



by Benjamin Phocas

Since May 2020, the Army has been forced to radically modify the way it conducts training. At that time, Cadet Command announced that Cadet Summer Training (CST) would not take place as usual. CST is the [Army's largest annual training event](#), and is both a key [factor in branch assignment](#) and in teaching foundational soldier skills to thousands of ROTC cadets. Despite the COVID procedures implemented across the DOD, the recent deployment of thousands of American troops to defend the Kabul airport has shown that conflict doesn't end because of COVID, and the need for American soldiers is still a very real necessity.

While necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the isolation and lockdown policies associated with the global pandemic resulted in the loss of key training. For example, at the United States Military Academy, cadets went months without handling the weapons systems that they will carry into future combat against a well-trained and motivated adversary.

Simply stated, we owe it to our soldiers to give them every tool they can have to be successful. With that in mind and in the current environment, it is important to identify tools to keep tactical knowledge fresh when there are long gaps between opportunities for field training.

This article offers sources that I have found useful for my own early career professional development. Soldiers and officers who engage with these sources, read the material they provide, and conduct the practical exercises can build muscle memory, retain perishable military skills, provide knowledge, or help introduce new concepts. This will help to better prepare servicemembers whose training has been limited by long periods of lockdown, especially in the recent schedule upheavals caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These resources are entirely free and can be accessed virtually from the barracks, the dorm, or choice location of refuge during a period of quarantine or isolation.

Fundamentals

With large ranges potentially being cancelled and Soldiers being forced into isolation, leaders need to be creative in maintaining proficiency in their primary weapon systems. Locked down in the barracks with COVID precautions in place, teams can easily take over a section of hallway and conduct dry rehearsals on their weapon systems. Using visible lasers and a piece of paper on the wall, soldiers can creatively continue to drill the fundamentals.

Online Resources

For many, the end of the workday means powering up the computer and watching Netflix until formation the next morning. However, the internet can provide much more than just mind-numbing entertainment. There are many resources online that can offer valuable knowledge to anyone willing to take the time to look. Entire websites such as [From the Green Notebook](#) and [The Company Leader](#) have been entirely devoted to the professional development of junior officers. Equally, there are a multitude of other similar sites devoted to each echelon of command from team leader up. There are numerous Tactical Decision Games that can help junior cadets and senior captains alike hone their decision-making skills and Troop Leading Procedures (TLPs) in a time constrained setting.

Social media, another haven for junior troops trying to de-stress, can in fact be another source of valuable information. Pages such as "[the_continental_marine](#)", "[the_random_oh](#)", "[wandering_hoosier1](#)" and "[the_cognitive_raider](#)" are great resources that provide leadership commentary, training tips, hip pocket classes, and relevant information on the capabilities, equipment, uniform, airframes, and UAS capabilities for both peer allies and competitors.

Recently showcased on one of these pages were Chinese infantry weapons systems, including a single man portable [QJZ89 .50 caliber machine gun](#), weighing only 58 lbs. (with tripod), and their continued employment of the [Type 74](#) hot-shot flamethrower. These weapons are extreme force multipliers that give our potential opponent both the ability to

clear an entire room in seconds with a jet of flame and much greater engagement range than organic US platoon level weapons (QJZ89 has a max point range of 1500 meters).

[Youtube](#) can also provide a great showcase of our competitors. It is one thing to know the camouflage patterns of peer forces, but it is another to have the practiced eye to locate a figure wearing a mottled uniform in flat light. This too can be practiced from the relative comfort of one's home. A former marine going by the title '[Brent0331](#)' has done an extensive series of field tests for almost every camouflage utilized by NATO, the Warsaw Pact, China, and several smaller nations. He has also compiled a five-part series to specifically help junior warfighters enhance their [target acquisition](#) skills. Additionally, this channel provides refresher courses on patrolling, battle drills, Individual Movement Techniques (IMT), SALUTE reports, and many other basic soldier skills.

For servicemembers wishing to continue to study past simply identifying a Russian soldier by the uniform and weapon they're carrying, I would highly recommend taking the time to watch the [Russian May Day Parade](#). It is a quick and easy way to become familiar with every vehicle in the Russian arsenal, especially the newest vehicles and technology they are eager to show off to the world. Vice News reporter Simon Ostrovsky's coverage of the [war in Ukraine](#) can also provide a great firsthand look at Russian low intensity conflict and the 'Little Green Men.' News media outlets from across the world use YouTube as a cheap and effective broadcast system, and can be great resources for anyone trying to stay up to date on global affairs and perspectives.

Learning from the Physical Environment

While the internet can be an excellent source of material to supplement classroom learning, it does not substitute practicing tactical proficiency in the field. Fortunately, you can flex your tactical muscles while accomplishing everyday tasks, even away from the office. For example, urban warfare in major cities and sprawling suburbs may differ greatly from

anything previously experienced in training. Modern cities are mazes of streets, alleys, tunnels, hatches, and sometimes entirely absurd structures with a complex layout. Former USMC Lt. Nate Fick wrote in [One Bullet Away](#) about having to search for an enemy command post in a Baghdad amusement park.

In defense of our urban warfare centers, it would be entirely impractical to attempt to recreate the skyscrapers of Beijing or hundreds of years of accumulated architecture of an ancient European city. Thus, it is up to us to learn as best we can. We must prepare to face the unexpected and to be able to create solutions. For example, the Israeli Army demonstrated such creativity in 2002 by clearing whole city blocks without [stepping foot onto the streets](#).

While walking to class, the barracks, the bar, or the burrito place just off post, take the time to look at your surroundings. Even google maps can be used to practice urban route planning and terrain analysis. At a train station in Tarrytown, NY, I randomly noticed that the elevated platform I was standing on was large enough for an entire infantry platoon to move unseen by UAS or ground forces from almost any direction for almost three hundred meters.

Even if you do not know exactly how you would go about accomplishing tactical tasks in a complex urban environment, hopefully these questions will drive you to conduct research of your own, expand your knowledge, and be able to write your own answers to these questions.

Hopefully this article has provided a reference point from which practitioners can refine and adapt to best fit their individual formations needs and resources, and can start discussions within those formations. The end goal isn't to have these websites and resources used as common reference points, but to inspire leaders to get creative and unconventional with their future training.

Ben Phocas is a Cadet at the United States Military Academy where he studies Defense and Strategic Studies. He is an intern at the Modern War Institute and Urban Warfare Project.

The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policies or positions of the United States Military Academy, US Army, or the Department of Defense.

Share this:

- [Email](#)
- [Tweet](#)
- 
- [Print](#)
- [WhatsApp](#)