

Task of the Quarter

Improving Training Strategy

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We have all seen commanders try to pass off questionable training schedules during battalion or brigade training meetings. When the higher commander asks, "Why are you doing this?" the right answer would be, "A recent assessment shows that our unit needs improvement in that area."

More often than not, however, the reviewing commander sees similar training events submitted and resubmitted, week after week. He knows the unit is having a breakdown in its training strategy for improvement. At company level, looking for events to put on the training schedule is a chore if the unit is not assessing and planning for improvement.

But at this level, developing a training strategy is not that hard. All it involves is thinking and planning by the unit commander and subordinate leaders. The first thing that should be done is a METL (mission essential task list) assessment. The METL is basically those tasks that are essential to the wartime mission. Any unit that doesn't have a METL should develop one, with the help of the unit's training officer or S-3.

To assess a unit METL, the commander should see his unit performing the tasks outlined in it. These should include both collective and individual tasks. A training scenario should simulate unit involvement in a multi-echelon task. As the unit performs the tasks set forth in the scenario, the unit commander compares or grades the unit, using the T-P-U system. If the unit is trained at the task, it is given a T (for trained); if only partially trained, a P (for needs practice); if the task is to-

tally new to the unit or it performs poorly, it should be given a U (for untrained).

From these ratings, the commander can then plot the training strategy for the upcoming quarter or year. The general goal is to improve the unit's METL proficiency until it receives all Ts and then to maintain that rating. But METL improvement takes time. While the individual tasks that make up the more complex collective and multi-echelon tasks can be trained and assessed almost daily at unit level, most collective tasks must be trained and assessed during large unit training events.

At the weekly training meetings, the battery or company commander presents the newly assessed METL to the subordinate leaders. Together, they select the unit's training strategy for improvement, with all levels of the leadership taking responsibility for the unit's success.

The first tasks to be addressed for improvement should be any untrained (U) tasks, which show the weakest link in the current training strategy. Untrained METL tasks are then broken

down to the platoon, squad, and individual segments of the collective task. These individual and squad sub-tasks can then be placed on the next few training schedules—T-6, T-7 (training weeks). If the task is totally new to a unit, or the unit is in desperate need of improvement, the commander can request permission to change the upcoming published training schedules. This is advisable only when the unit changes commanders or a real problem exists. The weak task is eventually trained, assessed, and hopefully upgraded to a P or a T on the company METL.

Since the subordinate units' company METLs affect the overall battalion or brigade METL, the higher commanders may have a way to influence the total picture and bring success for the whole unit.

As the battalion commander sees the assessment results of the entire unit, let's say after an ARTEP, one or more collective tasks may need improvement. More than likely, each subordinate unit needs improvement in the tasks found untrained or partially trained. The commander can then start to plan for the

SAMPLE BATTALION METL ASSESSMENT			
TASK	TRAINED (RUN)	PARTIALLY TRAINED (WALK)	UNTRAINED (CRAWL)
PERFORM STRATEGIC DEPLOYMENT			U
SUSTAINMENT OPERATIONS		P	
MANEUVER OFFENSIVELY	T		
DEFEND POSITION		P	
SURVIVABILITY OPERATIONS		P	

Table 1

SAMPLE TASK OF THE QUARTER	
TASK	QUARTER OF EMPHASIS
PERFORM STRATEGIC DEPLOYMENT	1st QTR FY 95
SUSTAINMENT OPERATIONS	2d QTR FY 95
MANEUVER OFFENSIVELY	3d QTR FY 95
DEFEND POSITIONS	4th QTR FY 95
SURVIVABILITY OPERATIONS	1st QTR FY 96

Table 2

SAMPLE TASK OF THE MONTH — COMPANY LEVEL	
TASK	MONTH OF EMPHASIS
CONVOY OPERATIONS	OCTOBER
RAIL LOAD EQUIPMENT	NOVEMBER
AIR LOAD EQUIPMENT/PERSONNEL	DECEMBER
COMPANY SUPPLY OPERATIONS	JANUARY
COMPANY MAINTENANCE OPERATIONS	FEBRUARY
AMBUSH OPERATIONS	MARCH
ENGAGEMENT OPERATIONS	APRIL
COMPANY DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS	MAY
DEFEND AGAINST AIR ATTACK	JUNE
NBC OPERATIONS	JULY
FIRE AND BOMB TEAM OPERATIONS	AUGUST

Table 3

improvement of the entire unit in these tasks.

One way to do this is to assign each of the deficient tasks a time period for emphasis and improvement. Depending on the size of the unit and the available resources, one task per training quarter should be enough. Assigning too many tasks in short time will only lead the subordinate units to perform most of them in an unimpressive manner. If the unit concentrates personnel, resources, and time on the improvement of one collective METL task per quarter, in a couple of years, the entire unit will improve.

An additional benefit to all this planning would be that each subordinate commander and his personnel would know the complete training plan and direction for the battalion or brigade. It would work like this: Each quarter a task from the METL would be chosen for improvement. The battalion METL tasks are made up of many collective tasks that can be trained at the company level. It is only when the battalion is conducting multi-echelon, collective

training that the whole task can be assessed. The battalion or brigade commander issues the training guidance for the quarter and tells the units the Task of the Quarter. The units are then able to focus personnel and time on the improvement of the sub-tasks at company, platoon, squad, and individual levels.

Doing this will help the entire unit know what the overall training plan or strategy is, and will help guide the subordinate units in planning training schedules. What the subordinate units put on their training schedules will more closely reflect the overall strategy of the whole unit.

This Task of the Quarter strategy is not meant to take over all training for the quarter but to act as a focus. Training will still need to be done on the tasks on which the unit is proficient, to maintain the high state of proficiency and until the next assessment. The proficiency training is done at a much higher intensity to maintain the unit at or near ARTEP standards.

A training strategy of this type allows a unit to improve upon the tasks that

need improvement and provides time for day-to-day activities and command taskings. To do this, the battalion allots its staff, time, and resources to the Task of the Quarter. Using a Crawl, Walk, Run method, the battalion training staff can advise the subordinate units on the appropriate company or platoon level tasks to start on. The battalion training officer, along with the company commander, can assess the unit's proficiency in the company and platoon tasks that make up the battalion task. The battalion training officer acts as part of a checks and balances system. If the unit tries to train collective tasks not at its level of competency, the battalion training officer will then guide the company commander to more suitable tasks.

This guidance is not meant to interfere with the company commander's ability to plan and conduct training for the unit. It enables the battalion training officer to use experience and the battalion's strategy to ensure that the company is not off-track, wasting time and resources in achieving its goal. The training officer should also ensure that the unit's training attitude is correct. Often, subordinate units train to "just train," and don't educate the soldiers involved on how the task they are training relates to their combat mission. A new or concerned company commander will welcome the advice of an experienced S-3 training officer. He must use the battalion staff to make his command successful and add to the success of the battalion as a whole.

The accompanying charts show a sample battalion METL and the way it relates to the company, platoon, and individual tasks. The charts show how Task of the Quarter programs would work.

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