

# INFANTRY BASIC OFFICER LEADERSHIP COURSE

## *Platoon Leader Decision Making for the 21st Century*

CPT MICHAEL FORTENBERRY

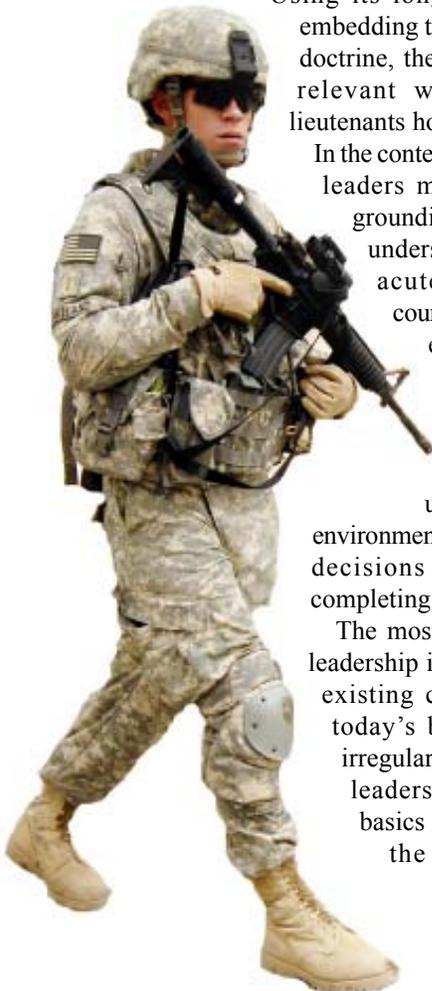
In the Infantry Basic Officer Leadership Course (IBOLC), lieutenants train to lead infantry platoons in modern warfare. While much time is spent teaching the students to embrace the Warrior Ethos, infantry culture and small unit tactics, critical thinking and decision-making skills are the most important leader traits developed during the course. Students are trained and assessed in three critical areas: *Intelligence, Character and Tactical Skills*, and *Competencies Development*. These individual and leader tasks and skills are essential in leading Soldiers on today's battlefields.

The typical methods of teaching infantry leadership do not permit lieutenants to fully recognize the intricacies of modern warfare. Thus, IBOLC is an outcomes-based leader development program designed to build the foundation of infantry leadership and prepare lieutenants for the complexities of the operational environment.

Using its long-established framework of embedding the basics of infantry tactics and doctrine, the curriculum has become more relevant with emphasis on teaching lieutenants how to think.

In the contemporary environment small unit leaders must not only possess a firm grounding in infantry tactics, but also understand cause and effect and be acute to the principles of counterinsurgency (COIN). Leaders, especially at the squad and platoon levels, often find themselves in unique and even abnormal situations. Through situational awareness and understanding of the environment, these leaders are making smart decisions to solve problems while completing their missions.

The most important tenet in small unit leadership is versatility. This is due to two existing characteristics that dominate today's battlefield — ambiguity and irregular or random violence. Small unit leaders who are equipped with the basics of infantry tactics and possess the maturity to make sound



### BOLC III Outcomes

- Values and Ethics**
  - \* Junior officer who embodies, lives and defends the Army Values;
- Leadership**
  - \* Possesses attributes and competencies to assess, train, and lead at first unit of assignment;
- Officership**
  - \* Applies roles and responsibilities at first unit of assignment;
- Personal Development**
  - \* Demonstrates self-development and an understanding of the lifelong learning process for himself and future subordinates;
  - \* Advances personal and professional development as the future of the Army;
- Technical Competence**
  - \* Demonstrates technical skills proficiency for individual branch integration as a member of the combined arms team;
  - \* As a leader applies Army management systems and sustainment functions;
- Tactical Competence**
  - \* Makes appropriate decisions based on doctrine (includes troop leading procedures), assessment, critical thinking and judgment to provide a solution to a tactical problem;
  - \* Functions as a leader in employing warrior task and battle drills and branch-defined technical and tactical skills;
  - \* Adapts TLPs and problem-solving skills to branch specific mission support requirements;
  - \* Executes branch defined missions in support of full spectrum operations.

decisions will operate more effectively in the conflicts of the 21st century. Civilians, culture, complex terrain, economy, religion and politics all make up the peripheral conditions that weigh on a leader's ability to achieve objectivity and decisiveness in both planning and decision making.

Tactical decision making is an amalgamated thought process using critical thinking skills and Army doctrine to develop solutions and evaluate outcomes. In IBOLC, leader intelligence development is defined in two aspects of decision making — analytical and intuition.

Lieutenants are taught to understand that not every problem has a textbook remedy and not every situation should be

approached with a lockstep mentality. We emphasize that leaders will need to use both analytical and intuitive thinking to develop rational courses of action. While analytical thinking combines sequential, procedural and comparative methods in a scientific approach to problem solving, leaders are often required to fall back on their intuition. Where uncertainty and ambiguity often prevail, leaders who possess cognitive skills in understanding the environment and how and when it changes will be able to identify the outcomes derived by their unit's actions.

Intuitive thinking enables individuals who are constrained by time to rely on personal experience, judgment, and understanding of the environment. These elements serve as an aggregate to enable quick decision making. Leaders learn to weigh their actions against desired outcomes in order to avoid negative consequences.

Students are challenged intellectually through multiple learning exercises designed to improve their ability to think, lead, and plan. Lieutenants receive a full week of training on troop leading procedures and stability operations. In addition, they are required to complete a book report from the Chief of Infantry Reading List and a tactical decision exercise. These assignments are contemporary operating environment based and help to develop analytical and intuitive decision making. An example of a tactical decision exercise is illustrated in Figure 1.

This simple exercise helps to develop intuitive decision making while building on the sequential process defined in the troop leading procedures. It requires the student to conduct a hasty mission analysis. The student analyzes terrain, time, and relative combat power. He faces constraints and limitations on resources and personnel. By forcing the student to consider these constraints and the civilian dynamic, we improve the student's intangible ability to form creative solutions.

Lieutenants leave IBOLC understanding that the operational environment changes frequently. Once students deploy, the need to adjust behavior, tactics and techniques as well as perception of the enemy and civilians on the battlefield will be necessary. Often units transition battlespace and move from one area to another. A threat in one area may not be the same in another, and the cultural and political dynamics sometimes differ by region.

On today's battlefield the need for leaders who can develop tactically sound courses of action while making ethically grounded decisions is critical. We offer this question to our students: "Is the tactical victory worth operational or even strategic setbacks?"

As stated in Chapter 1 of FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*: "Any use of force generates a series of actions. There may be times when an overwhelming effort is necessary to destroy or intimidate an opponent and reassure the populace. Extremist insurgent combatants often have to be killed. In any case, however, counterinsurgents should calculate carefully the type and amount of force to be applied and who wields it for any operation. An operation that kills insurgents is counterproductive if collateral damage leads to the recruitment of fifty more insurgents."

According to Field Manual 6-22, *Army Leadership*, the factors which make up leader character are the Army Values, empathy, and the Warrior Ethos. Students are required to complete an ethical vignette involving a real-world leader dilemma or leadership character flaw in relation to the Army Values. The student must

### Hasty TCP in Mosul, Iraq

**Situation:**

You are the support platoon leader of 3-327th Infantry (Air Assault) and are currently in the brigade support area (BSA), adjacent to the main highway leading north into Mosul. It is now 1400 hrs. The battalion has operated in the AO for two months and has been effective in transitioning to stability and support operations.

While updating the HHC commander on the last 24/next 24-hour operations, you receive a message over the radio from the battalion commander. He is 10 kilometers south of the BSA heading north toward Mosul, and he has just spotted a "suspicious" individual in a white four-door SUV also heading north at a high rate of speed. The BN CDR orders you to detail all personnel in the SUV.

Several of your vehicles and personnel are conducting LOGPAC operations in the city, and a couple of vehicles are deadlined. However, you have 2 x M998s with mounted .50 caliber machine guns, 1 x M1083 LMTV and your command HMMWV available in the BSA. You have 15 x Pax in the BSA. Also available are 5 x strands of concertina wire and 2 x TCP signs in Kurdish and Arabic.

The HHC CDR reminds you of the rules of engagement which state that deadly force is authorized in case of a perceived deadly threat and always in self-defense. You also know that it takes approximately two minutes to get from the BSA to Hwy 1.

**Requirement:**

Develop your plan for detaining the suspects. Include your concept sketch and timeline. Then provide a brief explanation.

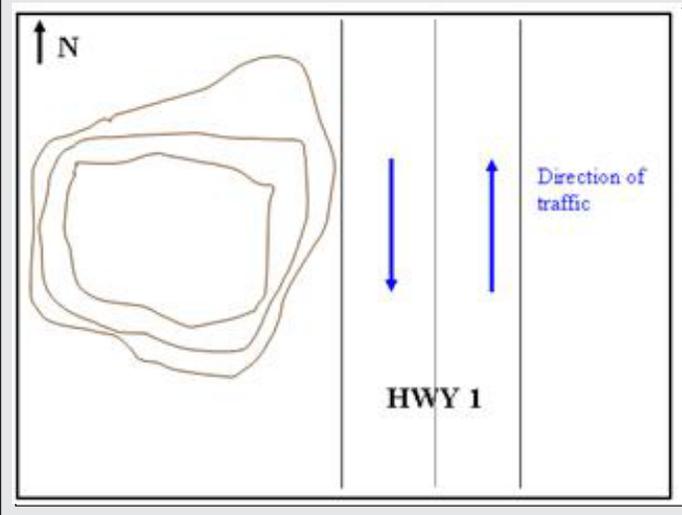


Figure 1 — Example Tactical Decision Exercise

demonstrate a clear understanding of the dilemma or character flaw that pertains to the decisions and actions taken by all individuals involved. The assignment is either written or briefed in front of the student's peers.

As outlined in our graduation requirements under **Character and Tactical Skills** and **Competency Development**, we continue to maintain a stern focus on physical fitness and infantry platoon tactics. Students will demonstrate the ability to work as a team and

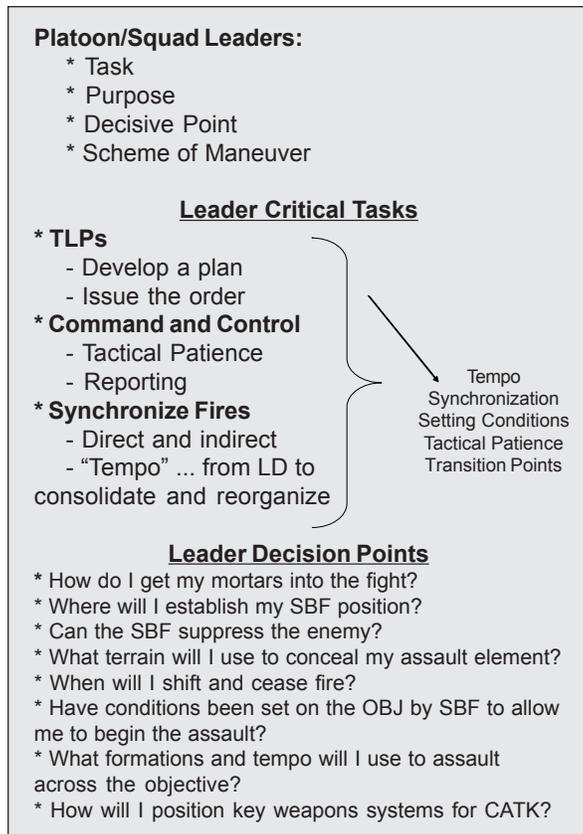
encompass “will” and “heart.” They must complete seven of eight “stress events” designed to test their physical fitness and intestinal fortitude. These events include advanced land navigation, the obstacle course, a six-mile run, and combatives level I certification.

We also place a premium on a student’s ability to work with his peers. Feedback is provided to the senior platoon cadre through two peer evaluations conducted in weeks six and 12. Each student completes foot marches ranging from four to 12 miles and the five-mile run at the Ranger Training Brigade. We emphasize to the students that the rigors of the operational environment demand that Soldiers be in top physical condition. In fact, it is paramount to ensure the success of rifle platoons whether they are operating in the high mountains in Afghanistan or the intense summer heat of Mesopotamia.

Lieutenants want to be taught primarily what is needed to succeed in the contemporary environment. We show the lieutenants that the applicability of the fundamentals is no different now than it was in years and wars past. The basics are the same whether a platoon is conducting a dismounted patrol through the jungles of Vietnam or a mounted patrol through the streets of Baghdad. The five principles of patrolling — security, planning, reconnaissance, communication and common sense — are just as important to the small unit leader as ever before.

As a testament to our efforts, we have received favorable comments from a variety of observers over the past year or so, the most prominent coming from students in the Maneuver Captain’s Career Course. These junior captains often observe and participate in our training. Most have deployed to the operational environment serving as platoon leaders, company executive officers, and staff officers. These captains provide additional mentorship and serve as an outstanding example of the type of company commanders that lieutenants can expect to see once they arrive at their units.

By the time we bring in these captains, the lieutenants have had 10 weeks of training under their platoon trainers. The



**Figure 2 — Platoon Live-Fire Exercise AAR**

career course students help give a fresh perspective on the learning objectives and assist in making clear many of the lessons we want the students to comprehend.

Collectively these captains agree that our training is more realistic and relevant to the COE than when they attended the course several years ago. After having served as the acting company commander for a company cordon and search mission during the final field exercise, one captain stated that the old Infantry Officer Basic Course served mostly as a Pre-Ranger Course with emphasis on the basics, improving a lieutenant’s will and heart, and his ability to “just suck it up.”

Intellectual and tactical competencies development continues as the class progresses to its collective training phase at week seven. In this phase we assess the student’s analytical and intuitive decision making through multiple situational field and live-fire exercises. The five critical areas — tempo, synchronization, setting conditions, tactical patience and transition points — are at the heart of Infantry leadership during maneuver. Each student is required to show understanding

in the application of these tasks.

During the after actions review (AAR) for the platoon live-fire exercise, students in leadership roles are required to lead their squad or platoon through the AAR process. It is used for all collective training events to include the squad live-fire exercise, platoon support-by-fire and attack live-fire exercises, platoon situational training exercises, and the company cordon and search and company attack.

The cadre supervises the AAR process while the student in charge of the event assesses the performance of his unit. He begins by first identifying the key leader decision points. Discussion is then open for all students to provide their own perspective on the decisions made by the leader, his actions or lack thereof. This allows for shared learning. Students listen while their peers offer their own ideas at the time the unit arrived at the decision point.

Students learn by watching their peers make decisions and then discuss the actions to identify and understand the leader critical task. For example, during the platoon attack, the platoon leader decided to wait to employ his mortars on the objective until the support-by-fire position was completely established in order to fix the enemy on the objective for the assault element. Another student serving in the support by fire as the M249 automatic rifleman felt that it would have been best to employ the mortars earlier in order to allow the support-by-fire element to move into position unhindered.

Neither student is wrong in his assessment. The decision point, “How do I get my mortars into the fight?” will generate a significant amount of discussion which will lead the students to resolve the issues for themselves. What we are looking for is not so much whether the decision that was made was a good one, but whether or not the leader did the appropriate level of analysis at each of the decision points. The questions a leader should ask are:

■ “What effects do I need to achieve on the objective in order to allow my assault element to close in and destroy the enemy?”

■ “How many rounds should it take to achieve this effect?” and

■ “What is the best place and time to safely employ these mortars in order to reduce fratricide?”

The students demonstrate their understanding in surface danger zones, minimum safe distances, and the risk of overhead fires.

All of these questions a leader ponders while under distress will cause a lull in his unit’s momentum. This lull is not frowned upon. Instead, it becomes an opportunity to generate further discussion in the relationship between cause and effect and the five critical leader tasks. In the end, the point intended is for the students, and particularly the leader, to understand that all five leader critical tasks were affected, and leadership decisions during the execution of an operation are almost always intuitive.

Of course, the platoon attack battle drill is nothing new. The concepts and principles are taught the same today as they were before. What is novel is getting the students to understand how these principles are relevant in the contemporary environment. At the end of the AAR, the cadre will ask, “OK gentlemen, you approached the objective and learned that there are civilians present. Upon approach your unit receives small arms fire from the area where civilians are located. How does this variable affect your decision making?”

As expected, the usual reaction to this question varies. The circumstances are similar; however, the conditions have changed. Now the students have to reassess their options to prevent civilian casualties. Mortars may no longer be an option. The unit will have to better control its direct fire weapons systems.

We explain to the lieutenants that not every course of action or technique is universal. An excerpt from FM 3-21.8, Chapter 1, explains:

*“The operational environment is a composite of the conditions, circumstances and influences that affect the employment of military forces and bear on the decisions of the unit leader... Understanding the operational environment is perhaps the most difficult aspect of making decisions and conducting operations. The TTP for accomplishing tasks are fairly straightforward... Choosing and applying the appropriate TTP based on the specific conditions of a given operational environment, however, is never straightforward and always carries with it second and third order effects.”*

In the COE, whether negative or positive, every decision has an impact on the outcome of an operation. Leaders are required to manage the counteractions or consequences during all phases of an operation. An approach to resolve a problem or achieve a goal in Afghanistan may not carry over to Iraq and vice versa. A good example to this is the use of small rewards, or micro-rewards, as a tool for small unit leaders to persuade local nationals to provide information on insurgent activity. While Afghans are more likely persuaded by monetary incentives, Iraqi civilians living in the affluent districts of western Baghdad may not. This means that leaders have to be versatile. They must be able to adjust and identify what works and, more importantly, consider the consequences of their actions.

**Example Scenario**

During the company cordon and search, conditions on the objective are set to create a contemporary environment. The student leadership encounters multiple variables throughout the exercise designed to keep the lieutenants off balance. A student from the MCCC serves as the company commander. He arrives to the field the evening before the mission and issues an operations order to the student leadership. The company has 12 hours to conduct troop leading procedures, rehearse, and prepare to conduct an air movement to a landing zone near the objective.

While the company prepares for the operation, the cadre positions a detail of 30 or so lieutenants from the battalion’s Lieutenant Transition Detachment on the objective to serve as civilians on the battlefield (COB). Role players on the objective are played by international students. These role players are volunteers who speak Arabic.

In a fictitious scenario, the McKenna MOUT site is turned into the provincial capitol of the Paknov Province. The province is one of four in a war torn country known as Krosnochistan. The country has been in civil unrest for over a year. A pro-democratic movement removed a totalitarian regime prior to the arrival of coalition forces. The U.S formed a coalition and deployed troops to the country nine months ago to aid the newly formed democratic government in establishing stability.

A group known as the “People’s Loyal Resistance,” or PLR, is attempting to influence the population and take control of the government. Many of its leaders were members of the former regime and are responsible for much of the violence throughout the country. These people belong to the Tiki tribe and have a strong support base within its villages and towns.

The city of Al McKenna is decisive to the coalition forces and Krosnochistani government because it sits on a fault line between two warring tribes — the Tiki and Mansuck tribes. Most of the city’s inhabitants are from the Mansuck tribe; however, a significant number of the Tiki tribespeople live in the area. Recent kidnappings



Figure 3 — Step 1 of example company cordon and search operation



Figure 4 — Step 2



Figure 5 — Step 3

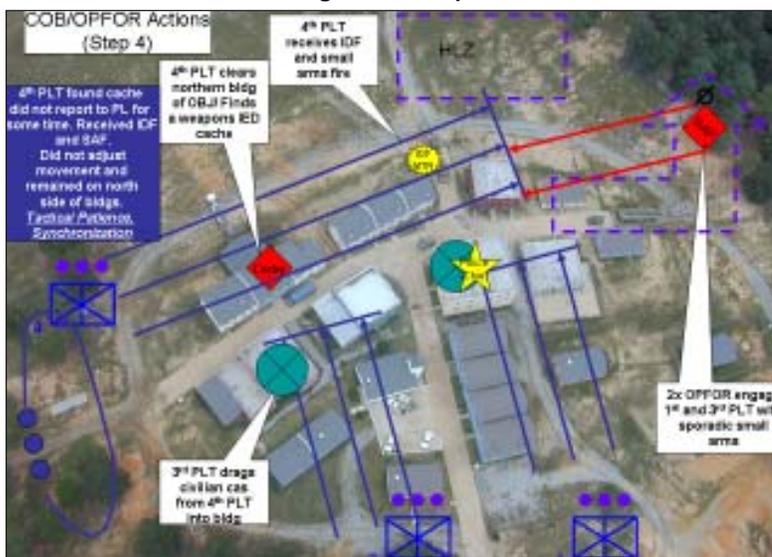


Figure 6 — Step 4

of government officials and other acts of intimidation have caused many Mansuck tribespeople to leave the area. Within the past 24 hours, the police station has been attacked with mortars and one policeman was killed by an improvised explosive device (IED).

The company is ordered to conduct a cordon and search of the city to confirm or deny the presence of anti-coalition forces. After planning, rehearsals and cold load training, the students air mobile to a landing zone about 800 meters west of the city and conduct a tactical dismounted approach. Usually the company commander arranges his forces on the objective with one or two platoons establishing an overwatch position to the west and/or east of the city, while the other platoons search the buildings. In almost every instance, the commander determines that an essential part of setting the conditions on the objective shortly after entering the city is to meet with the police chief and request his assistance during the company's operation.

Variables are introduced throughout the exercise to force a modification and adjustment in behavior and require that the student leadership make quick decisions. The actions of the COBs and role players are choreographed prior to the exercise, and the variables are usually not considered by the students during the planning phase.

The MCCC student serving as the company commander is briefed prior to the exercise. He is aware of the variables and learning objectives set forth and plays along with the scenario in order to allow the cadre to maximize the impacts of the script.

We modify the intensity of the training to prevent information overload. During the exercise we will reduce the impact of the variables on the student's decision making if we begin to see that the student leadership is overwhelmed. The cadre determines what actions role players and COBs take as the situation develops.

In a recent class we directed that the police chief and one of his policemen move and meet with the platoon that had established an overwatch position to the west of the city. The role players were told to approach the position and, in Arabic, vocally welcome the platoon. All platoons use their international Arab speaking students to serve as the platoon's interpreter.

Initially, the platoon in overwatch acted suspicious toward the police chief as he and the policeman approached the platoon's position. Both men were dressed in Arab garb, and the policeman carried an M4 rifle slung over his shoulder. The student platoon sergeant halted the two role players and ordered them to be searched. Once the police chief identified himself and both were determined to be policemen, the platoon sergeant began an engagement with the two men. The traditional handshake was offered by the police chief, and the platoon sergeant accepted. However, to assess how the platoon sergeant would react to cultural sensibilities, we told the police chief ahead of time to attempt to kiss his guest on both cheeks. This is customary of many cultures throughout

Middle East and Mediterranean. The platoon sergeant hesitated and almost pushed the police chief away before realizing that he could potentially cause insult or humiliation.

For the most part, the platoon sergeant did well. He invited the police chief into his secure position and began a thorough engagement. The company commander and his other platoons had not moved out of the woods to the south of the city. The commander wanted to meet with the police chief prior to beginning his search. He received word from the platoon leader in the overwatch position that the police chief had arrived at their position and welcomed the company to search the city.

As the platoon sergeant and platoon leader continued their engagement with the police chief, an incident occurred that set the tone for the rest of the exercise. The cadre directed that a COB dressed in Arab garb walk down the main street of the city carrying a log on his shoulder. The log, approximately six feet in length and eight to 10 inches in thickness, could be mistaken by a distant observer as a rocket-propelled grenade launcher.

The main street of the city lies perpendicular to the position of the platoon, and observation is good. As the COB entered the street and walked facing to the west toward the platoon in overwatch, a team leader ordered a M249 automatic rifleman to fire on the civilian. The automatic rifleman fired two 6-9 round bursts killing the civilian pedestrian.

The commander and his other two platoons to the south had begun moving out of the woods and were 75 meters from the city when they heard the firing. Not knowing what happened, the platoons dropped and sought cover. This incident caused confusion, and the company began to lose its momentum. Shortly afterwards, many civilians within the city became hostile toward the company. This mood would remain throughout the operation.

While the company commander assessed the situation and prepared to calm a rowdy crowd approaching his unit, a loud explosion occurred from the center of the town. No one knew what caused the explosion. A civilian from the city ran toward the platoon in overwatch yelling for the police chief to return to the center of town.

**The principles that make up infantry doctrine are the foundation of the lieutenant's new profession. These basic parameters will remain true for generations of combat leaders to come. However, decision-making development for the next century needs to challenge leaders to think in the abstract and expand intuitive decision making rather than depend solely on the sequential processes.**

At that time, what the students do not know is that an IED has prematurely exploded on a civilian pedestrian injuring him severely. The cadre use moulage kits to simulate the wounds suffered by the IED. The COB sustained partial amputation of his right leg below the knee.

To prevent the company from becoming overwhelmed at this point, we delayed initiating further variables. Time was given to the company to assess casualties and ease tensions. The police chief and his policemen assisted in calming the civilian demonstrators.

As the environment became less hostile, the company received a mortar attack of eight to 10 rounds. During this variable the cadre assessed two to three U.S. casualties while the COBs frantically scattered to their homes to avoid becoming injured. The company was forced to treat friendly as well as local casualties.

With the exception of two to three sporadic mortar attacks, the company continued to search the town mostly unopposed throughout the remainder of the exercise. These attacks caused no casualties or significant damage. One platoon found a weapons cache in a town house building.

As the company completed its search of the city, a two-man opposing force (OPFOR) element hidden in the woods to the east, fired on one of the platoons with semi and automatic small arms. One was killed immediately, and the other escaped unharmed.

Once the insurgent team is repelled, the company consolidated and reorganized, established a landing zone for air medical evacuation of both friendly and civilian casualties, and began a painful effort to reestablish legitimacy and trust among the civilian populace.

In this exercise, one of the key

components is getting the lieutenants to understand that the operational environment is a constant battle over lessons learned. The threat here, as in most insurgencies, has the initial advantage — knowledge of terrain, the cultural and political environment, and the ability to wage a protracted battle through sporadic engagements with absent regard for collateral damage.

In order to lessen these advantages, leaders must maintain objectivity throughout the operational process. Simplifying facts and assumptions based off personal experience, judgment and ethics allows leaders to achieve the desired end state.

The company had ample time to develop its plan using the analytical decision-making process of the troop leading procedures. While purpose and intent were defined during this more deliberate planning process, the student leadership was forced to exercise its intuitive thinking as the conditions changed.

The principles that make up infantry doctrine are the foundation of the lieutenant's new profession. These basic parameters will remain true for generations of combat leaders to come. However, decision-making development for the next century needs to challenge leaders to think in the abstract and expand intuitive decision making rather than depend solely on the sequential processes. Small unit infantry leaders must consider the "unknowns" and "what ifs" at leader critical decision points.

With conflicts like Vietnam, Somalia, Haiti and the Balkans, the second half of the 20th century taught us that rarely will an enemy of the United States project conventional violence against the American military. As technology, urban growth and globalization affect the scope and mannerisms of 21st century conflict, the need to grow small unit leader decision making at the initial entry phase of training young officers is crucial.

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