



by Marc E. “Dewey” Boberg, Ed.D.

“Things turn out best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out.” - John Wooden

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...

Shortly after commissioning and attending the Armor Officer Basic Course (now ABOLC) I reported to Fort Hood, Texas. I was quickly assigned to the 1/12 Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, where I became an M1A1 tank platoon leader in 3rd Platoon, D Company. All my Soldiers and NCOs were veterans of the first Gulf War—I literally was the only one without combat experience. My platoon sergeant was Sergeant First Class Anthony Garcia. SFC Garcia was a tank Master Gunner with more than 17 years of experience. He would become the most influential person in my training especially as it pertains to understanding tanks and practical lessons in Army leadership.

Perhaps the greatest lesson SFC Garcia taught me was to ‘fight the tank you got.’ He meant we had to make the best of whatever situation we faced, including fighting off of a tank that might not be fully functional. At that time in 1/12 CAV, we had brand new M1A1 Abrams Heavy Common tanks. They were the latest technology: 70 tons strong, yet smooth as a Caddy at 50mph on rough terrain, and precise enough to hit a target with our 120mm smoothbore cannon—while moving—from over 3km away. These new tanks were immaculate.

My early training as a platoon leader was smooth, fighting these new tanks. As the new year started at Fort Hood, we began a training sequence to prepare for a spring rotation to the National Training Center (NTC) in the Mojave desert of Southern California. We used our awesome tanks to train, becoming competent and confident at our primary wartime tasks. Each of the platoon’s crews fired distinguished (900 or better out of 1000 points) on crew gunnery. The platoon further distinguished itself in platoon gunnery. We had performed exceptionally on our new equipment. But SFC Garcia reminded us that we might not always have our home station equipment—we needed to be prepared to fight off of older tanks in the future.

In March of 1993 we left behind our pristine tanks at Fort Hood, flew to NTC, and drew borrowed tanks for a month of simulated combat. These ones were bruised and scarred.

Each rotation (usually 10 per year), a new unit borrowed the same set of vehicles and weapons systems, trained hard in the desert on them, and turned them back in for the next unit to use the following month. The Mojave Desert terrain and environment are rough on people and equipment. We did everything we could to repair and fix up those well worn M1s—but the truth is they had been ridden hard and put away wet.

A few days into the simulated war against the “Krasnovian Horde”, we received orders to establish a battalion hasty defense at the Whale Gap. The entire regiment of the opposition forces would attack the next morning (it is always at dawn). We did our planning, preparation, and rehearsals through the night. It was pitch black, zero percent illumination. I literally couldn’t see my hand in front of my face. Unfortunately the terrain wasn’t our friend either, so we beat our equipment up pretty bad during preparation, running 70-ton machines through the narrow wadis in the dark. While rehearsing, my tank’s very large driver landed us in a hole, smacked his knee on the master power switch, and bent it such that the slightest touch would shut it off. My platoon sergeant’s tank had it worse—it threw track, rendering it immobilized in place. There was no time to repair either.

As the sun began to rise and the OPFOR Regiment rolled towards the Whale Gap, over the

platoon radio net, SFC Garcia reminded us to “fight the tank”.

He meant we had to do the very best we could with what we had. His tank was going to fight from where he was as long as he could. My tank was also going to fight to its utmost—and also very carefully, so we didn’t kill the power in the middle of the fight. As the battle started, our problems only worsened. I struggled to communicate over the banged-up, older radio to anyone beyond a 100-meter radius. I was forced to rely on SFC Garcia talking to the Company Commander and calling for artillery. Then my wingman tank’s fire control system computer malfunctioned, requiring SGT Harris’s crew to use less accurate and less efficient auxiliary sights to continue fighting. With three tanks fighting in various levels of degraded mode, we had only one fully mission capable tank.

You know what happened? We fought our tanks—and 3rd Platoon, D/1-12 Cavalry was credited with destroying 47 enemy vehicles, an entire battalion, during that day’s battle. SGT Harris’s crew, fighting in degraded mode with his auxiliary sight, was named “Hero of the Battle” and credited with 18 enemy vehicles destroyed. We dominated an enemy known for regularly overwhelming rotating units. They didn’t get within 1000 meters of our positions. Why? Because we did everything we could with what we had. I was the happiest dude on the planet that day—up until we realized that even though we won, we still had to fix those tanks for the next fight.

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SFC Garcia taught me this lesson in the California desert in 1993. I would apply it again and again throughout my career, including more than a decade later in combat in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. We have been blessed in the U.S. Army with awesome equipment, tremendous capabilities, and great Soldiers. But we have to recognize that there are factors we control, and others we don’t always control.

In spite of our best efforts, in training and in combat we might not have every system working exactly as it was designed. But we can still use some creativity and grit to fight the tank and accomplish the mission.

Disruption happens. Every day, every game, every meeting, every opportunity, every battle – things rarely ever go exactly as planned. Disruption seems to be a consistent part of the moment-by-moment fabric of our lives. You might not be able to control how things play out, but you can control how you respond.

We say that “attitude is everything.” And it’s never more real and true than when you’re

faced with having to adjust to disruption. Attitude matters first and foremost because having a positive and optimistic outlook can lift you when the storms of life create waves in your world. When you're committed to having a positive perspective grounded in reality, you start to rise with the waves instead of getting crushed by them.

Attitude and self-talk go hand-in-hand. An effective self-talk phrase is "something good is just about to happen". When you start to believe that something good is just about to happen, your perspective shifts. You reframe your vision to start looking for the good things. And then, as if on cue, good things actually do start happening all around you! It's because when your mind is primed to notice good things, before you know it an avalanche of positives is occurring everywhere you look. As you look intently for how things can go right, they often do.

When disruption happens in a tank fight, or a game, or at work, or in life, we've got to seize our outlook and turn it to the positive. The shift in mindset primes our brain to look for positives, and this perspective helps you adapt to whatever challenges you're facing. Take hold of the belief that "something good is just about to happen," and you'll notice that disruption can actually become a good thing. Fight the Tank!

Lieutenant Colonel Marc (Dewey) Boberg, Ed.D., U.S. Army, Retired, currently serves as the Chair for Officership at the Simon Center for the Professional Military Ethic, U. S. Military Academy, West Point, New York. During his career, LTC Boberg served as an Armor Officer in the 1st Cavalry Division, 2nd Infantry Division, and deployed multiple times in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom with the 3rd Infantry Division.

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