



by Chris Slininger

In [Combat Lessons No. 7](#), General George C. Marshall wrote, “The great combat lesson learned from every operation is the importance of leadership. Our equipment, our supply, and above all, our men, are splendid. Aggressive and determined leadership is the priceless factor which inspires a command and upon which all success in battle depends. It is responsible for success or failure.”

If we look at the personnel that fill our ranks, whether enlisted, warrant officer, commissioned officer, or civilian, we have leaders and future leaders. While not all aspire to lead, all must be ready to assume the mantle and accomplish the mission in this era of Great Power Competition. Therefore, the leaders of today must train decision-making and leadership skills, especially in operationalized units. While train and deploy cycle units have dedicated periods to master their occupational specialty and leadership training prior to

deployments; operationalized teams do not. Operationalized units must incorporate leadership and decision-making training now if they are to be successful.

Commonly accepted training principles include NCO-led, realistic, mission-focused training. Commanders must plan, resource, and protect training to include the assessment phase. Fortunately for operationalized units, most tasks from their unit's Mission Essential Task List (METL) can be accomplished daily, weekly, or monthly. Additionally, Army Senior Leaders (ASLs) are currently implementing and refining the Regionally Aligned Readiness and Modernization Model (ReARMM) to focus Divisions and Brigades on theaters they will deploy and fight in. Part of this effort includes re-focusing training efforts on small unit tactics in a geographically dispersed, degraded operational environment.

Critical to operations in this environment are trust, problem-solving, and communication skills. Without communication and trust, junior Commanders will find it difficult to have higher buy-in on the training plan, particularly if the training potentially impacts operations. Conversely, senior Commanders must understand that dedicated small unit training must take place and be protected. While operations must concurrently take place, they rarely are occurring every moment of the workday. Thus, subordinate leaders can identify time to conduct deliberate training and execute the activity without impacting higher headquarters operations. Ideally, Commanders monitor operational tempo and battle rhythm to identify a standard training time at echelon.

It is incumbent upon Company Commanders to identify and prioritize training within their formations. Commanders at echelon must have an open dialogue about training requirements of their formations outside of Training Meetings. Commanders need to break down the formality of these meetings and open the dialogue to candidly discuss training conducted and not conducted, honest assessments of unit proficiency, and properly resourcing training requirements.

Outside of prioritizing training time and protecting the time, commanders in operationalized units must identify their training requirements. For example, in operationalized units, the METL gets trained almost daily. Yet, teams still make mistakes, and the Commander must identify where the source of the deficiency is. Unfortunately, due to high OPTEMPO, the evaluation and assessment phase rarely occurs, and commanders often have to make a subjective estimate on their unit's capabilities.

In most instances, Commanders will benefit from focusing their units on training the soft skills of their jobs. These skills typically consist of critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, and writing. Sharpening these toolsets allow personnel to analyze their

operations, their role, and think at echelon on the second and third-order effects of their operations.

While some operational units might not be forward, the principle of training while fighting still applies. Therefore, leaders in these units must decentralize command to the lowest level and focus their subordinate leaders on accomplishing the mission. They can do this while simultaneously training atrophied skills and honing leadership capabilities. As we enter the era of Great Power Competition, our Soldiers will face peer enemies both in technology and resourcing. Our Soldiers and leaders will be the decisive effort, and we must begin training now if we hope to win.

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