

# THE WARRIOR CHALLENGE

## A Catalyst for Changing the Culture of BCT

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**B**asic Combat Training (BCT) has undergone an entire transformation over the past year to produce Soldiers better prepared for an Army at war. Many initiatives fueled this fire of change, but none bear the significance equal to the Warrior Challenge. The Warrior Challenge in its simplest form is a set of externally evaluated STX lanes designed to challenge both the drill sergeants and Soldiers in the conduct of squad-level tactical missions while demonstrating the application of individual skills learned during BCT. The original intent of the Warrior Challenge was to force the development of our noncombat arms MOS drill sergeants; however, the end product proved to be much greater. Because of this impact, the Warrior Challenge has been added to the new BCT program of instruction (POI). This article addresses the “how to” of the Warrior Challenge and some of the results identified after a year of continuous execution of the program.

The Warrior Challenge as stated earlier is a set of externally evaluated STX lanes. Each BCT squad competes against an established standard during the conduct of tactical missions. Key to the success of the program, the drill sergeants act as squad leaders and are evaluated on their performance during the conduct of the missions. Each squad earns points based on their performance and competes for the Warrior Challenge Streamer. Additionally, the top scoring drill sergeant squad leader earns the Warrior Ethos award and trophy. Currently, the missions in the Warrior Challenge include movement to contact, convoy resupply, and rescue an ambushed convoy. These missions and associated tasks are derived from the current

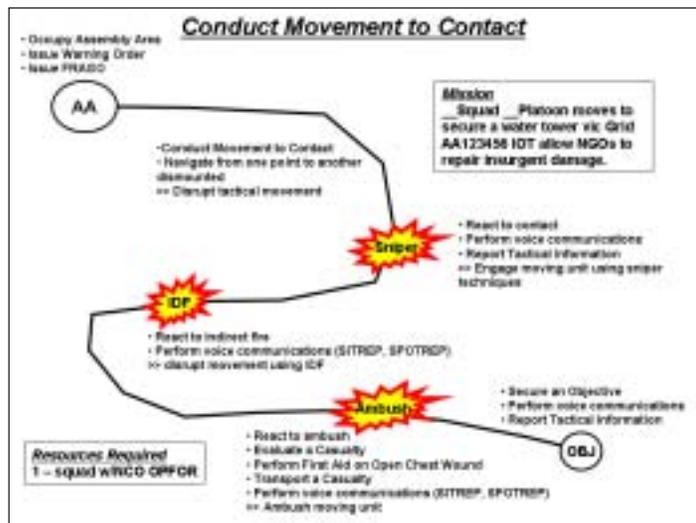


Figure 1

operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and supported by the 40 Core Warrior Tasks and nine Warrior Drills as defined by Task Force Soldier.

For the movement to contact mission, the squad is given a scenario where small insurgent elements are attempting to destroy local infrastructure like water sources and roads/bridges. Specifically, the squad’s mission is to secure a key water source to allow non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to repair damage caused by the insurgent forces. They are further tasked to destroy any insurgent forces they encounter during their mission. Under the leadership of the drill sergeant squad leader, the squad plans and conducts rehearsals for the mission in a semi-secure assembly area. As the squad begins movement to their objective, they encounter a sniper, indirect fire, and an ambush. In each case, the squad is evaluated on their performance of the appropriate battle drill, their reporting procedures (SALUTE, SITREP, SPOTREP), and their ability to continue the mission. While the lane is well structured, there is a great deal of “free play” between the friendly and enemy forces. The enemy is issued a mission to conduct a

baited ambush and conducts this mission under the supervision of a drill sergeant as well. In many cases, the friendly unit detects the ambush and seizes the initiative from the enemy – likewise the enemy may totally overwhelm the friendly unit. In either case, the observer controller (OC) observes the contact and assesses the casualties accordingly. During the course of the mission, the squad has multiple opportunities to treat and evacuate both friendly and enemy casualties based on the

adjudication of the contact. Once their objective is secured and the casualties are treated and evacuated, the squad receives a change of mission and conducts an after action review (AAR) led by the observer controller. Upon the completion of the AAR, the observer controller issues the squad leader the next mission.

The next mission requires the squad to conduct vehicle movement to resupply a unit not in contact. The insurgents continue to operate in the area conducting small ambushes to interdict movement along key road networks. As in the previous mission, the squad conducts planning and rehearsals in the assembly area. During the conduct of the mission, the squad encounters a far ambush and a blocked ambush. In each case, the squad is evaluated on their performance of the appropriate battle drill and their reporting procedures. “Free play” applies in this lane as well, and the OC assesses casualties to further develop the squad in both first aid tasks and casualty evacuation. As before, the OC leads the squad through an AAR, then issues a fragmentary order (FRAGO) for the final mission.

The third and final mission requires the

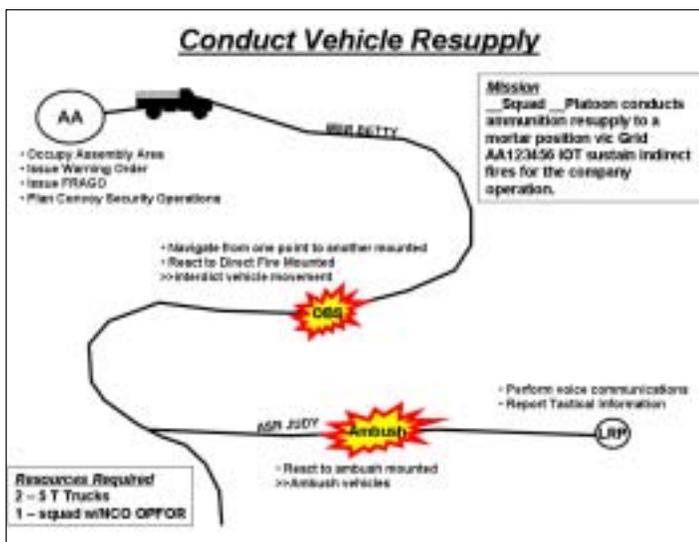


Figure 2

squad to rescue an ambushed convoy. The insurgents continue to interdict vehicle movement with IEDs and small ambushes. A two-vehicle convoy is ambushed on its way back from conducting a mission. The squad must secure the vehicles and treat and evacuate the casualties. While the squad conducts this portion of the mission, they receive fire from a couple of insurgents who break contact and draw them into a nearby building. The squad enters and clears multiple rooms within the building in an effort to identify and kill or capture the insurgents. As the squad clears the rooms in the building, they are presented multiple targets that range from small children to women to hostile men and women. In each case, the Soldiers are evaluated on room clearing and shoot/don't shoot responses. Once the building is cleared the squad completes the original mission, establishes a helicopter PZ, and calls for a MEDEVAC. As in the other scenarios, the squad is evaluated on their performance of the tasks and drills required to successfully complete the mission.

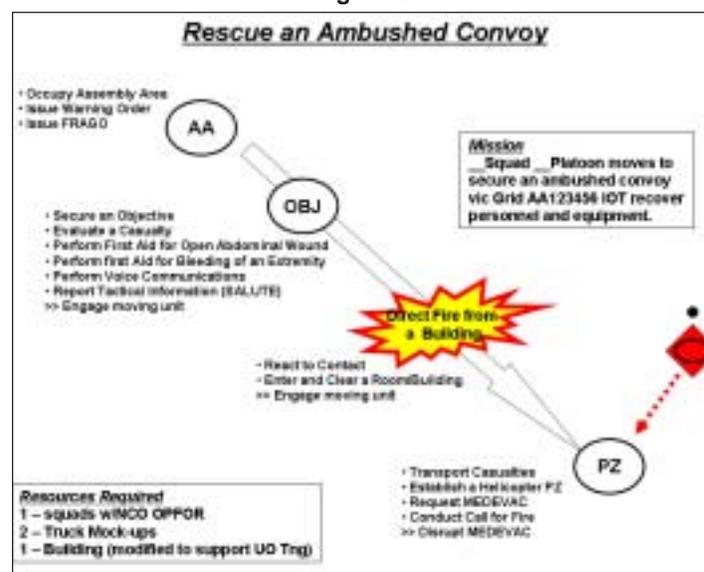
Understanding the extent of the missions in the Warrior Challenge, one may wonder how this can be possible in BCT. How can we expect our noncombat arms drill sergeants to lead their squads in these “infantry” tasks? How do we prepare Soldiers to perform these tasks in the short eight weeks provided? How do we execute this STX training on the shoestring resources we have in personnel and equipment? Is it really an evaluation and what are we truly assessing? What results can I expect? The remainder of this article addresses each of these questions and explains how a battalion has conquered these challenges with internal resources.

How can we expect our noncombat arms drill sergeants to lead their squads in these “infantry” tasks? First, these are no longer just “infantry” tasks. The contemporary operating environment (COE) presents challenges like these throughout the entire area of operation. The results in OEF and OIF have highlighted the requirement for all Soldiers and leaders to master these skills, regardless of their MOS. The Army most recently codified the “warrior first” intent in the warrior tasks and drills which are the foundation for the missions within the Warrior Challenge. Second, how can we *not* expect our drill sergeants to lead their squads in these tasks? All of our drill sergeants were great NCOs before

arriving at BCT and can perform the leader tasks required to lead a squad through these missions. They do need training to practice, rehearse and refine their leader and tactical skills to give them the confidence necessary to train and lead their Soldiers. In order to address this area, we developed a two-pronged approach: leader training and peer training. We assembled the drill sergeants, company commanders, and first sergeants and executed leader training on each aspect of the Warrior Challenge. Some of these training events were conducted with ad hoc squads made of leaders actually executing the missions. Some of this training was conducted as NCOPD focused on specific tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) like room clearing. In each case, leaders were trained on the performance of the missions and provided TTPs to prepare their Soldiers to execute the supporting tasks. Peer training occurred back at the companies. One or two subject matter experts (SMEs) within the company would continue the leader training process in preparation for upcoming cycles. Each time a company conducted the Warrior Challenge, the drill sergeants shared TTPs and developed strategies to prepare themselves and their Soldiers for the next Warrior Challenge. This basically developed into an “upward spiral” whereby the training, as well as the leader and Soldier performance, improved with each execution of the Warrior Challenge.

How do we prepare Soldiers to perform these tasks in the short eight weeks provided? The key here is focus. The focus of BCT used to be on sterile phase testing. Now the focus is on performing well during the Warrior Challenge. In order to perform well during the Warrior Challenge, a Soldier has to understand both *how* and *when* to perform a task. The how for a task occurs during instruction in pretty much in the same manner as always – task, condition, and standard. The trick of capturing when to perform the task occurs during a more focused Drill Sergeant’s Time. Because of the added focus of the Warrior Challenge, drill sergeants use every opportunity to train their Soldiers in the performance of fire team and squad drills while reinforcing the tasks traditionally taught during BCT. Every opportunity during the day is used to train/reinforce some task – whether it is tactical movement to or from

Figure 3



training or a battle drill during PT cool down. Each time the drill sergeants execute Warrior Challenge, they develop a more comprehensive strategy to train their Soldiers for the next one, and again training improves.

**H**ow do we execute this STX training on the shoestring resources we have in time, personnel and equipment? Every installation will vary slightly on available resources. However, with careful planning and command emphasis, the STXs can be executed with resources internal to the battalion. Each BCT company has enough transportation assets to support the Convoy Resupply lane. We use an existing building and static vehicles to support the Rescue an Ambushed Convoy lane. Temporary rooms can be made of pickets and target cloth as an alternate and almost any vehicle can be substituted for the objective on the lane as well. There is enough pyrotechnics and blank ammunition in the current FTX to support all three lanes. To ensure we have enough drill sergeants to have one for each squad, we execute with eight squads each day. Some drill sergeants lead a squad through both days; however, no drill sergeant leads more than two squads during the course of the training. With only eight squads executing each day, we have the remaining eight squads with drill sergeant supervision available for OPFOR support. Time and OCs go hand-in-hand as the biggest challenge. In order to gain the most efficient use of time, we use two OCs on each lane. One OC is moving with a squad, while the other OC is simultaneously observing planning and rehearsals in the assembly area with another squad. Using this method, it takes approximately 12 hours to execute eight squads each day. A typical FTX timeline is: Day 1, deploy to field and prepare; Day 2 and 3, conduct Warrior Challenge (8 squads each day); Day 4, continue Warrior Challenge as necessary and conduct retraining; Day 5, redeploy. It is important to note Day 4 remains available for back up in the event of bad weather or other distracters that postpone or delay the training on Day 2 or 3. It is also used for retraining squads that fail to meet the standard. To place the proper emphasis and aid in assessment, the OCs are the battalion commander, the command sergeant major, and the Company Commanders. We currently use

all four company commanders across the battalion to run each Warrior Challenge. Each company commander gets an opportunity to evaluate 32 squads each quarter as well as an opportunity to observe training and SOPs of his sister companies. The value added here is self evident, and as in many areas throughout the program, contributes to improved training throughout the battalion.

Is it really an evaluation, and what are we truly assessing? Let there be no doubt – this is an evaluation. Both the drill sergeants and the Soldiers are being evaluated on individual, collective and leader tasks throughout the training. In the assembly areas, Soldiers are evaluated on individual weapon proficiency with the M16A2 and the M249 SAW, use of the Claymore and AT-4, map reading, and maintenance of their individual weapons and equipment. During the time in the assembly area, the drill sergeant and squad are graded on occupation and local security, planning, FRAGOs, and rehearsals. During the execution of each mission, the squad is evaluated on the performance of numerous tasks and drills. In many cases, these tasks and drills are redundant across all three missions, and the squad improves through the execution and AAR of each lane. All of the evaluations are based on task/condition/standard and performance measures from the most current doctrine rolled into training and evaluation outlines (T&EOs).

**T**he squad is scored based on how well they perform these tasks as outlined in the T&EOs and platoon and company streamers are awarded for those who meet or exceed the established standard. The highest scoring drill sergeant is also recognized with the Warrior Ethos Award presented by the battalion commander at graduation. While these are the positive awards that come from the evaluation, the true assessment is in the training and the trainers. Commanders at company and battalion along with the battalion CSM see every drill sergeant and a cross section of every platoon in each company. The key leaders gain an extremely accurate assessment for the level of training proficiency of both the Soldiers and the drill sergeants. This is a much more effective tool for developing training than the traditional statistics used in years past. Based on our

assessments over the past year, we have been able to refine our leader training and identify drill sergeants that require additional training in programs like the Combat Leader's Course (CLC) at Fort Benning.

What results can I expect? The upward spiral effect on improving training throughout BCT seems endless. This is attributed primarily to continued professional growth of the drill sergeants. As highlighted earlier, the drill sergeants continue to assess their own abilities and develop strategies to improve themselves and their Soldiers in the upcoming cycle. The noncombat arms drill sergeants had the steepest learning curve; however, they have improved the most. Three of the last five top performing drill sergeants had combat support and combat service support backgrounds. All of the company commanders in the battalion have OC'd at least 32 squad STXs in the last 60 days. The positive impact this has on their professional development, as well as training within their organizations, is incredible. The most important result is the impact on the individual Soldier. Soldiers now receive realistic, relevant training that prepares them for scenarios they will soon face in combat. Each cycle, this training gets better based on the continued improvement of leaders at all levels, and the Soldiers leave basic training confident and proficient in the application of their warrior tasks and drills.

The original intent of the Warrior Challenge was to force the development of our noncombat arms drill sergeants; however the end product proved to be much greater. The program provides a vehicle whereby the Soldiers are trained and the leaders at all levels are developed. It provides focus for our training and challenges drill sergeants to continue to develop professionally while on the trail. Because of these results, the Warrior Challenge has been added to the new BCT POI. Most importantly, the Warrior Challenge is the catalyst for change in the BCT culture and fosters the best conditions to train our Soldiers and leaders for an Army at War.

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