



*Editor's Note: Typically, when I see a brigade-level physical training event on the calendar, I automatically think of a three or four mile run at a pace that is hell on my knees. Today's guest post is by a current brigade commander who sees things much differently. He views organizational physical training events as an opportunity to build teamwork, foster esprit de corps, and rally units around their guidons.*

By Dave Hodne

In two weeks, I will relinquish command of the Army's newest Stryker Brigade Combat Team in a change of command ceremony at Ft. Carson, Colorado. Central to the ceremony will be the traditional passing of the unit colors among commanders. Soldiers often only cast a passing glance at their unit colors and the streamers atop them. Sadly, they rarely notice that their colors represent almost 100 years of the history of a unit that first established its legacy on the bloody fields in Europe during World War I.

Of course, the weeks prior to relinquishing command offer opportunities for reflection.

I consider myself very fortunate in that prior to commanding 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the Army entrusted me with the opportunity to command twice at the Battalion level in both the 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 4<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry, and the 2nd Battalion, 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regiment. The colors for these formations similarly host storied combat honors.

I also have a confession to make.

In over 6 years in command, I have yet to take my unit colors on an independent run “around the block.”

I have nothing against unit runs, and my units participated in Division level runs commemorating holidays or contributing to causes including the Great Aloha Run and the Sounds of Freedom supporting many charities. As a Battalion Commander, I also participated in the 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regimental Run at Ranger Rendezvous honoring Rangers past and present. This amounted to 4 “unit runs” in 6 years of command...all as a subordinate commander participating in a larger unit event.

Excepting these special or charitable occasions, however, standard unit runs often conducted at a leisurely pace often miss the intent of truly building morale and enhancing esprit de corps within the formation. They also miss an opportunity to “share the unit colors” with the entire formation.

While I may not take the colors “for a spin” around post, I very much enjoy the opportunity to conduct unit level physical training. Even at the Brigade level (with well over 4,000 Soldiers), unit PT events can go a long way to building a unit culture, fostering teamwork, and instilling pride in the colors that we all share. Everyday, each Soldier contributes to the reputation and success of a unit, and creative unit PT events offer everyone an opportunity to rally around the colors...and not solely rally around the chain of command. After all, unit history is episodic. It is the recollection of cohorts of Soldiers entrusted with the reputation of a unit for fleeting moments in time. Sharing the colors allows them to appreciate this very important responsibility.



COL Hodne addresses the Brigade before the event begins

In the Raider Brigade, Soldiers have grown accustomed to conducting “Brigade PRT” requiring them to negotiate walls, traverse tank ditches, high crawl under barbed wire, and move entire formations over shipping containers...all while managing a heavy and unruly FMTV tire (complete with the rim). Units are also unaware of the specific nature of the physical training events prior to execution (two years and multiple events later they are certainly wiser to them). As the event unfolds, we deliberately introduce additional degrees of chaos and confusion to challenge leaders and allow for all Soldiers to contribute towards solving problems. Every aspect of the event requires teamwork to complete the events, and all quickly realize the unit colors are essential to establishing order in the midst of 4,000 Soldiers tackling the course, while preserving unit integrity. The noise and confusion of the scene is difficult to describe, but for all who participate it is both enjoyable and memorable. The pride in unit formations rallying around their colors is also electric.



A unit negotiates a tank ditch with their LMTV tire

Charged with reorganizing a former ABCT into the Army’s newest SBCT within an accelerated timeline, it was important to communicate intent, maintain a climate, and most importantly, build a hard, determined, and expeditionary culture essential to a tactically agile, operationally mobile, and strategically deployable Stryker formation. Crucibles inherent to collective training events occurring at Ft. Carson, Pinon Canyon, and the National Training Center certainly contributed to this culture. However, even unit level physical readiness training reinforces an opportunity to challenge leaders and formations, instill the importance of teamwork, and provide a venue to showcase unit pride. While a Brigade certainly possesses more resources to create elaborate events similar to the

popular [Spartan Race](#), a little creativity at the Company, Troop, Battery, and Battalion can go a long way to building cohesive squads and platoons.

As I reflect on command, these unit physical training events very much contributed to an organizational culture I am proud to be a part of. I am glad that in addition to sharing hardships, I also shared the colors.

In doing so, I hope Soldiers share a deeper respect for how we all contribute to preserving their legacy.



*A young guidon bearer leads his unit over their first obstacle*

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