



# CompanyCommand

## *Building Combat-Ready Teams*



**To:** Company Commanders

**From:** Company Commanders

## **Is Training Management Still Relevant?**

The relentless cycle of deployments over the past eight years has increased training requirements and decreased training time, making it more difficult to manage training. As commanders, we are responsible for training our units, yet our company training schedules can easily become dominated by events mandated, planned and resourced by higher headquarters. This situation led a member of the CC forum to ask: "I'm taking command soon, and I hear a lot of older leaders talk about how

we've lost the art of training management. My question is this: Given the lockstep ARFORGEN train-up-to-deploy process and combat operations that guys like me have been doing nonstop, is training management even relevant right now? If so, how? Looking for practical ideas/tips that I can actually put into action." This question touched a nerve within the community of company-level commanders. Listen in to excerpts from some of the responses.

**John McFarlin**

**Past CDR, HHT/4-10 CAV**

While one of the complaints that I had as a new troop commander was that there was so little white space left in the ARFORGEN train-up for deployment, over time I came to understand how to work with the situation and stop wasting precious energy fighting it. As leaders, we want to retain the greatest autonomy by assessing, planning and executing a training plan that we've authored. That mindset is written into our doctrine, and it's part of our culture. It's what makes us leaders. But we have to be mature enough to understand the extremely high stakes involved in the current era of persistent conflict and to accept the wheel that's already been invented.

Battalion and brigade staffs work hard to manage limited training resources to get "two-fers," resulting in rigid plans that chafe. But the alternative would be some units not being able to "get to the feed trough." In some cases, there just isn't enough training land, ranges and time to allow commanders to plan and execute on their own. That doesn't mean that company commanders should blindly accept every training gate in the predeployment bubble-gum chart as equally important. You still have to talk it through with your brother and sister commanders and identify training "distractors" mistaken as "must-haves." We can make the best of this suboptimal situation by refining mandated plans rather than chasing down resources. If BN staff have reserved a range, for example, then we don't have to. That's time saved. We trade autonomy and the feeling of owning the plan "soup-to-

nuts" for the benefit of everyone accomplishing the training.

Training management still matters, but I found that the first step was making sure that all of the mandatory training events were properly mapped. I also made an effort to make sure that if it was a squadron-level training event, then training events beneficial to my unit were included. That's the give and take of the BN training meeting—backed up by commanders talking with S-3s offline before and after training meetings. Then, you bring what you negotiated there into your own troop training meeting. If, after taking into account all the directed training, you don't have any white space for addressing training needs specific to your organization, then that's the red line where you have to bring it up with your commander. You may be told that you have to mitigate risk. But that's for the CDR and 1SG to figure out.

**Brandon Soltwisch**

**Current CDR, D & HHC/1-77 AR**

Is training management still relevant? Yes! No doubt about it. Although the gates are laid out for you in your preparation for deployment, how you get there is, in many respects, still up to you. If you aren't managing that training, then you are spinning out of control and are failing in your command responsibility for the combat readiness of your formation. We're required to prepare for and execute a much broader spectrum of tasks than ever before. It isn't as simple as the old METL crosswalk, but it's still the same doctrinal approach.

We are a product of our environment, and the fast-paced,

*CPT Brandon Soltwisch, at the reenlistment of three of his Company D, 1st Battalion, 77th Armor Regiment soldiers in Iraq, believes that training management is an essential element of a commander's responsibility.*



quick-turn deployments have forced us to adapt our training methodology. We don't have the time to train one task at a time; we have to train three. Our job is to identify the tasks that most closely translate across the broadest spectrum to generate the widest-reaching effects. I picked five things I wanted to be good at: troop leading procedures, precombat checks and rehearsals; rifle marksmanship; tactical combat casualty/combat lifesaver skills; battle drills; and physical training. To me, these are the things that translated across every one of my METL tasks. The keys are deciding where to take risks and then talking to your boss about it and getting his buy-in to your methodology. An honest discussion about realistic expectations of where your unit can—and, more importantly, cannot—go from here is imperative. The last part of the puzzle is forcing your subordinate leaders to get you there by using the Eight-Step Training Model and effective training meetings. You already know that BN/BDE are going to throw a wrench in your plans with last-minute taskings that some people use as an excuse not to manage training at their level. As long as you accept the inevitable last-minute taskings and work to reduce the distractions in the 33 percent of the time that you truly control, then you will be successful.

### **John Mooney**

**Past CDR, E/1-64 AR**

Does training management matter? You better believe it! First, the train-to-deploy process is not as lockstep as everyone makes it out to be. There is always slack in the schedule, and the training-management process will help the commander make the best possible use of the limited time he does control. Second, training-management doctrine should be used during every deployment cycle to validate the training plan and make sure that it still supports the deployment mission and is tailored to the experience level of the unit. Third, as long as we are fighting a war somewhere, there will be a tension between training to the core METL and directed METL. The classic example is NBC training. Training management will help balance the important (core skills) with the urgent (deployment training).

The primary tip I can give is to plan at longer range than companies usually do—all the way out to deployment. Then you can forecast and make time for as many of your priorities as possible. Show your plan to the battalion commander for his buy-in, which should help you execute your plan without being top-driven. It will take some creativity to squeeze every last bit of value out of the time available. For

### **Company Command Glossary**

**1SG**—First sergeant.

**AAR**—After action review.

**ARFORGEN**—Army force generation process. The ARFORGEN process is used to manage the force and ensure the ability to support demands for Army forces. ARFORGEN sequences activities for all active and reserve Army units including reset, staffing and employment.

**BDE**—Brigade.

**BN**—Battalion.

**CDR**—Commander.

**FORSCOM**—Forces Command.

**IWQ**—Individual weapons qualification.

**METL**—Mission essential task list.

**NBC**—Nuclear, biological, chemical.

**OIF**—Operation Iraqi Freedom.

**STX**—Situational training exercise.





*LT Brian Murdock meets with the mukhtar of Shakra Sufla, a village in northern Iraq, during a humanitarian assistance mission. LT Murdock and his fellow leaders are striving to learn the doctrine of training management after their recent deployment.*

example, combine training physically demanding tasks with PT time, such as breach drills with weighted dummy bangalores. Hip-pocket training is essential; give your NCOs guidance on your priorities, and push them to run with it.

#### **Lawrence Joiner**

**Current CDR, B/1-623 FA, KYARNG**

Most training now, especially mobilization training, is “turnkey” for units. Units show up, go through the training and deploy. Instructors and resources are provided. This saves time and is a good use of resources, but it does not teach anyone in the unit the principles of training management (FM 7-0/7-1), nor does it develop unit leaders to become subject-matter experts. The Eight-Step Training Model must be used at the unit level. Training management boils down to putting the time into planning and resourcing to produce an end state; it should not be geared merely to meeting a requirement. IWQ is a good example. Many commanders think of it as an annual training requirement with an end state of percentage complete, when in fact IWQ is feedback for the Soldier and a tool for the commander to assess the proficiency of his unit’s weapons-training program.

#### **Brian Murdock**

**Future CDR**

Outstanding question! Training management has been a topic of discussion every week for about three months in my company. I think the answer is yes, it is important. Whether or not you can conduct proper training management specific to your branch, however, depends on the amount of dwell time your unit has. If you’re looking at 12 months home and then back to theater, you will certainly be told what tasks must be trained prior to deployment by your BDE or higher. If you can get 18 to 24 months at home, you have the opportunity to

brush up on your core competencies. Prior to my deployment in support of OIF 9/11, I was “force-fed” all my training. We were getting ready to deploy and certain gates had to be met before we left, so white space on the training calendar was nonexistent. When we redeployed home in December and had an opportunity to train, it was as if no one knew how to conduct doctrinal training management. I knew the training we had laid on was not the proper way to conduct training, and I wanted to make sure my Soldiers were going to be trained the right way. I combed the CompanyCommand forum for ideas and where to start, and now the only reason I have any idea how to develop training doctrinally is because of the information I have learned from past company commanders in the CompanyCommand forum and from reading training doctrine.

#### **What Army Doctrine Tells Us**

Training management is the process used by Army leaders to identify training requirements and subsequently plan, prepare, execute and assess training. Army training management provides a systematic way of managing time and resources and of meeting training objectives through purposeful training activities. ...

The single most important company meeting is the training meeting. (See TC 25-30) ... At company and platoon level, meetings directly concern the specifics of training preparation, execution and preexecution checks. ... Commanders should emphasize collective training proficiency of small units—crews, teams, squads, sections, platoons—over company and higher level training. Small-unit proficiency provides the foundation for large-unit readiness.

—FM 7.0, *Training for Full Spectrum Operations*

*CPT Joshua Gaspard, shown with three Iraqi army commanders, argues that “training management is the single most important responsibility of a company commander” between deployments.*



### **Joshua Gaspard**

**Past CDR, B & HHC/3-187 IN, 3-101 ABN DIV (AASLT)**

Training management is the single most important responsibility of a company commander during garrison time. Those who talk about how we’ve “lost” the art of training management have failed to impart its importance to their subordinates and have failed to professionally educate their subordinates (and maybe themselves) by not reading doctrine (7.0, 5.0, 3.0, 7-8, 7-10, CCTs, or the latest versions of those documents for your respective branch). Training management is more relevant now than ever because it is *your* company that will be at a remote patrol base. Your unit’s level of training will be all so evident when you are required to conduct combat operations autonomously. Train like a madman!

#### **Army Eight-Step Training Model**

- Plan the training.
- Train and certify the leaders.
- Recon the site.
- Issue the plan.
- Rehearse.
- Execute.
- Conduct an AAR.
- Retrain.

### **Nick Nethery**

**Current CDR, 737th EOD CO**

I agree with most of you about the necessity of training management (although some of you are confusing time management and training management), and I agree with the importance of developing subordinates, especially junior officers. So, yes, training management is important, but no, it is not an art. You take your higher’s directed METL and decide what you want to add, then choose when to focus on what. There is no finesse to it, and it takes little time. If you have a “road to war,” most training is decided for you. If you don’t have a “road to war,” then you’re not deploying anytime soon and you probably have a lot more autonomy, so enjoy it and use the opportunity to develop yourself as a planner.

### **Matthew Ellett**

**Current CDR, B Co. (MI), 4th BSTB, 4-101 ABN DIV (AASLT)**

Regardless of what the ARFORGEN and FORSCOM deployment requirements and recommended timelines say, you still have to manage your time. Time is like money, and you have a limited budget. What happens when you don’t manage your budget? You go over and are socked with debt. When you can’t manage your training to maximize time, you end up losing out on what you need to do. Even when MACOMs dictate what you ought to do, not every unit fits its timeline, and not every unit fits the full set of requirements. The ownership concept here is key. You own your company. You and you alone are responsible for training your company.

### **Adam Armstrong**

**Current CDR, B/2-508 PIR, 4-82nd ABN DIV**

I would say that training management is even *more* relevant now than it has been in the past. The ARFORGEN process does create a fairly regimented framework for the unit’s time between deployments. Building the new team, resetting both Soldiers and equipment, conducting mission-readiness exercises and then packing everything back up for shipping—all within 12 to 14 months—can be nothing but a compact process.

There is a period in there that requires us to get back to the training-management roots. During reset, commanders make money by prioritizing training on critical individual and leader skills that they know will be needed for the collective good. There are opportunities to set the unit up for



*CPT Adam Armstrong (center), with village elders during a joint patrol with the Afghan National Army, believes that meticulous training management set the conditions for his battalion's successful preparation for deployment.*



success in the upcoming period of collective training by sending individuals to required schools and executing in-house training for individuals, crews and small teams. Because that period is so short, CDRs cannot afford to squander any of that valuable time.

Our brigade is currently deployed to Afghanistan. For us, the most important period in developing our ability to fight and win as a unit was the intensive training cycle in January–March 2009. Commanders received the directed METL towards the end of October, and then we went to work designing the training plan for our units. Those two months engineering the plan so that we would come back from leave ready to train in January were crucial to our ability to train in the intensive training cycle and perform here in Afghanistan.

In three months' time, we went from individual marksmanship through company STXs, encompassing realistic live fires for maneuver elements at every level between. The only way to do that was through meticulous training management. That "art" is essential to ensuring that critical gates are achieved in a process in which every step builds upon the last to obtain the desired end state—a unit capable of meeting the requirements for the upcoming mission set. Not only is training management vital to preparing the unit for deployments on short turns, but it is equally important to ensuring that Soldiers' time is maximized during training periods while preserving much-needed time with their families through diligence in execution.

Training management is best done as a team. Commanders worked together as a team over some long hours to develop the path that each of our companies would follow. The process is even better when employing the lieutenants to work its various aspects. Don't forget the wealth of experience provided by our fantastic NCOs. The argument that we have lost the art of training man-

agement only goes as far as how willing we are to teach, coach and mentor the next generation of leaders to execute it.

*We hope that this article serves as a catalyst for professional conversation about training management within your unit. If you are a currently commissioned officer, we invite you to log on to <http://CC.army.mil> and share your insights and experiences with training management and any other challenges of building and leading combat-ready teams. If you are not eligible for CC membership but wish to contribute, e-mail your ideas to [cocmd.team@us.army.mil](mailto:cocmd.team@us.army.mil). Leadership counts!*