



By Larry Kay

The Chief of Staff of the Army, General James C. McConville recently stated, “We will strive to reduce OPTEMPO, adjust policies to prioritize people, and reduce requirements to provide leaders additional time to invest in their people.”[1] A lofty goal for sure, but it begs the question: how do we meet his intent, and what does it look like in practice? What follows is a planning methodology designed to assist commanders in the management of time, the prioritization of people and resources, and the faithful management of command discipline programs. Essentially, the methodology below will help units “do less, better.”[2]

The PERL Method

If war and strategy can have a grammar, then so can training - this methodology is a grammar. In true Army fashion, it is referred to as the PERL method, which stands for planning/preparation (P), execution (E), recovery (R), and leave (L). It is a method grounded in the operations process: Plan, Prepare, Execute, and Assess, and therefore its practice should not be considered dissimilar or dissonant with what is already established doctrinally throughout the Army.[3]

As FM 7-0 states, “Commanders provide top-down guidance in the training focus, direction, and resources while subordinate leaders provide feedback on unit task proficiency, identify needed training resources, and execute training to standard. This team effort helps maintain

training focus, establishes training priorities, and enables effective communication between command echelons.”[4] The PERL method, in conjunction with a clear and concise intent and vision, provides discipline for leaders’ pursuit and achievement of training objectives by satisfying their insatiable appetite for continuous training, despite its overall detriment to unit readiness.

The PERL methodology provides units with the appropriate time to prepare, execute, and recover from training. Furthermore, it ensures that commanders, at the company and battalion level, manage and balance their training. By providing endurance to organizations, the PERL method mitigates wear on Soldiers, Families, and equipment. Additionally, it provides maximum time for units to execute command discipline programs, such as CMDP, CSDP, and CDDP. In the short term, it ensures that training is well planned, prepared for, and resourced. In the long term, it mitigates loss (financial, equipment, morale, and retention) to the Army.

How the PERL Method works

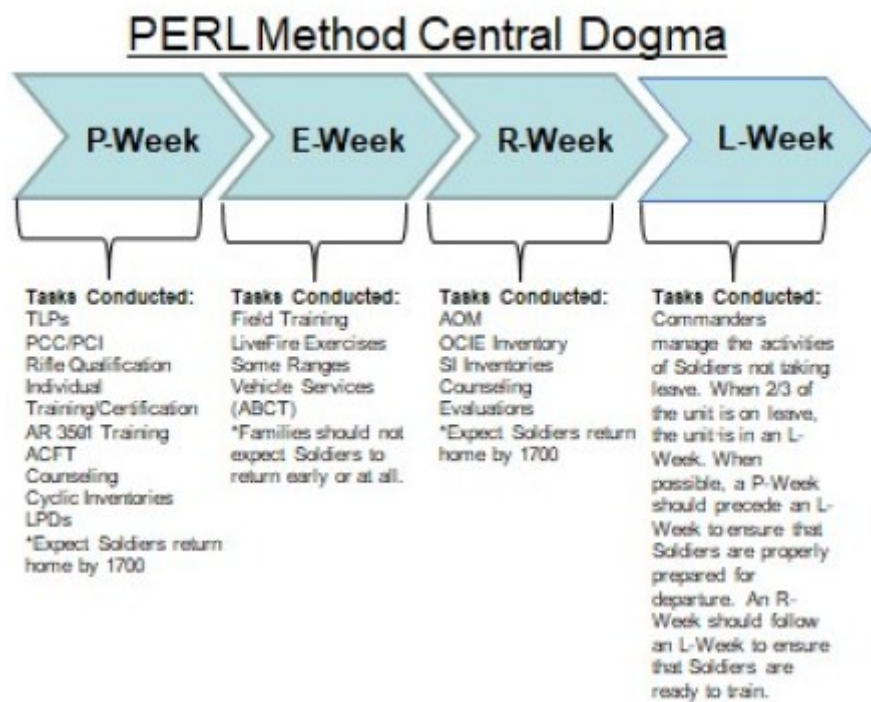
The PERL Method consists of a series of facts, assumptions, and constraints. For the PERL Method to work, it must be directed at the brigade level, enforced at the battalion level, and managed at the company level. Companies are required to brief how they are managing their PERL method at battalion training meetings, while battalions describe how they are enforcing it at their brigade quarterly training briefs. Eventually, the PERL Method is the signing of a contract between the brigade and company commander, and by extension, the more sacred contract between the command, Soldiers, and their Families. Each PERL week consists of a series of exclusive constraints which state what you may not do during a preparatory week, execution week, recovery week, or leave week.

During an execution or E-Week, units are training, specifically when training requires late hours or Soldiers to remain overnight. E-Weeks include field training, live-fire exercises, services, new equipment fieldings (NEFs), and some range densities. To ensure responsible oversight, battalion commanders may permit two consecutive E-Weeks, while brigade commanders are the approval authority to permit three consecutive E-Weeks.

Preparation or P-Weeks are preparatory weeks aimed at planning and preparing for the training the following week. There are some small-scale training events which are preparatory in nature, for example driver’s training and rifle marksmanship ranges (which potentially include night-fire). In P-Weeks, units may conduct the ACFT, counseling, inspections, SOP refinements, and AR 350-1 training like SHARP and EO. TLPs are completed during P-Weeks. As a rule, and to ensure that units adhere to the principles of

training, P-Weeks must precede E-Weeks, and they can run consecutively, depending on the amount of planning and preparation required for the upcoming training.

Recovery or R-Week follows a standard five-day recovery model, during which after operations maintenance (AOM) is completed. Weapons maintenance, equipment maintenance, OCIE inventories, counseling, evaluations, and AARs are completed during R-Weeks. R-Weeks must follow E-Weeks to ensure units are maintaining their equipment and may be conducted consecutively consistent with the amount of maintenance required as a result of the training.



Leave or L-Weeks are utilized when the majority of the formation is on leave.[5] This consideration is important when integrated into an installation tasking cycle, as units are not totally absolved of additional responsibilities.

A key constraint of the PERL Method is that P-Weeks and E-Weeks are not blended, meaning you cannot focus your attention on preparing for a future event while also giving attention to execution of a current event. As Ron Swanson would say, “don’t half-ass two things; whole-ass one thing.” Additionally, a unit cannot execute more than seven E-Weeks in a quarterly period. The logic behind this constraint is that if a quarter, which roughly consists of twelve weeks, is divided into three efforts accordingly, then each activity (preparing, executing, and recovering) consumes four separate weeks. If a unit executes

training in more than seven weeks, it is either not preparing for training, or not recovering from the training, violating all of the principles of training and contributing to lost and broken equipment and broken Soldiers.

Trespassing the Province of Command

According to FM 7-0, “Commanders provide clear guidance that directs subordinates’ actions while promoting freedom of action and initiative.”[6] Rightfully, commanders at every echelon are reluctant to interfere with the prerogatives of subordinate commanders. However, guiding company/battery/troop commanders, who have approximately five to eight years of experience does not constitute interference. Explaining specific constraints (what commanders are either required to do or prohibited from doing) only helps to focus their energy and optimize their efforts. Some company commanders will read this and say to themselves, “that’s what we do already.”

PERL Method & Red-Amber-Green Cycles

The fundamental question that every organization asks themselves when developing a unit training plan is: Should we plan our training around red-cycle tasks, or should we assign red-cycle tasks based on training? FM 7-0 provides the answer, “Time management cycles help subordinate units identify, focus, and protect training periods and resources needed to support unit training. **This cycle ensures that subordinate organizations can concentrate on executing their UTP.**”[7]

MONTH	JAN				FEB				MAR			
TW	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
1-61 CAV	R	P	E	R	P	P	E	E	R	P	E	R
1-506 IN	R	P	P	E	R	P	E	R	P	E	R	P
2-506 IN	R	P	E	P	R	E	R	P	E	R	P	E
3-506 IN	R	R	P	E	R	P	E	E	R	R	P	E
4-320 FA	R	P	P	P	E	R	P	E	R	P	E	R
4 BEB	R	P	P	P	P	E	R	R	P	E	R	R
801 BSB	R	R	R	P	E	R	P	P	E	R	P	E

Units plan their training and afterward, they assign units as either red, amber, or green noting their ability to complete other tasks based on the availability of manpower and resources. To do this effectively, brigades must possess the battalion training plans or training calendars reasonably ahead of time, so they can develop a course of action which accomplishes all specified and implied red-cycle tasks. Then, prior to the quarterly training brief (QTB), the staff determines whose training should be interfered with the least, presumably consecutive E-Weeks, and assigns those units as ‘green-cycle.’

Next, the staff determines who is not training, or not in an E-Week status, and assigns those

units as 'red-cycle.' By doing this process, the staff negotiates the risk possible with other units' training, and preparatory and recovery activities, remembering all the while that units, "must concentrate on executing their UTP." [8] After the staff identifies 'green-cycle' and 'red-cycle' units, it then determines which units are in an 'amber-cycle.'

Some leaders disagree with this approach. However, and especially as red-cycle tasks are concerned, commanders and staffs must avoid falling victim to the perfect solution or the "nirvana" fallacy, wherein leaders harbor a false assumption that a perfect solution exists or that a solution should be rejected because some part of the problem would still exist after it were implemented. It is for this reason that staffs conduct course of action development, analysis, and comparison, to enable commanders to make risk decisions and exceptions, as the circumstances require.

Will this action plan sufficiently influence subordinates to do what doctrine has implored commanders to do for generations? Field Service Regulations for Operations dated May 22, 1941 stated, "A good commander avoids subjecting his troops to useless hardships, guarding against the dissipation of combat strength in inconsequential actions or harassment of them through faulty staff management." [9] Indeed, the CSA's action plan requires units to, "routinely inspect systems that focus on people, pay, awards, counseling, barracks, and physical/mental/spiritual health." [10] The implication is that these systems be well-developed, implemented, and managed prior to the inspection, which necessitates the smart execution of command discipline programs in conjunction with unit training plans.

The PERL Method, as outlined in FM 7-0, is not novel, nor is the logic of its approach difficult - it is an articulation of the intent to simply do less, better, while prioritizing people and teams. At the same time, its intended audience is officers and leaders who just put stuff on the calendar without any measure of intent, METL-focus, empathy, or critical thinking. Then again, if this method and other methods like it are unnecessary, then command and staff meetings would be shorter, FLIPLs would be non-existent, operational readiness rates would always be above 90%, and retention would never be an issue. The PERL method is not perfect, and I remain skeptical of any method or approach that sells itself as *the answer* as opposed to *an answer*. My only hope in sharing this particular method is that it enables a broader discussion which may result in units doing less while taking care of our most valuable assets - our Soldiers.

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[1] General James C. McConville, “Action Plan to Prioritize People and Teams,” October, 2020.

[2] Major General Douglas A. Sims. This expression was used sometime in 2020, as he assumed command of the 1st Infantry Division.

[3] I made up the acronym. Not a novel idea, some units refer to this as the P-Week Methodology. BG David Hodne utilized a similar program while in command of the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. Special operations forces utilize a similar method as part of the JORTS.

[4] US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 7-0, Train to Win in a Complex World (Washington, DC: Government Printing Officer, 2016), 1-3.

[5][5] This challenge will be how to categorize short weeks connected to 4-day weekends, but that is what staff analysis is for.

[6] US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 7-0, Train to Win in a Complex World (Washington, DC: Government Printing Officer, 2016), 1-4.

[7] Ibid, 2-11.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Field Service Regulations for Operations, May 22, 1941, page 19.

[10] General James C. McConville, “Action Plan to Prioritize People and Teams,” October, 2020.

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