



Operation Enduring Freedom Leader Book



In the Experience



AFGHANISTAN

Preparing for the Experience



SGT Philip Witkowski



25 May 1979 - 1 May 2004

SSG Brian Hobbs



26 July 1973 - 13 October 2004

CPL David Fraise



1 May 1980 - 7 June 2004

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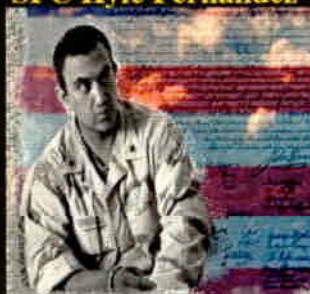
24 October 1982-20 September 2004

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10 August 1974 - 12 August 2004

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9 May 1978 - 13 October 2004



We dedicate this AAR book to our fallen heroes that have made the ultimate sacrifice while serving in Afghanistan.

We present this book to our brothers in arms.

Table of Contents

How do you combat fatigue, stress, and fear in yourself? In your soldiers?	A1-A6
How do you counsel a seasoned PSG who might have been to combat twice while you were at USMA or ROTC?	A7-A11
How do you get to know your soldiers in a combat environment without getting too close? How do you gauge this closeness?	A12-A16
How important is your level of physical fitness as an officer? How important is it in combat for your unit?	A17-A21
What did ROTC/USMA do specifically that made you most effective as a combat leader?	A22-A25
How did you enforce standards as a new LT?	A26-A28
What things will a new LT be expected to know?	A29-A32
How do you conduct training in a combat environment?	A33-A36
What are the most important skills your troops need in a combat environment, and why?	A37-A40
How do you deal with the loss or serious injury of a soldier?	A41-A44
What techniques/training did you use to best prepare soldiers to deal with personal/family issues while deployed?	A45-A48
What advice would you give to a future officer preparing to lead soldiers?	A49-A52
What do you love most about being a LT?	A53-A56
What makes a platoon leader successful?	A57-A60
Meet the Contributors	B1-B6



Afghan Leader Book

OEF 5 April 2004-May 2005

3rd Brigade, "Broncos!", 25th ID (L)



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1LT Thomas Bouchillon	TC	Platoon Leader	2LT Gisela Mendonca	TC	Platoon Leader
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1LT Tom Grywalski	IN	Scout Platoon Leader	1LT Donnie Choe	IN	Platoon Leader
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1LT Hollie Miller	MS	Platoon Leader	2LT Christopher Suttles	IN	Platoon Leader

Meet the Contributors / Section B



1. How do you combat fatigue, stress, and fear in yourself? In your Soldiers?

In times when fatigue, stress, and fear begin to creep in, I rely on my spiritual foundations. I've found that when my physical health (fatigue) and mental health (stress and fear) suffer, my spiritual well-being can overcome. I find it true that our total level of health results from the sum of our physical, mental, and spiritual health. One way to help your Soldiers overcome is simply by remaining strong. Even though you may be tired, weak, and struck with fear, an outward confidence may boost their spirits. Another is to look out for their spiritual health.

~1LT Eliel Pimentel, XO, HHC/2-35 IN

I believe the best way to combat fatigue is to ensure that you are keeping a proper balance between physical and mental fitness. Exercise is a perfect way to help relieve stress and help build endurance. It is also important to have a release program to help you and your soldiers break away from work at the end of a hard day. I recommend organized platoon events such as sports, video and board games. Also encourage soldiers to read or take educational, and professional classes.

~2LT Nicole DeTomaso, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

I combat fatigue by maintaining a high level of physical fitness. There is no substitute for being physically fit. I also try to get at least six hours of sleep a night. This isn't always possible, so I try to get a full eight hours of sleep one day a week. Stress is inevitable, but my favorite ways to combat it are PT and writing letters home. Studying the Bible every day helps keep me focused on God's eternal plan, not just operations in Afghanistan. I also keep a picture album of my son and my wife nearby. Flipping through the pictures always brings a smile to my face. My biggest fear is failure. I am not afraid of dying. I don't

think I do a very good job of combating my fear of failure. In fact, I think I antagonize it.

For my Soldiers, the same rules apply for fatigue, physical fitness, and rest. I have found that Soldiers with families are generally better apt to handle stressful situations. Family issues, however, can also add stress to a Soldier's life, thus affecting his mission performance. I also encourage my Soldiers to become and remain physically, mentally, and spiritually fit. I know and understand the roles and capabilities of Division Mental Health, Chaplains, and Legal Assistance. I encourage my Soldiers to use these resources, and have often referred them. The best



way for Soldiers to combat fear is to be confident in their leaders, their training, and their equipment. This starts long before deployment, but can be maintained and even improved in theater as training time becomes available.

~1LT Thomas Bouchillon, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

I have found the best way to combat fatigue and stress is to do one of two things: 1) go work out at the gym or 2) read a book. By reading or working out I can somewhat "remove" myself from the surroundings and thus the stress incorporated in it. As for alleviating stress and fatigue in Soldiers, I recommend talking to them on a daily basis. If you show Soldiers that you care, a greater chance exists for Soldiers to discuss issues that are bothering them. Furthermore, talking (even more importantly listening) is one of the best remedies for stress and fear.

~1LT Jeremy Endlish, FSO, C/2-35 IN

Fatigue is very much a part of combat and the best way to deal with it is to apply common sense. In training at your home station field discipline is easier to maintain, because you only have to endure a few

weeks of it. In a combat zone, everyday is consumed with work. You will conduct mission after mission for an entire year, so the risk of burning out or physically breaking down your Soldiers is at an all time high. The same field discipline that you maintained on the two-week field problems at home station will have to be reassessed in a combat zone. The line between common sense and discipline is sometimes a delicate balancing act. As a leader, you must ensure that you are never putting your Soldiers' safety unnecessarily at risk, while still being smart about what measures are necessary at any given time. After a few months in country Soldiers will begin to suffer a variety of ailments such as feet fungus, back sores, or heat rashes. Leaders must be smart about operational tempo, troop rotation, and mission cycles. For example, in the hot times of the summer in Afghanistan the temperature is in excess of 120 degrees and the Soldiers are wearing body armor, so operating on a reverse cycle is a useful technique if possible. Allow the Soldiers to bed down in an orchard during the hot hours and conduct your missions during hours of limited visibility. Leaders must also ensure that a Soldier's load is carefully thought through and field hygiene is maintained and supervised at all times.

Closely tied to the balancing of fatigue is the balancing of stress. Every Soldier deals with stress in his own way; the important thing is that leaders provide their men with ample time to deal with stress in their own ways. For me, sports are always a good technique for relieving stress. Also, communicating with my family always seems to help quell stress. My Soldiers seem to prefer these same techniques as well.

Similar to relief of stress is relief of fear. Each man has his own way of dealing with fear. Leaders, however, play a much bigger role in the relief of fear. Fear comes from risk and it is the leader's job to mitigate risk. There will always be fear in a combat zone, but a leader can make logical decisions and coordinate for extra equipment or personnel in order to minimize risk and thus reduce fear. Also, maintaining the highest standard of training makes everyone very confident in his own abilities, thereby neutralizing fear to a certain degree. Fear must be discussed and addressed openly, so that everyone realizes that his feelings are natural. Sensing sessions or quiet discussions between the Soldiers and leaders will facilitate the handling of fear. As the platoon leader, it is important for you to explain the risks, why they must be taken, and what you have done to mitigate them. Addressing fear in this mature and systematic manner will provide the Soldiers with confidence in their leaders and will help them mentally handle their fears.

~ILT Tom Grywalski, Scout PL, HHC/2-35 IN

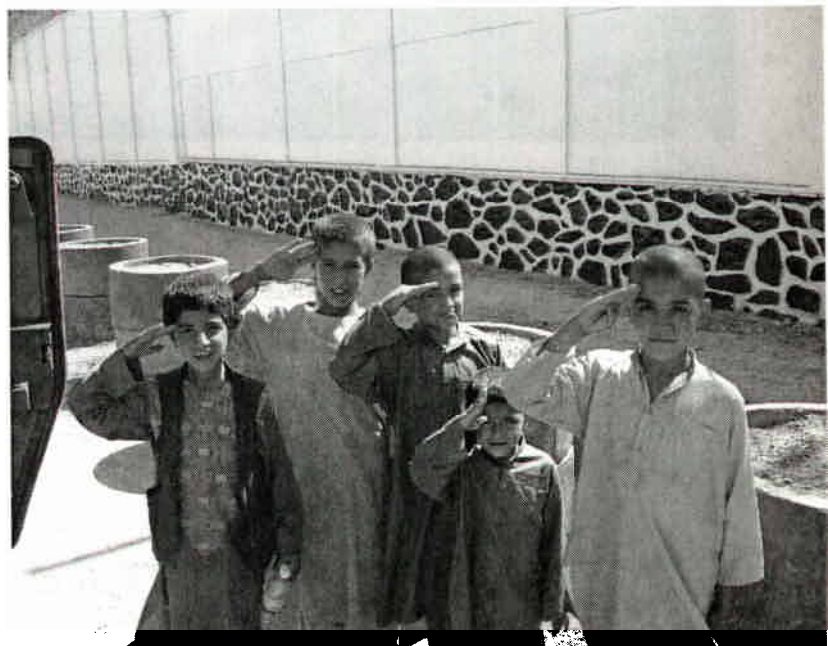
The best ways that I have found to combat fatigue, stress, and fear is to maintain a positive attitude, continue with a steady workout routine, and try to get lost in a book or movie on my down time. Maintaining a positive attitude affects others, therefore, making your working environment less stressful and more relaxed. Continuing with a steady workout routine and losing yourself in other activities such as reading or watching a movie allows you to put your current situation out of your thoughts so that you may relax your mind for a short period of time.

~ILT Mia Suttles, PL, C/125 MI

Combating stress is a constant, daily issue. Time to relax is a very good thing to have. Sometimes this is not an option. Open communication with your Soldiers is important, so that you can relate to their issues; sometimes you may have the same concerns. A healthy PT program is also vital. Physical activities can reduce mental stress and build a solid team environment.

*~ILT Paul Spelock,
XO, HQ&A/325 FSB*

All of these will affect each Soldier on a deployment, and each individual will have a slightly different way of dealing with each. Some of the best ways to combat



fatigue and stress is by maintaining a high level of physical fitness. The Army continues to place great emphasis on physical fitness; so many of the locations US Soldiers deploy have a gym/workout facility of some type. Weightlifting and running are excellent ways to recharge both mentally and physically, and both provide you with a block of time to yourself, when you can clear your mind of work-related issues and focus on something else entirely. It is the same with Soldiers and, as a leader, you must ensure you are setting the right example in your platoon/section/unit by encouraging them to stay physically fit and to find their own “niche” that allows them to relax and enjoy short periods of respite from the everyday grind of deployment.

Fear in yourself—something everyone experiences, especially those who are younger/newer to the military and deployments in general. Two traits come to mind when dealing with fear: confidence and the ability to remain calm. Maintaining confidence (not arrogance or pride) in your training, leadership, and above all, yourself, will be an incredibly strengthening factor in tough situations. Remaining calm will also aid you greatly; ROTC/USMA training will prepare you more than you know to think clearly and quickly in tough, sometimes frightening situations, and it is your ability to remain calm and collected in the face of these challenges that will lead to the best decisions best for you and your Soldiers. Your Soldiers will feed off the way you handle fear—they will be able to sense your tension and nervousness, or your calm, collected attitude, depending upon your reaction. If you are calm and relaxed, chances are they will be calmer as well, making the unit as a whole more prepared to conquer any difficult situation it must face.

~1LT James Stokes, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 3rd BDE, 25th ID (L)

I try to establish a battle rhythm / routine that incorporates working out and personal time. I ensure that I have time set aside for those two things no matter how pressing things are. In my Soldiers, I try to talk to them and ensure they do the same.

~2LT Andrew Johannes, PL, C/65th EN

Basically I deal with combat fatigue, stress, and fear, the same way I deal with life in general. Take one day at a time. Do one thing at a time, without worrying about the other million things that have to be done. Most importantly, talk to someone who will listen, and if need be, maybe even guide you. I personally leave everything up to God. I pray that he will give me the strength physically, emotionally, and mentally to get through this difficult time in my life. He hasn't let me down yet. When I feel that the day is beginning to wear on me, I take time out to sit and clear my head. It may only be a few minutes of time, but time is of the essence. Never jump right into something else, thinking it will make you forget. Eventually it all adds up, the days add up, and the toll it takes on you will be greater. I try to instill this same idea in my soldiers; however, I know that every individual is different and deals with things differently so I must cater to them. I always make sure they have a gateway...a gateway to communicate and take time out to laugh and smile. Planning platoon and company events is very important, whether the soldiers realize it or not. It's almost a way of making them forget where they are for a moment, and enjoy themselves. Asking soldiers how their day is going, going out on a mission with them to see what it is they do, sitting down and eating chow with them are just a few things that could mean the world to them. You want to make the environment friendly, yet remain professional.

~1LT Hollie Miller, PL, C/325 FSB

Before commencing on this series of questions, a description of my background is paramount in pinpointing the audience to which this applies. Being commissioned in the Medical Service Corps as a Field Medical Assistant afforded me the opportunity to work in the Infantry two years as a Medical Platoon Leader, which gave me the experience to work as the Executive Officer of a Medical Company. This option gave me the ability to operate and encapsulate both the Combat Arms and Combat Service/Health Support arena.

There are many career paths to choose from in the military, but despite which one you choose you will be challenged with problems and expected to react proactively. Along with all of these problems comes the challenge of dealing with the adversity of fatigue, stress, and fear sometimes all at the same time. Everyone has a way of dealing with stress, but a cool head with the voice of reason in the fog of a tough situation will take you a long way. In order to maintain control and overcome these three negative factors a leader must be prepared. Prepared, from my perspective, is being physically, mentally and spiritually fit.

Physically fit means that your body is at the optimum level to perform longer, harder, and more effectively than the average individual, which would be your Soldiers and competitively your peers.

Exercising regularly and a healthy diet will keep your body in the shape it needs to be to perform.

Mentally fit means that you have educated yourself by ascertaining a plethora of knowledge in your specialty by reading, understanding and applying the key principles to daily operations in Soldiering. A key additive to supplement the studies of your craft is learning from your Non-Commissioned officers who have experienced and can professionally develop and guide you through these situations.

Spiritually fit means that you have a way to set your mind at ease whether it be through religion, a quiet time set aside for yourself, or comfort through a mutual friend. The key to spiritual fitness is relaxing the mind so when the time comes to step up to the tough situations your mind is clear and your spirit is calm and ready.

Applying these three principles continuously has kept me competitive and without knowing it helped me to deal with fear, stress, and fatigue. After facing adversity as a leader, dealing with tough situations will become second nature. Solicit a rigorous training program to combat the big three to your team and they will never falter and meet any challenge presented. *~1LT Gabriel Medley, XO, C/325 FSB*

Fatigue, stress and fear can all become less potent by simply concealing it. As all tend to be contagious, it's important to try to hide your own personal stress and frustration as much as possible from your Soldiers. Most of the time milder cases of any of these are suppressible by focusing on tasks at hand. As redundant as it seems, much of this is a mental game. Changing your way of thinking can change the way you feel. Focus on goals, both professional and personal. People get burned out, edgy, and, occasionally, depressed. Unhealthy thoughts and feelings surface. Part of the job Army NCOs and officers must do is to create an environment dedicated to hard work but free of strain so relentless that it renders Soldiers ineffective. In other words, motive your Soldiers as you are best able to. Mental health is just as important as physical health. Assuring good mental health is prevalent in a unit, does not equate to lowering standards. It could mean setting goals for your troops when their state of mind fails to allow them to. It could mean making training fun while still conducting it to standard. This relates to getting to know your Soldiers: find out what motivates them and incorporate it into plans when possible.

~2LT Rich Viola, FLE CDR, 325 FSB



In the past seven months I have learned a lot about how I deal with combat fatigue and stress. I have found that finding a little time for myself each day or even each week allows me to regenerate and focus. Having a sense of humor and not taking things so personally have also helped reduce my stress levels. Keeping a notebook with me at all times and writing tasks, missions, or even just things to do has

helped me keep my mind at ease, rather than thinking that I have forgotten to do something. Maintaining communication with my family and friends, whether through e-mail or phone conversations, also keeps me grounded.

Fear in yourself is something that I think everyone deals with differently. I know that I was very nervous when I arrived to KAF and was told I would be handling the host nation support. It was a job not everyone knew about, and there weren't many people to ask about it, since not many have done it before.

During that time I found it helpful to lean on my NCOs. I was a very new LT and my SSG really helped me realize that we could work together and make the mission happen. Since then I have taken over a platoon and I have kept that same standard of leaning on my NCOs to help make the mission happen. I think every leader has fear buried deep inside them; it is when your soldiers and NCOs are out there executing your plan that you realize that there is nothing to be afraid of. As the platoon leader, dealing with soldier's fear will be a challenge. I know that if I take the time to get to know each and every one of them, we can prevent or deal with their fear together. In a combat zone there will be times of fear. I know that is when I will find peace in knowing that I have done the training, my soldiers are trained, and most importantly that this is our job.

I believe that the best way to deal with combat fatigue, stress and fear in my soldiers is to know them. My platoon runs twenty-four hour operations; this means that some of my soldiers work the night shift and it can be difficult to transition to sleeping during the day and being awake all night. Then again, some soldiers enjoy the night shift for one reason or another. That is why I find that getting to know soldiers is the best way to deal with stress and fatigue. *~2LT Gisela Mendonca, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB*

Fatigue: Bring your platoon to combat in top physical condition. You'll be spending weeks at a time in complete battle rattle, and that's in the upwards of 50-60 lbs. without a ruck-sack; add the ruck and you just hit the 100 lb. mark. That's no joke as you move through mountainous terrain at 10,000 ft. in elevation. The fitter the platoon the easier the fatigue is on everyone.

Stress: This is somewhat tough----- Every Soldier has different triggers that can set his stress levels off, but most frequently I see stress emanating from problems at home. See my answer to question 12 and you'll find that a lot of these stress problems can be handled with the Soldier's financial/insurance paperwork being squared away (power's of attorney complete for spouses and NOT for girlfriends!) prior to leaving, and pray that your battalion has a solid Family Readiness Group (FRG). This can be critical.

Fear: Not much you can do to overcome fear that I know of; Face it head on.

~CPT Chris Barlow, PL, A/2-35 IN

Combating fatigue, stress, and fear in a combat environment is very different from garrison environment. You can't deal with the situation with alcohol or family. What you end up resorting to is the company of your fellow LT's and what little comfort you can find with books, movies, music, and even working out. However, dealing with the fatigue, stress, and fear in your Soldiers, is not as hard as you might expect. Soldiers are more resilient and resourceful than you'd believe. They have a larger support base within the platoon than you have. However, if you do have a Soldier who isn't able to cope with the fatigue, stress, and fear on his own, then you need to find ways to get his mind off of the situation. Having a battle rhythm definitely helps. Platoon PT (sports or run) and formations for different activities will allow everyone to support one another. *~1LT Donnie Choe, PL, A/2-27 IN*

Probably the best way I have found to combat fatigue, stress, and fear in myself and my Soldiers is attitude. Maintaining a positive attitude, while focusing on the task at hand helps to maintain a solid working atmosphere. Ensuring that Soldiers receive proper rest is obviously a necessary factor. Finally, working out and maintaining physical fitness both reduces stress and takes the Soldiers' minds temporarily off of their less than desirable situation.



~2LT Patton Nix, PL, C/2-27 IN

You combat fatigue by giving your Soldiers rest. It is not simply stating the obvious. Just because it is the Army doesn't mean you have to have first call at first light. If there is nothing going on then give your Soldiers the chance to rest if all other tasks (maintenance, weapons zero, etc) are complete. The worst thing to do is waste a Soldier's time by keeping him up to do nothing. At the same time keep your Soldiers active and alert in the field. It sounds like a contradiction, but inactivity leads to lethargy and complacency. The best place to conduct training is in the field. Conduct a patrol in an area you have not been to in a while, make stops and practice dismounting and patrolling, as long as it is mission oriented and has a purpose it will affect your AO as well as keep your Soldier's focused.

The best way to combat fear in your Soldiers is to maintain a sense of humor. A good joke goes a long way. I don't think the fear ever goes away, but maintaining a positive attitude and making light of things flows down to the most inexperienced Soldier. Remain calm and focus at what you have to do that day.

Do not focus on redeployment or what the bad guys have in store for you next week. Focus on today's route, today's patrol, and what you need to accomplish in the next 24 hours in the safest and with the most methodical approach possible. It will also make the time go by faster.

~1LT Lex Holmberg, PL, B/2-27 IN

Honestly I can't say I personally have had a problem with any of these factors. I think that by doing PT daily and keeping in contact with my family back home through letters and phone calls I've managed to avoid any problems. I try to keep myself busy while on the FOB so I don't have time to let my mind wander down those paths. Several of my Soldiers have experienced these stressors though. I had three Soldiers who were in contact on two consecutive missions. They wouldn't admit it but they became scared and it affected their performance. Each Soldier will respond in his own way, so it is extremely important to know your men. I simply talked to the most senior man and reassured him that we were all well trained and were more than capable of completing the mission and then going home to our families. The other two required a different approach. For them, ensuring that they were given the opportunity to talk with loved ones seemed to do the trick. There are opportunities to make phone calls, use email, participate in Video Teleconferences, and good old-fashioned letter writing. These all help Soldiers stay in touch with home and stay mentally healthy. There are also opportunities to send Soldiers to Bagram or Kandahar for a little break from the stress of living at the FOB and the missions that go with it.

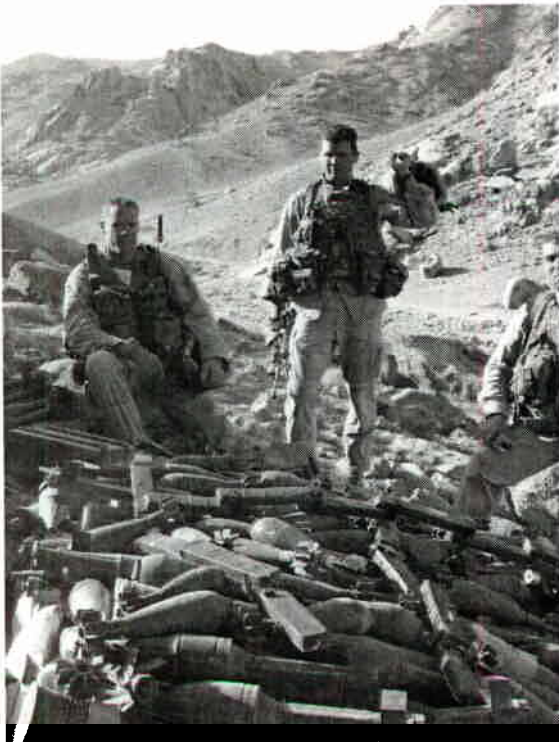
~1LT David Widder, Mortar PL, HHC/2-27 IN

As a combat infantryman, you are paid to close with and destroy the enemy through maneuver and fire. As a result, your job is inherently more dangerous than most other professions. Once you accept the fact that you volunteered and pursued this career on your own accord, you can begin to combat the stress, fatigue, and fear. Everyone feels afraid at times, but it is how you act under these conditions that determine whether you can overcome these feelings. Your Soldiers will pick up on your mindset, and as a result, have an easier time adjusting to their own bouts of fear and fatigue.

~2LT Eric Hill, PL, C/2-35 IN

I deal with combat fatigue, stress, and fear by looking around at my Soldiers, peers, and leaders and watch their actions and how they deal with different situations. Their weakness or fear gives me strength to handle all the situations I have encountered. When my Soldiers show fear when we go to do an operation, I walk ahead or I am the first into the situation that way they know that there is nothing to fear. Combat fatigue, stress, and fear have been easy for me to deal with during the deployment because I have motivated Soldiers.

~2LT Christopher Suttles, PL, C/2-27 IN



2. How do you counsel a seasoned PSG who might have been to combat twice while you were at USMA or ROTC?

You have to be straightforward. Don't pretend to know anything you really don't--it will be painfully obvious. On the other hand, be strong and confident. Nobody wants a pushover for a platoon leader. Let him know where you stand on important issues such as integrity, discipline, etc. Be honest--share your strengths and weaknesses with him. Be prepared to listen as well. Counseling is not just a lecture on your expectations. - Also, don't treat this as the only time you open up to your platoon sergeant. You must continually work on your relationship. If you are going to be effective in leading and caring for your platoon, you must be very close and understand each other well.

~1LT Eliel Pimentel, XO, HHC/2-35 IN

I think the best way to counsel a veteran platoon sergeant is to highlight your expectations while at the same time letting he or she know that you recognize their experience and are expecting them to mentor you. My former First Sergeant told me "never go in to a situation knocking the door down." Take time to get to know your platoon sergeant, it may not come easy, but they have a wealth of experience to share.

~2LT Nicole DeTomaso, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

First, I looked at the constants. Moral standards do not change with rank or even experience. I counseled my platoon sergeant first on what I expected of him morally and ethically. Next, I approached the counseling from a humble standpoint, stating that I expected him to show me what right looks like in his actions and in the actions of our Soldiers. I told him I expected him to train our platoon based on sound doctrine and his combat experience. I expected PT to be challenging for everyone, yet creative enough so as to not burn Soldiers out. I already knew him prior to taking the platoon, so I understood what type of man he was. He knew Soldiers and their families, and mentored subordinate leaders. I was fortunate. However, my counseling was still clear and direct, and gave my expectations of him. We talked through the session, made a few minor changes, and came out with a final product.

~1LT Thomas Bouchillon, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

Although I did not have a combat seasoned PSG, I have found that when talking to senior NCOs, you should talk to them man-to-man. When you talk man-to-man as opposed to superior-to-subordinate, a seasoned NCO will be inclined to not only listen to you more but will also provide you with more practical feedback. Simply put, senior NCOs want the same kind of respect that you yourself demand. However, when doing this method, one should be wary of becoming too "buddy-buddy," which could ultimately undermine the platoon leadership.

~1LT Jeremy Endlish, FSO, C/2-35 IN

When conducting initial counseling with an experienced PSG, I feel that it is important to first clarify the duties and responsibilities of the PSG as he views them. Ask your platoon sergeant what he feels his role is in the platoon and what he perceives as the platoon leader's role. This opens the discussion and affords you with the opportunity to express your vision without coming across in a domineering manner. Ensure that you know your own duty description as the Army defines it. Approaching the counseling in such a way will ensure that you are both clear on what to expect from one another. Second, it is imperative that you both have a common vision for the platoon. Through your discussion decide upon what goals the two of you want to set for the platoon. This provides you with an end state to which you both may work and aspire toward. Lastly, have your platoon sergeant set quantifiable goals for himself. Ensure that his goals will foster the platoon along its path to the end state that you have both just agreed upon.

In future quarterly counseling sessions with the platoon sergeant you must refer back to these quantifiable goals that he outlined for himself. This provides you with a benchmark from which you can gauge his progress. Instead of coming across to your platoon sergeant as judgmental or biased, the counseling is undeniably turned into more of his own self-assessment. This approach allows all issues to be brought out into the open without coming across in the wrong manner. Just make sure that you communicate with your platoon sergeant at all times. Do not be shy.

~1LT Tom Grywalski, Scout PL, HHC/2-35 IN

Your PSG may have more time in service and experience than you, but you cannot let that stop you from letting him know what you expect from him. My counselings are more of a conversation. I maintain an open mind to what he has to say because of his experience and I always consider what opinions he holds. After I have heard his ideas and feedback, we come to a mutual agreement on the issue.

~ILT Mia Suttles, PL, C/125 MI

I am a direct commission, so I was enlisted for a few years before I became an officer. The counseling has to be handled the same as any other Soldier. The environment is different from previous combat zones. Getting to understand the PSG will help you find a good way to work with them and get a good program going.

~ILT Paul Spelock, XO, HQ&A/325 FSB

Patience, honesty, and a willingness to listen and learn are three of the most important aspects of dealing with your PSG as a new PL. Each and every PSG will be different, but if you are honest about your willingness to learn and ask questions, while at the same time ensuring they understand you are there to LEAD the platoon, they will be that much more likely to work with you and pass any pertinent knowledge they will have certainly obtained over their years in the military. Ensure THEY know that YOU are aware that they have a great deal of experience you would like to “tap into” in order develop yourself as a leader. They will also have their finger on the real “pulse” of the platoon, which will enable you to quickly find out key pieces of information regarding your squad leaders and other members of the unit. Mentally assess their leadership strengths and weaknesses (as compared to your own perceived leadership style), and then tailor your approach to learning based on the strong points you see in him/her regarding leadership.

Be patient when you first arrive to your platoon—unless there are glaring problems upon your arrival, do not start changing things right away. Take the time to observe and “soak it all in”. Yes, you are the leader, but you are also the newcomer; show the PSG (and Soldiers) you are there to lead and become part of their team, and take the time to really get to know your PSG well. If you express a genuine interest in learning about their views on the job, the platoon members, the company chain of command, etc, they will be much more willing to set you up for success as a new PL. *~ILT James Stokes, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 3rd BDE, 25th ID (L)*



This was my situation. I counseled my PSG like I was taught to counsel at USMA and EOBC. I

came up with a list (with him) of what duties and responsibilities I expected him to perform and told him I wanted to focus on. The most important thing I have learned about the PL/PSG relationship is that counseling occurs everyday, especially if you have a great professional NCO. The first initial counseling should be no big deal since you have already been talking with each other for many days, which is probably why you are given 30 days to perform initial counseling.

~2LT Andrew Johannes, PL, C/65th EN

A seasoned PSG with combat experience is the experienced one. That's the most important thing to remember. He/She could teach you more than you could ever know. When counseling him/her, I

discuss my expectations, leadership style, and experiences. I then ask for the same information in return. I make it known to the PSG that I understand he/she is the experienced one and will bring a lot to the table for myself and the soldiers. The PSG and I will work as a team always, and teach one another through the process, growing as leaders together and individually. No matter how much experience a person has gathered, there is always room for more.

~1LT Hollie Müller, PL, C/325 FSB

From my experience as a brand new Second Lieutenant, counseling an E-7 or E-6 was probably one of the toughest tasks because you want to come across professionally yet gain their confidence at the same time. My course of action to remedy this awkwardness is right when you hit ground at your unit, observe and ask questions at the lowest level. Always look for ways to add or improve the already existing structure. When the time comes for the initial counseling you are able to talk intelligently about the current operations and give your input to future operations of the unit. Express your issues and concerns in a manner that compliments the efforts of the leadership within your organization. Set goals with your senior leader making it a partnership not a dictatorship. Applying these simple guidelines help in the cohesion process and ultimately the leadership team. Again it takes time to gain the confidence of your subordinates but patience and consistent presence in all functions at all levels will help expedite the process.

~1LT Gabriel Medley, XO, C/325 FSB

One of the most important things is to approach each counseling session with the appropriate level of respect. This is someone who is potentially twice your age with possibly a decade or two more experience than you. Don't be intimidated by the contrast of his experience over yours, and don't let him direct the counseling. While feedback and constructive conversation facilitate a productive counseling session, make sure you don't let him take over and direct the session by his own accords. Talk to your commander and first sergeant about it, as well as any other senior NCOs who will lend you their time. Remember, however, that it's your assessment and your standards. While your platoon sergeant may far surpass you in military experience, he probably doesn't have anything resembling your background. Looking at his duties and performance from a different angle could be extremely beneficial for him.

~2LT Rich Viola, FLE CDR, 325 FSB

Conducting an initial counseling with your platoon sergeant should be a way of getting on the same sheet of music. When preparing an initial counseling I think that it is important to clarify expectations. I also believe that the PSG should have input on what is expected from him, as well as what he expects from you. This way the counseling can be more of a personal evaluation, rather than a lecture. It is very important to set goals that are quantifiable in the counseling to maintain accountability and identify progress in future quarterly counseling. Communication between the command team is very important and neither one should be afraid to discuss issues.

~2LT Gisela Mendonca, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB



As a new PL, you will have no clue as to where your platoon stands in terms of performance. That said, you aren't going to know which direction it should be heading in and how to make it a stronger fighting force. That's why your first counseling session with your PSG is the one where he's doing the majority of the talking, and you're doing the majority of listening. Coming in with the attitude that you've already got things figured out and immediately suggesting how it should be will lead to a difficult first few months. Have plenty of

questions. Over time you'll figure out what right looks like, and then begin to develop the changes necessary. *~CPT Chris Barlow, PL, A/2-35 IN*

If your PSG is a professional NCO, who knows his job, then he will make sure your counseling is done right. You are probably his second or third PL so he is expecting the counseling. However, if you still feel unsure because you're a new PL, then give it a few days to observe your new platoon and your PSG. Once you've taken time to stand back and observe, figure out what you can offer the platoon and how your PSG can help you. Cover this on your PSG counseling. *~1LT Donnie Choe, PL, A/2-27 IN*

I am very fortunate to have my current platoon sergeant as my first. He has not required much counseling thus far, since he understands his job well, and performs even better. However, for the first couple days I simply sat back and watched how he ran the platoon, then gave him feedback on what I thought needed to be improved. The best way to counsel a seasoned platoon sergeant like mine is to give them a list of expectations and ensure they understand the relationship that you wish to form. *~2LT Patton Nix, PL, C/2-27 IN*

Counseling someone senior to you in experience does not have to be a one-way conversation. In your initial counseling ask for advice as well as laying out expectations. The best advice I can give is to just relax. Remember that you are the platoon LEADER for a reason. You have been put in charge of a platoon for a reason, because you have proven yourself fit to do so just like 2nd Lieutenants have done in a time proven process for over 200 years of United States Military tradition. If the military schooling tradition was ineffective it wouldn't be as successful as it has been. Just remember your PSG is there to work with you just as much as he is there to work for you. Establishing a team concept during your initial counseling early on is critical to the rest of your working relationship together. *~1LT Lex Holmberg, PL, B/2-27 IN*

This is a no brainer. You know what you expect from your right hand man. Simply tell him. He will understand and expect that you don't know everything. Tell him this. You will never earn respect from anyone if you aren't honest. If you don't know, ask. If you do know, ask anyway. All people are more receptive if they believe that you will or have considered what they had to say. At the same time you must balance this with the fact that you are in charge and what you say is the final word for your platoon. *~1LT David Widder, Mortar PL, HHC/2-27 IN*

The relationship between a platoon leader and a platoon sergeant is one of the most interesting dynamics in the military. Even though the platoon sergeant usually has at least 8 years on the new platoon leader that is just coming into the Army, you must be confident that all of the schooling that you have been put through has qualified you for this position. Four years of college, IOBC, and Ranger School alone have more than prepared you to take charge of a platoon. The platoon sergeant's area of expertise is different than yours, and as a result, you have skill sets that he does not have.

With that being said, it is still awkward at first to counsel a platoon sergeant. It should be done in a professional manner with the intentions of an optimal working relationship in consideration. Once you develop this, counseling your platoon sergeant (who most likely will have been counseled by a PL before) will hopefully be a painless process. You will counsel your PSG several times as a PL, and every time it gets easier. *~2LT Eric Hill, PL, C/2-35 IN*

I was extremely lucky to receive a PSG that has had a lot of experience and knows how to train new LTs. As far as counseling him, I use two way counseling. We sit down, discuss the problem and then come to correct answers to fix the problem. I take into account his actions or reactions, and then we discuss all the alternatives to find out what is a good solution. *~2LT Christopher Suttles, PL, C/2-27 IN*



**3. How do you get to know your Soldiers in a combat environment without getting too close?
How do you gauge this closeness?**

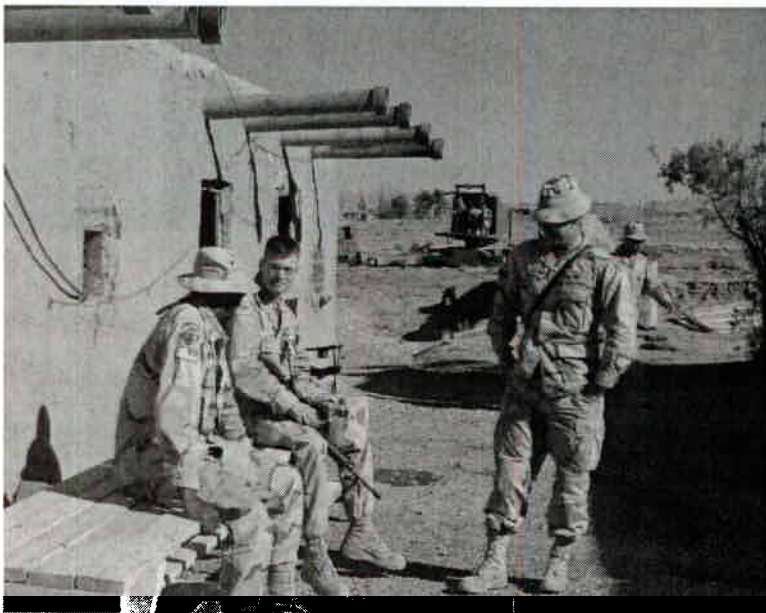
You must go beyond their name and where they are from. Take the time to sit and talk to each of them from time to time. Figure out what they like/fear/cherish in life. Don't be afraid to ask serious questions, and don't be afraid to share your thoughts with them either. Don't do this because you have to; do it because you **want** to. Soldiers are extremely perceptive and they will be able to tell whether or not you have a genuine interest in their lives. You can learn a lot of things about being a platoon leader, but nobody can teach you how to care or love your Soldiers. It may sound dramatic or extreme, but you have to love all your Soldiers. Everything else will flow from that emotion.--- A good indicator that you may be getting too close to any Soldier is when you begin to show favoritism towards any Soldier. In fact, having even the smallest inclination to favor one Soldier over another is never a healthy sign of your relationship. You may get along with some Soldiers better than others, but you must be very careful in the way that you interact with them. I believe that even *perceived* favoritism is as bad as actual favoritism. --- Additionally, although it is important (whenever the situation permits) to explain to your Soldiers why you are doing something, you should never *have* to explain yourself. If you're too close to your Soldiers, you might find that they will expect/demand an explanation for things out of the ordinary.

~1LT Eliel Pimentel, XO, HHC/2-35 IN

I think the best way to get to know your soldiers is to talk to them. Help them whenever you can; never feel that you are above and beyond a tasking. If your soldiers can do it so can you. Also go out of your way to learn your soldiers' job. When your soldiers see that you want to learn they will show you, and many times open up to you in the process. Although it is important to get to know your soldiers it is also important that they know there is still a separation between the leader and the soldier. Be approachable but know when to walk a way.

~2LT Nicole DeTomaso, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

Hopefully, you will know your Soldiers before going into combat. If I were to take over a unit in a combat environment, I don't think there is anything special that I would do to get to know my Soldiers. My personality is very open. I instinctively want to know about a person's family, where they are from,



and who they are as a person. I remember names and ask questions, not to let them think I care, but because I actually do care. Some people are introverts. Frankly, they may not be best suited for this line of work. I think signs that a leader has gotten too friendly with his Soldiers may include the Soldiers questioning orders (not giving suggestions), not taking what he says seriously, and of course, calling their leader by his first name. I always gave clear, direct orders to my Soldiers, so there was never any questioning of my authority.

**~1LT Thomas Bouchillon,
PL, HQ&A/325 FSB**

Even though there is no magical gauge that measures getting too close to a soldier, there are some simple rules that I follow to keep me on the right track. First, always follow the guidelines established by command policies and UCMJ. Secondly, trust your gut instinct; it is easy to detect when a Soldier starts seeing you too much as a friend as opposed to being his leader. With respect to getting to know my Soldiers, I recommend going to meals

with them. Meal times provide an opportunity technically outside the work hours to relax and to talk about non-work issues. *-1LT Jeremy Endlish, FSO, C/2-35 IN*

Getting to know your Soldiers is simple. Talk to your Soldiers. If it is possible, then try to speak with them when you are not around other Soldiers. Ask your Soldiers questions about where they're from, about how their families are doing and remember what they tell you. If you remember the names of their children, wives, or their home town, then they will know that you care and it will not go unnoticed. Keep up to date with and take interest in their personal lives. If you are a good leader, this will come natural as you learn the personalities in your platoon. You should want to know about their lives and what experiences or environments have shaped them. Knowing these aspects of each Soldier will also help you learn how to lead the variety of personalities within your platoon. Learning to adapt your leadership style is your responsibility as a leader. If you just pass someone on as a "trouble child" without having tried different techniques, then you have failed as a leader.

In combat, especially, knowing your Soldiers' personal lives is extremely beneficial, because often times a Soldier's personal life is the only thing that makes him happy. A thought of home and of family and of friends sustains a man in combat. Anyone who has been in a firefight knows that on that following evening or on that following morning after the fight, no one is thinking about patriotism or glory. Everyone is simply thinking about his loved ones and about going home to see them. Such feelings are completely natural and being able to relate to the feelings and your men is key. One technique that I use is sharing my guard shift with my Soldiers. I like to pull guard with my men and I rotate who I pull guard with on each night. This provides me with a few hours of good quality time every night in which I can get to know a Soldier on a more profound level. However, relationships do not develop in one direction only. A leader must allow his men to learn about him as well. This process is facilitated if you explain yourself and what experiences have shaped your personality. You don't owe them an explanation by rank or as formal military structure dictates, but it shows respect if you explain your rationale and thought process when you have time. This enables them to learn about you. Therefore when you don't have time to explain why they must do something, then the Soldiers will automatically think, "oh well, LT always has a good reason."

When are you getting too close to your men? I use the old adage of "taking a hill" as my gauge. While explaining yourself sometimes is important, you must not do this every time or they will begin to expect an explanation for everything. This is very important. Explain to them just enough so that they know your decisions are not unfounded. They must not question you, because at any given split second they might have to "take a hill" and there won't be time for doubt or questions. If they know that you care about them and that you don't make rash decisions, then they will put their trust in you and you will have no problems. This working relationship with your men is not an overnight process, so be patient and be consistent. Also, be careful that you do not engage in every conversation with you men. Sometimes topics will be discussed that deal with subjects that are perhaps not the most moral subjects. It is important that you do not partake in such discussions. No one is a saint, but it is important for an officer to maintain his moral fiber in front of his troops. Engaging in crude conversations will compromise your integrity in the eyes of your Soldiers. When you are in combat you live with your men for every hour of every day, so maintain discipline in your professional separation without coming across as aloof.

-1LT Tom Grywalski, Scout PL, HHC/2-35 IN

Being a PL is the time during your career when you are able to get to work with the soldiers on a daily basis. I take time during my day to just sit and talk to soldiers and see how they are doing. That is the time that the soldiers and I get to know each other as well as discuss any issues that the soldier may be dealing with. My soldiers respect me as their PL and as someone they trust, but they are good with understanding that there is a line that is not to be crossed. They know what types of issues and jokes they would share with a friend versus the ones they share with their leadership. *-1LT Mia Suttles, PL, C/125 MI*

Spending time with the Soldiers is important. Sitting down and talking with them or participating in sporting activities can help. Going to their work areas and actually doing the work goes a long way. Keeping the ability to go a period of time without physically being around them or contacting them directly gives you space from getting too close to them. *-1LT Paul Spelock, XO, HQ&A/325 FSB*

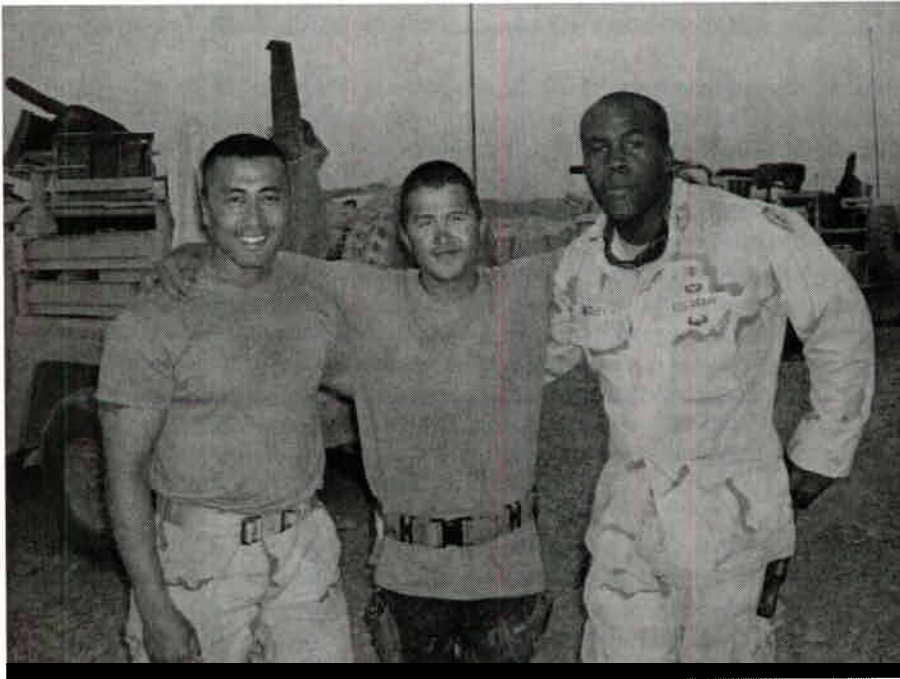
Listening and talking to your Soldiers is the easiest way to get to know them. Sounds simple, but the listening part is especially important, and you should show that you have a genuine interest in what they have to say. Each time I begin working with a new section/platoon, I promise myself that I will learn one quality, 'mission-related' task/idea from each of my Soldiers—you can never learn too much, and there is always something of merit to learn from every person with whom you work. Also, make the effort to find one similar interest you share with each of your Soldiers, as this will give you common ground to start a professional relationship (on some level). Also, take the time to learn the names of their wives, husbands, and children; this will go a long way to ensuring your Soldiers know you truly care about them and their loved ones.

No one expects (nor should you) you to know everything about your Soldiers or to develop strong relationships with each one—you are their leader, and a leader must maintain a certain "zone of separation" between himself/herself and the Soldiers he/she leads. Lead from the front, never ask them to complete a task you would not complete yourself, and ensure they realize you will not always be able to explain "why" something must be done; it just needs to be done. On occasion, offer an explanation as to why you are making a certain decision a certain way, but make this the exception rather than the rule. As you develop a reputation for making sound decisions, they will come to understand your reasoning process and know that you think things through while always considering their safety and well-being, and this will enable them to grow to trust you and follow you, no matter what the order given or decision made.

~1LT James Stokes, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 3rd BDE, 25th ID (L)

Getting to know your Soldiers is not a problem in a combat environment since you are around them most of the time, especially eating and sleeping. Gauging closeness depends on the situation and the Soldiers. NCOs make the biggest difference. When your NCOs are professional, your Soldiers usually follow.

~2LT Andrew Johannes, PL, C/65th EN



Getting to know your soldiers is the most exciting aspect of being a platoon leader. When in a combat environment, you get to know your soldiers on a whole different level. You see them have good days and bad days. You become more aware of their personality type. In order to get to know them, you have to spend time with them, but there is a time and place for this, in order to prevent getting too close. The time I spend with the soldiers is during

work hours, in the work area. I'll sit down with them in their work area, carry on a conversation with them (not necessarily work related), eat chow with them, or just hang out. I go out on ambulance runs with them to see what it is they do on a daily basis. And believe me when I say, soldiers will impress you beyond belief with their knowledge and skills. It's important to know when your soldiers are having personal problems, and be able to talk with them about their problems. No one wants to talk to someone about their personal life if they don't feel that person even knows them.

~1LT Hollie Miller, PL, C/325 FSB

Simply put, if you conduct yourself in a professional yet approachable manner then Soldiers, no matter how stubborn, will come around. Soldiers will know if you are genuine or are putting on a façade because they are watching when you are not. The type of unit you are in could affect how close you react with Soldiers, because in many instances you could have males and females in your unit. From my experience, the Combat Arms units tend to have really close camaraderie internally due to the all male Soldier outfit. The Combat Service Support arena is difficult and can be tricky because you have both male and female genders to teach, coach, mentor, and train.

Whatever side of the house your career path takes you always remember you walk on a thin line with Soldiers. The best way is the safe way, which is to keep it professional both on and off duty. Officers are often scrutinized for the way they deal with Soldiers partly because they are at a level where there is zero tolerance for fraternization. It is frowned upon and in extreme cases UCMJ consequences may be the outcome. Leaders don't have to let their guard down to be a part of the team, but allowing Soldiers to know that you are human lets you share your experiences, goals and aspirations. Too close is when you second-guess yourself with your interactions. Would you do it if your rater or senior rater were present?

~1LT Gabriel Medley, XO, C/325 FSB

I think the key here is accessibility. Different leadership styles introduce this trait in different ways. However the leader demonstrates this accessibility, the most important thing is that Soldiers know that they can talk to you – in the proper manner. Just don't let this lessen the level of respect demanded of your Soldiers.

Of course, the trap leaders sometimes find themselves in occurs when Soldiers begin to think of the leader as a friend. That is problematic since it often undermines the working relationship of the LT as a leader and the Soldier as a follower. Leadership must remain clear-cut to avoid these situations. Leaders can't be timid about laying down guidelines and handing out rightly-deserved punishment because they want to be liked. Being liked and being respected are two separate things, and the latter is always the more important quality.

At the same time, getting to know your Soldiers usually needs to be an active process. Just "being there" can limit the extent to which one can understand them and their concerns. Leaders must find time to get to know their Soldiers jobs and, through this, get to know the Soldiers themselves. Get them to teach you their jobs and, in the process, get to know what type of Soldiers they are. Organize events and activities that allow themselves to demonstrate who they are as a person. It's certainly not a quick process. Soldiers, though part of a team, have individual personalities. Some may distance themselves from their leaders. Find out what works and what doesn't, and have patience. Not everyone is the most sociable person in the world.

~2LT Rich Viola, FLE CDR, 325 FSB

When getting to know your soldiers in a combat environment, it is difficult to not get too close. Learning about a soldier's family and remembering details about them helps your soldiers realize that you care about them, their happiness and well being. When you are in combat, you spend every minute of everyday with soldiers. As their leader, they may want you to joke around with them. It is important to remember where to draw the line. Basically, as long as standards are in place and professional military courtesy is extended, I do not believe that you are "too close."

~2LT Gisela Mendonca, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

Some days you'll feel like time is your worst enemy, because you'll have plenty of it on your hands between missions. Not having the opportunity to hang around and talk to your Soldiers will be next to impossible. You should be genuinely interested in their background, family and future goals, and most will be eager to tell you all about these things. You'll just have to ensure that you're not crossing the line between your role as the leader and that of a buddy. Remember, you're not there to be a friend or a drinking buddy on the weekends. You're a leader with responsibilities to their health and welfare, which means your relationship with a Soldier should never allow you to turn the other cheek when it comes to a disciplinary infraction. Be careful with this. I've seen leaders hang themselves.

~CPT Chris Barlow, PL, A/2-35 IN

Getting to know your Soldiers during combat and in garrison should not be any different. You should work towards learning about your Soldiers and NCO's without getting too comfortable. If your Soldiers forget that you are their PL, which you can tell by their demeanor, then you are getting too close.

One example is if your Soldiers call you by your first or last name without the appropriate title. Respect your Soldiers when you're with them, and they will respect you in return.

~1LT Donnie Choe, PL, A/2-27 IN

I feel I arrived in my platoon at probably the best time possible. In our Forward Operating Base I literally live in the same tent as my Soldiers, and therefore have been able to learn a great deal about them very quickly. I know their complaints, their personal problems, and what motivates them. This has made me better able to take care of the platoon all while maintaining a professional distance.

I will know I am getting too close to my Soldiers when I start to make personal exceptions that I would not under normal circumstances. Soldiers must view and respect you as their platoon leader. You must set a tone in the platoon that states, "I am in charge, but I am also here for you." With that you can be a professional leader, yet close to subordinates.

~2LT Patton Nix, PL, C/2-27 IN

Treat your Soldiers with dignity and respect while never wavering on standards, however unpopular it may be, and they will respect you and follow you anywhere.

~1LT Lex Holmberg, PL, B/2-27 IN

Talk to your Soldiers everyday. Go to where the decisive point of the day is. If your Soldiers are doing maintenance in the motor pool, be in the motor pool. Talk to them. Know about their family situation. Talk to the team leaders about the Soldiers under them, likewise squad leaders to team leaders. Let the leadership work for you. Do not fall into the trap of calling your Soldiers by anything but their rank and last name. Be professional.

~1LT David Widder, Mortar PL, HHC/2-27 IN

For the sole fact that you are deployed in a combat zone, you are in the presence of your Soldiers almost always. Besides your little corner of the tent that you can escape to when you are back in the rear, the rest of the time is spent with your Soldiers. As a result, you will quickly know everything about all of them, whether or not you wanted to. Knowing your Soldiers is a key tool in gaining their respect and getting along with them because it demonstrates that you care. My Soldiers do a great job of identifying the "gray area" between a professional and peer relationship, and rarely cross the line. However, that line is crossed at times. If an NCO doesn't already correct the problem, then it usually takes nothing more than an offline chat with the Soldier to discuss how things need to happen.

~2LT Eric Hill, PL, C/2-35 IN

I arrived at my unit two weeks before we shipped out for the deployment. I didn't know my Soldiers when I left Hawaii, so I was forced to learn my Soldiers in the combat environment. My Soldiers and I have a mutual respect for each other and there are different levels of knowing Soldiers. When I arrived to the unit, I first sat back and analyzed all my Soldiers as much as possible. I tried to gauge who needed leadership and who needed direction. I still haven't been able to fully gauge everyone, because situations change daily, but I adjust myself accordingly to coach, teach, and mentor those who need it.

~2LT Christopher Suttles, PL, C/2-27 IN

4. How important is your level of physical fitness as an officer? How important is it in combat for your unit?

You're probably tired of hearing how important it is to be in great shape as an officer, but it is an honest truth. You don't have to be the best at everything, but you definitely need to be one of the most physically fit Soldiers in your platoon. It is a good thing when your Soldiers are constantly trying to beat you in a run or in an individual event like pull ups or the rope climb. When that happened to me as a platoon leader, that meant instant respect. My Soldiers all knew I could run or road march to the end with any of them. You can't motivate Soldiers in a road march if you are visibly in bad shape. It's a sad site



when a lieutenant can't lead his Soldiers physically. Ask yourself: How can you lead or motivate your Soldiers if you're not at the head of the formation? When it comes to a combat environment, physical fitness is crucial. If you allow your Soldiers to deploy in poor physical condition, you have failed them. Being physically fit out here will help your Soldiers bear some of the rigors of a combat tour: less sleep, very random and increasingly changing rest patterns, extreme heat, heavy weights, and less than standard nutrition, to name a few. --- Staying in shape in a combat environment can be a tough task because you may lack

the time or facilities to exercise as you may have been able to in garrison. However, solid cardiovascular fitness will make a significant difference in higher elevations, and upper body and leg strength may prevent exhaustion from heavy gear in hot weather.

~1LT Eliel Pimentel, XO, HHC/2-35 IN

I feel it is extremely important to maintain a high level of physical fitness as an officer. How can you lead your soldiers if you're falling behind? Physical fitness doesn't always come naturally. Many people have to work hard to meet or exceed the standard. You may not be able to finish first but if you can hang with your soldiers you will receive a plethora of respect from them. It is also important to maintain a level of physical fitness at all times. Your body is put through a lot of additional hardships on a deployment. You work longer days and certainly longer weeks, there are no weekends off. You can spend a whole day in your individual body armor (IBA) so it is important to work at your endurance.

~2LT Nicole DeTomaso, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

As an officer, I am expected to maintain a high level of physical fitness. That's a given. For my unit, I ensured we were physically fit. As a truck platoon, one may think that physical fitness is not important, but all of my Soldiers have been attached to a maneuver unit for combat missions, and they can assure you that physical fitness is paramount to success in war. For example, an infantry battalion was conducting maneuvers with several of my trucks and drivers attached. The infantry battalion had other female searchers attached, as well. The female searchers were not physically fit enough to "hang" so the infantry battalion used two of my female truck drivers to go into the village as the female search team. On today's battlefield, there is sometimes no rear. CSS Soldiers are serving on the front lines with maneuver elements. Again, there is no substitute for physical fitness.

~1LT Thomas Bouchillon, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

Physical fitness should be one of the highest priorities any officer has in a combat zone. If you cannot handle the physical stress of combat, you may hinder the success of a mission. With respect to

fitness and how important it is to the infantry I am assigned to, I will only say that PT is one of the commander's top priorities and those who are not physically fit risk being relieved.

-1LT Jeremy Endlish, FSO, C/2-35 IN

Physical fitness is one of the singularly most important aspects of being an officer and a leader of men. If not the most physically fit individual in your platoon, you must be one of the top few. You must have the ability to lead your platoon from the front in a very strenuous physical training session. Genetics are part of nature, so it is not uncommon for one or two Soldiers in a platoon to naturally be more fit than their platoon leader. Work ethic, however, is not natural. Work ethic is achieved through discipline and if you are not more physically fit than everyone in your platoon then you must make up for it in the arena of discipline. Go above and beyond by taking yourself through extended workout sessions or an extra PT session in a day. Your men will respect your hard work.

Imagine the hardest PT session that you have ever done and you have an idea of what combat is like. Mental stress and tension physically manifest themselves in you and combat is very trying in these areas. In combat, even in the light infantry, each Soldier carries about 65 pounds of gear on his person. When you consider the ballistic body armor, Kevlar, weapon, and ammunition UBL, a Soldier carries a lot of weight and this is not even considering the rucksack or the rest of his kit. Altitude and temperature in the modern combat zones are far more arduous than they are at any base in the United States. The effects that such conditions have upon physical fitness are obvious, especially when IMTing for hours at a time. When these factors are coupled with the mental stress that naturally comes from having real bullets snapping over your head, the physical wear is tremendous. The highest standard of physical fitness in combat is absolutely vital. As a combat leader it is your moral responsibility to ensure that you have made every effort to shape yourself and your men into your maximum level of physical fitness.

-1LT Tom Grywalski, Scout PL, HHC/2-35 IN

When I was in ROTC, physical fitness was preached as extremely important to an officer's career. It's true. One of the first impressions your soldiers, peers, and your boss have of you is your level of physical fitness. You can either gain or lose respect immediately after a PT session. Soldiers may doubt your ability to be a leader and lead from the front if you are not physically fit. If you are one of the top physically fit people in your platoon, they will be more inclined to believe that you can lead them. Maintaining a high level of physical fitness while deployed is important for physical and mental reasons. For my soldiers, working out has a greater effect on them while deployed because it allows them to get lost in their thoughts.

-1LT Mia Suttles, PL, C/125 MI

Physical fitness is important because you have to keep up with your Soldiers. The officer tends to work longer days and must be ready to go the next morning. At the ASP, the working conditions are always outside and the temperatures are higher, so being in good shape is important to deal with all that is going on there.

-1LT Paul Spelock, XO, HQ&A/325 FSB

Physical fitness continues to be one of the most noticed and most emphasized aspects of being an officer in the US Army. Your ability to maintain a high level of physical fitness will greatly influence your Soldiers' perceptions of your determination and dedication to exceed standards in all other areas of your job.

Physical fitness is especially important in a combat zone, as it is an outstanding way to combat stress while inside the wire and crucially important to your ability to perform at maximum levels outside the wire. In Afghanistan, the terrain in certain areas is best described as brutal, with elevations easily exceeding 10,000 feet. We are combating an enemy who has lived in this environment all his life, so he has an inherent physical advantage right from the start, and maintaining a high level of physical fitness is paramount to each Soldier's ability to meet that enemy on as even a playing field as possible.

-1LT James Stokes, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 3rd BDE, 25th ID (L)

Being physically fit is expected of all officers and is the quickest way to lose the respect of your men. For my platoon, my sappers had to be able to keep up with their infantry counterparts through the mountains of Afghanistan while carrying more weight.

-2LT Andrew Johannes, PL, C/65th EN

Physical fitness is by far one of the most important aspects of an officer, a soldier, and life...even more so in combat. Not only does physical fitness keep you physically fit in combat, but it keeps you mentally and emotionally fit as well. It is one of the greatest stress relievers. It's extremely important for an officer to be physically fit, in order to lead from the front. We are supposed to set the standard, set the example, and lead the way. Soldiers notice everything about an officer. Participating in organized PT with your soldiers regularly can gain you an enormous amount of respect. They like to see you out there, doing what they're doing.

~1LT Hollie Miller, PL, C/325 FSB

A high level of physical fitness is a stepping-stone to success as a young Junior Officer in the Army. First impressions will impact you in many ways, and one event that will never go away is Physical Training. Soldiers are constantly subconsciously evaluating their leaders. Lieutenants don't have to be all-stars in every physical event but should be able keep up with the top tier of their organization.

In combat it is incumbent of every young officer to be in the best shape possible. Your subordinates count on you to guide them in the right direction. Excellence in physical fitness helps combat fatigue and increases mental fitness in strenuous situations. How can you think if you are out of breath or tired because your body has not been challenged or pushed to optimum levels? If you are in shape you can go the distance effectively. We train as we fight so ensure that Physical Fitness is at the forefront of all training programs so when it is time to perform in austere environments, it is second nature.

~1LT Gabriel Medley, XO, C/325 FSB

A Colonel once told me that you don't have to be the best (though you should try in as many areas as possible), but if you are among the worst, that is a problem. You can't lead from the front if you've just fallen out of a run. Part of being an effective leader is not having any problems; that is, not *demonstrating* any personal issues at play that have the potential to counteract effectiveness. Physical condition is not something that can be as easily disguised or downplayed as other personal issues, especially in the Army. Fitness and health are often held as indicators for a variety of traits necessary of an Army officer, or any military leader. Consider what questions poor health and fitness may elicit. *If he doesn't take care of himself, why should I? If he doesn't take care of himself, why would he take care of me? Does he care? Does he have control of his life? If not, why do I want him in control of mine?* Though such critiques may seem unfair in some regards, these are questions that Soldiers *will* ask themselves, their peers, and their NCOs.

The Army Physical Fitness Program was designed as a method of ensuring that all Soldiers are prepared to fight if and when necessary. When in garrison, the tendency can often be to train with APFT success in mind. In a combat environment, that might not be the best approach. Make sure that you and your NCOs take that into account, restructure the PT program accordingly and give your Soldiers a new focus and motivation.

~2LT Rich Viola, FLE CDR, 325 FSB



Physical fitness is the first thing your soldiers will notice about you. I think that physical fitness is just as important for an officer as it is for a soldier. PT standards are in place for officers and soldiers alike. Although it is difficult to lead from the rear, I believe that it is how you treat your soldiers that determines your leadership abilities. In combat physical fitness is the difference between "carrying your injured buddy off the battlefield and carrying your buddy halfway off the battlefield."

~2LT Gisela Mendonca, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

ABSOLUTELY PARAMOUNT. The first area of evaluation by your Soldiers and NCOs will be during a PT session. And trust me all eyes will be on you. Everyone already knows, and for the most part, understands that your experiences and military knowledge is limited--at best. So don't be the LT who shows up soft. It may result in you losing your platoon. I've watched it happen. Oh yeah, and for you infantry guys: Don't forget your Tab either.

~CPT Chris Barlow, PL, A/2-35 IN

Your physical fitness as an officer is by which you make your first impression. Your Soldiers and NCO's will make their initial judgments by how fit you look and how well you can PT. You don't have to be the best runner or the fittest person in your platoon, but you can't ever quit in front of your men. Remember, you are expected to lead from the front whether during training or in combat.

In combat, your physical fitness but more importantly your physical toughness is very important. Whether you're climbing a mountain or making a long movement to contact, your platoon will go off of your toughness. If you're physically weak, then your platoon will suffer because they will not be able to make the mission.

~1LT Donnie Choe, PL, A/2-27 IN

Physical fitness as an officer, especially an Infantry officer, is paramount. I feel I received instant credibility from my platoon just for being in good shape. I do not know how, but level of physical fitness is one of the first things that Soldiers find out, and once one knows, all know.

Unfortunately, I have not experienced the importance of physical fitness in combat yet. However, I do know from schools that it makes a mediocre unit a much better one. My platoon walked many of the mountains around this AO and could not express enough how difficult they were. Physical fitness must be uniform across a unit, especially in combat. A single Soldier's lack of fitness affects an entire unit's readiness.

~2LT Patton Nix, PL, C/2-27 IN

Despite what they tell you as a cadet, you don't have to be the strongest or fastest in the platoon to gain the respect of your Soldiers, but you better be in the top 10%. Praise those that beat you in a run or at lifting weights at the gym, and motivate the rest of your Soldiers to try and beat you on the next run, but never fall out of anything in front of your Soldiers. A physically weak leader will never lead by example, especially in the infantry. Poor physical fitness in not just embarrassing in a combat environment but is also dangerous. If you can't keep up, you can't lead.

~1LT Lex Holmberg, PL, B/2-27 IN

Physical fitness is important as an officer because you are a leader. As an XO it was not necessary to be a PT stud. As the Mortar PL it is helpful but not absolutely necessary. You do not need to be a physical specimen. But remember you are a leader. You should work as hard as you can before deploying. Being in good shape will help you, especially with adjusting to the altitude difference. You must set the example for your Soldiers to follow. Never ask them to do something that you wouldn't or couldn't do yourself. When you arrive, continue to do PT, it will help you stay in shape and keep your stress level down.

~1LT David Widder, Mortar PL, HHC/2-27 IN

Physical fitness should be one of your main focuses as an infantry officer. The infantry is unique in that physical fitness takes a bigger precedence than it does in most other branches. In order to execute your job through leading from the front, you need to be physically strong. Your Soldiers look to you to set the standard and at the same time are continually sizing you up. If you can't hang, they will identify you as a weak leader, whether or not that is a fair assumption. Therefore, I would focus on getting into great shape before you show up to the platoon. You don't have to be the fastest or strongest, but you better make you sure you are one of the top finishers.

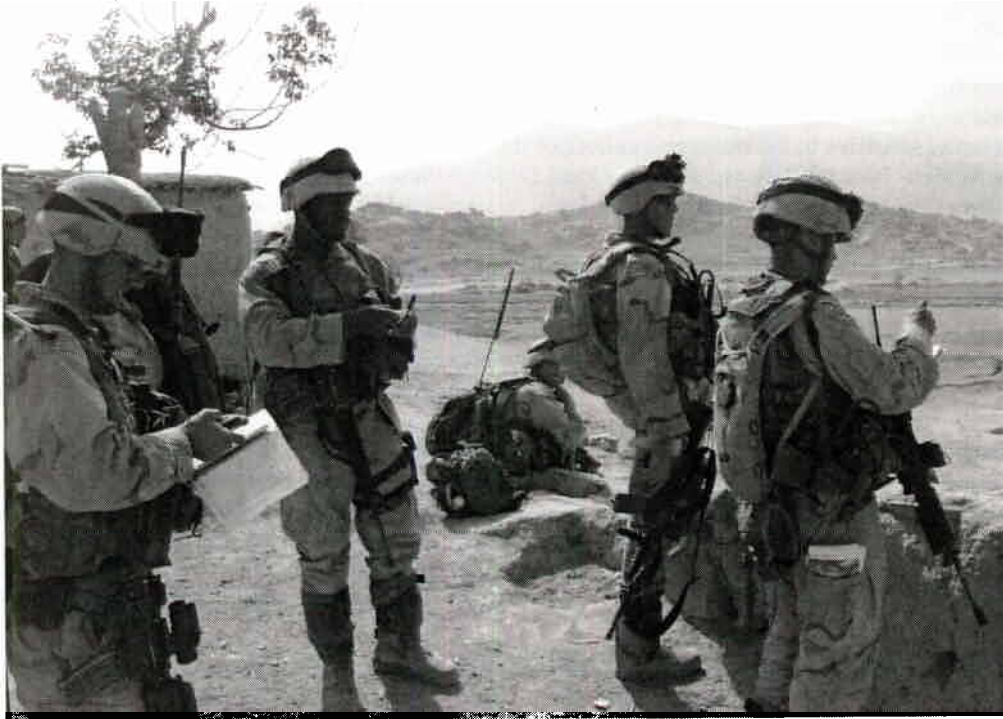
Combat operations take a lot out of you. Extreme weather, tough terrain, and poor diet at times make operations physically demanding. If you are not in good shape, you have no grounds to stand on when you are yelling at your guys who fell out of a road march on the way to a cordon and search. It is my experience that the better shape you are, the less you are prone to injuries, which hinder the unit's operational tempo while conducting combat operations.

~2LT Eric Hill, PL, C/2-35 IN

Officer physical fitness is very important once you arrive to the unit, because usually the first impressions people receive are on how you can perform at PT and then whether or not you have a Ranger

tab or not. Physical fitness is very important in combat because the mission constantly changes and so does the environment. You have to be ready for anything at any time, because it will happen.

-2LT Christopher Suttles, PL, C/2-27 IN



5. What did ROTC/USMA do specifically that made you most effective as a combat leader?

I think the ability to accept a very ambiguous and uncertain environment with **an open and flexible mind** has been helpful. Except when being engaged, the line between friendly and enemy is hardly ever clear. A lot of the time you are not actively fighting the enemy. Instead, you will be in villages and towns assessing security, providing medical supplies and care, and bringing resources to build civil infrastructure. If you bring the history and political complexities into context for your Soldiers, they will have a much better understanding of how they are contributing to the war on terrorism, and because of that understanding they will more likely take the mission with more care, ownership, and seriousness. I believe USMA taught me to understand the global picture and the importance of conveying that to Soldiers. I also learned that **being sensitive** to the needs and culture of the local population may not be an immediate response for Soldiers because they associate any local person with the enemy. Bringing that sensitivity out of your Soldiers may help “win the hearts and minds.”
~*1LT Eliel Pimentel, XO, HHC/2-35 IN*

I feel that what ROTC did was help me to utilize my leadership skills by placing me in various NCO and officer positions. It also encouraged me to build confidence in my abilities and make my mistakes early on. In addition the cadre and my peers helped mold my leadership style through constructive criticism. As a result it was easier for me to recognize my weaknesses.

~*2LT Nicole DeTomaso, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB*

Discipline. No doubt. As a student, I successfully balanced two jobs, ROTC (to include daily PT), class, extensive study hours, and fraternity commitments. I was up in the morning by 0500 and went to bed most nights at about 2200, usually with no break in between. I was also financially independent, so I was poor. Going to college and the ROTC program forced me to take on real responsibility. I developed discipline not because someone made me, but because I was driven not to fail.

~*1LT Thomas Bouchillon, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB*

USMA provided me with two valuable skills that help me in my effectiveness as a combat leader: 1) time management and 2) organizational skills. If I did not have the time management and organizational skills that West Point trained me to have, I feel that I would be lost here in Afghanistan.

~*1LT Jeremy Endlish, FSO, C/2-35 IN*



The USMA taught me to remain calm under pressure, which is a necessity in combat. In combat a million things will be going on around you and stress will be at a peak level, so you must have the ability to stay calm and think clearly. Additionally, staying calm is important because of how it affects your Soldiers. Your Soldiers will automatically mirror how you handle yourself. If you allow the stress to make

you act out of control, then the command and control of your unit is lost. A loss of command and control places the lives of you and your men at risk. Only through practice can you get better at handling yourself under pressure and the USMA is designed around simulating such conditions. As a platoon leader, design the peacetime training for your platoon in a manner that best simulates the multiple stresses of a combat environment.

~1LT Tom Grywalski, Scout PL, HHC/2-35 IN

While in ROTC, I learned how to manage my time well, how to handle situations, and how to deal with different personalities. I learned from peers who were prior service on different situations that they had seen or been involved with while in the Army. I can apply what I have learned, but every situation is different. There are many situations that you find yourself or your soldiers in that ROTC cannot completely prepare you to handle, but as long as you learn from past experiences, you will handle the situation with ease.

~1LT Mia Suttles, PL, C/125 MI

The progressive, step-by-step leadership challenges provided in ROTC/USMA were critical in developing me into a leader. Each year, I was presented with a new level of tasks that allowed me to add new ideas and leadership techniques while reinforcing the skills I had learned the prior year. As a cadet, you are also able to pull “strong points” of the different leadership techniques of your classmates and add them into your own personal leadership style. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this; everyone has different strengths that might be unique to that person. By drawing from the “positives” of your fellow classmates, you are able to build a comprehensive, in-depth leadership style that includes some of the stronger aspects of the people with whom you work and train.

Communication was also a crucial skill that I learned and honed while in ROTC. I am a firm believer in the fact that the ability to communicate efficiently and effectively is something that must be practiced, evaluated, and improved upon constantly. As a PL, you must be able to express yourself clearly and quickly in a manner your subordinates understand and to which they can relate. You must also remain flexible in the way you communicate, as different subordinates and superiors will respond more positively depending upon the way in which you give orders and provide information.

Finally, ROTC taught me the importance of being part of a team. My classmates and I developed strong, long-lasting bonds that have allowed us to stay in touch with each other even now, over three years since we graduated and went our separate ways. In the same aspect, I was able to carry that appreciation for being a part of a team into my PL days, and now I maintain contact with my PSG and other members of my platoon in the same manner as my classmates.

~1LT James Stokes, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 3rd BDE, 25th ID (L)

USMA taught me how to deal with stress and communicate effectively.

~2LT Andrew Johannes, PL, C/65th EN

Being an ROTC cadet taught me multi-tasking. I wasn't just a cadet, but a college student as well. It was almost as if I had two separate lives. Being a platoon leader in a combat zone is very similar. You are professional at all times and working long hours, but you must not lose yourself in the mix of things.

~1LT Hollie Miller, PL, C/325 FSB

ROTC developed me into a well-rounded person. Going to school, I didn't have someone knocking at my door or barking orders at me to get me going. This forced me to be a self-motivator and time manager. I had to make my own schedules and excel by finding my niche with a vast school of students and professors from all walks of life. As a four-year scholarship recipient, my future years were already charted, which brought structure to my newly sparked career. The faculty of the Military Science department were professionals and exhibited a family oriented atmosphere which helped me to keep focus on the challenges in front of me and not the distractions of school and home. These points I make are similar to being in a combat environment because as a combat leader you must be self motivated and a good manager of time to make things happen, keeping your unit going when the times get tough. Your team, just as I related to my faculty (ROTC) is like family and a good relationship will help you lead your troops through the most challenging situations. You must set a schedule for your team to include goals as combat is not always fast paced, but can get redundant and can lead to complacency. Find your niche with your unit just as you did with the community of your commissioning source, as this parallel will take you to the next level.

~1LT Gabriel Medley, XO, C/325 FSB

My ROTC experience took place at a small, academically tough liberal arts college. Due to the program's inherent time commitment, the first thing I came to understand was the importance of time management. The combination of a military training program and the college experience made for a quick lesson in this. It also allowed for a greater understanding of the relationship between civilian and military life prior to actually entering the Army. This was not simply limited to the balance between duty and personal time, but also to the relationship the military had with surrounding civilian communities. Because my school was small, it was quite visible to the community it was within. Our training was not on a military post but on both a college campus and a small town. Of course, we met with a number of reactions from other college students, faculty, and staff, as well as town residents. Occasionally, criticisms and complaints would sting the military science department, but it was all part of understanding to a greater extent the civilian perspectives of the military prior to our actual service.

As far as leadership, the curriculum emphasized building confidence and then working from there. In the duration of my time at Wheaton, ROTC increased my sense of awareness of the concerns of others. The best leaders--and Soldiers--work for others rather than themselves. Their own success is a product of this selflessness. Thus, ROTC provided good preparation for what the military was all about.

While my school's program emphasized planning on the spur of the moment with the clock ticking, it also developed my ability to plan for my subordinates and myself with the bigger picture in mind. Through the training, I was more able to tier my goals and set short-term goals with a more vivid picture of the long-term purpose as the backdrop. It showed me how to visualize a beginning and an end to both training and a mission, and then plan accordingly. *~2LT Rich Viola, FLE CDR, 325 FSB*

The ROTC program at Florida State University taught me to make decisions. In combat making decisions are what officers are for. No matter how many things are going on at once, as the officer you must stay calm and collected and make a decision. *~2LT Gisela Mendonca, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB*

While attending USMA I gained the confidence to deal with superiors and subordinates in different situations. The four-class system, which forced you to hold different leadership positions, taught me that having a trusting relationship is key to being a good leader in combat and in garrison. And trust is built by a shared respect between a leader and his subordinates, especially during combat. If my Soldiers know that I care for and respect them, then they will follow me anywhere. That is what a combat leader should strive to achieve. *~1LT Donnie Choe, PL, A/2-27 IN*

USMA enhanced my time management skills and my ability to understand my role as a leader. Additionally, it placed me in virtually every position at the company level, which gives me some insight into the role of my subordinate leaders. Most importantly, however, it reinforced in me the importance of integrity and doing the right thing. That is what I can best offer to the platoon: a morally and ethically sound leader that will make educated decisions. *~2LT Patton Nix, PL, C/2-27 IN*

ROTC taught me more about dealing with people more than anything else. Tactics and physical fitness mean nothing if you can't manage, motivate, discipline, and inspire 34 Soldiers from all different walks of life to work together effectively. It's not about how good you are, it's about how good all of you are. I have seen so many officers that are studs on paper because of badges, tabs, and OERs but suck at dealing with people. Interpersonal and Building skills are just as important if not more so than anything you have accomplished as an individual. Soldiers don't care what you accomplished a few months ago, they care about how you build your platoon as a fighting team that can safely get through the next mission. You are only as good as your last day, what you did at Ranger or Airborne school last year doesn't mean a thing. *~1LT Lex Holmberg, PL, B/2-27 IN*



It was not anything specific that ROTC did for me. It was the people that I was around in ROTC. I paid special attention to the prior service cadets and the enlisted cadre. The information and knowledge that they can give you is invaluable. *~1LT David Widder, Mortar PL, HHC/2-27 IN*

My ROTC experience at the University of Virginia taught me a lot, but the most important lesson was the ability to separate my career and my personal life. I think the best officers are the ones that make a clear distinction between how they carry themselves at the workplace and how they act when they are "off." Being at the University taught me how to separate myself from the Army, but at the drop of a hat be able to turn around and give it 100% when I am leading Soldiers. If you can't do this, you are going to get burned out fast and will not be able to deliver when the time comes. *~2LT Eric Hill, PL, C/2-35 IN*

The PMS at the school I went to was an Infantry LTC and he gave me constant guidance on how to handle Soldiers and situations. ROTC also trained me in infantry tactics, so the technical aspects of the job were fairly easy. I think the hardest part of leading an infantry platoon is dealing with the strange situations that come up with the Soldiers. The actual reacting to contact and war situations that come up are easy, because everyone knows their job and performs as they are suppose to perform. The situations that Soldiers bring on themselves, I believe, are the most difficult things I have to deal with. *~2LT Christopher Suttles, PL, C/2-27 IN*

6. How did you enforce standards as a new LT?

You have to make it unmistakably clear to all your Soldiers where you stand on the hot issues and what's most important to you. With ethical and behavioral standards, I let all my Soldiers know when I'd back them up, and when I wouldn't. I did that the very first day I met my platoon. - With day-to-day, discipline standards you first have to be in agreement with your platoon sergeant on the enforcement piece. Then you demand your team leaders and squad leaders enforce standards as they see fit. However, that doesn't mean you can't make on the spot corrections when you see something wrong and you are the only one there to observe it. - Lastly, you must live by the standards. Your rank brings no exemption to unit standards. Soldiers will watch you carefully and will do as you do. The examples are many: packing lists/layouts, grooming and uniform standards, personal hygiene, living quarters, etc.

~1LT Eliel Pimentel, XO, HHC/2-35 IN

I feel the best way to enforce standards is to ensure that you as well as your NCOs are upholding them. A leader cannot expect a soldier to do something they fail to do themselves. Double standards are a crutch in a platoon because soldiers know when their leaders fail to meet the standard and it will cause them to lose confidence and respect for them.

~2LT Nicole DeTomaso, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

Honestly, I relied heavily on my platoon sergeant at first. Once I was comfortable with the platoon and my squad leaders, I could begin communicating my expectations and standards to my subordinate leaders and Soldiers. I put more responsibility on the shoulders of my squad leaders than most people do, but it worked for me. If a Soldier was not meeting the standard, I (along side my platoon sergeant) would hold his squad leader responsible. All I can say is that it worked. When my platoon was integrated into a new company and a new battalion for the deployment, we stood out in a good way. It was evident that my squads were well-developed, cohesive teams.

~1LT Thomas Bouchillon, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB



Enforcing standards is one of the easiest things to do. When you identify something that is wrong take actions to correct it and do not ignore it thinking someone else will fix it. Most importantly though, do not concern yourself with being "cool" or a "good guy" while making corrections. Soldiers may get upset for being called out for an infraction, but they will eventually learn and understand that making corrections is something *professional and not personal*.

~1LT Jeremy Endlish, FSO, C/2-35 IN

The first way for a new LT to enforce standards is to uphold them.

Hypocrisy will instantly kill a command climate. Just like in physical training, a new LT must lead from the front in all that he does, which includes any type of military standard. If the leader and disciplining authority does not uphold a given standard, then how can you ever expect to punish a Soldier for not meeting that same standard? By embodying the standards, you build yourself a power base upon which you can achieve enough leverage to enforce standards even as a new LT.

~1LT Tom Grywalski, Scout PL, HHC/2-35 IN

I make sure that the platoon knows what the standards are and that the NCOs and I enforce the standards. We do not lower the standards. I ensure that my NCOs and I lead by example and follow the standards as well.

~1LT Mia Suttles, PL, C/125 MI

I was consistent with the Soldiers. I sat and talked with them, so they would know where they stand and what is expected of them. I worked with my PSG so we would be on the same page and he would back me on my decisions. **~1LT Paul Spelock, XO, HQ&A/325 FSB**

Enforce the standard by exceeding and exemplifying it every day. Lead from the front and show your Soldiers what right looks like through your daily actions and behavior. If you do this, there will be no question in their minds as to your where you stand, and no room for them to consider not putting in the effort to meet each and every standard. It is that simple.

~1LT James Stokes, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 3rd BDE, 25th ID (L)

Unless it is unsafe or dangerous, a new LT should let his or her NCOs enforce standards and make sure they do it. **~2LT Andrew Johannes, PL, C/65th EN**

Coming into a platoon that had been working together for quite some time, the standards were already there, and I basically just held them to those standards. I can't ask a soldier to do something I am not willing to do myself; therefore I must exceed the standard. **~1LT Hollie Miller, PL, C/325 FSB**

The only way to enforce standards is to know them and live by them. If you live by them, you set your self apart from those that don't and your Soldiers will see that. Respect is earned not given; in order to enforce standards you have to earn the respect of your Soldiers. **~1LT Gabriel Medley, XO, C/325 FSB**

Rule number one is to adhere to standards. Leaders can enforce a standard verbally or through memorandums and SOPs, but that effort could be negated by a failure to uphold it themselves. Show your Soldiers and NCOs how something is to be done if you want it done right. Many people are visual learners. They need to see in order to be able to do.

Some things are just simple. For uniform policies, make sure you wear the right uniform at all times. Make sure you are where you need to be ahead of time. Keep to your schedule. Keep promises. It's all about integrity.

Don't be afraid to punish, but leave the actual punishment in the hands of your NCOs as much as possible. Just make sure that effective corrections occur as necessary. Don't let things slide, and never EVER demonstrate favoritism. **~2LT Rich Viola, FLE CDR, 325 FSB**

Making sure that the soldiers understand what the standards are and enforcing them for everyone across the board lets every soldier and NCO know that you mean business. **~2LT Gisela Mendonca, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB**

This is not difficult once you understand what the Battalion and Company standards are. Make sure this is covered when you sit down for your first counseling with your Company Commander and Battalion Commander. I'm confident that they'll both already have this rolled up for you as a part of your initial counseling. Once you've got it, enforce them ruthlessly. Start by using your leadership to stomp problems out. For example, you realize a Soldier is doing something outside of the standard--- give a squad leader an opportunity to fix the problem. If you find that the problem persists in this particular squad or within the platoon in general. You start making the corrections and developing the corrective punishment. Trust me--- You're SL's should take this personally, as you are now developing the discipline for his squad and he'll start taking a little more initiative with his corrective training. If he doesn't seem to mind you disciplining his Soldiers then he has no business being in that position of leadership. Your NCO's should be ruthless with enforcing standards.



~CPT Chris Barlow, PL, A/2-35 IN

As a new lieutenant, I enforced standards within my platoon by trying to be the standard bearer. It's always "do as I do", and not "do as I say." However, if you're worried because you don't think your LT rank has much authority, you need to wake up. Whether you're a LT or a CPT, you're still an officer with just as much authority to enforce the standard. So be the leader as soon as you get your new platoon.

~1LT Donnie Choe, PL, A/2-27 IN

I came into the platoon and learned the standards set by the company. Enforcing them was easy for me because of the caliber of my NCOs. However, there were times where I made spot corrections on Soldiers for actions that I simply do not tolerate. Additionally, I let squad leaders know when their teams were screwed up whether the issue was security or of other sorts. The biggest thing in my mind though is using the chain of command and letting it work. When it fails, which has not been often for my platoon, hold the leaders responsible accountable.

~2LT Patton Nix, PL, C/2-27 IN

Enforce standards through your NCOs, especially as a new PL. If your Soldiers are not keeping them, then your squad leaders are not doing their job. During my 19 months as a platoon leader I have replaced 3 squad leaders. There is no shame in it. Undisciplined Soldiers are a danger to you, each other, and themselves. Constant counseling of NCOs, something so often overlooked, especially in combat, can often make such corrections much more easy (as I have found out the hard way).

~1LT Lex Holmberg, PL, B/2-27 IN

As a new LT, hold your PSG and your Squad Leaders accountable. Make them enforce the standards that you set forth. Your span of control is only 3-4 Soldiers. Make them control the Soldiers under them. That being said, always be a living example of the standard. When you see a deficiency, don't be afraid to make an on the spot correction.

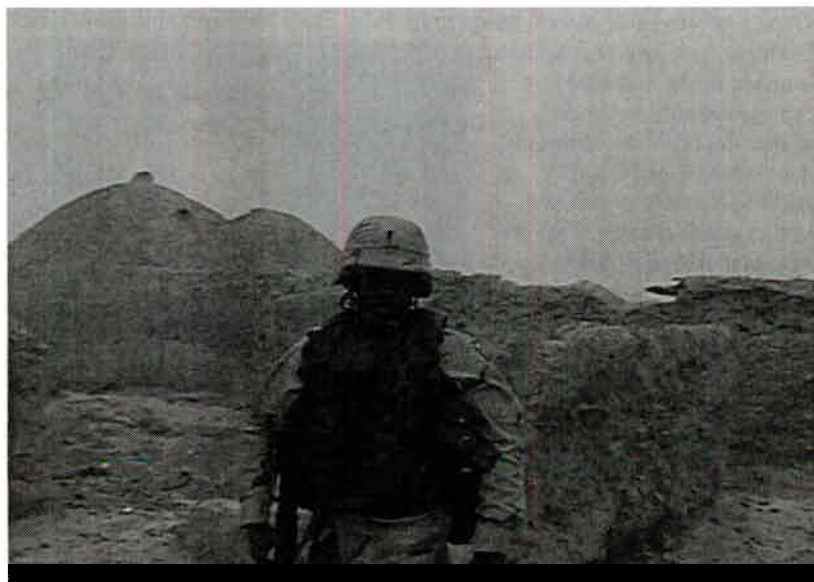
~1LT David Widder, Mortar PL, HHC/2-27 IN

In many ways, it is easier to enforce standards as a new guy than it is to start enforcing them as a veteran PL. When you get to your platoon, you are starting out with a clean slate. No one knows who you are or how you operate, so what you do from day one is what everyone takes for granted as the way it will be. If you start enforcing standards as soon as you take command, it sets your platoon up for success. The bottom line is that *you* are the platoon leader, and *you* should be the biggest standard enforcer in the platoon.

~2LT Eric Hill, PL, C/2-35 IN

I enforce the standards by not allowing my Soldiers fall below the standards or trying to set new lower standards. Enforcing standards in the combat zone during mission is easy, however when we are refitting in the rear, it is more difficult because the Soldiers want to relax totally, but the standards must be maintained.

~2LT Christopher Suttles, PL, C/2-27 IN



7. What things will a new LT be expected to know?

Everyone will expect you to know the basic tools of the profession. You don't have to know every exacting detail of FM 7-8, but you must understand all the principles of squad and platoon infantry tactics. You should also have a good understanding of friendly and enemy weapons systems and capabilities-that will facilitate good mission planning. Lastly, *know how to plan a mission*. Don't plan the mission on your own. You're a fool if you try to do that. As the platoon leader, you lead the mission planning process, but you don't own it completely.--*know how to bring in all your platoon resources and knowledge to plan the mission.*

~1LT Eliel Pimentel, XO, HHC/2-35 IN

Some things a new lieutenant will be expected to know are how to make decisions, and how to learn. You are not expected to know everything, and you're not always going to make the right decisions. Mentoring, learning, time, and experience are a few factors that help make a good platoon leader.

~2LT Nicole DeTomaso, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

A new LT will not be expected to know much operationally, just sound doctrine. He is expected to know general military knowledge, such as uniform wear and customs and courtesies. He is expected to be physically fit and of the highest moral character. He is also expected to be willing to listen and learn. Receive input from subordinate leaders, listen to your platoon sergeant and squad leaders, make decisions, and take responsibility for the outcome of those decisions. It's pretty simple.

~1LT Thomas Bouchillon, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

A new LT will be expected to know more than he or she already knows. In other words, a new LT must be prepared to combine the book knowledge from OBC with the hands-on-training of a real unit. With respect to more quantifiable items, I highly recommend that young LT's become highly proficient at land navigation and computer programs such as Excel, Word and PowerPoint.

~1LT Jeremy Endlish, FSO, C/2-35 IN

A new LT is only expected to know FMs and books. If you do not know the appropriate FMs, then you have failed from the start. A new LT is, however, expected to want to learn. As soon as a new LT arrives in his unit, he should attempt to learn everything that he can beyond the books. Be inquisitive and motivated to learn and you will have success as a new LT. Learn everything that you can from others' experiences.

~1LT Tom Grywalski, Scout PL, HHC/2-35 IN

A new LT will be expected to know how to handle herself/himself as well as make sound decisions. You are not going to be the subject matter expert in your platoon; no one expects you to be. Do not micro-manage tasks given to your NCOs. Trust your soldiers and NCOs to accomplish these tasks.



Learn as much as you can about the equipment your platoon is responsible for from your soldiers. You are a leader; therefore, you need to be able to make sound decisions based on logical thought with the best intentions for your platoon in mind. Always make sure that you are looking out for what is right for your soldiers and your platoon. **~1LT Mia Suttles, PL, C/125 MI**

A new LT should know the basics of their job and be up to date on regulations. This will help them gain a good foothold on their job and set them up for success.

~1LT Paul Spelock, XO, HQ&A/325 FSB

Initially, ensure you know the basics that were taught at OBC, which, in my case, included Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield, threat assessments, MDMP, etc. These areas will be different depending on your branch, but ensure you study hard and take the time to learn as much as you can during your time at OBC. Also ensure you stay current on all the tasks taught in ROTC/USMA, including physical training, military bearing, uniform wear, basic infantry skills and tasks, and the willingness to take charge.

As soon as you find out what specific type of platoon or section you will be going to, try to begin reading and studying anything you can get your hands on related to the portions of the job you do not know (prior to arrival). It is also important to learn as much as possible from your PSG. My first job was as the PL for a Tactical Human and Counter Intelligence Platoon, and I immediately sat down with the PSG and began picking his brain on the “ins and outs” of HUMINT collection, much of which was never taught to me in the classroom.

No one, including your company commander, 1SG, or PSG, will expect you to know everything about being a PL right off the bat. However, the more you know upon your arrival to the unit, the better the first impression and the greater the amount of respect you will initially earn from your commander, your NCO chain of command, and your Soldiers. If they see you have taken the time to prepare as much as possible for the job you are undertaking, they will be more receptive to your ideas, more willing to trust your judgment, and more eager to follow your orders.

~1LT James Stokes, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 3rd BDE, 25th ID (L)

New LTs need to know how to read, write, listen, learn, and make decisions.

~2LT Andrew Johannes, PL, C/65th EN

A new LT will first and foremost be expected to know how to be a leader. That’s what you have been training for. In most cases, your first PSG and platoon will understand that they are just that, your first. They most likely know more than you at that point, and should be willing to answer any questions you may have to get you up to speed. It is going to be your job to ask the questions and find the answers.

~1LT Hollie Miller, PL, C/325 FSB

A Lieutenant is expected to know the basics in their area of service to the Army. Nothing really to expound upon in this area because in order to lead one must follow, and in order to follow one must be a sponge and gain as much knowledge as possible to improve the organization. A high learning curve will pay dividends in professional development.

~1LT Gabriel Medley, XO, C/325 FSB

Foremost, a new LT must understand what his/her place is. There may be a tendency to jump in a leadership position with the mindset that you know everything, or, at least, that you must appear to. In reality, that approach tends to irritate most NCOs and Soldiers. There definitely is a balance – sometimes a delicate one – between adopting the appropriate “take charge” attitude for your leadership position and overstepping your bounds.

The expectations of a new LT will vary, based upon levels of prior service experience, military schooling, and a variety of other factors. A new 2LT with 10 years of prior service will probably get a different reception than a new 2LT who went straight to college or the Academy out of high school. Then again, a number of Soldiers may not initially realize the difference. As broad as this may sound, the main thing a new LT should keep in mind during his pre-commission training and throughout the duration of his OBC experience is to take in as much as possible from all training prior to arriving at the new unit and go from there. It might not sound like the most insightful advice, but that’s really about all you can do. For most LTs, the majority of their development as a new LT will come from *being* an LT. Preparation sets a good foundation to foster development, but the experience of being a platoon leader is what builds upon that foundation.

~2LT Rich Viola, FLE CDR, 325 FSB

A new LT is expected to know where to find the answers, and to be willing to learn. As the new LT you are not expected to know every FM or every DA Form, you are just expected to be willing to do what it takes to find out the answers and listen to your NCOs.

~2LT Gisela Mendonca, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

Make sure you understand the orders process, and how to develop a plan at the platoon level. Other than that----have an open mind and open ears. Listen to your NCOs. Namely, the competent ones, and it'll all come together.

~CPT Chris Barlow, PL, A/2-35 IN

New LT's are expected to know how to write an OPORD, how to conduct battle drills, how to uphold the standard, and basically how to make the right decision with the info you have at hand. You are also expected to be human and not know every little detail of FM 7-8. For that, you are expected to know when you need to go to your NCO's and Soldiers for help. Put your pride aside and seek help when you need it.

~1LT Donnie Choe, PL, A/2-27 IN

A new LT in a combat scenario needs to know:

The AO and intelligence on the AO
The mission and intent two levels up
Soldiers in his platoon and leaders in his company
Company SOPs
ROE
What the company has done, and intent for future ops

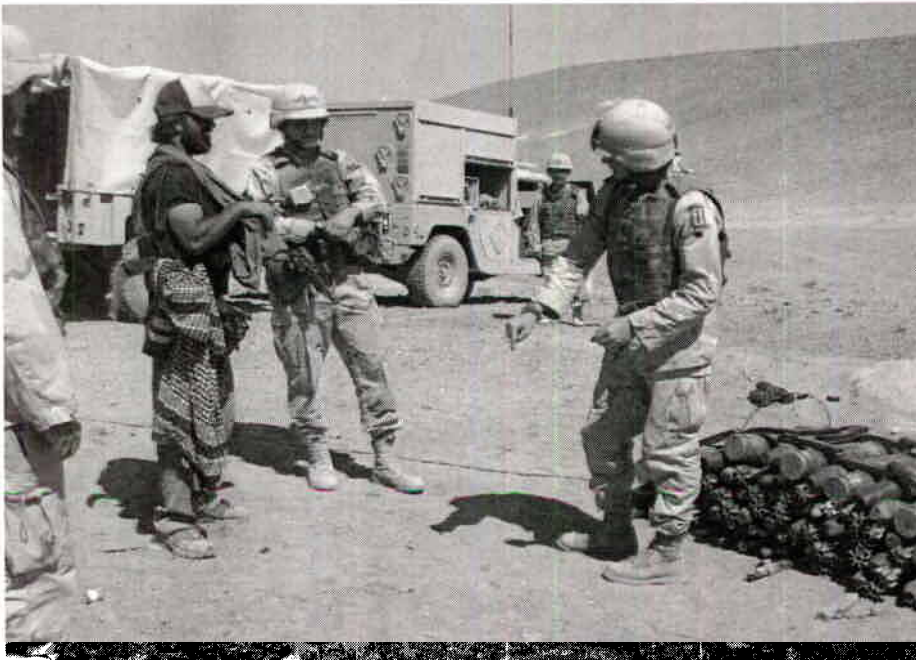
What he is expected to know:

Tactical/technical competence
How to lead and lead well
Initiative
Responsibility
Integrity and how to enforce it
How to use resources/and find resources if necessary
How to maintain unit physical fitness
Basic cultural background and basic history of the area

~2LT Patton Nix, PL, C/2-27 IN

What I learned in IOBC had little application to what I learned at my unit. You won't know what a DD2166-8 is, how to run a range, or even do mounted patrols. My best advice is that you will be expected to learn. Be an observer of things, and ask questions from your commander, NCOs, peers, and even Soldiers. They will respect you for having the initiative and courage to ask questions and learn.

~1LT Lex Holmberg, PL, B/2-27 IN



You will need to know basic skills. If you are an Infantry PL you will need to know land nav, weapons capabilities, infantry tactics, etc. Know the basics of your job and the NCO's will teach you the rest that you need to know.

*~1LT David
Widder, Mortar PL,
HHC/2-27 IN*

Your Soldiers will love to quiz you on everything, so knowing a little bit on a wide array of topics is beneficial. Definitely know FM 7-8 proficiently. You should definitely be familiar with all of the tools associated with the profession, such as weapons systems and communication equipment. Every platoon has SOPs already established on almost every aspect of operating, so a lot of information will be absorbed through “on the job” training. IOBC and Ranger School will definitely give a great knowledge base from which you can build.

~2LT Eric Hill, PL, C/2-35 IN

Know the technical aspects of the job and be receptive to input from your Soldiers, peers, and leaders. A new LT should know that what he has learned does not make him the subject matter expert, his Soldiers are the SMEs, however he should know that he is the overall authority in the platoon and makes the final decision. He should know to use his NCOs to their fullest extent and to learn from them. Even if he has bad NCOs, he can learn what not to do in different situations.

~2LT Christopher Suttles, PL, C/2-27 IN

8. How do you conduct training in a combat environment?

Your facilities and environment will dictate what you can do. At a minimum, keep shooting—both day and night. That will force the confirmation of zeroes, lasers, and optics, as well as weapon maintenance. *Cross-train as much as possible.* On occasion, have your FO, Medic, and RTO teach classes on different parts of their job. You don't need to get too creative with the teaching plan—the FO will teach how to call for fire, the medic will show how to stick an IV (try it at night too), and the RTO will show how to place *every* communication device into operation from filling it with COMSEC keys to troubleshooting common problems. If you have time (and you eventually will) go beyond that. Have your gunners teach the 240B or your unit engineers show how they search for mines. Not only will that keep their knowledge fresh, but it will build your overall platoon strength. It won't be as painful when your RTO goes on leave, because there are a couple of guys ready to step in and handle the job.

~1LT Eliel Pimentel, XO, HHC/2-35 IN

Many times it is easier to conduct training in a combat environment because you have an abundant amount of supplies, equipment, and ammunition. The platoon is together at the same time and place nearly



every day. It is important to keep your soldiers qualified at the rifle range and practice executing mounted and dismounted battle drills. You want these drills to be a second nature for your soldiers. As a result, when they are faced with a real life situation they are able to react quickly and efficiently under pressure.

~2LT Nicole DeTomaso, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

Opportunity training is the key. For example, at Kandahar, an abandoned village off post has been designated where units can train with minimal restrictions.

As a battalion, we have used this training area numerous times to alert, assemble, and conduct a quick reaction convoy. We have also conducted convoy live fire exercises and used the area to test-fire our weapons. On a smaller scale, leaders can ensure Soldiers maintain and even improve their proficiency on equipment such as radios, PLGRs, NVGs, and crew-served weapons. There are periods of lull time when such opportunity training presents itself. Remember, skills that are not used habitually are lost over time.

~1LT Thomas Bouchillon, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

Training in a combat environment is just like that of a non-hostile environment in every aspect except that combat environments usually have fewer restrictions. By this I mean in a combat zone you are granted more flexibility in training to make the training more realistic. For instance, safety boxes are removed for artillery shoots and rifle ranges can be modified in any way to suit the needs of an infantry company.

~1LT Jeremy Endlish, FSO, C/2-35 IN

Training in combat is too easy. Whenever there is down time, and there will be, there is usually an opportunity to cross-train. On operations you and your unit will be exposed to and work along side a wide variety of units. Those units will have different weapons and different skills than your unit. Ask them to teach you what they know. You never know when all of you will be hit and one of your Soldiers may have to take over a weapon system that is not his own. It is important to have your non-commissioned officers conduct hip-pocket training on a consistent basis, not only because it keeps every Soldier's skills sharp but also because it keeps them being productive and out of trouble. Just like ensuring PT is done to the highest

of standards, it is also your moral responsibility as a leader to ensure that training is consistently conducted at the highest of standards.

~1LT Tom Grywalski, Scout PL, HHC/2-35 IN

We have scheduled our workload properly and have set times for training. We have also had opportunities to piggyback with other units in training. This allowed us to get a few Soldiers in at a time without hindering our mission.

~1LT Paul Spelock, XO, HQ&A/325 FSB

In my current job, conducting training is easy--we do it every day while working shifts. As part of the operations section, my Soldiers work 12-14 hours a day, 7 days a week, for the entirety of the deployment. Although the operations' tempo in the Tactical Operations Center (TOC) is often high, there is always "down time" during which specific training can be conducted to further develop the MI Soldiers in my section.

In our line of work, it is important to have a preset plan of specific areas you want to train on each week. I sit down with my section NCO every one to two weeks to develop a plan for specific tasks on which my section Soldiers need to train. That way,



when down time occurs, I do not have to waste time "thinking up" something for my guys to do, as there is already a developed plan for training that fits into my overall methodology of continually developing my Soldiers to improve their analytical and operational capabilities. Always remember that you will conduct a large amount of "training by doing" on a deployment; these scenarios often offer a steep learning curve, but you will be surprised at how quickly and efficiently both you and your Soldiers will learn in these types of situations.

Another critical aspect of continually developing my Soldiers' skills is the feedback and guidance provided by both myself and my NCOIC. It is difficult, if not impossible, to provide new guidance and "azimuth checks" to your Soldiers every day, nor is it fair to the Soldier. As a leader, you must monitor your Soldiers' performance over a longer period of time, assess their strengths and weaknesses, and then provide specific guidance to set them up for success and to improve their skills in the areas identified. Weekly/bi-weekly assessment meetings are also crucial to our specific type of work schedule—they enable me to openly discuss positives and negatives with each of my Soldiers on their job performance during the past one to two weeks. We will openly discuss projects, IPB techniques, and "sustains and improves" that apply to each Soldiers' performance in the section, and then use these sessions to add specific tasks to the training outlines for the next 2-week period.

~1LT James Stokes, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 3rd BDE, 25th ID (L)

It's hard, especially when the mission Op tempo is high. When your Soldiers come off missions, you want to make sure they have time to relax. Preparing for missions and rehearsals are the main way that training is conducted.

-2LT Andrew Johannes, PL, C/65th EN

Improvise, improvise, improvise! Almost any training done in garrison can be done in combat, to an extent. Working with an ambulance platoon, I've noticed the medics don't get as much hands on medical training with the patients as the medics in treatment platoon. Therefore, each of the medics is rotated through the clinic in order to practice and enhance their medical skills. The PSG and I evaluate the soldiers skills, record their strengths and weaknesses, and then decide on the training we feel is most needed. There is always down time in a combat environment, and it is important that your soldiers aren't just sitting around doing nothing. Sometimes it's okay to do nothing. We all need a break. But after a while, nothing begins to wear on your morale. Training is a good morale booster.

-1LT Hollie Miller, PL, C/325 FSB

Training can be conducted anywhere. As a Company Executive Officer performing duties in Afghanistan, there are times when you barely have time to breathe, and there are times when you can watch the seconds on a clock. In the off hours we capitalize on training in low-density areas to keep the skills honed for any contingencies that may arise. Time management of personnel and resources is vital to

realistic and successful training in the combat environment.

-1LT Gabriel Medley,

XO, C/325 FSB



The same way you would outside of a combat environment. Most of the resources you need are on hand. Ammo is usually available, and in most combat zones your back door is your range. Get creative.

-CPT Chris Barlow,

PL, A/2-35 IN

Conducting training in a combat environment is not much different from garrison. You plan your training around missions, get resources, and conduct the training. The problem is deciding on what to

train. Train your guys on what is pertinent to the current mission. If you are going on a long and dangerous convoy, work on down gunner and down driver drills. If you're conducting a movement to contact, work on movement and battle drills. Spend your down time wisely so that you're not over training or under training.

-1LT Donnie Choe, PL, A/2-27 IN

Training in a combat environment is based on two things: initiative and creativity. Making ranges on a mountainside to reconfirm zeros, using abandoned buildings to perform MOUT training and doing live fires whenever possible are all examples. Every movement is a training exercise and an opportunity to maintain proficiency of common tasks.

-2LT Patton Nix, PL, C/2-27 IN

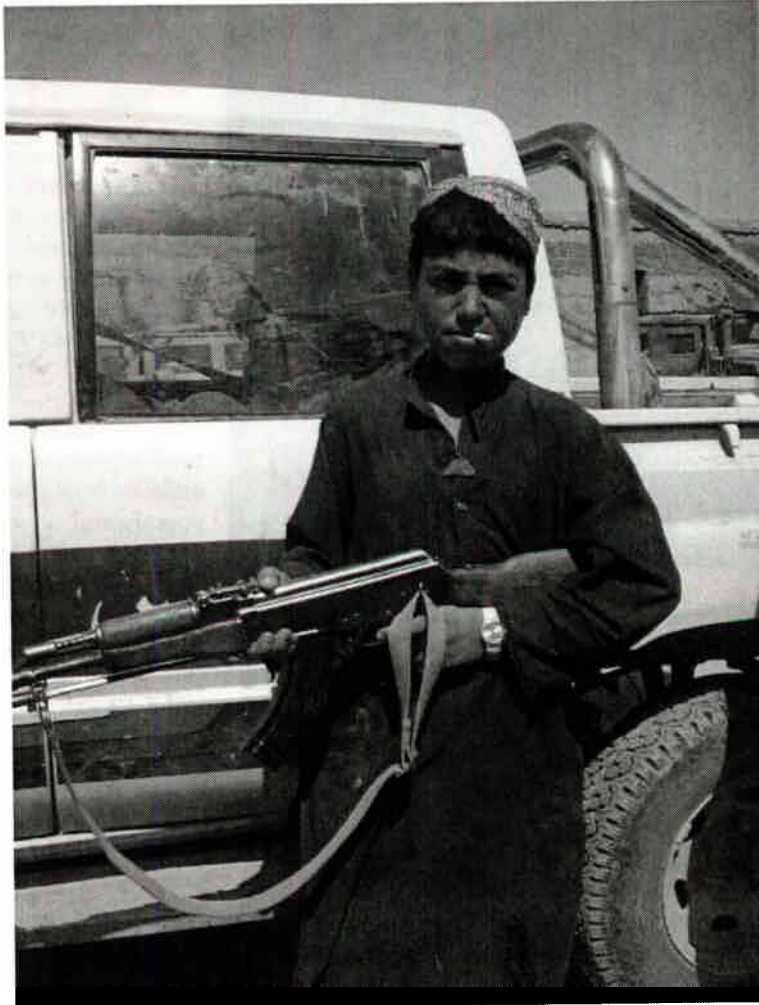
Conduct mission oriented training (see answer 1). Have your RTO teach a commo class. Have your FO teach your platoon how to call for fire. Have an NCO who was a former 11H (Heavy Anti-Armor Weapons Infantryman) teach mounted vehicle operations. There is a wealth of knowledge already in your platoon. Remember, you are not an individual anymore; you are a manager of a 34 man team. Use all assets in that team to make it better.

-1LT Lex Holmberg, PL, B/2-27 IN

You must fit in training when possible. When back at the FOB coordinate with other units like mortars and FA to coordinate calling for fires. You can fit training in while outside the wire as well. We routinely do crew drills with the mortars when we are outside the wire. The key is to balance mission readiness with time available. *~1LT David Widder, Mortar PL, HHC/2-27 IN*

Fit it in when you can. My platoon and I were out on operations on average two weeks out of the month, so training was squeezed in between recovery and mission preparation. I definitely tried to get the platoon out to the range as much as possible, and supplemented the days between operations with daily classes. Training is vital to keeping up platoon tactical and technical proficiency, but equally important is time for Soldiers to relax. Combat is a highly stressful environment, and Soldiers need and deserve down time between operations to unwind. PT in my opinion is the best training in a combat environment. While benefiting the Soldier on missions, it also aids in releasing stress. *~2LT Eric Hill, PL, C/2-35 IN*

During the times of our refits, we conduct training on the range and CTT whenever possible. A lot of our training happens on our patrols, because when we are out on patrol and we find an area suitable for some quick hip pocket or practical training, we secure the area and conduct what we want to. It is actually easier to conduct training in the field because we are always able to find hills or empty ruins that allow us to come up with real time situations for the training. *~2LT Christopher Suttles, PL, C/2-27 IN*



9. What are the most important skills your troops need in a combat environment, and why?

The ability to shoot well on the move, apply first aid, call for indirect fire, and maintain radio communications are good areas to focus training around. - A lot of the contact in the area has been at great distances. The ability to employ the weapon systems available to you at their maximum range is important. - Also, bringing your indirect fire assets to the fight can make a huge difference. - Given the terrain here, maintaining communications is a constant burden. Not only is it your link to your unit for supplies and information, but it is your life line in case someone is hurt. *~1LT Eliel Pimentel, XO, HHC/2-35 IN*

In my opinion of few of the most important skills a soldier needs in a combat environment are physical, tactical, and technical. It is also important to remember the Warrior Ethos and to recognize that everyone must be a soldier first, and a technician last. Physical skills can be improved by doing physical fitness exercises routinely. Training in small unit tactics and weapons qualifications can enhance tactical skills. Lastly technical skills are exercised everyday by allowing soldiers to work in their MOS; a combat environment is the best place for soldiers to learn and refresh their skills.

~2LT Nicole DeTomaso, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

As a truck platoon, my Soldiers must be extensively familiar with the maintenance and operation of their trucks. BDAR and self-recovery are must-have skills for truck drivers in combat. My Soldiers are also extremely proficient on crew-served weapons. Any one of my Soldiers can inspect, load, and accurately fire any weapon system in the platoon. All leaders should be able to operate a variety of communication systems (i.e. FBCB2, TACSAT, SINGARS, etc.). Mounted land navigation is a critical skill for truck drivers—obviously. Soldiers should be able to navigate with a GPS based system. First aid is a must for all Soldiers, regardless of MOS. In my opinion, combat lifesaver training should be a yearly requirement for every Soldier and officer in the Army. Lastly, a platoon must have reaction skills imbedded through teamwork as a result of extensive training. A good platoon is so cohesive, that Soldiers instinctively know and understand the role of every other Soldier. They react properly from training, and battle drills are executed without hesitation. *~1LT Thomas Bouchillon, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB*

The ability to think outside the proverbial box is the most important skill a Soldier can have in combat. Field manuals and ARTEP tasks are excellent guidelines for conducting land warfare; however, they are just guidelines. Soldiers must be capable of taking what they have learned from FM's and training tasks to make practical and effective decisions on the ground. This process mainly involves a Soldier being able to look at the terrain in conjunction with the current situation to make a plan come to fruition.

~1LT Jeremy Endlish, FSO, C/2-35 IN

The most important skills that your troops need in a combat environment are marksmanship and medical training. Despite what one might think, a human being can suffer multiple wounds from 5.56mm rounds and still be cognizant enough to continue to fight and to move around on the battlefield. It is very important that Soldiers have precise accurate fires. Unless a Soldier can fire a kill shot under the most stressful of conditions, he has not yet met the standard. Organizing "stress shoots" is a good training technique. Medical training is equally as important as marksmanship. Administering an IV to a Soldier while calm and in a classroom setting is much different from administering one while bullets are flying and your hands are shaking from adrenaline. You should have your unit practice "stress sticks" and other medical treatments in a simulated combat scenario. Also, ensure that each Soldier knows how to conduct a needle decompression of a tension pneumothorax and how to employ a variety of tourniquet techniques.

~1LT Tom Grywalski, Scout PL, HHC/2-35 IN

For my soldiers, the most important skill is decision-making because the decisions they make on a day-to-day basis impact operations on the battlefield. They know that good decisions on coordinating for assets will have a positive impact on the operations on the battlefield and could possibly save friendly forces' lives. They also understand that a bad decision could possibly do the opposite.

~1LT Mia Suttles, PL, C/125 MI

For military intelligence Soldiers, the two most important skills are decision-making and time-management. With the incredible amount of threat reporting we deal with on a day-to-day basis, it is

impossible to read and report every piece of information that comes into our shop. Our Soldiers must make quick, accurate assessments to determine what information is pertinent to the current fight, what information needs to go to which specific unit, and how best to communicate that information quickly and efficiently to ensure the combat units have the most accurate, up-to-date and timely intelligence possible.

~1LT James Stokes, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 3rd BDE, 25th ID (L)

Infantry Basics (i.e. taking a knee, maintaining a weapon system properly, ensuring that magazines are kept clean with the proper spring tension, etc...) and situational awareness.

~2LT Andrew Johannes, PL, C/65th EN



In a combat environment, soldiers must know their job. It's no longer training or testing. This is the real thing. They need to know how to react quickly to situations, use their critical thinking skills, and make decisions. As a platoon leader, it is our job to make sure the soldiers receive extensive training in garrison to prepare them for deployment. It is our job, as well as the PSG's, to ensure our soldiers are ready.

~1LT Hollie Miller, PL, C/325 FSB

My Soldiers need the skill of reacting proactively as stated earlier. At the lowest level our junior enlisted are constantly making decisions without the presence of their supervisors. Soldiers need to know that they may not be able to look to their leaders for guidance because they may not be around. If we teach our young Soldiers to take initiative with the command teams intent, then this will increase productivity as a whole. A unit cannot function without decision-making. Therefore allowing Soldiers the levity to make decisions will put them on the spot forcing them to think on their own which will in the moment truth in a war time situation, improving the odds for triumph.

~1LT Gabriel Medley, XO, C/325 FSB

Overall, troops need to maintain a keen sense of awareness. Combat environments seldom provide the best conditions in terms of weather, food, and sanitation. Even the best situations leave the door open for a common problem among Soldiers: not taking care of oneself. The luxuries of sanitation and cleaning facilities are not as prevalent. It lies more on the shoulders of each Soldier to put forth the effort to take care of himself. Make sure that each Soldier is educated on the environment he is heading into and what he needs to do to stay healthy. Just make sure your NCOs are watching out for them once the deployment is underway. A Soldier's sense of urgency must be upheld, even when worn out or bored. If this diminishes, their reaction time does too. Devise ways of keeping everyone on their toes, through training and scheduling the battle rhythm for your platoon.

~2LT Rich Viola, FLE CDR, 325 FSB

Knowledge of the job and basic soldier skills are the most important in a combat environment. Knowledge of their job and the ability to follow orders from their leaders in combat is the difference between life and death. Basic soldier skills to include rifle marksmanship and first aid training are essential in a combat environment. If you are ineffective with your weapon, than what can you offer in the combat

zone? First aid and CLS training are great in a combat environment. Once a soldier arrives to combat and realizes that they do need that training or at least refresher training, it is available. *-2LT Gisela Mendonca, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB*

Ensure they know the basic Skill Level I tasks. More specifically: Weapons familiarization, Foreign Language Familiarization (for us it was Pashtu), and first aid. There will not be time to learn how to tie a tourniquet on the battle field while your buddy is bleeding out!

-CPT Chris Barlow, PL, A/2-35 IN

The most important skill that your Soldiers need is being able to adapt to the different situations. I can list hundreds of specific skills that will help your Soldiers, but being able to adapt to different situations will ensure that you and your Soldiers complete the mission.

-1LT Donnie Choe, PL, A/2-27 IN

In this combat environment, the most important skills necessary are MOUT (entering, clearing and searching rooms/compounds), movement (both mounted and dismounted), react to contact/IED/ambush, physical fitness, and situational awareness. All of these add up to security, maintenance of which gives a unit a sizeable advantage over the enemy.

-2LT Patton Nix, PL, C/2-27 IN

SMCT level one skills are the building blocks for everything. You can't have a team leader who can't navigate lead his team through battle drill 1. Ensure your Soldiers have the basics, and move from there.

-1LT Lex Holmberg, PL, B/2-27 IN

They must be physically fit to the point where they can hump 150 lbs and fight upon arrival. They must be able to hit what they shoot, so they can kill what they shoot at. Finally they must be patient because they are not going to see action for months at a time, then they'll have to react to contact because their lives depend on it.

-1LT David Widder, Mortar PL, HHC/2-27 IN

Besides the most obvious tactical skills every infantry Soldier should possess, I feel that the most important is combat lifesaving. There has been more than one occasion on operations where two or more combat-related injuries have occurred. Due to the fact that every infantry platoon only has one embedded medic, it is imperative that every Soldier be able to execute the necessary basic lifesaving skills to help each other when more than one casualty is prevalent.

-2LT Eric Hill, PL, C/2-35 IN

The troops need to know everyone's job in the platoon. Cross training needs to be performed as much as possible, because it is never known when somebody may have to perform someone else's job. My guys are good at their job, but they need to know about the whole operation of the platoon so that they understand why we are doing certain things.

-2LT Christopher Suttles, PL, C/2-27 IN



10. How do you deal with the loss or serious injury of a Soldier?

You can't keep quiet as if it never happened. Talking about it openly will help Soldiers vent their emotions. I once saw a platoon leader gather his men immediately after returning from a mission where they had first witnessed serious injuries and loss of life. As best he could, he tried to explain that pain and death are harsh realities of war, and then he encouraged everyone to talk about how they felt with a friend. He even offered himself for conversation if anyone cared for it. - I think his actions helped his Soldiers overcome the idea of death together rather than as individuals. ***~1LT Eliel Pimentel, XO, HHC/2-35 IN***

The best way to deal with the loss or injury of a soldier is to keep everyone informed and to talk about the event. It is important that the family is notified first and foremost so they hear about the incident through the proper channels. Immediately after the family is up to date it is vital for leaders to tell their soldiers about the situation so rumors don't spread. It is important to talk about the situation to help soldiers cope with the loss. This also helps to ensure that if the event was the result of a mistake or accident that the same thing doesn't happen again. ***~2LT Nicole DeTomaso, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB***



I pray every day for the safety of my Soldiers, and thank God, to this day, none have been lost nor sustained a combat-related injury. In the event that I lost a Soldier, I think I would immediately bring the platoon together and give them all the facts as I knew it. I would bring a Chaplain and a mental health professional on site as soon as possible. I would write a letter to the Soldier's family, and commence the repatriation process. I know there would be intense grief within my platoon, and I would facilitate any discussions that needed to take place. I don't know how it would affect my platoon's mission performance, since I have *never* had to deal with this. I would *pray* and ask God for wisdom and guidance for me, and courage and resolve for my Soldiers. ***~1LT Thomas Bouchillon, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB***

There is not really any way to easily deal with the loss or serious injury of a Soldier. One technique is to have the chaplain hold a sensing session with anyone who was close to the casualty either in personal life or in the actual firefight. All of the Soldiers will deal with the situation in their own ways. Some Soldiers will act tough about the situation, while others will not talk about the situation. As the leader you must know the personalities of your Soldiers and make your best assessment of who will have the most difficulty handling the situation. For those individuals, regardless of whether they express the need to or not, schedule a time for that person to meet with the chaplain or a mentor.

Additionally, it is very important to organize and hold a nice ceremony or service for anyone who was seriously wounded or killed in combat. Even if it were not spoken, in his heart each Soldier is secretly happy knowing that such a ceremony would be held for him if something were to happen. As a leader you must always treat such a sacrifice with the utmost respect and dignity. Your Soldiers will be satisfied. Also, continue to monitor the mental state of the Soldiers and make necessary arrangements for professional help if problems begin to develop.

~1LT Tom Grywalski, Scout PL, HHC/2-35 IN

With injuries, we work with the Soldier to assess how long they will be out of action. I have yet to have to deal with a serious injury or loss of a Soldier. We would have the chaplain available for all Soldiers that are distraught over the Soldier and have a program set up to contact the Soldier's family to inform them of the occurrence.

~1LT Paul Spelock, XO, HQ&A/325 FSB

I believe the most important aspect of dealing with the injury or loss of a Soldier, whether one from your section/platoon or from the unit as a whole, is to ensure you and your Soldiers remember the sacrifice he or she made and the life they lived up to that sacrifice. Death is a large part of today's battlefield, and we have been given a much harsher glimpse of it in the years since 9/11. However, at the same time, we, as Soldiers, have chosen this line of work, many of us specifically because of the tragedies that occurred on that day. For me, it is important to focus on a departed/wounded Soldiers' sacrifice, what they gave of themselves and their time, and the selfless manner in which they gave it.

Mourn them, yes—but honor them as well, by ensuring all your Soldiers know the importance of attending events such as ramp ceremonies and the awarding of purple hearts, as those are the events that honor the sacrifice of those who gave all they had to give. Always remember that this willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice is something all of us would do, and is one of the most important qualities that separates the Soldier from the civilian, making us unique in who we are and in the role we chose to fulfill in support of our families, our freedom, and our country.

On a less "philosophical" level, make sure you openly discuss these types of situations with your Soldiers, especially if the loss occurred within your section. Try not to let the other Soldiers in the section/platoon internalize all of their feelings, as this can lead to problems. If they are willing, discuss your memories of the Soldier who has passed, focusing on the most memorable aspects of the person as well as how they would want you to react in that situation. This causes everyone to empathize, in a sense, with the person who has passed, and often makes "coming to grips" with the loss much easier.

~1LT James Stokes, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 3rd BDE, 25th ID (L)

Luckily I have not had to deal with the loss or serious injury of a soldier. In any case though, I would be right there by my soldier's side if he/she were injured. Dealing with the loss of a soldier is a much more difficult question to answer. No one is really sure as to how they will react to something so dreadful, until it actually happens. I know that I would spend a great amount of time with the platoon, talking to them, making sure each of them talks with combat stress control at least once, including myself.

~1LT Hollie Miller, PL, C/325 FSB

Dealing with a tragic event is probably one of the toughest situations a leader has to deal with. A good point to stress to your Soldiers is that people deal with loss of life or catastrophic events in their own way, Soldiers must remember that the way their counterparts deal with problems may be different from their own and must be mindful of common courtesy with infringing on the personal space of others.

My story, takes place in Westpoint, NY where our unit, 2nd Battalion 5th IN Bobcats were responsible for the overall summer training of cadets. Officer Professional Development, which will take place quite often in your life as an Army Officer, was a 10-mile foot march across the training area. During this event our Battalion Executive Officer was found slumped near a tree. I happened to be down the hill

conducting call for fire training when I heard a shout for help. I called to one of my medics who was covering the range to prepare the Ambulance to transport the fallen Soldier to the hospital. We got to the hospital in record time but to no avail, it was his time to go. The Battalion was shocked. It was a simple training exercise but the Soldier had 95% arterial blockage. This really lowered the morale of the command team and Soldiers of the unit. He was my boss as an officer on his staff. Some Soldiers cried. Others exercised extensive workout plans with runs and weightlifting to release anger. For most Soldiers the best way to deal with it was to vent to someone about the incident to get feedback and consult to ease the situation. Family will always help ease the conscience in most situations and there are other ancillary services available such as the Chaplain, Mental Health, and of course Leadership which in some cases entails yourself.

~1LT Gabriel Medley, XO, C/325 FSB

While I'll admit to having no experience with any battlefield deaths or serious injuries of any of my Soldiers, I would assume the possibility has crossed the mind of all LTs frequently. It would be difficult for me to simply guess my own reaction to such a scenario, but I do have a grasp of what would be necessary to do for my Soldiers. The chaplain is certainly the key resource for coping with such severe situations, but you can't expect to simply hand the problem off to someone else in the hopes that it will soon disappear. Use the chaplain as a resource for how to deal with this. He doesn't have all the answers, but there's a good chance that he has more than you do.

In a combat situation, you will probably feel a need to "stop everything" in the midst of a tragic situation. The Army does not allow for that, and that must be taken into account. That could be the toughest thing for many of your Soldiers to deal with. For their own sake, not just the unit's, make sure they continue to push forward. This relates to the first question, on dealing with fatigue, fear, and stress. Don't let emotions halt the mission, but make sure that the Soldier gets every bit of the respect, care, and even mourning he deserves.

~2LT Rich Viola, FLE CDR, 325 FSB

There is no textbook way to deal with the loss of human life, especially one of your soldiers. I believe that it is important to know your soldiers and the way they handle stress and understand that some will take longer to heal than others, and some will need more attention than others. It is also important to have the chaplain or mental health available to your soldiers. An honorable ceremony and a caring proper notification of the family is also necessary.

~2LT Gisela Mendonca, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

Unfortunately, I lost a Soldier in an IED attack within the first two months of our deployment. This is never an easy situation to tackle. We didn't know that he had passed until I received a call later in the evening from the Battalion HQ, stating that he wasn't able to pull through on the surgical table. One of the hardest things I've ever had to do as a PL was to tell the boys the news. I gathered the Platoon together and choked the words out. The following night we all got together and traded stories about the Soldier for hours. We laughed and cried, but this seemed to be the ultimate therapy and form of closure for all of us. I keep in touch with his wife and intend to for as long as she is willing to accept my phone calls. One important last note.....I was in the vehicle trailing his, and was at the CCP with him for the majority of the time while we awaited the air Medevac. When asked by the family for all the details concerning a Soldier's last few moments, sometimes the details aren't always necessary, but the better times and the impact that he had on everyone's life is.

~CPT Chris Barlow, PL, A/2-35 IN

Although I haven't had to deal with the loss of a Soldier in my platoon, I had to deal with the loss of a Soldier in the company that I'd known very well. When he was killed, everyone was in shock for days because he was the first Soldier we had lost to enemy fire. The battalion and company conducted a fallen Soldier memorial service, which allowed everyone who knew the Soldier to have some closure.

~1LT Donnie Choe, PL, A/2-27 IN

Losing a Soldier to death, injury, or personal issues at home will affect his peers no matter what. Don't try and make your men forget about it because they won't and can't. Life is a series of experiences, good and bad, you will never change that. Again, take one day at a time. The best advice I can give is don't make them forget, but don't give them a chance to dwell and feel sorry for themselves. Continue patrolling, continue doing PT. Don't interrupt your routine to dwell on something somber. Continue doing what you were doing better and harder than before.

~1LT Lex Holmberg, PL, B/2-27 IN

We have lost only one Soldier in the Battalion TF. That loss affected the three Soldiers in my platoon. In combat, people will die. Expect that someone will be injured or worse in your deployment. Make a plan before hand. Ensure that you have all key data on hand for all Soldiers. If someone is injured have that Soldier call his next of kin. That will ease the minds of the family.

~1LT David Widder, Mortar PL, HHC/2-27 IN

Dealing with this scenario three times as a platoon leader during my deployment, I can honestly say that this is the hardest thing a platoon leader has to deal with. The best thing for you to do for the sake of your platoon is to drive on. You know as a platoon leader that there is an inherent risk on every combat operation, and even though these risks are calculated, injuries and deaths are still going to occur. The platoon needs to drive on, because it only lowers the morale and operational tempo to dwell on the events that occurred. If you did your job to insure that the appropriate measures were taken to provide the best safety measures during your operation, everything else is out of your control.

~2LT Eric Hill, PL, C/2-35 IN

11. What techniques/training did you use to best prepare Soldiers to deal with personal/family issues while deployed?

The first thing to do is know your Soldiers well. Then you will know the issues they face in their lives. Before we deployed, my platoon sergeant and I tried to sit down and talk with every Soldier about their personal and family plans. The unit had many checks and systems in place to ensure most issues were taken care of prior to the deployment, but it never hurts to ask a Soldier questions about their plans to invest, pay off a debt, or relocate their family. Sometimes a Soldier may be shy about an issue in their life and won't readily bring it up in group settings.- In the end, one of the best things you can do to help your Soldiers is give them the time to prepare their lives for the deployment.

~1LT Eliel Pimentel, XO, HHC/2-35 IN

The best way to deal with personal and family issues while deployed is to take advantage of your chaplains and aide and assist the family readiness group (FRG). Know your soldiers so you can identify an issue before it becomes a problem.

~2LT Nicole DeTomaso, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

I thought I did a good job knowing my Soldiers and identifying potential problems prior to the deployment. What I should have done, in conjunction with my platoon sergeant, is have a "personnel scrub" for every Soldier in the platoon. Every Soldier, in writing, every detail I could extract. For example, PVT Smith is married—second wife. She has two kids, he has three. Her two kids live with their father, two of his three live with them. I knew this stuff about my Soldiers, but I should have done a better job identifying potential problems. I could have done this by keeping a written log and following up with the Soldier. I have found that many Soldiers have a tendency to not give out sensitive personal information due to embarrassment or fear that their leaders may view them as weak. This happened to me on the deployment. The best advice is to know your Soldiers and their families personally. Don't just know about them, *know them*.

~1LT Thomas Bouchillon, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

First, give Soldiers a lot of time with their families prior to a deployment so they can take care of any legal/financial/personal issues they may have. Second, ensure your Soldiers have a plan on talking to their families prior to a deployment whether it is via mail correspondence or a weekly phone call. Finally, while being deployed ask your Soldiers if they are having any family issues that you or the COC can assist in.

~1LT Jeremy Endlish, FSO, C/2-35 IN



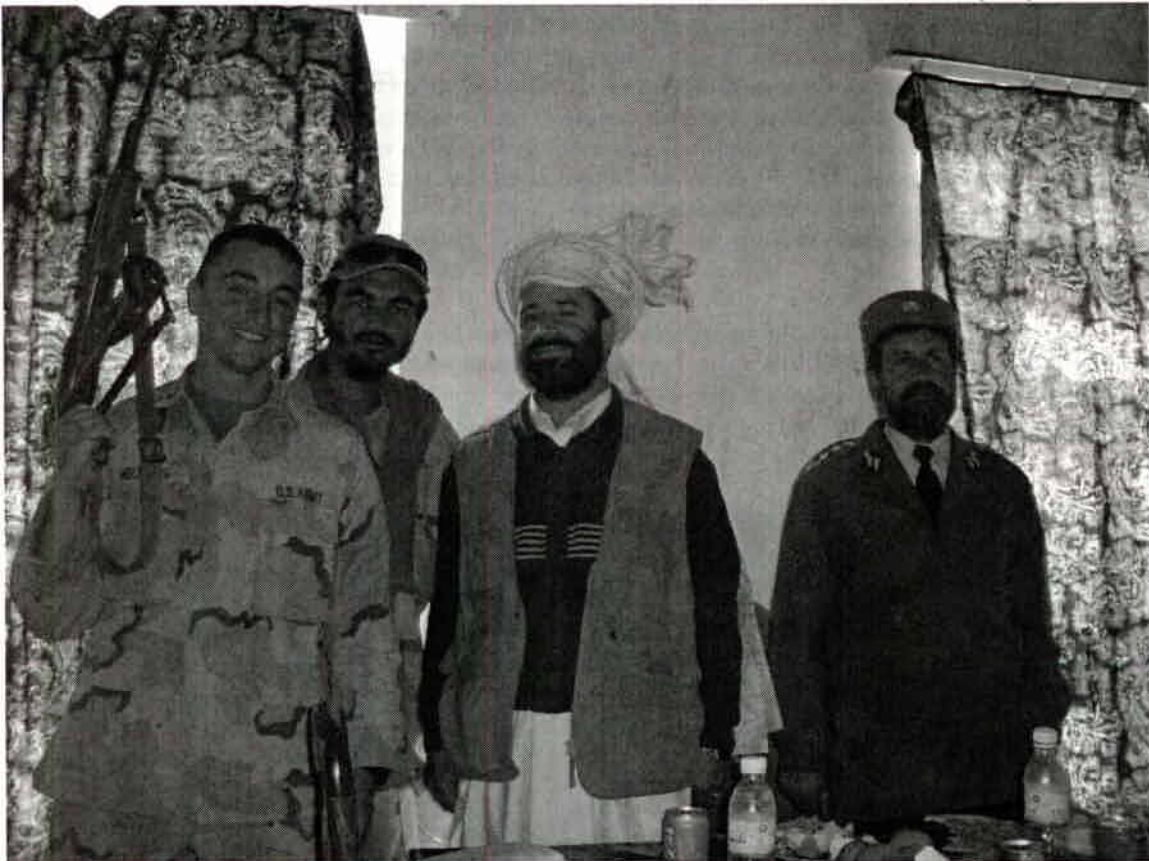
Before deploying to a combat zone it is especially important for leaders to become very aware of their Soldiers' personal lives. The leaders need to personally inspect Soldier's SGLI, Powers of Attorney, Wills or any other necessary paperwork. That Soldier's leadership failed him. Such involvement should not be portrayed as micromanaging or lack of trust, because it is simply caring for the welfare of Soldiers. Having two or more sets of eyes checking over the same paperwork will minimize any confusion or errors.

While deployed, it is also very important to ensure that morale calls are permitted if possible and that operations such as the mail are not handled lightly. Additionally, it is important to take time to quietly talk to each of your Soldiers about their personal life. Again, I like to share guard shifts with them and conduct an informal counseling session or a sensing session. Also, in quarterly formal counseling sessions personal and family issues should be a point of discussion. Lastly, if anything bad ever happens a Soldier should be given the necessary amount of time to grieve or handle whatever issues arise. No Soldier is mission essential. If he is, then the leadership has not trained the unit to standard and the leadership is at fault. Everyone in combat wants to know that the Soldier along side him is focused on the mission at hand and this cannot happen if personal issues are not resolved. Failure to resolve personal or family issues can severely damage the cohesion of the unit.

~1LT Tom Grywalski, Scout PL, HHC/2-35 IN

I made sure that I knew my soldiers' family situations before we deployed. I could tell which soldiers may have family issues develop during the deployment. I spoke with the soldiers to find out what they were doing in order to prevent difficult family situations from occurring. Before we deployed, my soldiers and their families attended short meetings about what to expect while their spouse was deployed. Our FRG also ensured that the soldiers' spouses knew that the FRG was there to support them.

~1LT Mia Suttles, PL, C/125 MI



This goes back to communication. We have had Soldiers that have family issues at home. We work with them to make sure they have the time to contact their families and also offer them time to sit and talk with the leadership to see what we can do for them. Visits to the chaplain are also offered to allow an outside party to help the Soldier deal with their issues.

~1LT Paul Spelock, XO, HQ&A/325 FSB

Taking the time to really get to know your Soldiers prior to deployment will aid in helping them deal with issues that occur during the actual deployment itself. If time permits, have a few section/platoon functions for the Soldiers and their families, as this type of relaxed atmosphere will allow you to spend time with them away from the stresses and demands of your daily work schedule. This will also enable you to get to know each Soldiers' family on a more detailed level, and that, in turn, will give you a better understanding of each Soldiers' personal life, which will have a significant impact on them and their

performance during the deployment. If you are married, encourage your spouse to take the lead in maintaining regular communication with the other spouses in the unit, and ensure all Soldiers' families are fully aware of the benefits and offerings available through organizations like unit Family Readiness Groups (FRG).
~1LT James Stokes, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 3rd BDE, 25th ID (L)

Filling out the proper paper work, putting together family care plans, etc. aren't the only techniques of preparing a soldier and his/her family for a deployment. The Family Readiness Group took a major part in ensuring the families were involved with the deployment as much as possible. We had meetings and cookouts prior to deploying, and while deployed, the platoon leaders wrote a monthly newsletter to keep family and friends updated. As for dealing with personal/family issues, you need to make sure you give the soldiers a gateway to come to you, the PSG, their squad leader, or team leader. From the beginning, I made it clear that my door is always open if anyone needs to talk, but on a professional/work-related topic we need to use our chain of command. It is extremely important for your soldiers to feel comfortable enough with you, to come and talk to you and share their personal problems. You must get to know each of them and spend time with them. Taking care of your soldiers is your job. With each problem, help the soldier figure out the best way to handle the situation, and then together go to the commander and get him/her involved.
~1LT Hollie Miller, PL, C/325 FSB

The best way to deal with Soldier issues is to frequently conduct some type of Family Readiness Group meeting with your unit whether it be at the platoon or the company level with the spouses or family members of the Soldiers. Utilize email to disseminate information at least monthly to keep family members informed on the unit status. Allow Soldiers to call home frequently if possible to talk to loved ones as this will lift morale and enable Soldiers to deal with personal or unresolved issues at the home front. Another way to help Soldiers deal with issues is to have small group meetings at the squad level to talk about the current situation in the combat area and incorporate discussion points of realistic situations that could pertain to anyone to help Soldiers deal with the crisis rather than ignore it or react inappropriately due to inexperience.
~1LT Gabriel Medley, XO, C/325 FSB

Again, accessibility is a key trait. Since I arrived at my unit only a couple weeks prior to deployment, I really didn't have much of an opportunity to get to know my Soldiers before we left. Still, issues did come about once we arrived in Kandahar. One thing that you learn in the military is that you will see a lot of unusual things. Don't try to take control of every issue by yourself. If a Soldier is having marital issues back home, it might not be the most beneficial for him if you try to play counselor, especially if you are a single officer. Again, be accessible but also know the appropriate means of dealing with a situation, as well as the best people for dealing with specific issues.
~2LT Rich Viola, FLE CDR, 325 FSB

Prior to deployment, ensuring all paperwork and family care plans are accurate and in place will remove any margin for error while deployed. This allows the soldier to focus on the mission and know that their family is taken care of, no matter what.

While deployed, ensuring soldiers receive their mail and are given time to e-mail or make phone calls home really makes all the difference. If a soldier is worried about their family issues at home, it would be difficult for them to focus while in combat.
~2LT Gisela Mendonca, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

Make sure everyone's financial and insurance paperwork is straight. Your Platoon sergeant should be on top of most of this. If he isn't, talk to your ISG. He'll definitely know what's up. There are also several cost free Army/Nationwide programs that the wives should know about should they ever need assistance with coping with things like depression. I personally wrote each of the wives in my platoon to let them know that I appreciated the sacrifices they make daily, and in closing I included the FRG leader's name and number as well as the Army assistance number should they need any assistance or just someone to talk to in the absence of their husband.
~CPT Chris Barlow, PL, A/2-35 IN

My platoon sergeant took charge of getting the platoon and their family ready for deployment by making a list of items to take care of before deployment. You can ensure that Soldiers will focus on their mission when deployed by allowing the Soldiers to spend time with their family and take care of important issues before deployment. Also, having a working FRG (Family Readiness Group) helps Soldiers deal with family issues while deployed.

~ILT Donnie Choe, PL, A/2-27 IN

The key to family issues is the FRG. You must build a strong FRG no matter how painful it is. Soldiers will not be effective if their mind isn't on the task at hand. We did not have a particularly strong FRG when we deployed. It was hard on the wives as they worked together to get through the deployment. Encourage all Soldiers to enroll and participate WITH their spouses in the FRG. This is just as important as training for combat.

*~ILT David Widder, Mortar PL,
HHC/2-27 IN*

There are several tools available to all of my Soldiers to deal with issues while deployed. I have always made it public to my Soldiers that I am always available to talk to about personal concerns my Soldiers are dealing with. If there is an issue or topic that a Soldier doesn't feel like he can discuss with me or I feel that it is above my level, I direct them to our battalion chaplain, who is a great source for advice and outreach. I feel that the unlimited access to phones and email have eliminated a lot of personal issues while deployed because of the consistent communication between the Soldier and his family. However, when this is not available, Soldiers do a good job of listening to each other.



~2LT Eric Hill, PL, C/2-35 IN

12. What advice would you give to a future officer preparing to lead Soldiers?

You owe it to your Soldiers to know yourself and what you value in life. You shouldn't spend time as a platoon leader figuring out who you are and why you joined the Army. If you are sure of yourself, then you will lead without fear or hesitation. - *Take what you do seriously, but remember to never take yourself too seriously.* Have a sense of humor; you will need it. Be able to take a joke and deal a few out as well. Study your profession and *continue to study* once you begin your Army career. Most of all, **listen** to your Soldiers and NCOs.

~1LT Eliel Pimentel, XO, HHC/2-35 IN

Some advice that I would give to an officer getting ready to lead soldiers is: Be confident, don't doubt yourself, always trust your instinct. Be humble, if you make a mistake learn from it. Enforce and maintain standards, know where to find and how to use resources. Be approachable; learn from your superiors, NCOs, peers, and soldiers. Prepare yourself physically, first impressions are lasting impressions.

~2LT Nicole DeTomaso, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

First, make sure you are committed to giving it everything you have. Not everyone has the heart to be a leader of Soldiers, and that is okay. But our country and our Soldiers deserve leaders that are 100% committed to the cause. Next, if you have a family, make sure they are committed to supporting you. The job of an Army wife is hard. Often times she has to be the mother and the father. It works best when she supports not only you as her husband, but when she believes in the cause our country is undertaking. Big-picture perspective is important, and if she supports the war, she is more likely to support you. Lastly, be



ready to learn. Get as much institutional knowledge as possible now, and then go into your unit with an open mind. Get your hands on everything and know how it works.

~1LT Thomas Bouchillon, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

I will keep this simple: 1) work out every day, 2) pay attention in OBC, 3) read field manuals and 4) work on listening skills.

~1LT Jeremy Endlish, FSO, C/2-35 IN

The first piece of advice is to remain open-minded and motivated. Embrace every opportunity that you have to learn from someone, especially the non-commissioned officers in your unit. Ask them questions, observe them, and learn from them, but make your own decisions and have the motivation and dedication to see them through. The second piece of advice is to remain flexible. The ability to adapt is critical for any leader. No mission will ever play out on the battlefield exactly as you have planned it. An officer's ability to adapt and adjust to the fog and friction on the battlefield is a necessity. Without flexibility every mission would fail. Lastly, do what you love. Try to pick a branch that best fits your personality and be honest in your self-assessment. Whichever branch you choose, however, always try your hardest to maintain a positive attitude and make the best out of everything. When you lead Soldiers they will reflect your attitude and if you are positive, then the unit will be happier and healthier.

~1LT Tom Grywalski, Scout PL, HHC/2-35 IN

Be patient. Do not try to jump into your new job and take a strong hold over things without observing how things operate first. Be open to your soldiers' and NCOs' ideas. You are expected to coach, teach, and mentor your soldiers, but remember that you should be open to receive it as well.

~1LT Mia Suttles, PL, C/125 MI

Get a good understanding of your expected job position. Contact your PSG and get to know the Soldiers. The PSG will be your most important link to your Soldiers.

~1LT Paul Spelock, XO, HQ&A/325 FSB

Soldiers will see, hear, and closely scrutinize everything you do, especially when you first arrive at your unit. It is paramount that you immediately establish yourself as a strong, fair, and consistent leader who is also willing to learn from his or her Soldiers. Set the highest standard in your platoon in as many areas as possible right off the bat, including physical fitness, military bearing, and knowledge of basic FM's. As you become integrated into the unit, take the time to really listen to your Soldiers about their problems, their lives, and their families. The more you know about them, the more you will be able to relate to them as a leader and mentor, and the easier it will be for you to motivate them to follow you anytime, anywhere. Soldiers know when their leaders have a genuine interest in their lives and well-being; show them you care, you know how to lead, and you are willing to put yourself to the test, and they will follow you anywhere. Sounds cliché, but it works and is the ground truth 99% of the time.

~1LT James Stokes, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 3rd BDE, 25th ID (L)

As you join your first platoon, go in with an open mind. You are the new student in a class that has been together for months, maybe even years. Yes it is your job to take charge, but take the first few days or weeks to watch, assess, and learn. Don't go in there with the mentality of "I know it all. I am in charge now. I want to do this and that and this." I'm not saying change is a bad thing, but assess first. You'll begin to filter in and see things that can be improved upon. Watch and learn from your PSG and NCOs. I can't say it enough. Watch and learn from your PSG and NCOs. Ask a million questions. Listen to their opinions and advice.

~1LT Hollie Miller, PL, C/325 FSB

The expression "leaders are made not born" takes the cake. No one is perfect, but those that strive to be tend to have more success than those that don't. As stated earlier, read the manuals in your field of expertise, and know the rules, rights, and law as a Soldier such as UCMJ.

Stay out of trouble. The biggest career ender that I have seen was due to alcohol and fraternization so watch your actions on and off duty. A venerable person is one that will take Soldiers to the next level because their actions are genuine and promote esprit de corps within the unit. Ultimately, be yourself and learn from your NCO support channel and your direct leadership. Find a role model in your career field to help guide you in your future endeavors, as this will help you resource all options.

~1LT Gabriel Medley, XO, C/325 FSB

Be open to change. Some people grow so comfortable with themselves that they refuse to grow to their full potential. Force yourself out of your comfort zone from time to time. It builds toughness and character, both of which you'll need. If you have an opportunity for additional training and military schooling, take that opportunity for the sake of your Soldiers if not yourself. Don't allow yourself to plateau – that can be as detrimental as failure if it persists.

Never shrug off criticism, but don't dwell on it either. If several people who know you fairly well make a criticism, it probably has some validity. With time, you'll probably get better at sorting out what's true and what's false. Remember, this is a key time for your own development. Take advantage of it while you have that opportunity.

~2LT Rich Viola, FLE CDR, 325 FSB

A wise ISG once told me, "you should knock on the door firmly to let the soldiers know you are there, but be careful not to knock the house down." Learn from those who came before you. Listen to your NCOs and make changes if need be once you have settled in. There are not a number of days before you can start making changes, but be careful not to change everything at once. Everyone has their own organizational skills and idiosyncrasies, let your soldiers learn about you while you learn about them too.

~2LT Gisela Mendonca, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

Be in shape when you show up. Follow your instincts. Listen to your NCOs, over time you'll

figure out which NCO's are consistently reliable. Always know your Battalion and Company Commander's intent and remain loyal to it. This is very important----as platoon leader you may not always see or understand the big picture. Train ruthlessly before deploying. When in theatre find a balance between missions, training, and downtime. Remember it's a marathon not a sprint. Soldiers will burn out on you if you run them into the ground.
~CPT Chris Barlow, PL, A/2-35 IN

Whether you're a quiet confident leader or a loud confident leader, don't let your pride make you do something you'll regret. Be a leader who can laugh at his own mistakes because as a brand new PL, you will make plenty of mistakes. And don't ever think that you are better than your Soldiers. Always treat your Soldiers with the same professional respect that you demand from them.

~ILT Donnie Choe, PL, A/2-27 IN

Advice I would give to a new PL:

Go to the range

Study doctrine

Know how to maneuver and communicate

Know how to call for fire

Study the area where you will be operating if going to a combat zone

Be able to interact with others on a personal level

Be confident and able to react under pressure

Take initiative and charge immediately, be the leader

Take care of Soldiers, listen to them, learn from them, and know them inside and out; be cognizant of their problems and understanding of family issues

Be a leader from day one, understand higher's intent two levels up, and make a decision that is both ethical and moral...a bad decision is better than no decision, but ultimately do what is right

Be a professional at all

times~2LT Patton Nix, PL,
C/2-27 IN

NEVER EVER
EVER EVER sacrifice your values. Take that for what it is. Again, you are the platoon LEADER for a reason. Make unpopular decisions if you feel in your gut it's the right thing to do, and make decisions you know will result in an ass kicking later from your superiors if you know it is morally, ethically, and tactically the right thing to do at the time. There are so many times during this deployment where I have been the senior



leader on the ground with no commander to ask advice or take orders from at the time of execution. As far as I am concerned no one can judge your actions after the fact because they weren't there. I have probably gotten yelled at by every officer senior to me at some time during my stay here, from Battalion Commander to assistant S3. I have learned a tremendous amount of lessons the hard way, and with the knowledge I have now, I would go back and approach a lot of things differently. But it brings me a tremendous amount of comfort to know that with the knowledge I had at the time I would not change a single thing. Not one, And that helps me sleep at night. Hope that makes sense.

There is nothing wrong with making a mistake, just make certain you learn from it.

~ILT Lex Holmberg, PL, B/2-27 IN

You have been given all the tools you need in IOBC. Now all that is left to do is execute. Use your NCO's to accomplish every task and also to learn from. They possess all the skills you do not and you have those that they do not. Together you will be able to do any mission. You are team.

~1LT David Widder, Mortar PL, HHC/2-27 IN

Devote all of your attention to developing your craft. This is your career for at least the next four years. Whether you want the responsibility, you are directly accountable for about thirty sons, brothers, and husbands. What you do has a direct effect on that Soldier, so take that into account when you make decisions on behalf of your platoon.

~2LT Eric Hill, PL, C/2-35 IN

Listen to your NCOs and peers. Most of them have a lot more experience than you do and will help you and not leave you out to dry. Know that you are not the subject matter expert; however know that you are the overall authority for the platoon, so your decision is final.

~2LT Christopher Suttles, PL, C/2-27 IN



13. What do you love most about being a LT?

The thing I love most about being a lieutenant is being close to Soldiers. In addition to being their tactical leader, you can also be somebody they can come to for advice. You can learn a lot by getting to know them and asking them for advice. You have the rare opportunity to build a team that will fight together in combat and a family that will stick together in garrison. The relationships you make in your platoon will last a lifetime, especially if those relationships develop in a combat environment. I may not remember every first and last name forever, but I will surely remember every face and many stories. As a platoon leader I've experienced far more out of life than what mine had to offer-- I've rejoiced in the arrival of newborn babies; I've picked Soldiers up at the police station after some poor decisions; I've seen Soldiers overcome substance abuse; I've seen Soldiers get married; I've taken Soldiers to credit counselors. --- When our unit was not allowed to take block leave for Christmas, I invited everyone to my house for dinner. We cooked and ate together like a big family. We smoked cigars and shared all our families' Christmas Eve traditions, and in the absence of our families back home, we were our own family. -- I think that while we are once again away from our families this coming Christmas, those Soldiers will be able to look back to that night and remember they have loved ones nearby.

~1LT Eliel Pimentel, XO, HHC/2-35 IN

The thing I love most about being a lieutenant are the Soldiers. Getting to know Soldiers and promoting and building the team endorse lasting memories. There is nothing more rewarding then spending time with your platoon after a long workday or accomplishing an important mission.

~2LT Nicole DeTomaso, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

The thing I love most is the close interaction with Soldiers. Soldiers generally like lieutenants. Especially those that are willing to learn. Soldiers don't joke around with captains, and certainly not field grade officers. I knew I had the right relationship with my Soldiers when one day they set up an elaborate prank on me. The next day, we were dispatching trucks, conducting PCIs, and getting ready to roll out on a tactical convoy. They were all business. I enjoyed having decision-making authority as a platoon leader. I also understood with that type of leadership came a lot of responsibility. I enjoyed that responsibility, and hopefully, used to benefit the unit and my Soldiers.

~1LT Thomas Bouchillon, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

The thing I love most about being an LT is the ability to interact with troops at the platoon level. When you are in a platoon you are given the chance to not only see individuals develop into better Soldiers, but also see yourself develop into a better leader. Additionally, when you are part of a platoon you are part of a family that everyone must work to improve and maintain.

~1LT Jeremy Endlish, FSO, C/2-35 IN

I absolutely love being a LT, because I get to work directly with Soldiers. Everyone will always tell you that your time as a platoon leader will be your best time in the Army and they are not lying. I always brushed off that comment, until I was actually in the Army and realized the truth in it. Being a part of a team is the greatest feeling. The camaraderie and fellowship that develops through enduring challenges and hardships together gives you a sense of gratification that is not easily described. It is wonderful. You are part of a team, a platoon, and a brotherhood. Your Soldiers are your teammates and you are the captain of the team. Being a LT puts you in a position where you are able to develop the type of brotherhood that will last a lifetime. This is a rare opportunity in the Army. You have to realize that after being a PL you will not be in command again for about 5 years until you become a company commander and that only lasts for approximately 18 months. Then, you are back to staff until your battalion command approximately 10 years later. As an LT you have the opportunity to hold a variety of jobs, all of which allow you to work very closely with Soldiers. That is what I love about being an LT.

~1LT Tom Grywalski, Scout PL, HHC/2-35 IN

Being able to make an impact on my Soldiers is the best part of being a LT. One example is that I have been able to help make an already outstanding Soldier into an even more impressive soldier by advising him to maintain his distance on things that distract him from fulfilling his potential to the fullest. After he was promoted to SGT, he realized this and thanked me for the encouragement to become the Soldier he is today. It is gratifying to know that I made a difference in my Soldiers' lives.

~1LT Mia Suttles, PL, C/125 MI

I love helping the Soldiers. Seeing them complete a mission ahead of schedule and being able to let other Soldier know how good they are doing. I like working with the Soldiers and helping get their career goals in line.

~1LT Paul Spelock, XO, HQ&A/325 FSB

Working with Soldiers. The first job I had was a PL, and that was the most enjoyable and rewarding experience to date. When you have the opportunity to work with the same group of people on a day-to-day basis, training, learning, and completing a multitude of different tasks and objectives together, you build bonds and friendships that last long after you have left that unit. I still work with many Soldiers from my old platoon, as the MI community is fairly small, and I still know the names of their spouses, their kids, where they are from, what their interests are, and many other details of each of their lives. Even though I left that platoon leader position almost two years ago, I took a part of each of those Soldiers with me. This job is all about the men and women with whom you serve, you live, you struggle, and you sacrifice, every hour of every day, especially during more strenuous times such as deployments.

~1LT James Stokes, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 3rd BDE, 25th ID (L)

I love the freedom to make mistakes and learn from them and working with Soldiers.

~2LT Andrew Johannes, PL, C/65th EN

Being a platoon leader is what I love most about being an LT. I know that one day I'll be in a staff position and miss being out there with the soldiers. The soldiers are what make my day. I've just recently transitioned over to a new unit, company, and platoon. Upon my arrival, the soldiers were eager to help me adjust to my new job and environment, and teach me about what it is they do day to day. I felt they were almost as excited to have me as I was to have them. Soldiers know an LT is new to the game, and they are always there to give you a pat on the back. It is your job to take care of the soldiers; however, if you stop and think about it, the soldiers are taking care of you as well.

~1LT Hollie Miller, PL, C/325 FSB



The most rewarding part of being an LT is directly leading Soldiers. Building a team can be challenging, but you reap the fruits for your labor. Your time is short as a Lieutenant so make the most of dealing directly with Soldiers issues and making a direct impact on a unit. Once you learn your area of expertise, you will know that training, leading and maintaining

becomes a rewarding experience. Being a Lieutenant gives you the chance to set your mark in the Army while being allowed to make mistakes at the same time. Your chance to grow and your chance to shine so make the most of it.

~1LT Gabriel Medley, XO, C/325 FSB

The higher in rank you ascend as an officer, the more distance seems to grow between you and your Soldiers. This is probably the time when you can get to know them best, when you're in charge of a (relatively) small element. For many LTs, this is the closest they will come to actually being one of the Soldiers. Take advantage of it while minding your responsibility. You'll learn quite a bit.

LTs probably have the most leverage to learn and make mistakes. There is more room for experimentation in planning training, setting standards, and developing your own leadership style. This shouldn't be mistaken for an excuse for carelessness and laziness, but rather an increased motivation in the entire professional development process. *~2LT Rich Viola, FLE CDR, 325 FSB*

The best part of being an LT is being with soldiers. Soldiers are the most amazing part of my day. Unfortunately I was on staff for my first ten months as a 2LT, but even with the minimal contact I had with soldiers then, they were the best part of my day. Now that I have a platoon, everyday is remarkably challenging and enjoyable. The best part of being around soldiers as an LT is that they want to teach you everything that they know, and they are so proud to do it. *~2LT Gisela Mendonca, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB*

The sense of camaraderie. Watching a platoon, grow and mature as a team. This will undoubtedly take place while deployed. *~CPT Chris Barlow, PL, A/2-35 IN*

What I love most about being a lieutenant is that you work with Soldiers at a level where your rank matters less than your performance. Your Soldiers will respect your rank no matter what, but they are more likely to be honest with you as their leader. You can learn a lot from your Soldiers. *~1LT Donnie Choe, PL, A/2-27 IN*

The thing I love most about being a LT is my Soldiers. I have an awesome platoon, full of awesome guys that simply want to do their jobs and go home. I love learning about them and interacting with them. Most importantly, I love leading them and knowing that they are my responsibility. I love being a rifle platoon leader. I love knowing that my decisions as a leader decide the fate of my unit, and that motivates me to make the most informed, knowledgeable decisions so that my platoon returns from combat without casualties, and without reservations that the duty they performed here was a positive one. *~2LT Patton Nix, PL, C/2-27 IN*

I love my ability to effect change. As a LT you can change people, professionally and morally. You are the first echelon of command leadership to 34 Soldiers. There are not many jobs in the world that offer such an opportunity. *~1LT Lex Holmberg, PL, B/2-27 IN*



I guess I'd have to say being at the level that allows interaction with the enlisted Soldiers. They are the reason that missions are successful or not. I enjoy working with the men who make results out of a commander's intent. *~1LT David Widder, Mortar PL, HHC/2-27 IN*

I honestly believe that this is the best job available to me. No other job allows you to do any

of the things associated with that of being a rifle platoon leader. Working with the kind of men that the infantry attracts to its ranks is also a great benefit. I strongly believe that it takes a certain type of person to volunteer for this, and to work together with these modern day warriors is an experience that few will ever experience. Being a PL is unique because it is the only time in your career as an officer that you will directly get to work with Soldiers.

~2LT Eric Hill, PL, C/2-35 IN

Being able to make a difference in my Soldiers. I love it when my Soldiers are griping and complaining and it only takes one word or a brief explanation from me to calm them down and motivate them. Knowing that the Soldiers respect me for being me is the best thing in the world for me.

~2LT Christopher Suttles, PL, C/2-27 IN

14. What makes a platoon leader successful?

There are many things that can make you a good Soldier and a good leader. A lot of those things you can learn and practice. But in my mind, you have to genuinely care about your Soldiers in order to be successful. If you truly and deeply care about all your Soldiers, the rest will follow--you will know how to plan and execute a mission well because it will keep them alive; you will find the time to talk to them because you want to know what's happening in their lives; you will dedicate your time and efforts to give them whatever help they need because you care for their well being. When Soldiers know you genuinely care for them, they will follow you anywhere and do anything to make you a success.

~1LT Eliel Pimentel, XO, HHC/2-35 IN

I believe what makes a platoon leader successful is the team. The platoon leader is only the supervisor, the platoon sergeant, squad leaders, and team leaders are the managers and the soldiers are the workforces, they make things happen. Being successful isn't about one person; it's about the whole team working together and completing the mission.

~2LT Nicole DeTomaso, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB

Attitude can make a platoon leader successful. A new platoon leader who arrives with a positive attitude towards everyone will definitely make a good impression. Just because one NCO didn't perform well for one platoon leader, does not mean that he can't perform well for you. Expect the best from people, and you will usually get it. Confidence goes a long way in success, as well. Be confident in your abilities. Know your weakness, admit to them, and work on them. Make sound decisions and take responsibility for your actions. Most of all, care about what you do. Remember that you work for the Soldiers. Lead them in a way that you would someone leading your son or daughter.

~1LT Thomas Bouchillon, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB



At one point in my life I thought success was merely measured by completing the mission on time and to standard. Today, however, I feel success is based on a lot more. Now success means going home after accomplishing something and asking myself two questions: 1) did I do my job to the best of my ability and 2) did I manage my resources responsibly? If I can answer yes to both of those questions, then I know I was successful. One must remember that tasks can be completed to time and to standard while not given 100% of ones ability and also while wasting resources to include man-hours and supplies.

~1LT Jeremy Endlish, FSO, C/2-35 IN

Perspective makes a platoon leader successful. First, a platoon leader must observe before making changes. He must keep perspective on the fact that his men have probably endured a number of previous platoon leaders all of whom had their own quirks to which the men had to adjust. A platoon leader must keep this in mind when first entering a platoon and when dealing with his Soldiers and especially his non-commissioned officers. A new platoon leader must work hard and allow time for the natural relationship to develop between he and his men.

Second, a platoon leader must not take himself too seriously. The Army, specifically the infantry, is an alpha male society and regardless of what is on your collar your men will test you. Realize that this is simply a fact of life and do not shy away from the challenges. Meet them in a mature, moral way and allow your preparedness to speak for itself. This implies that for a platoon leader to be successful he absolutely must arrive to his unit in superior physical condition and must know the academic portion of his job. Most of all, the platoon leader must not be afraid to get dirty or pull long hours. Regardless of your natural abilities, your work ethic and discipline will speak volumes to your men.

Third, a platoon leader must keep in perspective just how true leadership develops. True loyalty and leadership that will endure the trying times does not magically appear because of a diploma or a commissioning certificate. It appears through sharing hardships and through the PL leading from the front. A platoon leader must never ask anything of his men that he would not ask of himself, whether it is digging a fox hole or manning an observation post.

~1LT Tom Grywalski, Scout PL, HHC/2-35 IN

Being a well-rounded, confident, and approachable person who is able to accomplish any task given to him/her is what makes a platoon leader succeed. As long as you hold those attributes, the rest will fall into place with the support of your peers and soldiers.

~1LT Mia Suttles, PL, C/125 MI

A good PL communicates with their PSG and has a good working relationship with them. Knowledge of the regulations and operations of their position. This will help when monitoring Soldiers for efficiency and planning. This will also help when your area is being tasked for details and missions so you can get the minimum number of Soldier in your AO to complete the mission.

~1LT Paul Spelock, XO, HQ&A/325 FSB

Strong communication skills, confidence, and a willingness and desire to learn.

Communication is critical to your success in dealing with a multitude of different people every day in the Army. During the fast-paced tempo typically experienced during deployment, you must be able to make your point quickly and clearly so your Soldiers and superiors understand your intent and your reasoning. Being an effective communicator allows you to build more positive relationships with others, sort out problems more quickly and diplomatically, and express yourself more concisely and effectively.

Confidence in yourself will trickle "down" to the rest of your Soldiers and give them assurance in your abilities as a leader. Ensure you do not come across as arrogant or proud; however, a quiet confidence will be sensed by the people with whom you work and will reflect positively upon you. Have confidence in the training you have received and your ability to utilize and implement that training into making sound, authoritative decisions every day; do this and you cannot go wrong.

Finally, a willingness and desire to learn are both crucial for self-development as you progress in your Army career. Never reach a point when you think you know all there is to know about something; continue to create opportunities, both military and non-military related, in which you can learn something new. Taking the time outside of work to teach yourself a language, a skill, or even a hobby, will be a key factor in maintaining a sharp mind as well as giving yourself an outlet to relieve stress and focus on something besides work, especially during a deployment.

~1LT James Stokes, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 3rd BDE, 25th ID (L)

I feel like all thirteen questions I just answered, answer this last question. To sum it all up, taking care of your soldiers, knowing your soldiers, establishing a good relationship with your PSG and NCOs, being willing to go that extra mile, exceeding the standard, etc. will make you a successful platoon leader.

~1LT Hollie Miller, PL, C/325 FSB

Success is determined by results. To achieve the best results, follow the aforementioned suggestions as they will serve as guidelines for you to mold and shape into your own. Everyone can achieve success but the

route to success may be entirely different than that of your counterpart. Be humble until you find your niche, capitalize on it and excel. ***~1LT Gabriel Medley, XO, C/325 FSB***

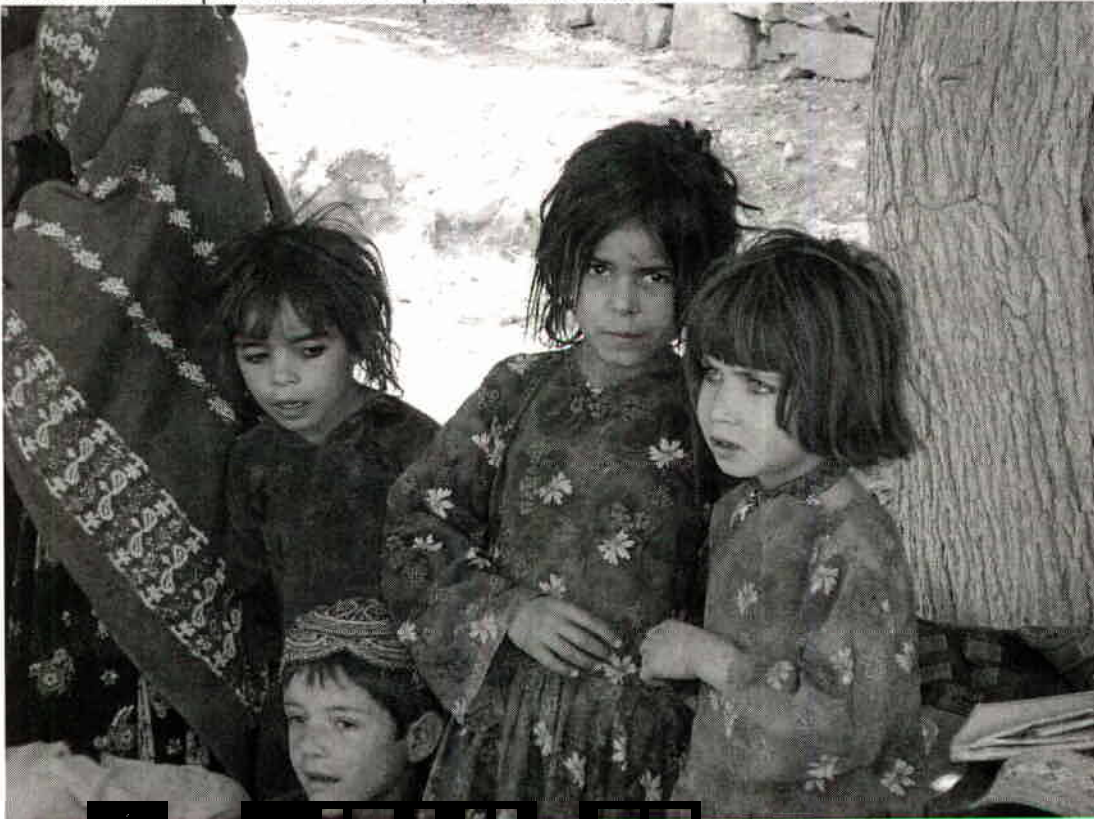
Successful platoon leaders stem from effective NCOs and other mentors. Platoon leadership involves constant learning from these people. It's up to the LT, however, to immediately apply that knowledge and continue to seek self-improvement.

Communication skills are invaluable as an LT. Poor communication is a common cause of failure but never an excuse. Exercise effective communication with your subordinates and demand that they do the same. If you tend to distance yourself from your Soldiers, then that will obviously affect how frequent they communicate with you. Maintain a presence, ask questions, and always prepare constructive criticism as you see fit. A big part of your job is supervising, assessing, and responding, not only in regards to your subordinates but also your own performance. ***~2LT Rich Viola, FLE CDR, 325 FSB***

A platoon makes a PL successful. Without NCOs building soldiers and soldiers working hard everyday, a PL could not be successful. ***~2LT Gisela Mendonca, PL, HQ&A/325 FSB***

Simply put, the Soldiers and the NCO's in your platoon make you a successful platoon leader. But that doesn't mean that you can slack off and totally rely on your platoon. You have to give it your best effort everyday to look out for your platoon and your Soldiers. Remember, you work for your Soldiers. ***~1LT Donnie Choe, PL, A/2-27 IN***

The platoon makes the platoon leader successful. The PL heavily relies on the senior NCOs in the platoon to properly train and educate their subordinates. They are the backbone of the unit. The PL, with good NCOs, has a relatively easy job to be successful. However, with poor NCOs, the PL must focus his efforts into training and motivating those NCOs, or finding someone else to better perform the job. Those circumstances will make the PL successful within his unit. However, for a PL to be truly successful for both the unit and himself, he must inspire his Soldiers and motivate them, then reward them for their efforts. He must aspire to have the best platoon in the battalion. ***~2LT Patton Nix, PL, C/2-27 IN***



Again, you are not an individual and your OER doesn't mean anything if you die in Afghanistan because your platoon sucked. You are a manager and leader of 34 men. Train them the best you can, let them train you, and let them train each other. Everything you need is right there for you when you arrive for your first day of work, its utilizing it to its fullest potential that means success or failure.

~1LT Lex Holmberg, PL, B/2-27 IN

A PL is successful when he is able to complete any and all missions given to him. He should be able to advise the Commander on the status and ability of his men to accomplish any task. When you know the limits of your men, you can predict what they can and cannot do. This will allow you to make decisions that will be successful on the battlefield and lead to mission accomplishment.

~1LT David Widder, Mortar PL, HHC/2-27 IN

The key to being a successful platoon leader is to be strong in every aspect of your job spectrum. Many feel that they can be strong in one area and it will overshadow their weaknesses, but the best Soldiers I have met have been well-rounded. Being physically fit is just one area. Other areas are often times neglected, and this can easily make or break a new PL. Interpersonal skills in many ways are just as important as tactical or technical knowledge. Organization and time management are also skills that a successful platoon leader has in his arsenal. Some traits cannot be taught, and you either have them or you don't. However, the biggest thing that will make a platoon leader successful is a natural and effective leadership style. Without a comfortable leadership style, a working relationship with the platoon is severely hindered, which results in poor performance.

~2LT Eric Hill, PL, C/2-35 IN



Afghan Leader Book
OEF 5 April 2004-May 2005
3rd Brigade, "Broncos!", 25th ID (L)



Meet the Contributors



2LT Richard Viola

My name is Richard Viola. I received my commission as an Ordnance 2LT from Wheaton College ROTC on 11 May 2003. I am currently the LTF-325 FLE commander in Shindand, Afghanistan. Upon return to Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, I will resume my duties as a DS Platoon Leader in charge of 53 Soldiers. I've also been the company XO, as well as a Platoon TAC at ROTC Advanced Camp prior to reporting to OBC. My military schooling consists of Airborne School and Ordnance Officer Basic Course at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. My AKO address is richard.c.viola@us.army.mil

2LT Andrew Johannes

Current Job: 2-5 IN Task Force Engineer and 2/C/65th EN BN Platoon Leader

Previous Job: EOBC Student

School: USMA – West Point

Year Group: 2003

Branch: Engineers

AKO email: andrew.johannes@us.army.mil, Telephone #: 303 523 9582

Army Schools: Air Assault, Airborne, Ranger

Duties and Responsibilities: Platoon Leader (28 Sappers), Task Force Engineer (tactical planning of engineer assets), FOB Project Manager / Builder (designing, requesting approval, resourcing, and building FOBs), Task Force CERP officer (supervising local community service projects), Camp Commandant (planning the layout of the FOB and developing Camp SOPs), local well inspector, local building inspector, local road inspector, construction engineer (vertical and horizontal), pump mechanic (installing and monitoring shower pump), generator mechanic (fixing/servicing the FOB generators), drainage engineer (developing and building a drainage plan for the FOB), power usage engineer (developing plans to power FOBs and requesting the materials and generators), site surveyor for buildings and local projects (i.e. junkyards), demolition supervisor (blowing up caches with EOD), LNO for local contractors for building projects, and Report of Survey officer.

1LT Hollie Miller

My name is Hollie Miller. I am a 2003 graduate of Marshall University in W.V. I was a member of the ROTC program for two years. Upon graduating, I went to Fort Knox, KY to work with basic camp cadets as a squad tactical officer (Great Experience). From Fort Knox I moved on to Fort Sam Houston, TX for the Medical Service Corps OBC. When completing OBC I moved on to Hawaii in October to be a part of the 725th Main Support Battalion, 25th Infantry Division (Light). I became the Treatment Platoon Leader. I found out I would be deploying as soon as arrived to the unit. My platoon's job from then on out was to medically prepare all soldiers for the deployment. In April 2004, my company deployed to many parts of Afghanistan. I was located in K2, Uzbekistan, working as the Hospital OIC for the first six months of the deployment. After six months, I was reassigned to a new unit, 325th Forward Support Battalion, 25th Infantry Division (Light) in Kandahar, which is currently my location. I am now an Ambulance Platoon Leader. A few of my platoons duties consist of picking up patients at the gates, providing medical care to patients at the gates, picking up patients from the flight line, providing coverage for mine clearing, etc.

CPT Christopher Barlow

Current Job: Platoon Leader (2nd Platoon, A Co. 2-35 Infantry)

Year Group: 2000

Email: christopher.barlow@us.army.mil

Army Schools: MSOBC, Airborne, and Ranger School

I was originally commissioned as a Medical Service Corps officer out of the University of Colorado at Boulder. I attended OBC at Fort Sam Houston and was assigned to 2-35 Infantry Battalion out of Schofield Barracks (25th ID) as the Medical Platoon Leader (MEDO). I remained the MEDO for roughly 18 months, and was later asked to stay on as the HHC XO within the Battalion. After holding this job for just over a year it was time for me to take on an actual Medical job. However, before moving to another unit and after several long discussions concerning my future with the chain of command, I decided to branch transfer to Infantry. From there, I headed off to Ranger School, and returned to assume a Line Platoon in Alpha Company. I've been the platoon Leader now for

over 15 months, and I'm hoping to keep it for as long as possible. I'm quite certain my best years as an officer will be spent right here as platoon leader.

Deployment Duties: We've been forward deployed to Afghanistan now for five months and still have seven more in front of us. During our first 4 months my platoon was assigned to Fire Base Tycz located in the Oruzgon Province. This was an incredible but equally busy opportunity for the platoon. We conducted two sometime three combat patrols a day, and most which were mounted. The key to success when patrolling the same area or district in this case is to break your routine. Always use different routes of infil and exfil, vary the times of day that you leave the fire base, and whenever possible stay off the roads (provided there is no evidence of land mines in the area). Also, whenever developing a patrol plan always ensure you've incorporated the "fatal five". 1. Routes of Infil 2. Routes of Exfil 3. Fires 4. Medevac 5. Commo. Cover these and you'll be OK.

1LT Thomas Grywalski

My name is Thomas Grywalski and I graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point on 2 June 2001. I entered into the Infantry and am currently serving with 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry in Afghanistan. My military schooling includes the Infantry Officer Basic Course, Air Assault School, Airborne School, and Ranger School. My previous jobs include being an Infantry line platoon leader and the Battalion Adjutant. Currently I am the Scout Platoon Leader for the Task Force. I am in charge of a 19 man platoon that is task organized into three scout teams, each of which contains an M24 sniper team and a .50 cal sniper team. Our operations include a variety of observation missions, sniper missions, and direct action missions conducted primarily with Task Force Cacti, the Afghan National Army, the Afghan Special Forces, and the U.S. Special Forces. My AKO email address is, as follows:
thomas.grywalski@us.army.mil.

1LT Paul Spelock

Ordnance

Marshall University, University of Pittsburgh, Huntington Junior College of Business, University of Phoenix Online

Current Positions: Platoon Leader 221st OD CO
XO HQ/A 325th, 25ID
CO HQ/A 325th, 25ID

Previous Positions: PL 261st OD CO
XO 261st OD CO
CO 261st OD CO

I have been tasked with being the XO of HQ/A 325, my mission with this unit is to make sure the maintenance of all vehicles within the company is being done in a timely manner. While in a combat zone, a new LT can be expected to pick up many additional duties outside their normal scope of operations. Time management skills and communication are necessary to accomplish this.

1LT Jeremy Endlish

Current Job/Year Group: C/2-35 INF FSO, YR 2002

Previous Jobs: General Support Battery FSO and Platoon Leader

Email: Jeremy.endlish@us.army.mil

Army Schools: FAOBC, Airborne

Narrative: As an FSO I am responsible for integrating and controlling all indirect, fixed wing and rotary assets for company missions here in Afghanistan. I also act as the primary fires advisor for my company commander before, during and after all combat missions. To date I have conducted over 5 combat operations where at a minimum at least one fire mission was shot with the company mortars, which have proven themselves an invaluable resource.

1LT Eliel Pimentel

My name is Eliel H. Pimentel - USMA Class of 2002. My Army schools include: Airborne School, Infantry Officer

Basic Course, and Ranger School. After being a platoon leader for nearly a year, I became a company executive officer just prior to our deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom V. As an XO, I was responsible for the logistics and maintenance for a company combat team at a forward operating base containing nearly 250 soldiers of various specialties and nations, over 30 vehicles, a DFAC, a FARP (forward aircraft refueling point), various indirect fire weapon systems, and a medical clinic. We ran and supported continuous missions and patrols from the firebase that, among others, included village assessments, cordon and searches, rescue operations, resupply missions, and ambushes.

Email: eliel.pimentel@us.army.mil

2LT Nicole DeTomaso

I am currently the supply platoon leader for 325FSB, 3BDE, 25th ID, Schofield Barracks, HI. As the supply platoon leader I am responsible for the water purification section, petroleum section, and the Central Receiving Point. As a whole my platoon is responsible for providing services to support approximately 30,000 soldiers.

I graduated from Michigan State University in May of 2003 and was commissioned as a Quartermaster Officer. I graduated from the Quarter Master Officer Basic Course (QMOBC) in February 2004, and immediately reported to Fort Benning for Airborne School. After earning my Parachutist's Badge I reported to Schofield Barracks Hawaii. I spent a few months as the rear detachment executive officer for 325FSB, and then I deployed to Kandahar Afghanistan. My AKO address is Nicole.detomaso@us.army.mil.

1LT Donnie Choe

I am an infantry officer currently acting as a rifle platoon leader for 1st Platoon, A Co, 2/27 IN deployed to Afghanistan. Before becoming a platoon leader, I attended airborne school, sapper leader course, infantry officer basic course, and ranger school. I am a USMA grad, class of 2002 who is fortunate enough to have had 9 months of PL time in garrison and 7 plus months of PL time in combat. I've assumed duty as the company executive officer on a few occasions in the absence of the actual XO. However, what I enjoy most is the responsibility that comes with leading a platoon on extended missions that often last more than two weeks at a time. Please feel free to email me at

Donnie.choe@us.army.mil.

1LT Thomas Bouchillon

AKO: thomas.j.bouchillon@us.army.mil

I am currently the Adjutant for 325th Forward Support Battalion. Prior to that, I was a truck platoon leader for 16 months, six months in Afghanistan with the 325th. I served on battalion staff as the Assistant SPO and the Assistant S3 for 725th Main Support Battalion prior to being a platoon leader. I attended college at the University of North Alabama and graduated with a commission in May 2001 in the Transportation Corps. I have attended TOBC, Air Assault School, SPO Course Phase I and Phase II, and virtually every unit movement course imaginable. As a platoon leader for my first six months in Afghanistan, my platoon accumulated over 11,000 miles and conducted over 700 transportation missions. My trucks and my soldiers have conducted missions in Jalalabad, Ghazni, Bagram, Salerno, Spin Buldak, Qalat, Kandahar, and several other places in the CJOA. We have supported every type of unit imaginable—infantry, artillery, British Royal Air Force, New Zealanders, Romanians, French TG, SOF, KBR, base operations, Marines, Air Force, Navy, just to name a few.

1LT James Stokes

My name is 1LT Jamie Stokes, and I graduated from James Madison University in May 2001 with a degree in Accounting and an ROTC commission as a Military Intelligence Officer. My previous jobs included ten months as a Platoon Leader for a Tactical Human Intelligence Collection Platoon and four months as the J2 Battle Captain for a Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force during deployment to Zamboanga, Philippines in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. I have completed the Military Intelligence Officer Basic Course and Air Assault School. I am currently the Assistant S2 (Intelligence Officer) for the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, now taking part in OEF-V in Afghanistan. My section is responsible for providing intelligence collection support and analysis during troop engagements, conducting threat assessments of all Anti-Coalition Militia within Regional Command South, facilitating liaison with multiple military and non-military collection agencies, and briefing the Brigade Commander

nightly in regards to current enemy activity and assessed enemy plans of action against US forces. My email is james.j.stokes@us.army.mil, and my current DSN phone number is 318-841-1006.

2LT Patton Christopher Nix

AKO: patton.nix@us.army.mil

Branch: Infantry

Schools: West Point Class of 2003

Major: Aerospace Engineering

Airborne

Air Assault

Infantry Officer Basic Course

Ranger School

Infantry Mortar Leaders Course

While I have only been in country for one month, this short period of time has demanded much out of me as a leader. I have been in charge of my platoon, a liaison for both the United States and my commanders, and basically a counselor for personal issues within my unit.

The primary and only mission that my unit has partaken in since my arrival in country is preparation for and execution of the national elections. My responsibility was basically to ensure security, delivery and pickup of ballots to and from election sites, and safe return of ballots. Additionally, presence patrols were required in order to intimidate the enemy and make them wary of attacking election sites. We successfully completed all of the above with only minor complications.

As far as general readiness, my responsibility as a PL is to find creative ways to train in a combat scenario. In a lot of ways it is easier than in garrison since companies have a lot of leeway with what they can do in their individual FOBs. However, the leadership must find ways to integrate training with the natural surroundings, while being careful not to intimidate/scare the local population. The platoon leader must ensure that his unit is always combat ready, and effective. That means maintaining training and physical fitness, while caring for the needs of individual soldiers.

The platoon leader is required to be flexible. Nearly all of our ops since I arrived in country have been mounted, something I know very little about simply because of lack in experience. Squad and platoon movements are frequent. Being able to react to contact while mounted, with both sized elements, is a necessary learning point for any new platoon leader in this type of scenario.

The PL also acts as a liaison with the local nationals. He must understand common customs and courtesies of the region in which he is operating, and be able to interact with the local populous. In this case, the Commander's intent is to win the respect and collaboration of the local nationals, treat them with respect and make them an asset to security (if we are securing their interests, they will help secure ours). We can only do that by interacting with them on a personal level and helping them understand our role in their country. A good leader can do that simply by treating the locals with respect, and catering to their needs when we can reasonably do so.

Finally, the PL must be able to deal with issues that arise in the lives of soldiers. For instance, since I have been in country I have dealt with a divorce/monetary issue that one of my team leader's is struggling with. The leader must be cognizant of those issues, and be sensitive to the needs of soldiers. A soldier who is having problems in his personal life cannot focus 100% of his efforts on his duties and responsibilities. A leader must care and help soldiers overcome those issues in order to make his platoon more combat effective, and ensure that his soldiers and their families live fulfilling lives outside of the Army.

1LT David Widder

1LT David Widder graduated from Ohio University in 2001 with a BA in Economics. He attended Infantry Officer Basic Course after graduation. Upon Graduation from Ranger and Airborne schools he was assigned to 2/C/2-27 Infantry Battalion. He served in that position for 15 months. He then served as the Company Executive Officer for 13 months, 5 of that in a combat zone. He was then assigned as the Battalion Mortar Platoon Leader where he currently serves.

As an executive officer he was in charge of all classes of supply for a 145-man task force, property accountability, as well as the maintenance on all unit equipment to include 17 vehicles.

As the mortar platoon leader he is in charge of 6 mortar tubes. He has two 120MM mortars and four 81MM mortars. He is charged with ensuring that accurate and timely fires are available to support the battalion commander's intent. The unit has not been employed as a Platoon in 7 months of combat. They have been used as squads. The addition of two 120MM mortars to the MTOE has cause the Platoon to use some new TTP's. 1LT Widder is charged with ensuring that employment meets the Commander's intent and maximizes effectiveness of the Platoon.

1LT Widder has been stationed at Orgun Fire Base, Afghanistan. He has been throughout Paktika and Logar Provinces supporting Operation Enduring Freedom and the Afghan elections. He has been on numerous counter-rocket patrols, company missions, battalion missions, and supported developing a new company sized FOB while serving as the company executive officer.

If you have questions please feel free to contact him at david.widder@us.army.mil

2LT Christopher Suttles

I am 2LT Christopher M. Suttles, assigned to 3rd PLT C Co. 2-27 INF BN. I am currently a platoon leader of the Heavy Weapons Platoon for my company. My platoon is in charge of all the vehicles and heavy weapons for the company. The platoon and I move the other two platoons in the company around so that they can perform dismounted missions. My most significant accomplishment was with the help of my PSG, I was able to take a Light Infantry Platoon and turn them into a Heavy Weapons Platoon. My platoon before I came to the unit was considered the OPFOR platoon and now we have become the Battalion main effort when needed. We took vehicles that barely ran when we arrived and now our vehicles are the best in the Battalion. I consider myself blessed with the platoon I received and the PSG I was put with to go to war.

Prior to the Army, I was enlisted in the Navy for six years. After I got out of the Navy, I went to college at Florida State University and graduated in 2003. While in ROTC I attended Airborne school in 2000 and Air Assault school in 2001. I was branched MI with a branch detail of INF. After graduating from college I attended IOBC and then Ranger school. My AKO email address is christopher.suttles@us.army.mil.

1LT Stephen Holmberg

AKO: Stephen.a.holmberg@us.army.mil

I am 1LT Stephen Alexander Holmberg. Graduated from Boston University and Army ROTC in 2002. I have been a Platoon Leader for 19 months (and counting) in B-CO, 2-27 Infantry. I have attended the Airborne and Air Assault courses.

Hope this helps to whoever reads it. Feel free to contact me at any time.

1LT Mia Suttles

My name is 1LT Mia Suttles and I graduated from Florida State University in April 2002 with a degree in International Affairs and Spanish. While I was a part of the Seminole Battalion, I was able to go to Airborne School in 2000 and earn my Airborne wings. After I was commissioned and attended MI OBC, I moved to Hawaii and became the Assistant S-2 (Intelligence Officer) for the 2nd Brigade Combat Team. While the Assistant S-2, I attended Air Assault School and earned my Air Assault Badge. I am now the Analysis and Control Team Chief/Headquarters Platoon Leader for C Co, 125th MI BN. My deployed duties range from Headquarter tasks to coordinating for intelligence collection for the 3rd Brigade Combat Team. My e-mail account is mia.suttles@us.army.mil.

2LT Eric Schuyler Hill

School: University of Virginia

Year Group: 2003

Branch: Infantry

AKO Email address: eric.s.hill1@us.army.mil

Army Schools: Infantry Officer Basic Course, Airborne School, Ranger School

- Platoon leader during 10 combat operations

- Confiscated and destroyed over 200 RPGs, 30 mortars, 10 AK-47s and ammunition, 20,000 Dyska rounds, 2 recoilless rifles and ammunition from ACM forces
- Responsible for over \$1,000,000 worth of equipment
- Conducted numerous combat air assaults, ground assault convoys, and village raids
- Helped facilitate Afghanistan's first democratic election

1LT Gabriel Medley

AKO: Gabriel.medley@us.army.mil

1LT Gabriel L. Medley began his endeavors with the US Army by accepting a 4-Year Army ROTC Scholarship in 1997 to Grambling State University in Grambling, LA. He completed his degree as a distinguished military graduate with a B.A. in Psychology and was commissioned in the Medical Service Corps in the spring of 2001.

1LT Medley's first assignment was as a Medical Platoon Leader, 1st Battalion 503rd Infantry Regiment, Camp Casey, Korea. After completing a year tour in Korea, 1LT Medley was afforded a second opportunity with his second Medical Platoon Leader position assigned to 2nd Bn 5th Infantry Regiment in Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. During this assignment the unit was deployed to Westpoint, NY for cadet summer training, and the Joint Readiness Training Center in Fort Polk, LA. Following this assignment 1LT Medley was selected to be the Executive Officer of Charlie Company 325th Forward Support Battalion. The Unit is currently deployed to the Khandahar Airfield, Afghanistan in Operation Enduring Freedom #5 to support the Global War on Terrorism.

1LT Medley's training includes the AMEDD Officer Basic Course, and the Unit Movement Officer's Course.

1LT Medley's awards include the Army Commendation Medal. He is also authorized to wear the Expert Field Medical Badge, the Parachutist Badge, and the Air Assault Badge.

1LT Medley is currently married to the former Christina Lynn Springer of Morgantown, WV. They have two children: Kiarra and Ailani.

Duties and Scope:

Executive Officer of an MTOE Forward Support Medical Company in the 25th Infantry Division (Light) deployed in Afghanistan; comprised of a headquarters section, a treatment platoon and an ambulance platoon. Provide Echelon I and II Combat Health Support to forward operating bases and area support in an Echelon III facility to a 10,000 soldier coalition force in Khandahar Army Airfield Afghanistan. Responsible for the maintenance and accountability of 22 prime movers (8 pacing items), 7 trailers, 5 generators, 26 medical equipment sets (5 pacing items, MTO&E support equipment and installation equipment valued in excess of \$3 million. Responsible for executing the CHS plan and improving overall command and control for all medical evacuation platforms in support of the southern region of Afghanistan. Serve as the company commander in his absence.

2LT Gisela Mendonca

My name is Gisela Mendonca, and I graduated from Florida State University in May of 2003. After receiving my commission I was an instructor at the Cadet Basic Camp in Ft. Knox, KY and then proceeded to my Transportation OBC at Ft. Eustis, VA. Upon arrival to Schofield Barracks, HI, I became the Movement Control Officer (MCO) for the 325th Forward Support Battalion. I remained in that position for the first seven months of the deployment. Currently I am the truck PL for 19 soldiers in HQ&A Company LTF 325. As the MCO for the Battalion I was responsible for overseeing the coordination of host nation support, as well as overseeing the inbound sustainment for all of Kandahar and the FB/FOBs we support. My AKO address is gisela.mendonca@us.army.mil.