



Company Command



Building Combat-Ready Teams

To: Company Commanders

From: Company Commanders

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>

Developing the “Killer Instinct” in Your Soldiers



“This training is designed to be uncomfortable—physically first, then mentally—to take Soldiers to dark places, under control, so that if they are ever taken there by the enemy, it’s not their first time.”

Company commander introducing that morning’s combatives training to his Soldiers

One part of the warrior ethos is ferocity in combat, and the innate capability and powerful motivation to kill the enemy and to never give up—regardless of the circumstances. One question we have been wrestling with in the CC forum lately is, “How do we cultivate this killer instinct in our Soldiers?”

In this article, we will present some excerpts from the conversation that is still ongoing in the CC forum. Our desire is that the article sparks thinking and conversation about this critical subject, both in your unit and in the forum.

The Mindset

George Corbari

B/5-7th ADA (Patriot), 69th ADA BDE, V Corps

At the crux of this discussion is the “warrior mindset.” It’s not about being 6’2” and 240 pounds of anger—it’s about making conscious choices about how you think. The killer instinct is a combination of confidence, concentration, and tenacity. Those qualities are next to worthless without the physical skill and ability to complete the task—but so, too, are the physical abilities without the proper mindset.

We train mental toughness not by throwing people who can’t swim into the water, but by teaching people how to deal with extreme situations, by teaching people how to focus effectively, by teaching Soldiers the importance of confidence and how to build and maintain that personal confidence. Here’s a mindset TTP that commanders can use before every mission:

When rehearsing actions on the objective, do more than just discuss the mechanics of the fight. Help Soldiers really visualize the battlefield by integrating all five senses. Talk about what they’ll see, hear, smell, touch and even taste. For those who haven’t been there, the details of combat won’t be such a shock to them.

The Personal Nature of Killing

Clete Goetz

642nd EN CO, 548th CSB, 10th MTN DIV

Killing someone becomes more difficult as the means of their demise becomes more personal. For example, strangling or stabbing someone is more abhorrent psychologically to the average person than shooting someone through open sights. I recommend you read Dave Grossman’s *On Killing*.

Incorporating combatives, knife-fighting techniques, take-downs, etc., will help to create killers. If you can train Soldiers to stab someone, you can expect them to shoot the enemy when required. You must create the mindset in them that killing the enemy is an acceptable action when given the permission to do so by legitimate authority.

Combatives as a Vehicle

Matt Michaelson

SS-21 OPFOR RS '95, B/4-5th ADA & D/4-5th ADA, 1st CAV DIV

Our Soldiers’ ability to react—and even act—under duress, pain, and seemingly insurmountable odds remains the hallmark of the warrior ethos. Tenacity against the enemy must be trained, expected, and demanded—but

demonstrated first and foremost by the leadership that has earned the respect and trust of the Soldiers. A few thoughts on how to teach the killer instinct to Soldiers using combatives martial training as the vehicle:

- Training on the edge between tenacity and often situationally driven, hand-shaking rage must be very carefully controlled. Risk assessment/mitigation procedures must be clearly outlined and enforced.

- Every Soldier will have a different threshold for explosion, specific to that individual. Some Soldiers will “go ugly” early (because they have had that upbringing, list of experiences, or simple desire to do so) while other Soldiers will “act the fish” for a surprisingly long time. Hold back the overzealous ones a little and carefully push the fish. Explain that if they wear the uniform, there is no fishing around. They will fight back or go home. This is the U.S. Army, this is combatives, and the country is at war.

- Remind them that combatives training is not true combat—in the real thing, getting hurt will be inevitable, and Soldiers must harden themselves both mentally and physically for that.

- Critical to any such training are qualified instructors who have “lived it.” Tips for instructors include: 1) Begin training events with historical examples of failure and success to garner maturity in mindset, and 2) Publicly praise Soldiers who demonstrate tenacity and the warrior ethos.

Complex, Thought-Provoking Training

Bryan Carroll

B Co and Rear Detachment/1-24th IN, 1/25th ID (L) (SBCT)

I believe that all people have some degree of this already inside them and it's on us as leaders to draw it out, hone it, and—the most critical part—make them believe it. Soldiers must be challenged in aggressive, thought-provoking, and physically rough training. Get buddy teams thinking on the LFX and then build up from there. Make them solve a complex obstacle while putting rounds down range. That was huge for preparing my privates and specialists to be rifle team leaders. You have no idea when the SPC on the SAW or the PFC on the M203 is going to step up and give the “Follow me!” to take that next room or building—it happens.

Never Quit

Jeffrey Sargent

B/501st MI, 1st AD

I was on my high school football team for four years, but my playing time was basically limited to the “Dummy Squad.” The team was undefeated, or close to it, all four years, and my job was basically to play against the first-string in practice—to get them ready for the next game. I gave my all, acquired tenacity and discipline, and I learned how to NOT QUIT.

During my senior year, I was second-string fullback at 155 pounds. I was stitched on the chin twice for cuts during blocking practice, and I suffered a torn meniscus from a four-player tackle while running a sweep I'll never forget, but I never quit. The doc said, “We can do surgery on you

now, and you'll be out for the rest of the season, or you can go to therapy and strengthen up now and have surgery after football season.” I chose the latter and ended up playing three weeks later. I played all of 30 minutes in games my entire four years of high school football.

I wasn't the biggest, quickest, or by any means, best player, but I had one thing: the will to never quit. The “killer instinct” comes from years of blood, sweat, and tears. It's not something you can quickly instill in a Soldier fresh off the block. I've tried to get my Soldiers to feel passion about things, and found it's just not something you can easily do. A “Hooah” in formation does not equal passion.

Tough, Realistic PT

Wes Morrison

C/1-120 IN, 30th HSB, 1st ID

What you can do is make sure Soldiers are physically and mentally rehearsed with physical training as realistic as you can achieve. We did hard PT, combatives, and squad competitions utilizing the CFLCC tasks with full combat load, incorporating IMT and one-man carries. By the end of the train-up and competition, the Soldiers were smoked, but proud. It toughened them up for combat, but also for things like searching palm groves for hours on end with a full combat load in 120-degree heat.

Create Combat Conditions in Training

Anthony Flood

SPT Co/2-20th SFG (A)

As for instilling the “aggressive spirit,” it can be done through tiring, realistic training. We shouldn't hurt our troops in training, but we can create combat-like training experiences where they are cold/hot, tired, hungry, have to carry their comrades, and are under pressure to make aggressive decisions.

Make them shoot off-handed, from in and under vehicles, through windows and from around corners, with rapid magazine changes. And, train them to talk calmly, yet firmly on a radio while under stress.

Do a series of 48-hour training problems going over react to contact, “man down” drills, etc., all while under fire, with constant movement, and leader changes. Depending of course on your situation, I recommend doing it mostly in an urban environment, using both military and civilian vehicles, with lots of noise and confusion.

Drill Aggressive Responses

Juan Nava

64th MP Co, 720th MP BN

Basically, it's about extracting aggression and drilling responses. Both will bring out the violent action we know as killing. That initial reaction can be drilled and trained so as to be second nature when attacked or attacking.

Early in our participation in the war, elements would come under fire and Soldiers demonstrated excellent fire discipline so as to mitigate collateral damage. However, many did not fire back because they didn't have clear tar-

Training Tips: Developing the Warrior Mindset

We recently talked with Dr. Nate Zinsser (Center for Enhanced Performance, USMA) who had this to say:

“The biggest problem I see in developing the killer instinct is getting people to overcome some long-standing habits fairly quickly. Soldiers must acknowledge that as humans, they are predators by nature. It’s only recently that our culture’s habits have been less aggressive, less predatory. We must put Soldiers back in touch with their nature as such.”

Here are some excerpts from “Developing the Warrior Mindset,” an article by Dr. Zinsser and Maj. Greg Burbelo, originally published in InfantryOnline (4/15/03):

Train the Mind

“It is not necessarily the tough, realistic, and demanding training that builds the warrior ethos; it is the perceptions and thoughts that we internalize before, during and after tough training events or combat that produce a hardened warrior mindset. Soldiers must realize the relationship between internal thoughts about tough and demanding training and immediate changes in their physiology which either physically frees them up to perform aggressively or slows them down to a level of mediocrity. Great soldiers and leaders think like champions because they perceptively view tough, realistic and demanding training with eagerness and trust, rather than with doubt and apprehension, both of which stem from a certain thought process.”

Trust the Training

“Generally, leaders wisely view training as the key to building confidence. However, the training mindset may unknowingly produce hesitation and doubt spurred by a focus of purposely looking for errors in training. This training mindset must therefore be balanced with a trusting mindset by first focusing 60 percent of the AAR process on what went right. Furthermore, areas that did not meet the standard should be generally viewed as temporary and fixable versus ‘permanently broken.’”

Visualize

“By using imagery, warriors can achieve mental and emotional readiness and execute with decisiveness through the creation of ‘déjà vu experiences.’ The thought is ‘I’ve already seen it, done it, and felt it in my head, and I was able to just execute as I had envisioned myself doing.’ The use of rock drills and rehearsals are similarly useful, but warriors can internally use this preparatory mental skill to ensure total conviction indicative of a warrior ethos.”

“Once you have learned to kill mentally, the physical part is easy. The hard part is then turning it off when necessary. While we prepare Soldiers to kill in war, we must also reverse the process to allow them to decompress, to assimilate back into society. Just as a diver emerges slowly from the depths of the ocean, we must ensure Soldiers are acclimated to new pressures and environments as they return from combat.”

gets. I modified my command guidance to them that under certain conditions (not urban/built up areas, etc.), if they received fire and had the cardinal direction, but not a clear target, then they were to find an inanimate object in that direction and nail it with accurate small arms weapon fire.

The result was one of two things: 1) The enemy would “bug out,” which enhanced your security and safety; or 2) Thinking you were engaging them, they would fire again and reveal their positions, upon which you could then take action. Once the Soldiers did fire back (controlled and accurate), they became less apprehensive about engaging the enemy. With each additional engagement, Soldiers’ proficiency, confidence, and instinct for aggression increased. The balance is that we as leaders must also cultivate control of that instinct. It’s the controls that allow us to be normal members of society when we are not operating under those extreme conditions.

Confidence in Leadership

Chris Conley

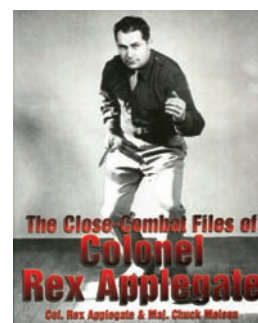
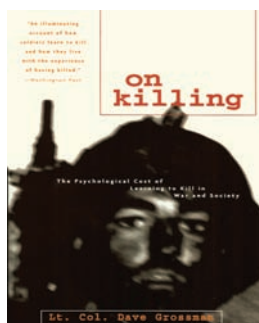
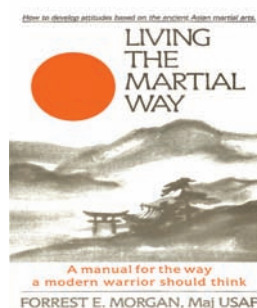
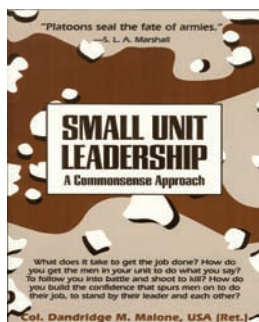
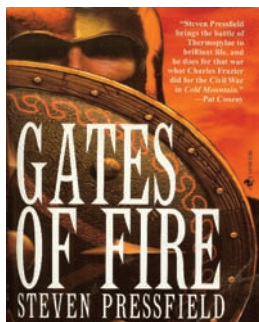
A/2-7th CAV (recently redesignated as A/1-12th CAV), 1st CAV DIV

Part of Soldiers’ willingness to fight comes from their confidence in us as leaders. When Soldiers have confidence in their abilities, comrades, equipment, AND leaders, they’re much more ready to fight. If you have to put your foot through a door and you have no idea what’s on the other side of it, but you’re confident that your team can move, shoot, and fight well enough to survive—or even better, succeed—you’re much more willing to put your foot through that door.

Special thanks to Matt Michaelson for developing the “Warrior Ethos/Killer Instinct” discussion as the Fitness Topic Lead for the CC team.

Professional Reading to Develop the Warrior Mindset

"Habit will be your champion. When you train the mind to think one way, and one way only, when you refuse to allow it to think in another, that will produce great strength in battle. ... Habit is a mighty ally, my young friend. The habit of fear and anger, or the habit of self-composure and courage." —*Gates of Fire*



"To achieve admiration and respect today, the warrior must set himself apart from the rest of society by his personal excellence. Where warriorship was once a birthright, it is now a calling."

—*Living the Martial Way*

Here's a short list of the books pictured above that company commanders are using to sharpen their warrior minds and those of their Soldiers:

- *Gates of Fire* by Steven Pressfield, Bantam Books, 1998.
- *Small Unit Leadership* by Col. Dandridge M. Malone, Presidio Press, 1983.
- *Living the Martial Way* by Maj. Forrest E. Morgan (USAF), Barricade Books, 1992.
- *Kill or Get Killed* by Col. Rex Applegate, Paladin Press, 2002.
- *Cold Steel: Technique of Close Combat* by John Styers, Paladin Press, 1952.
- *On Killing* by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, Back Bay Books, 1996.
- *In Search of the Warrior Spirit* by Richard Strozzi-Heckler, North Atlantic Books, 2003.
- *The Close Combat Files of Col. Rex Applegate* by Col. Rex Applegate and Maj. Chuck Melson, Paladin Press, 2002.

Next from CompanyCommand...

While we are cultivating the killer instinct and warrior ethos in our Soldiers, we are aware that exceptional leaders are also equipping Soldiers to make sense of killing in battle—to help them mentally process their combat experiences in a healthy way. The next CC article (ARMY Magazine, November) will focus on this critical subject.

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Are you a current company-level commander or a commissioned officer preparing to take the guidon? Join your professional forum at <http://companycommand.army.mil> where thousands of company commanders, who are committed to creating exceptional units, are sharing ideas and advancing the profession. Nate Self is taking the lead for the CC team with the ARMY Magazine articles. Send your comments, questions, or suggestions to him at nate.self@us.army.mil and/or to the CC team at cocmd.team@us.army.mil.