



**To:** Company Commanders  
**From:** CompanyCommand—your professional forum

CC is company commanders. We are in an ongoing professional conversation about leading Soldiers and building combat-ready teams. Company Commanders connect at: <http://CompanyCommand.army.mil>

## Training for War—What We’re Learning

By Maj Pete Kilner and Maj. Tony Burgess

In January 2004, members of the CC team had the privilege of spending an incredible evening with Tony Nadal (a company commander featured in the book, *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young*). After dinner, Tony took us to the Vietnam Memorial where we gathered around him in the cold January night. He shined a flashlight on panel #13, illuminating the names of his fallen warriors. When he was done telling their stories, he turned to us and said: “When I returned from Vietnam, no one asked me what I had learned.”

**If you commanded a company in combat, we are asking you to share what you learned.**

One way to do that is by completing the “Combat-Leader Interview” linked from the Warfighting topic on CC. In this article, we share with you excerpts from responses to one of the interview questions:

### The Question

*Will your experiences as a commander in war change the way you train or lead Soldiers? If so, how?*

### Absolutely Everything Focused on Combat

by Dave Polizzotti

(B/1-66 AR; HHC/1-66 AR, 4th ID, Ft. Hood)

Everything, absolutely everything done in garrison must be done to focus the company’s efforts on combat operations. Soldiers no longer just shoot to qualify on a pop-up M16 range. Now they are told that if they get 30 out of 40, then they still got killed 10 times. During field exercises, if a Soldier is “wounded” or killed, his chain of command writes letters of condolence. OPODs are used for everything we do, including our Sergeants’ Time Training, so that Soldiers get accustomed to hearing things in a specific format. That way, when they are in combat or thrust into a leadership position, they understand the language. Our experience in the desert has given both leaders and Soldiers a window of opportunity to get home-station training right.



Dave Polizzotti

Photographs provided by the authors.

**An Addition to Murphy's Laws of Combat**  
by Eric Lopez  
(C/1-87 IN, Ft. Drum)

I've learned to train Soldiers to do more than only react to contact—they have to be trained to make contact, to react to anything. In STX lanes, we always have the enemy fire first. Why? Why give away the initiative? Why allow potential bad guys to walk away if you have more firepower? We need to train our Soldiers to proactively develop situations, using words, warning shots, etc. I have also learned to empower leaders at the lowest levels—team leaders, squad leaders—to make life-and-death decisions. Here's an addition to Murphy's Laws of Combat: contact with the enemy or an IED will be made by your most junior, newest Soldier. So train him and his immediate leaders to handle the situation.

**Latitude in Training ... Initiative in Combat**  
by John Whyte

(HHC/2-11 IN; A/1-30 IN; HHC/3rd Bde, 3ID, Ft. Benning)

I think we all have to constantly work to give subordinates the opportunity to try something, possibly fail, and learn from it, while in training. I've always recognized and fought my tendency to be too directive or prescriptive.

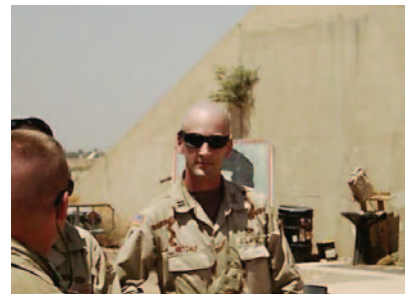


*John Whyte and (left) 1st Sgt. Michael "Todd" Hibbs in Baghdad.*

It often seems that training opportunities are too precious to waste an iteration of an event by letting a subordinate leader do something you're pretty sure won't work. If you are that sure that it won't work, then you're better off letting them try it—you'll never truly convince them any other way, and they'll learn from it. Who knows, you could be wrong and it might work! When you give them some latitude in training, it will pay off as initiative in combat.

**Train For the Friction of Counterinsurgency Operations**  
by Chase Metcalf  
(C/1-1 CAV, 1st AD, Germany)

The nature of warfare is changing. It is critical that all Soldiers know how to use their personal weapons to fight in all scenarios. I will insure that Soldiers train to a "T" on reflexive-fire techniques and dismounted movement/maneuver in a MOUT environment. To defeat an insurgency, it's important to train the ability to gather intelligence down to the Soldier level. Finally, building training scenarios with civilians on the battlefield and an unclear intelligence picture is definitely a higher priority than I used to consider it, due to the friction of counterinsurgency operations.



*Chase Metcalf at Balad Airbase.*

**Lead from the Front!**  
by Tony Lacy

(C/46 EN BN, 194th EN BDE, TNARNG)

You have to identify good leaders coming up. Those NCOs that get things done are who you want. The one that



*Tony Lacy and (left) 1st Sgt. Philip Williams in Kuwait at Camp Arifjan.*

always looked great in the rear is not always the one that can handle the pressure. The only way you can identify and develop your leaders' abilities is to push your training to the limit. Test them, make them better. Leadership—be involved, know your weaknesses, build a team, lead from the front! Your XO can handle the rear.

**Introduce as much Complexity as Safety Allows**  
by Mark Olsen

(D/3-325 AIR, 82nd ABN DIV, Ft. Bragg)

There are two things that I will emphasize in any future training event. I will push as much responsibility and decision-making as possible down to the squad/team-leader



level. As an anti-armor company, we often operated at below-the-platoon level. The company had extremely capable NCOs who performed exceedingly well. Their ability to confront and solve complex problems without always seeking guidance was crucial. Along the same line, I will introduce as much complexity as safety and the unit's training level allow. My experience in Iraq often involved having to be



*Mark Olsen with his PLs and XO. Left to right, Mark Galloway, Justin Hufnagel, Mark Olsen, Jeremy James, Timothy Murphy and Harlan McKinney.*

mentally prepared to conduct combat operations, interact with NGOs, and participate in a local governmental council meeting. Mental flexibility was imperative. The problems facing Soldiers, while not the same as those confronting a commander, did involve similar levels of complexity. Soldiers often had to decide whether the people confronting them should be left alone, needed to be detained, or were looking for a firefight. While hard to master, an essential task facing all Soldiers deployed is calibrating the level of force required to deal with any situation. These are difficult situations to handle, but Soldiers will react better if they have seen something similar before.

### **Stress Moving and Shooting in all Conditions** by Matt Harmon

(SFODA 313 and HSC/1-3 SFG (A), Ft. Bragg)

Fighting an insurgency is unlike anything taught in regular military manuals. From Green Berets to mechanics, everyone has to train to these ambiguous situations. Thinking outside the box is exactly how the enemy fights. We stress moving and shooting in all conditions with all your gear on. We work on exercises that cause the Soldiers to feel hot and tired, then are forced to make shots. We work hard on understanding the capabilities and limitations of our unit, our weapons, and ourselves. We focus on trying to think of every scenario and training exercise that could cause us to think and react. The days of



sitting in a prepared foxhole on a range and shooting targets at known distances is over. Everyone in every MOS has to be able to move, shoot, and communicate.

### **Train the Same Tasks in Different Ways** by Greg Ford

(C/311 MI, Fort Campbell)

I am much more focused on the tasks we performed in combat. My analysts are focusing on real-world locations; no longer do we train with fictional areas. We are training the same tasks, because they are our METL tasks, but we are doing so in different ways. Fort Campbell is not Iraq, so the REMBASS training has to be adjusted for the different terrain. We are working on putting the sensors out in the open and attempting to camouflage them there. One lesson we found is that the desert is unforgiving of failure to camouflage the sensors properly. Sensors are far more



*Greg Ford in Iraq with 1st Sgt. James Hamilton (left) and Capt. Josh Stanley (right) when Stanley was awarded the Bronze Star.*

easily compromised in the desert than they are in the forest. For my HUMINT guys, we are working more through translators or interpreters. That is how we operated over in Iraq, and properly using an interpreter results in much better results in the interrogation or interview. We are also tying in more with our supported battalions. These are the Soldiers who will give us the support over there for security and who will own the terrain we operate in. This allows us to get our TTPs down and feel comfortable with each other prior to deploying again. All my Soldiers understand that the skills they are training on are the skills that they will use in combat.

### **Train to Think Critically and Act Independently** by Marshall Tway

(D/1-1 CAV, 1st AD, Germany)

The ability to think critically and make sound decisions in the absence of guidance is absolutely essential. ... Training the ability to think critically and act independently is hard. You have to set the environment for your troopers and allow them the opportunity to practice without reprisal. ... It

takes time to change the organizational mind-set of a unit. ... Train junior leaders and every Soldier to understand how to get task, purpose, and end state out of an OPORD. ... Insure your subordinates have an intimate knowledge of their unit's doctrinal missions, capabilities, and limitations. ... Teach them how to read an OPORD to ensure they get the critical information from it. I used a curtailed mission-analysis process for my guys. Tailor one for your own unit. ... Actively seek to conduct centralized planning and decentralized execution of your missions (otherwise, there isn't much point to whole thing). ... Ensure you and your platoon leaders foster a command climate where you empower your subordinates to make decisions (important ones—or else you really are not changing much). ... Be prepared to have to fix some mistakes. It will happen, your subordinates are human—you messed some stuff up as a PL. ... Be prepared to tough it out. There will likely be some questions and some initial complaining when you don't pro-



vide the level of supervision the troops may be used to. ... Most importantly, give good, tailored guidance, but only give what you need to. Your Troopers will come back for more if they need it. ... After three months of commanding in combat, I was confident that I could trust my Troopers to make the right decision time after time.

#### **The Combat-Leader Interview Questions**

These six questions form the foundation of the interview, which is web-based and can be accessed from the Warfighting topic of CC. Responses can also be e-mailed directly to [peter.kilner@us.army.mil](mailto:peter.kilner@us.army.mil).

1. What was your toughest leadership challenge, and how did you address it?
2. Will your experience in combat change the way you lead and train Soldiers?
3. What do you think best prepared you for the challenge of leadership in combat?
4. What advice do you have for leaders preparing for combat in your specific theatre?
5. What image, event, or feeling do you think you will best remember most in 50 years?
6. Do you have any additional thoughts you'd like to share with the profession?

#### **Five Reasons to Complete The Combat-Leader Interview**

1. You are at the cutting edge of experience right now.
2. What you have learned will directly impact leaders who are currently in combat or getting ready to go now.
3. In the process of doing the interview, you will reflect on your own experience and learn as well.
4. It is not enough for us to learn as individuals or even as units—our effectiveness over time depends on how well we as a profession collectively learn and adapt.
5. **What is at stake is our long-term effectiveness as an Army.**

*On behalf of the profession, I would like to thank all the leaders who have stepped up to the plate to share what they are learning in combat. Your contribution is appreciated—you are making an impact! If you have commanded in combat, we urge you to take time to complete a Combat-Leader Interview. Find the link in the Warfighting topic or e-mail your responses directly to me. In closing, I would like to share*

*two things that seem to make interview responses more effective:*

1. *Be real. Speak from the heart. You are writing to your peer commanders and those who will follow in your footsteps.*
2. *Share specific stories to create context and a much deeper understanding about your insights. Real stories "stick" and make a difference that a bullet comment alone cannot.*

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