
will teach small-unit leadership through battle drills and patrols. The program will also teach young leaders how OPFORs fight, to further enhance their combat effectiveness.

My intent is not to suggest that all units immediately carry out a reorganization such as this one. Instead, I seek to share the insights Company B has

gained from this experiment and offer an option to commanders who face the small challenges of recruitment and retention that our commander faced. The problem of strength is not likely to go away any time soon; meanwhile, commanders must find innovative solutions to keep their troops combat- in spite of this challenge.

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The Basics Keep You Alive

FIRST SERGEANT JASON SILSBY

One of the biggest mistakes leaders and soldiers make when their units rotate to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) is that they forget the little things they were taught as young soldiers. As a young soldier coming into the Army back in the 1980s, I vividly remember my uncle, who had served two tours in Vietnam, telling me, "Stick to the basics and keep your head down because the enemy knows how to shoot, too." I have never forgotten these words. Hopefully, in this article I can tell you about a few things that may help your platoons and squads survive—and learn—at the JRTC.

The opposing force (OPFOR) is made up of soldiers just like you and me. There is no magic in the JRTC's OPFOR; they focus on the same small-unit tactics that your platoons and squads are taught. The OPFOR units work off the commander's intent and use a lot of initiative. This is what makes them so successful. Usually, they move in teams of three to five men, with the senior man being a corporal or sergeant. They live out of caches during the low intensity conflict phase. One piece of equipment they use that you cannot use is the Motorola radio. This is their main means of communicating with their teams. Since these radios are not secure, the OPFOR uses

brevity codes a lot to confuse the rotating units. Every OPFOR soldier knows how to call a basic indirect fire mission and adjust fire. OPFOR soldiers mainly use the roads and villages as boundaries for their control measures. Company commanders searching for the enemy should keep that in mind.

Marksmanship is another thing our Army could do a little better. We have been given extra items to add to our rifles when most of us don't shoot that

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well even with iron sights. Next time you're on a rifle range back at home station, try doing some training using your iron sights along with all the other attachments. It will pay off.

One of the biggest contributors I have seen is the M68 sight. I know batteries are a big problem and hope the Army will come up with a way to keep the sight from coming on prematurely. Also, do some home station training with soldiers engaging other soldiers

wearing MILES gear and using individual movement techniques. This is what the OPFOR does between rotations. You will be surprised how well soldiers will learn to engage a moving target. At the JRTC you'll see the OPFOR kneeling or standing behind trees most of the time while engaging your troops, because they have learned through trial and error that they don't get as many kills from the prone position. This goes against a lot of things you were taught as a soldier. Getting into a position that allows you to engage a target effectively is also important, but you should understand and exploit the realities of the MILES battlefield just as the OPFOR does.

Pulling security was probably one of the most boring things I did as a young soldier. I now realize it is also one of the most important things. Too many times I have been out there with my counterparts and seen their units surprised by the OPFOR. A lot of times we fail to realize how a good security plan helps us in the long run. When putting out observation posts or conducting reconnaissance and security (R&S) patrols, you have to apply some common sense. Don't finger drill it. Training units have a habit of going in thinking they're going to find the OPFOR at night. Not once have we found

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the OPFOR at night since I have been an observer controller (OC). I recommend moving during the day and resting at night. Just be sure to conduct small R&S patrols around your defensive perimeter. Don't let your guard down, because the minute you do, all hell will break loose.

Land navigation is a skill soldiers have lost. The precise laser GPS receiver (PLGR) is a great tool that we all wish could be a little smaller. But don't just add in waypoints and start walking. And don't forget that GPS can be jammed as well. Use all the other assets available to you, such as your map, your compass, and soldiers who have been there before. The map you use does not show all the trails and unimproved roads, as some special OC maps do. There are a lot more trails actually on the ground than you might think. It wasn't long ago that this was mechanized infantry country. As a company commander or platoon leader, you will get out of it what you put into it, so put a good team leader in charge of planning your routes, and I guarantee you won't go wrong. Allow enough time to plan your route, just as you do for the tactical plan.

Battle drills are something I consider very important, especially at squad

level. If squads can do them, platoons will have no problem. Commanders and first sergeants, you have to be firm when it comes to making platoons and squads rehearse their battle drills. Too many times I have seen platoons and squads come to the JRTC and have to relearn battle drills all over again. I think squad leaders are looking for a picture perfect drill every time, which they are probably not going to find. In addition, we as leaders do not put real-world stressors on them such as they get here from the OPFOR. Squad leaders, if you cut corners now, you will pay later. You have to be hard on your team leaders and soldiers; it will save lives. It has been proved time and time again. Knowing when to transition from one drill to another is also a tough decision to make. It can happen in a matter of seconds. The OPFOR soldiers are good at battle drills, and you have to master drills too if you want to beat them on their own turf.

Planning at the platoon and squad level is critical to mission success. As a platoon leader or squad leader, you often find yourself conducting condensed troop-leading procedures (TLPs) while you're at the JRTC. It's tough sometimes. Ask your OC to help you out when it comes time to plan a mission,

especially when you're still in the initial staging base. I had the opportunity to go to the Combat Leaders Course while I was a Ranger Instructor. This helped me understand the orders process better than I had realized. Platoon sergeant, don't assume your young platoon leader is totally competent in giving operation orders. You need to get involved. If both of you are struggling, ask the company commander. He just came from a school that taught him all about planning, so pick his brain. Carry those leader graphic training aid (GTA) cards in your pocket. They will help you through the TLPs.

Hopefully, the things I have discussed here will help your companies, platoons, and squads survive while they are deployed at the JRTC. Remember the basic things you were taught when you were a soldier. Leaders, you will realize some day, long after your company or platoon leaves the "box," how important this training experience really was to you and how much good, useful training you took home with you.

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