the proper number of towing shackles mounted as well.

Vehicles need to be cranked up regularly to charge the batteries that run the thermal sights and the radios. Make sure this happens. At a stand-to, all vehicles need to fire up to be ready for battle; but if each one cranks up on its own, a smart scout can count the number of vehicles in the position and estimate your strength. You can prevent this problem by using an FM short count to start all vehicles at once.

Don't get too tired for preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCSs). Include all systems, vehicles, weapons, and the troops themselves.

Always know where the battalion aid station is, and have the medics rehearse getting to it and back. Plan and rehearse medical evacuation. Apply all contingencies to the plan, such as mass casualties or loss of ambulance.

Have the XO or first sergeant and the maintenance sergeant monitor the administrative/logistical net at all times.

Prioritize your MILES casualties to prevent excessive "died of wounds" casualties.

Finally, keep track of all classes of supply.

Command and Control

Use sketches and sand tables to clarify your orders. Get graphics to everyone; all vehicles and dismount squad leaders need graphics so they can track the battle and report intelligently.

Involve your NCOs in tactical planning. This doesn't mean pulling them away from the troops often. Give a warning order and update it frequently so that they know what is going on, and invite their critical analysis.

Plan redundant communications, and use wire where applicable. Use pyrotechnic back-up signals and flags.

To remain alert and creative, leaders must sleep. Make and enforce a sleep plan. This may mean giving the counter-reconnaissance battle to the XO so you can sleep and then letting him sleep during the early portions of the main battle.

Don't leave an OPORD briefing with any of your questions unanswered. Doing so is a disloyalty to your commander and a crime against your troops. No one has all the answers or has thought of all the contingencies, and brain power that is pooled is more powerful.

Trust the XO and first sergeant to move the unit while you take the platoon leaders and the company FSO on leader reconnaissances.

Be where you can see the battle and influence the action, whether it's through your presence or your orders.

Discipline your radio nets, especially at platoon level; this means no unnecessary radio traffic and no extended transmissions. Don't automatically jump to another net when yours is being jammed. The enemy jammers will know they have been effective and chase you from one net to another.

Salt, or mark, your route to the line of departure, no matter how familiar you think you are with it. Stage for the move just after dark to ease movement. If you wait, you will be open to numerous problems. Rehearse the movement out of the assembly area. This rehearsal should be like a battle drill.

Tie your graphic control measures to identifiable terrain features. Soldiers can't see grid lines on the ground.

NTC MILES Issues

Boresight your MILES equipment twice a day and after every major movement. The same goes for night vision goggles in other training exercises. If you can't kill with MILES, you need not plan a real battle. Train a MILES expert for every platoon who can identify equipment problems during the boresighting. This is what the OPFOR does.

Conduct PMCS on your MILES equipment, which is a weapon system at the NTC. Direct-exchange any equipment that can't kill at maximum range.

Watch your vehicle load plans, and don't let equipment dangle over your MILES belts and cover the sensors. This is a MILES violation, and the OC will score the vehicle as "killed." Cheating only encourages bad habits and poor tactics that will get soldiers killed on a real battlefield.

Know the MILES kill codes so you don't allow bogus kills. The OCs will re-key a bogus kill code if you tell them about it.

Change your MILES batteries regularly to maintain the proper weapon effects. As the batteries weaken, so do your MILES systems.

Practice your MILES gunnery. A good BFV or tank gunner may not be a good MILES gunner if he doesn't practice.

The Player-OC Relationship

Keep the OC informed of your activities. Don't pick up and move without telling him. Although he is a distraction in many ways, he's also a fellow soldier who is there to help you improve your unit's operations.

Wear your MILES equipment at all times. This is a pet peeve to the OC. If the OPFOR attacks at an unexpected time and you're not wearing MILES gear, you will not be a player, and no lessons can be learned. The OC is not the enemy; he wants you to do well. He will enjoy your success

and especially seeing your improvement.

Remember that the OPFOR is made up of U.S. soldiers who train hard all year. Don't build up animosity against them. If they don't exploit your weaknesses at the NTC, your unit can't learn from them. (They were major contributors to our success in the Persian Gulf.)

Follow your SOPs, and don't change the way you do business simply to accommodate your OC. If he brings up some good points, use them, but don't do it his way just to please him.

Maintain discipline and military bearing during the initial briefings in the "Dust Bowl." You don't want any outsider, OC or not, to think your unit is substandard.

Don't whine about OPFOR "cheating." It is unlikely that the OPFOR soldiers have intentionally cheated. For them, cheating is a field-grade article 15 offense. Too often, unfounded cheating claims are used as an excuse, and the OC doesn't want to hear it. Most likely, any perceived cheating is due to a MILES system failure.

Leave your ego at the door during after-action reviews (AARs). Take no pride in the plan, but invite criticism. This is how we learn. A good idea for improvement will come out of every AAR. Implement these ideas as soon as possible in an environment where you can really test them.

Don't criticize the OCs or the OPFOR on your radio net. All nets are monitored, and this is unprofessional behavior.

Don't tolerate cheating in your company. The OCs know all the tricks. Your unit will suffer a serious decline in credibility, and its every success will be suspect.

Don't be stubborn; listen to the OC. He may not be a genius, but he has seen a lot of units and learned a lot of techniques that will be more than helpful to you.

Let the OC know that your goal is continual improvement, not beating the OPFOR, and this is a healthy foundation to build upon.

NTC Draw and The Dust Bowl

Get the XO, supply sergeant, communications sergeant, and company master gunner on the ground early to prepare them for the equipment draw. Meet with them once or twice daily to discuss your progress and to correct problems.

Do a complete and thorough inspection of all equipment you draw, including MILES gear. Don't allow your soldiers to be pressured into accepting equipment that is substandard.

Establish a good working relationship with the civilian personnel during the draw. They are the same people you will work with during turn-in; don't create animosities that will haunt you later.

Organize your Dust-Bowl area to facilitate your command and control your draw. The area should be professional and military in appearance and conduct. All eyes are on you while you're there, and you need to show that your unit is a professional fighting force.

Continue training during this period. There will be opportunities, and you need to take advantage of them as they arise. Work on MILES gunnery, marksmanship, and proficiency so your soldiers will be confident of themselves and the equip-

ment. Practice MILES troubleshooting, MILES gunnery, and individual movement techniques with MILES as much as possible.

Do your PCIs before leaving the Dust Bowl, or suffer the consequences.

Manage your time so your soldiers can get enough rest and some recreation. Don't let them get tired out during the draw, or they'll lose the fire before the fight.

NTC Turn-in

At the end of the training, treat the turn-in like another battle; plan, prepare, and execute violently.

Keep a firm grip on your sensitive items of supply. In the chaos of the turn-in, it's easy to lose track of these items, and a loss at this time can taint even a good rotation.

Be aware of safety considerations. The soldiers are tired after two weeks in the desert and may become careless.

Check the dumpsters, and be ruthless on what can and cannot be thrown out. It is not unusual to find discarded pyrotechnics, or parts that have been thrown out simply because some soldier found it easier than turning them in. The entire chain of command needs to get involved in preventing this waste.

Don't let the soldiers or, especially, the leaders get too eager to head for home. There is a job to be done first.

The turn-in is the XO's show, but you need to keep in touch with everything that is going on. Check on the troops; don't let them think you've just vanished.

Prepare your vehicles fully before trying to turn them in. If you try to rush them through the process, they'll bounce back, and you'll lose a lot of time.

Capture the lessons of the training rotation while they're fresh. If you wait until you get home, you'll forget them.

Help your fellow commanders, and ask them to help you as well. If everyone tackles turn-in as a team, the whole process will be easier.

Keep an updated status board to track overall progress.

Your NTC rotation will probably be the best training opportunity you and your unit will have during your command. Treat it as a training event instead of a test. A successful rotation is measured by lessons learned and improvements made. Do not put undue pressure on yourself or your soldiers to win or to be error free. Attack all tasks, in the field or in the Dust Bowl, as missions to be planned, rehearsed, and aggressively executed. Remember that your primary goal is your unit's improvement.

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