
Shoot, Move, Communicate

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The success of an infantry leader is judged by how well he does three things—shoot, move, and communicate. If he does those well, his unit's success

is assured. What could be easier?

Shoot. Move. Communicate.

The first time I heard those words I was a radiotelephone operator for the

platoon leader, and the company commander was patiently explaining their importance. When I heard them a couple of years later in Officer Candidate

School, it began to occur to me just how difficult it is to do those things right. In fact, it may be that nothing is more difficult than successfully directing the actions of a group of people as they attempt to shoot, move, and communicate. Many who attempt the task never succeed. Others get only part of it right. Only a rare few get it all right consistently enough to be considered successful.

Before going too far into this, however, it is important that we define what we mean by success. If we measure success by the number of promotions received, being able to shoot, move, and communicate may not be enough. If we measure success by mission accomplishment, especially in combat, with minimum casualties, then it is essential that we know how to direct the efforts of groups ranging from five or six soldiers to formations as large as brigades as they shoot, move, and communicate. We must also understand that the ability

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to do these three things is not limited to being able to do them in combat. In many respects, they are done in every unit, in one form or another, every day.

The mission of the infantry is to close with and destroy the enemy. Although there may be different ways of saying this, the point is that the infantry will take or hold ground, by the use of direct or indirect fire, by maneuvering when necessary, by either killing or capturing the enemy, or by forcing him to withdraw from contested ground. The ground in question may be a limited piece of terrain that can be occupied by a squad or a platoon, or it may be a forest, a mountain, a city, or a beach. The size is not important. Each infantry echelon has its own piece, and each unit must successfully shoot, move, and communicate if the whole is to succeed. Of course, the infantry does not do this alone. There's an entire combat arms team involved, but the infantry soldier is the heart of it all, and the rest of the team was created to support him. The essential part of this is that the infantryman do his part. He must be in the right place with the right

support at the right time and must have clear instructions on what he is to do.

Thus, the central question is whether the leader has prepared his soldiers to shoot accurately, taught them how to move to the right place, and provided them with clear instructions. If he has done all that, the chances of success are very high. But success in combat is never guaranteed. There are too many unknowns—weather, terrain, enemy capabilities, equipment failures, and many others.

An examination of the three words—shoot, move, communicate—will show the difficulty of accomplishing them. No dictionary will adequately define their importance.

Shooting implies using a weapon, either directly or indirectly aimed at an enemy, to either kill, wound, or drive him off. An infantryman has a variety of weapons at his disposal, and an infantry leader has an even greater choice. The first task may be as basic as selecting which weapon to use—rifle, grenade launcher, machinegun, TOW, mortar. The next step may not be so easy: Where does each weapon go in the formation? Which is on the right, and which on the left? Are the targets clearly defined? What type of position does the soldier prepare and occupy? How long will it take to finish that work? What about range cards and aiming stakes, mutual support, ammunition supply, principal direction of fire, final protective fire, target recognition, distribution of fire, fire discipline, alternate and supplemental positions, grazing fire, plunging fire, enfilade fire, dead space, ammunition redistribution plan?

What else do you have to do as a squad leader? What is your priority of work as a platoon leader? Maybe there is a forward observer with you, or a tank crew, an air defense artillery section, an electronic warfare element, or engineers. Oh, yes, preparation of the battlefield, obstacles, mines, wire. All these things are being incorporated into a single cohesive piece of terrain, and nobody has yet said, "Shoot." You are only getting *ready* to shoot!

Don't forget to consider the effects of weather and visibility on your prepara-

tions. Remember how difficult it was to accomplish all this work at the National Training Center, in Germany, or on a range at Fort Riley? Consider how much more difficult it will be when the enemy is practicing his own tasks of shoot, move, and communicate.

Basic rifle marksmanship, all 60 rounds of it, is not the answer. How is your maintenance program? Are all of your weapon systems operating? How about the logistics system? Do you have the right types of ammunition? Do you have enough of it? Do you have a means of transporting it? What will you do when the resupply truck breaks down? Are you defending? Preparing to attack? Going to the range? Is it so cold you can't hold the rifle steady for shivering? Are you too tired to focus on the problems at hand because you haven't been able to implement an effective sleep plan? Is the platoon sergeant (with 14 years of service) on leave and you have only your senior

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squad leader (with only a few months in the Army)?

Have we pretty well defined *Shoot*? At the platoon and squad level perhaps. Isn't it ironic that the toughest and most difficult jobs fall to the people who are least prepared to do them? It is the first sergeant and company commander who really have the training and experience to accomplish the *Shoot* phase at the squad and platoon level. But they also have their own shooting to be concerned about: Incorporating indirect fires. Coordinating among platoons, with adjacent units, and with other supporting elements. Managing traffic. Getting a deeper view of the battlefield. Using attack helicopters and close air support. Talking on multiple nets (shooting also requires communicating.) The engineers put the obstacle where? It can't be moved? Enemy armor is now being channeled to the platoon, which has only one antitank weapon? The one is being used by the guy just out of AIT because the experienced specialist broke his leg in intramural softball? Oh, now you may want to *move*? But we're not done *shooting*.

Shooting is hard!

Moving is harder! Moving, of course, implies going from one place to another, in some fashion. All movements should begin with a plan. And the plan should start at the beginning—where you are. Who is going? Where are you going? Is everyone going all the way to the final destination? Where *is* the final destination, and what is there? Or, what is *supposed* to be there?

How will you get there? That's one of the great things about the infantry—there are so many different ways to travel. In addition to riding trucks or buses, infantrymen walk, swim, or just drop in. It doesn't matter how they get to the battlefield; what is important is what happens after they get there.

The unit must be task organized to support the mission, and it must be properly equipped. Is the equipment in the right place? *Just where is the engineer tool set? How far can that 135-pound infantryman carry that 105-pound load today—uphill?* What formation will you use? *Are you certain this is the right route? Why did the very best compassman in the platoon have to go to the Advanced NCO Course this month?*

It is important while discussing this *movement* thing not to forget the purpose of a move. Are you simply going from point A to point B to occupy some piece of terrain, or are you moving to contact? Do you feel secure enough to speed along? Are you maneuvering to gain position and advantage so you can bring firepower to bear on the enemy? Are you moving only dismounted soldiers, or is there a combined arms team to control? Where is the unit that's supposed to be protecting your left flank? Why didn't anyone tell you the road was cratered and your resupply vehicles will be delayed several hours? Don't they know you're out of water, your soldiers are nearly out of bullets, and you have wounded soldiers to evacuate?

How much worse can it get? Where is that platoon? They went where? Why didn't you prepare those strip maps? The scout platoon is under heavy fire, and there won't be any

guides to bring the teams forward. No, I didn't mark my map—I was going to have a guide! Oh, watch out; are we outflanked? How did that enemy force get way over there so fast? The helicopter carrying the task force commander and his operations officer was shot down? What do we do now? Where do we go? Who's in charge? We need 15 trucks to move this outfit and they sent me only 9; what do I do now? We're pinned down and we can't move. How can I maneuver when I'm being attacked?

Moving is hard. You have to plan, plan, plan. Start point. Destination clearly defined. And keep in mind the possibility that you will often have to shoot and move at the same time.

Communicating is the hardest. Even when you clearly and distinctly hear what the other person is saying, the two of you may not be communicating. Even while you have plenty of time to read the operations order, you may not

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understand what is required or intended. Under the best of conditions, communicating is always difficult. Under the normal operating conditions for an infantry leader, it is far more difficult. It is important to understand that there may be times when you will have to perform the most complex tasks imaginable, under the most horrendous conditions, and all mechanical channels of communication are inoperable. What will you do? Do the men in your squad really know hand and arm signals? Are they truly proficient in executing battle drills? Mounted and dismounted? Do they know the SOP, and can they be relied upon to follow it? Did you actually lay that wire to the command post? To the adjacent unit? Does the man operating your radio know what he's doing? Do you have the right operating instructions? Can you use them? "Authenticate XJ"! What do you mean the rain washed the graphics off your map and you don't know where you're going? No one in that Korean Army platoon on my flank speaks English. How can I coordinate with them? *Your transmission is broken and garbled.*

Break squelch two times. Did I forget to change frequencies? *Get off my net!* Just how long did the commander tell me to hold this hill? Can I withdraw now? This operations order is pretty clear, but I don't understand the commander's intent. He can't really mean that. It clearly says we're to maintain radio listening silence, so I can't call him to ask about that paragraph. I'll just do what I'm certain he meant to say.

Does any of this seem made up to you? This brief article has only touched on the nature of the situation. No one has a tougher job than the small-unit infantry leader. No one has greater challenges or more difficult obstacles to overcome. From fire team leader to company commander. Only the best will succeed.

Fortunately, you don't have to try and do it alone. Of all the leadership traits that are indicated for comment on an efficiency report, perhaps the most important one of all is "Tactical and technical proficiency." To succeed you must study your profession and all that it demands. That study will be difficult, time-consuming, and never-ending. At times it will be drudgery. And you must practice what you study. No doubt you are familiar with the story about how a kingdom was lost for want of a nail. Well, the nails that hold your unit together are found in the toil and sweat of uncounted hours and endless days on ranges and in training, and in studying manuals and bulletins and talking to—communicating with—your subordinates, your peers, and your commanders. All of the information you need is available. Your boss and his boss will do all they can to help, because if you fail they may also fail. When you signed up for the infantry, they told you it would be fun. They never told you it would be easy.

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