



# Building the New Culture of Training

General Robert W. Cone, U.S. Army

**O**UR ARMY IS approaching a crossroads. Even as we continue examining wartime lessons, transitioning to an Army of preparation, and realizing the digital revolution's potential, we are confronting a number of crucial decisions. Among them is defining our approach to reinvigorating how the Army trains and readies for future conflicts. What we already know is that any future progress rests upon inspiring this young generation of soldiers. There is little chance such inspiration can be found in a haphazard approach. Rather, we must take a slight pause in our tempo to engage in serious reflection and assess the future of training.

Ultimately, three imperatives emerge as the foundation for training the Army of 2020:

- Return ownership of training to commanders and hold them responsible for engaging our young leaders.
- Refine and improve our understanding of the human elements of warfare.
- Harness the promise of technology to allow us to train faster, better, and more efficiently.

Reviewing the lessons learned following our last transition from a major war is helping to craft these imperatives into a coherent narrative. Our Army has been through this before. The Army that left Vietnam faced many of the challenges we confront today. At that time, General William DePuy and the newly formed U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command stepped forward to lead an intense, introspective review of how our Army trained and educated itself. TRADOC's efforts were controversial and took years to implement. However, the reward for this perseverance was a set of four innovations that changed our Army forever: standards-based training, the Noncommissioned Officer Education System, operational concepts, and "the Big 5"—the Abrams, Bradley, Paladin, Apache, and Blackhawk.

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Soldiers from the 662nd Movement Control Team, 25th Transportation Battalion, 501st Sustainment Brigade observe the arrival of M109A6 Paladin self-propelled howitzers via rail car at Camp Casey, South Korea, 27 March 2007. (U.S. Navy, MC01 Daniel N. Woods)

# Report Documentation Page

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE <b>FEB 2013</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2013 to 00-00-2013</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Building the New Culture of Training</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, Military Review, Truesdell Hall, 290 Stimson Ave., Unit 2, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 66027</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

Driven by an increasingly bellicose and adventurous Soviet Union, these innovations sparked a renaissance in operational thought and unit training. New initiatives, such as the School of Advanced Military Studies, meaningful doctrine, and a pioneering leader development system produced the most professional and competent leaders in the world. The results, obvious to anyone within our Army, were demonstrated to the world when U.S. forces shattered the Soviet-equipped Iraqi Army twice within a decade.

Just as impressively, 40 years after the “DePuy revolution,” the system he instituted remained robust enough to see the Army through a decade of war in Afghanistan and Iraq. We may be a bit battered and frayed, but we remain the most capable fighting force in the world.

Emerging from Vietnam, our predecessors left us something of inestimable value—a culture of training. In succeeding decades, the personal commitment of commanders to training excellence built the superb Army that performed so magnificently in recent conflicts. Our ability to adapt and to remold units while in contact with the enemy was built on this foundation of excellence. Furthermore, Army leaders, forged in the crucible of training, were

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our strategic reserve who led wartime adaptation. Simply put, our culture of training created an unbeatable combat overmatch against our enemies—no one could train faster or better than the U.S. Army.

## **The “New” Reality**

Before we can arrive at a compelling vision of future training, we must first appreciate the impact 11 years of war has had on the Army. The moral imperative to prepare our young men

and women for the situations they would face in Iraq and Afghanistan forced trainers to focus on a narrow range of skills. This entirely appropriate training focus came at the expense of broader leader development and the critical individual, collective, and staff skills required for large-scale combat operations.

While these training deficits are reversible, doing so means significantly changing how the Army trains now. For a decade, efficiency in generating readiness for a specific theater was vital to our success. To accomplish this, we centralized training and training resources, and our commanders became experts in creating readiness for missions they faced in Iraq and Afghanistan. But they did so by following cookie-cutter templates at the expense of seeing their traditional roles in designing and creating training programs marginalized. By maximizing unit readiness, fundamental training skills were allowed to atrophy. Commanders lost ownership of their training—the warrior’s art during times of peace.

The good news is that as I talk to today’s generation of young leaders, I find that they are excited about getting back to the business of training. At the same time, they recognize that despite enviable combat records, they have little experience in training management. But this is a skill that can be rapidly taught and learned. When coupled with combat experience and this generation’s innate understanding of technology, it will transform training.

Our Army inspired the Cold War generation. Grafenwoer Range 117, Sicily Drop Zone, and the Central Corridor inspired our gray-haired colonels and sergeants major because these places were about solving the problems of their time—the Soviet Union, Panama, and Iraq. This generation has grown up in the Balkans, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and we will only inspire them about training by bringing the problems of our modern world into the training environment.

Creating such a transformation begins with seeing our world through clear eyes and understanding that the future remains uncertain and dangerous. While technology continues to impact the character of modern war, the precision strikes have not been a panacea. The “easy war theories” have not provided the answers necessary for overcoming the messiness

of operations amidst large and civilian populations. Unfortunately, this is unlikely to change. Too often, enemies will possess a strategic lever, forcing us into operations we would rather avoid. In the end, those who bear the scars of combat know there is no easy, antiseptic narrative for conflict. As problems arise, the nation will turn to the Army to solve them. We must be ready.

## Commander's Ownership of Training

Only by designing training that matches the real-world problems confronting us can we assure such readiness. Unfortunately, the range of problems we face is great, and training time is limited. We do not have the luxury of focusing on one area of conflict, nor can we master every facet of each possible mission. As one young major told me, "We are going to have to take some rocks out of the Iraq and Afghanistan rucksack." Instead, our focus must center on those few critical skills that are broadly applicable across the full range of military operations and those that enable units to rapidly adapt to the challenges of specific missions.

The art behind this new training emphasis is in picking the right fundamental skills. For this, the Army relies on commanders who possess the vision, focus and understanding to create the right balance. Higher commanders should provide intent and priorities, and then allow subordinates to craft training within those boundaries. In effect, mission command applies in training just as it does in operations.

Senior leaders do, however, remain essential in this process. Battalion and brigade commanders provide the cornerstone of effective training. They understand the variety of training tools, can articulate a vision, and possess the experience to guide discussions on risk. In the words of one squadron commander, senior mission commanders "provide organizational acumen in setting the conditions for commanders at all levels to takeover training." Together, these commanders possess the ability to reestablish predictability, establish "white space" for subordinates and guide rebuilding critical skills and systems. In the end, we simply must again make commanders at all levels the responsible agent for training their units and provide them the resources to do so effectively.

## Addressing the Human Nature of War

As we reinvigorate our training systems and return training ownership to commanders, we cannot forget the lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan about the human nature of warfare. Our experiences in these conflicts demonstrate the importance of investing in language, culture, advisory, and other specialized "people" skills, on top of our foundational competencies of shoot, move, and communicate. Maintaining our close linkages with special operating forces as we train and fight also remains critical. We learned these lessons in Vietnam, and we paid dearly to relearn them in our recent wars. These new skill-sets are fundamental to our profession and can only be retained if they are codified within our doctrine as a warfighting function.

Moreover, our wartime experience has laid bare the impact prolonged combat exposure has on soldiers and leaders. Only by embedding resiliency skills into our training can we start mitigating such debilitating effects. This is about more than our current challenges. Rather, it is about providing leaders with the tools to navigate through the terrible human cost of combat in a variety of conditions and levels of intensity. In the words of one company commander, "When we lost [a soldier] in Najaf, it took great leaders to refocus soldiers on the larger picture." Resiliency is about accomplishing the mission as much as it is about taking care of the soldier. While specific training is central to the effort, challenging training builds the foundation of resiliency.

### *Unchanging Fundamentals*

- Shoot
- Move
- Communicate

### *The New Fundamentals*

- Culture and language skills
- Advisory skills
- SOF integration



**UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters airlift 105 mm howitzers to a predetermined area on Fort Drum, NY, 18 July 2012. (U.S. Army, SFC Steven Petibone)**

Additional help is on the way for commanders trying to include enhanced soldier and unit resiliency into their training programs. The growing field of human performance science demonstrates great potential to aid commanders in building more resilient soldiers and improving the efficiency of training. Science provides methods of assessing individual soldier strengths and weaknesses and tailoring their training for faster learning and greater skill retention. Simple, emerging tools, such as memory enhancement exercises or games, allow us to analyze and train the most important muscle in modern warfare, the human brain. Furthermore, advancements in decision science help train leaders to make accurate situational assessments and decisions under conditions of uncertainty. Finally, improving our understanding of the physical and mental requirements for various military specialties allows commanders to ensure they are putting soldiers into jobs where they will succeed.

## **The Promise of Technology**

While advances in the science of human learning and training help us train soldiers faster, the truth is that it can barely keep up with the expanding list of training requirements. The Army is working on giving commanders tools that help them train more

tasks quickly in almost any training environment. TRADOC has two overriding goals in this process: creating only those tools that fundamentally reinvent training development and delivery and ending the days of soldiers standing in lines at field tables or sitting through 100-slide presentations. Through technology, we are creating engaging training opportunities and delivering the right training at the point of need.

The potential for simulations in training cannot be overemphasized. Moreover, the use of simulations is grounded in our history. Thousands of hours in tank and aircraft simulators produced the best armor and Apache crews and teams in the world. As another example, when our intelligence community faced challenges in Iraq, they developed the foundry to build superb intelligence professionals and teams.

Live training remains essential. However, in a busy training schedule, simulations provide commanders options for certifying leaders, building fundamentals and training on tasks that may be too expensive or dangerous for live training. While some lean toward live training, this generation gets the potential of simulators or simulations and

### ***The S2 Game***

At the Intelligence Center of Excellence, during the course for new intelligence analysts, they are immersed in an interactive avatar-based game. This experience is designed to reinforce the training they have already received, but in a virtual environment. Soldiers moved their avatar, talked to people, received missions, and performed other tasks. Retention has increased four-fold, and a day's worth of lecture was shortened to two hours of interactive training. Additional time was invested in briefing and writing skills that analysts previously did not receive and which were a noted gap.



(U.S. Army, SFC Kelly Jo Bridgwater)

SFC Ron Bolinsky, committee chief in charge of Initial Entry Training students, 128th Aviation Brigade, Fort Eustis, VA., explains to a member of the Defense Orientation Conference Association how to operate an AH-64D Apache Longbow helicopter at Felker Army Airfield, 30 July 2012.

games. Their combat experience, coupled with their instinctive understanding of technology, enables them to blend live and simulation events to train faster and achieve greater proficiency than we ever imagined possible. They will help craft a set of live, virtual and constructive rheostats and train masterfully with the resources on hand.

Realizing this promise will not occur through happenstance. After 11 years of war, there are a thousand flowers blooming in the training arena, and the time has come to decide which ones we are going to pick. A coherent strategy for training, linking resources to desired outcomes, is the essential foundation for making hard decisions that advance our capabilities effectively and drop the programs we do not require. This decision begins with a simple question: Why do we want this piece of technology? If it does not dramatically improve training efficiency, we need the strength to walk

away. Most importantly, we owe commanders and soldiers training tools that are easy to use.

While the details require discussion and debate, one clear point has emerged. The greatest payoff is in investing in company-level training technology. Such investment includes extending the tactical network to the company level, thereby delivering critical training capability to the company.

### ***Technology Necessity Test***

- Does the system improve efficiency?
- Does the system allow us to achieve training objectives we cannot currently train?
- Is it easy for soldiers to use?
- Has it been integrated into our strategies?

The future of digital training lies in low overhead drivers at the point of need, not large simulation centers. Furthermore, experienced trainers know that unit assessments and training preparation are often the hardest and most labor-intensive jobs. Yet, in many ways, they are the easiest to automate. By perfecting company-level commanders' tools that allow them to see their units, plan their training, and coordinate training resources, we will give them more time to conduct training, rather than oversee training administration.

Exciting times lie before the training community. As commanders sift through the lessons of 11 years of war, they will reshape the fundamental skills for fighting. Demanding, effective training will remain fundamental to our ability to adapt on the battlefield. Creating such training begins

by reestablishing commanders as the owners and stewards of training in the Army.

Commanders in both the operational and institutional Army will lead our process, cementing the lessons we have learned in the human elements of warfare. They understand both the evolution of our fundamental skills and improving our preparation of soldiers to face the rigors of combat. By further leveraging their knowledge and experience in assessing the application and value of virtual training, we will choose wisely. Those intelligent investments will dramatically expand the quality and quantity of training.

Together, commanders will build the new culture of training for the next 40 years. That culture will contain the seeds of our future success. Victory will start here. **MR**

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