

# Commandant's Note

BRIGADIER GENERAL BENJAMIN C. FREAKLEY

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## TRAINING ADAPTIVE LEADERS AND UNITS

When General (Retired) Freddy Franks was about to deploy the VII Corps to Saudi Arabia for Operation Desert Shield, he visited Colonel (Retired) Russell P. “Red” Reeder, Jr., the famous commander of the 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, during the Normandy landings on D-Day, June 6, 1944. General Franks asked Colonel Reeder how he built adaptability into his unit prior to the invasion. He said he trained his unit to deal with uncertainty, elaborating on both his training in Tennessee and later in England.



He first focused on combat critical tasks and drills. Once his unit gained the competence and confidence in these core competencies, he started to work on flexibility and adaptability. For instance, he would allow a unit to plan and prepare for a mission but change the objective or task organization just prior to LD. Injecting this uncertainty into training paid off, making the unit far more adaptable when it landed in the wrong area on D-Day. On that fateful day, Colonel Reeder had two choices: either get back on the landing craft and brave the gauntlet of direct and indirect fires again or adapt. Thanks to the unit's training, it was able to adapt and secure its beachhead.

As leaders in the violent, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous contemporary operating environment (COE), we must take counsel from Colonel Reeder and proactively build competence, confidence, flexibility, and adaptability into our leaders and formations. The traits and factors that make adaptive leaders and units are not just intuitive; they can and must be developed and reinforced. How we build adaptability in the minds of leaders is very similar to the way we build any muscle in our body: through exercise. With more repetitions our minds become more adaptable.

Likewise, a regionally distinctive, adaptive threat has replaced, to some degree, the predictable, doctrinally rigid

threat we faced two decades ago. Remnants of the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and Iraqi dissident groups know they cannot survive a decisive engagement with American Infantry, so they resort to ambushes, mines, taking hostages, and hit-and-run attacks. This phenomenon is not unfamiliar to our Army or Infantry. History, including our own, is replete with examples of how a weaker army adopts its tactics to offset its opponent's numerical or technological superiority. What is unique is the diversity of the Threat's tactics from city

to city, village to village, and tribe to tribe. In Matt Zeigler's book *Three Block War: U.S. Marines in Iraq* and the U.S. Command and General Staff College publication *Sharp Corners*, the authors correctly outline the dilemma our junior leaders face. Providing subordinates a vision and clear intent, mission-type orders, and maximum latitude has proven more valuable than relying on checklists.

My focus as the Chief of Infantry is building flexibility and adaptability through our doctrine, professional education, and in our assignment considerations. Experience-based doctrine is our starting point, because it serves as the basis for much of what we do. Although we recognize that our doctrine continues to evolve, we also know that it is sound. In fact, it is being validated daily in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and in Iraq. At a minimum, our doctrine provides us with a common language and way of thinking, and provides the framework for initiative and a point of departure for the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that we see being developed by adaptable young American leaders throughout the world. These conditional TTPs soon find application among units facing similar conditions in a like environment. We are working to capture the more enduring of these TTPs, review them, and share them either through the Center for Army Lessons Learned or our own collaborative site for quick turnaround to both

combat Theaters and to units preparing for deployment. These enduring TTPs and lessons learned will also find their place in our doctrinal manuals and lesson plans. But doctrinal improvements will only take us so far in terms of instilling and sustaining adaptability in our leaders and units.

We will complement our doctrinal effort with professional education programs that foster and sustain adaptability. These programs must continue to produce Soldiers and leaders well-grounded in doctrine and who are well disciplined and well-rounded.

The goal is to place our officers and noncommissioned officers into as many tactical dilemmas as possible during their respective courses. This is nothing new; adaptability has long been a thread that runs through the fabric of our American tradition and of our military culture. A reading of our Army's history reveals skirmishes, battles, and wars won by Soldiers and units through their valor, their initiative, and their ability to respond to the unexpected. Our resident instruction is designed to build upon these qualities by maximizing the use of student Tactical Decision Exercises with the appropriate levels of peer and instructor evaluation. This is how we will prepare leaders to anticipate the unexpected, to react, and to seize and hold the initiative.

Finally, career management policies must afford opportunities for a diverse array of assignments that expose leaders and Soldiers to various types of units, climates, and geographical areas that further encourage and sustain adaptability. The leader's role in this effort is a crucial



one, since the maneuver commander will serve as the combined arms integrator at company, battalion, and brigade level. To successfully accomplish this, experience in multiple types of infantry and combined arms assignments is imperative. Experience teaches the enduring lessons, and we will work closely with the Human Resources Command to provide our combined arms leaders of the future with every possible advantage.

It is clear that we need to model our own training after Colonel Reeder's. His example of tough, realistic training under varying conditions accustoms leaders and units to confronting and solving a wide array of tactical dilemmas, builds competence and confidence, and develops the Soldiers' and units' ability to quickly adapt to new contingencies. Such training prepares leaders for the challenge of battle command at the same time it promotes Soldiers' confidence in the unit and its commander. Commanders must work to create and sustain an environment in which training deficiencies are identified and corrected, innovation is rewarded, and honest mistakes are accepted as the price of growing leaders. Today, our nation confronts an enemy who will stop at nothing to attack our interests and kill our citizens. We have beaten them in two countries in the past two years, and now they are desperate. As the Army continues to prosecute the Global War on Terrorism, it is adaptive leaders and units who will track down and kill those who have attacked us.

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