

Command Sergeant Major's Corner

COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR WILLIAM J. ULIBARRI

COIN: WHEN ADAPTABILITY MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

One of the unique aspects of counterinsurgency (COIN) operations is that conditions are constantly changing as insurgents quickly modify tactics and adapt to our actions. We are fighting “a hostile, thinking, and adaptive enemy” as described in FM 3-0, *Operations*, but we cannot forget that the infantrymen in our own squads and platoons think and adapt as well as, if not better than, our enemy. As leaders develop and refine their situational understanding, success may depend largely on the extent to which leaders are able to learn from those adaptive squads and platoons. While terrain, physical environment, and conditions are somewhat stable and relatively easy to adapt to, changing enemy tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) are more complex and elusive, and require our constant attention.

At the small unit level, an infantryman's ability to learn, adapt, and act is crucial, and shared information makes this possible. Post operational debriefs, hotwashes or after action reviews provide an excellent forum to learn from our comrades and their own perspectives on a recently completed operation or action. For example, the M1151 driver of the lead vehicle may have a distinctly different experience compared to that of the trail vehicle's .50 cal gunner.

It is important for leaders to provide the opportunity for Soldiers to discuss at least the significant events of each patrol. Learning from — and sharing — our own and others' experience in our organization is extremely valuable and provides a reference point from which we can learn from and disseminate the lessons learned across the Army and to other services. Our squad leaders and platoon sergeants are at their best as they lead Soldiers in the preparation and execution of missions; however, we must closely examine and assess their skills in coordination and planning operations as well. A lessons learned process at the unit level might assist in collecting, codifying, and disseminating information across a task force.

Another reference point from which we begin our education is our own COIN doctrine, published in FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*. NCOs should become familiar with FM 3-24 because it articulates established, enduring principles and tenets for COIN operations. While FM 3-24 is official Army doctrine, there are other learning resources published by the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL). These publications provide an array of articles, submitted by Soldiers from around the Army and gleaned from our own professional bulletins, consolidated in handbook or newsletter form. CALL publications enable all to learn from others' experience and to in turn give voice to their own experience so that their information may be passed along to others. Some COIN-specific publications

small unit leaders may find useful include CALL Newsletter 08-05 *Counterinsurgency Organization* (February 2008); CALL Handbook 07-6 *Southern Afghanistan COIN Operations* (October 2006); CALL Handbook 08-11 *COIN Patrolling* (April 2008);

CALL Newsletter 08-25 *A Battalion Task Force in COIN: Stryker TF 2-1 IN*. These represent a small sampling of learning resources available from CALL; there are also Combat Training Center bulletins, newsletters, and trends; special editions; *News From the Front*; training techniques; and initial impressions reports. Each of these publications may be obtained from the CALL homepage: <http://call.army.mil> using the “Request for Information or a CALL Product” link.

If the Infantry is to continue to be a learning organization, NCOs must become proactive in sharing their training, combat experiences, and lessons learned. I challenge all squad leaders and platoon sergeants attending the Basic NCO Course (BNCOC) or Maneuver Advanced NCO Course (M/ANCOC) to consider writing an article for publication in *Infantry* or for a CALL publication to share their experience. Communicating lessons learned within and beyond our immediate organization is an effective way of extending our influence. CALL provides an excellent vehicle to disseminate lessons learned throughout the force. I encourage all leaders to use this powerful tool as a learning resource as well as to teach others. The NCOcorpsnet and other professional on-line forums may also be helpful in discussing lessons learned; however, it is always important to remember that what worked in Baghdad today may not work in Mosul tomorrow, and that we have to keep operations security in mind when exchanging information. Army Knowledge Online lets us exchange information with those authorized access and is another effective way to get the word out. The crucial point is that we are constantly thinking, expanding our knowledge, and developing our Soldiers to do the same. The authors of FM 3-24 note that “Adapting occurs as Soldiers and Marines apply what they have learned through study and experience, assess the results of their actions, and continue to learn during operations.” Our success in the global war on terrorism reflects the ability of our Soldiers and leaders to adapt, get inside the enemy's thought process, and hit him when he least expects it, and as a result we have now seized the initiative.

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