

# Command Sergeant Major's Corner

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## URBAN COMBAT — WHERE ADAPTABILITY MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Infantrymen expect to be given the toughest, most demanding missions and there are few that compare to the demands and challenges of urban combat. The sheer complexity and potential uncertainty of operating in an urban environment combine with normal environmental challenges to make urban operations uniquely challenging for our Soldiers and small unit leaders.

In the last issue of *Infantry*, we discussed the importance of physical adaptations to operating in mountainous terrain. I submit that there are few environments that demand more mental adaptability than does the urban environment. Whether taking part in large scale clearing operations or performing routine patrols through a familiar neighborhood, infantrymen have to be ready to shift along the full spectrum of conflict at any moment. A friendly cordon and knock could easily transition into a fierce firefight involving heavy casualties, yet Soldiers demonstrate remarkable resilience after making such a transition as they react to contact, neutralize the threat, and continue their mission. When faced with the problem of frequent, accurate, enemy sniper fire, adaptive Soldiers invent and fabricate vehicle mounted sniper screens and adjust their activity and exposure to forestall or counter enemy actions. Small kill teams (SKT) patiently study an improvised explosive device (IED) cell's routine to better understand what markings and signals represent and how the enemy creates diversions. Soldiers on these SKTs demonstrate superb tactical patience and routinely undermine enemy attempts to manufacture, store, transport, emplace, or employ IEDs. An alert rifleman recognizes when something seems out of place; he has the intuition to lift up a board buried in cow manure, discovering a huge cache, or to check an obscure mound with a metal detector — discovering a field full of buried munitions. These are just a few examples of infantrymen who readily adapt to their environment and do extraordinary things every day.

While in training we may never be able to fully replicate the complexity and size of some of the urban areas we are currently operating in, but we still can create situations in training that develop Soldiers' skills and attributes that lead to superior performance in the complex urban environment. Infantry leaders at all levels, especially at the direct leadership level, should strive to develop the confidence, initiative, accountability, and responsibility of their small unit leaders, as well as all infantrymen and Soldiers under their charge. The Asymmetric Warfare Group

(AWG) has identified these attributes as of particular relevance to the global war on terrorism and refers to them as the *AWG Intangibles*. If we consolidate or centralize individual training at too high a level, will junior NCOs

gain confidence in their ability to train their Soldiers? Can we hold them accountable for training we take out of their hands? Can we then expect them to take the initiative to train all the other individual tasks we decide not to centralize?

The complexity of urban terrain demands our infantrymen be proficient thinkers and problem solvers who maintain situational awareness at all times. While most infantrymen are adaptive in varying degrees by their nature, they should have ample opportunity during training to develop and exercise their thinking and problem solving skills. Most platoon and company level leaders have enough combat experience to develop relevant tactical decision games, vignettes, and even situational training exercises to force Soldiers to think through tough situations. Developing our junior leaders' ability to think and adapt is arguably one of the most important things we can do; however, it is not quite as simple as the learning of a new tactic, technique, or procedure or how to operate a new item of equipment. We improve our thinking skills and adaptability through a combination of experience and education, and we can enhance them through creative training events designed to force Soldiers to arrive at creative solutions.

I encourage NCOs and all small unit leaders to review and use FM 3-06, FM 3-06.11 and TC 90-1 and Center for Army Lessons Learned web-based products as references for developing urban operations training plans. Additionally, the latest Leadership Field Manual, FM 6-22, is a valuable reference on adaptability and Soldier development. The Infantry Center's Ranger Course and the Asymmetric Warfare Group's Combat Application Training Course are superb courses that will assist with developing adaptable leaders. NCOs should pursue all available opportunities for self-development even as they train their Soldiers in the tactics, techniques, and procedures of urban combat.

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