

ENTER THE GAUNTLET

The Armor School Is Transforming How We Train Our Combat Leaders

by Second Lieutenant Humayun S. Khan

The Armor School is adopting the concept of the scrimmage, one of the most effective training techniques of a good football team, in order to improve the training of lieutenants, captains, and NCOs.

In the past, lieutenants trained with lieutenants, captains with captains, and NCOs with NCOs, but this kind of peer group training has obvious limitations. A captain learning to develop effective orders should ideally be testing his capabilities with lieutenants — like he will in the real world — rather than with other captains, yet this is the system the Armor School has used for years. This method is convenient and easy to schedule training this way, but unrealistic.

Good football teams use another method entirely. After initial conditioning, players learn the plays in blackboard “skull sessions,” then crawl and walk through non-contact drills, but the real training comes in scrimmages, where each player gets to perform in his game day role.

The Armor School is working to do the same thing. By synchronizing the course schedules of captains, lieutenants, and NCOs, the Armor School has been able to develop a training event called the Gauntlet that breaks through the limitations of peer group training and allows students at each level to deal with soldiers with the same experience levels that they will encounter in their units. Captains give their orders to lieutenants, not captains role-playing lieutenants.

The earlier method of peer group training, taken from public education, may have worked well when our leaders were in elementary school, but for the complex battlefield environment, a leader needs to know each job and work well with others without hesitation. While peer group training produces knowledgeable leaders, it does not provide the real-world experience of leading soldiers of different ranks

and knowledge levels. In so doing, we have limited experience-based learning and de-emphasized the relationship between peer groups.

Under the earlier system, Army leadership schools were focused on the assumption that transmitting and retaining knowledge is more important than gaining experience. Certainly, knowledge is a prerequisite for gaining experience, but experience may be more consequential on a future battlefield, especially a battle-simulated experience dealing with non-peers in a professional relationship.

A football scrimmage provides an analogy. It involves all the players in their respective roles. Quarterbacks do not scrimmage with other quarterbacks. A scrimmage is made realistic by pitting an offense against a defense, and by the pressure created by keeping score. A scrimmage allows the coaches and the quarterbacks to build skills not otherwise developed.

Currently, the school emphasizes problem solving, organization, tactical proficiency, decisiveness, communication, and judgment. While these skills are essential, they are limited with regard to the scope of the battlefield. The new skills students will focus on are: adaptability, innovation, conceptual thinking, intuition, creativity, rapid decision-making, and dealing with pressure. “Scrimmages,” can instill these attributes in our soldiers faster. In the 16th Cavalry Regiment, exercises called Gauntlets simulate scrimmages.

These training events are battle-focused, multi-echelon experiences designed to train adaptive leadership skills and build self-confidence. Students in the Armor Officer Basic Course, Armor Captains Career Course, Scout Leader Course, Cavalry Leader Course, and the NCO Academy Advanced NCO Course and Basic NCO courses currently overlap, providing opportunities for joint training.



These multi-echelon training events are organized at three levels — live training, virtual training, and constructive training. Live training is most similar to a scrimmage. It is as close to an actual battle experience as one can get. Live training opportunities are FTXs, gunnery, MOUT (Military Operations in Urban Terrain) paintball, and MOUT TEWT (Tactical Exercises Without Troops). Virtual training involves simulation of the battlefield, as in the CCTT (Close Combat Tactical Trainer), SIMNET, and UCOFT (Unit Conduct of Fire Trainer). Constructive training involves the training of tactics, rather than crew-level skills. Constructive training opportunities include Janus and TACOPS.

The 16th Cavalry Regiment at Fort Knox has conducted multi-echelon training events at all three levels and the results have been good. The first training event, CCTT/SIMNET, trained 64 lieutenants from the AOB Course and 80 captains from the ACC Course on the CCTT and SIMNET facilities concurrently. The captains’ course provided the task force operations order, computer scenario, and company-level leadership (students). The lieutenants’ course provided platoon leaders (students), and gunners, drivers, and loaders. Small group instructors in each course evaluated students.

The exercise trained troop leading procedures (TLPs) and offensive and defensive operations. Offensive operations for the captains were support by fire, breach, assault, and movement to contact, and the lieutenants executed battle drills, actions on contact, support/attack by fire, and assault. In the defense, captains conducted reconnaissance and security operations, preparation of a battle position, defending a battle position, and defending in sector, while lieutenants conducted direct fire planning, defend a battle position, and call for indirect fire. Through these missions, lieutenants were given the opportunity to learn from captains.



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Photos by Robert L. Stevenson

Captains provided leadership and mentoring to lieutenants in a working environment. The captains noted that they were able to assess how well they conveyed information and intent to lieutenants, not captains playing the role of lieutenants.

The next multi-echelon training event was a constructive TACOPS which also combined ACCC and AOB students. The intent was to allow a company (one captain and three lieutenants) to conduct a defense in sector in a constructive environment. Eleven captains and 33 lieutenants paired up in companies and conducted a leaders' reconnaissance. Later, each company fought a battle using the TACOPS constructive simulation, and winning companies were released for the remainder of the day, while losing companies transitioned to the OPFOR cell until victorious. Lieutenants found the tactical problem complex, and captains were often frustrated communicating with lieutenants. Both groups found the interaction useful.

An FTX Ten-Day War served as the live training event. Sixty-four lieutenants, 36 captains, and 16 sergeants first class trained to become confident, adaptive, and proficient leaders. The objectives were to maximize leadership opportunities, establish a method of leadership assessment, incorporate SASO (Stability and Support Operations) and OOTW (Operations Other Than War), and explore Force XXI technology. The exercise incorporated various scenarios with increasingly challenging variables and conditions,

requiring innovative thinking and testing the adaptability of students. The exercise provided a realistic, fatiguing, stressful, training environment, and assessed new leadership skills of adaptability, innovation, conceptual thinking, intuition, creativity, rapid decision-making, and dealing with pressure. It stressed leadership by combining student sergeants, lieutenants, and captains, leading one captain to comment: "...One of the most valuable pieces was having the NCOs involved, which added a lot of depth and experience... and gave the lieutenants some good insight about what it's going to be like working with their platoon sergeants for the first time."

"The greatest challenge is getting the lieutenants to listen to you," said one sergeant first class who was attending ANCOC. "... to integrate our experience with their training. But everybody's taking something from this. Nobody's coming in here saying they can't learn anything. Everybody's going to learn something. That's what's important and fun about it!"

The MOUT exercise, conducted live at the Zussman Urban Combat Training Site, replicated possible real world urban environments. The intent was to provide approximately 60 lieutenants and 28 captains the opportunity to solve complex problems in a MOUT environment. Platoons, led by captains in leadership positions, rotated through movement to contact, hasty defense, and hasty attack missions. Paintball added needed realism and pressure on leaders to execute well. Paintball also

provided a gauge to judge soldiering skill, something not provided by MILES gear or blank ammunition.

Training is changing at Fort Knox. It is evolving from a focus on knowledge to a battle-focused experience generating multi-grade, multi-echelon training. The lessons learned and the methodology established from these training events will be used to improve future events, making each one a progressively better learning environment. Captains, lieutenants, and NCOs for the first time will train with and learn from each other. Learning will come from battle and victory, and evaluations will be based on the battlefield. Students will be allowed to demonstrate the adaptive and innovative decision-making skills essential to deal with our technological future. They will develop into bold, confident, tough, and battlefield-savvy soldiers who can lead from the front and think fast in the heat of combat. They will be trained to handle uncertainty, weigh probabilities, and accept risks. The Armor School will train them as they will fight.

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