

Disclaimer: If you are expecting a blog post about the strategic impacts of sequestration or how to get furlough days back...read no further.



“It is terribly difficult for military men to keep their methods adapted to rapidly changing times. Between wars the military business slumps. Our people lose interest. Congress concerns itself with cutting the Army than with building it up. And the troops...find a large part of their time and energy taken up with caring for buildings, grounds, and other impedimenta. In view of all the inertias to be overcome, and in view of the fact that our lives and honor are not in peril from outside aggression, it is not likely that our Army is going to be kept to an up-to-the-minute state of preparedness.” -William E. Lassiter, 1929

Sequestration got you down?

Are you comparing today's training budgets to what we had in 2007-2008?

As the opening quote suggests, budgets have the tendency to shrink during the interwar

years (there has to be another conflict at some point-we're human right?). These reduced budgets can greatly impact our "up-to-the-minute state of preparedness" at the tactical level if we aren't creative. If we wait until we get to the field to talk tactics or test decision-making ability, we will be behind the power curve when our nation calls us to fight.

Tactical decision exercises (TDEs) provide low-resource training with large pay-offs. A good TDE can be developed in the course of an afternoon, and all it requires is a map, some markers and acetate, and your mind.

Below, I've provided the framework for 4 TDEs that will help you train your subordinate leaders when you can't leave the motorpool. While I would like to take credit for these, they were developed by militaries of the past, when their own budgets weren't looking so hot.

1.) Develop a Plan with Imperfect Information

This is a 10-15 minute timed exercise. Develop a scenario where your subordinate has to make a decision and issue verbal orders. Create a list of enemy events that you will share with them over the course of the allotted time. The events should start out with vague clues as to the enemy's intended course of action, and get more concrete as time elapses. Once your subordinate feels like they have enough information, they leave the room and begin planning. The goal is to get them comfortable with making decisions, without having a 100% clear picture of what the enemy is doing.

2.) Do I Follow the Original Order?

Give your subordinate the following: commander's intent, mission statement, and tasks to maneuver units. Develop a scenario where the situation changes and they must break from the original task to accomplish the intent.

3.) Plan on the Move

Issue a brief operations order to your subordinates and then load-up into a van. Make them plan a particular type of operation, with a map and overlay enroute, to the first stop (clearly a timed event). Once on the ground, everyone briefs their plan, conducts a quick after action review, receives the next mission, and loads back up. The process repeats itself throughout the duty day.

4.) Meet Friction

Give your subordinates a few additional assets (fire support, unmanned system, etc.) in support of the mission you ask them to plan. Minutes before they are expected to brief you on their plan, pull the asset and make them adjust their plan with limited time given. The same can be done with maintenance- A vehicle never goes down when its time to execute the mission-right?

For all of these decision exercises, **discussion** is a critical component to maximizing the learning that takes place.

These exercises balanced with maneuver experience (which may be few and far between) may help to:

- Develop critical thinking skills
- Keep leaders familiar with tactical mission graphics
- Increase decision-making speed
- Expose gaps in knowledge (both subordinate and leader)
- Creates a great venue for leader/subordinate dialogue
- Builds confidence in decision-making abilities
- Offer the ingredients necessary for effective Mission Command

For more on how you can use these exercises to help improve decision-making ability read Gary Klein's [Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions](#).

One final note, if in reading this you immediately thought to yourself "I'll just grab some of the exercises from the back of the old Armor magazines." Stop! (1) Those were based off old organizations that don't exist anymore. (2) Planning on a real map, with acetate is a much better experience. (3) Developing your own TDE will make you a smarter leader-trust me!

If you have ideas for other types of TDEs, please feel free to share them in the comments box below!

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