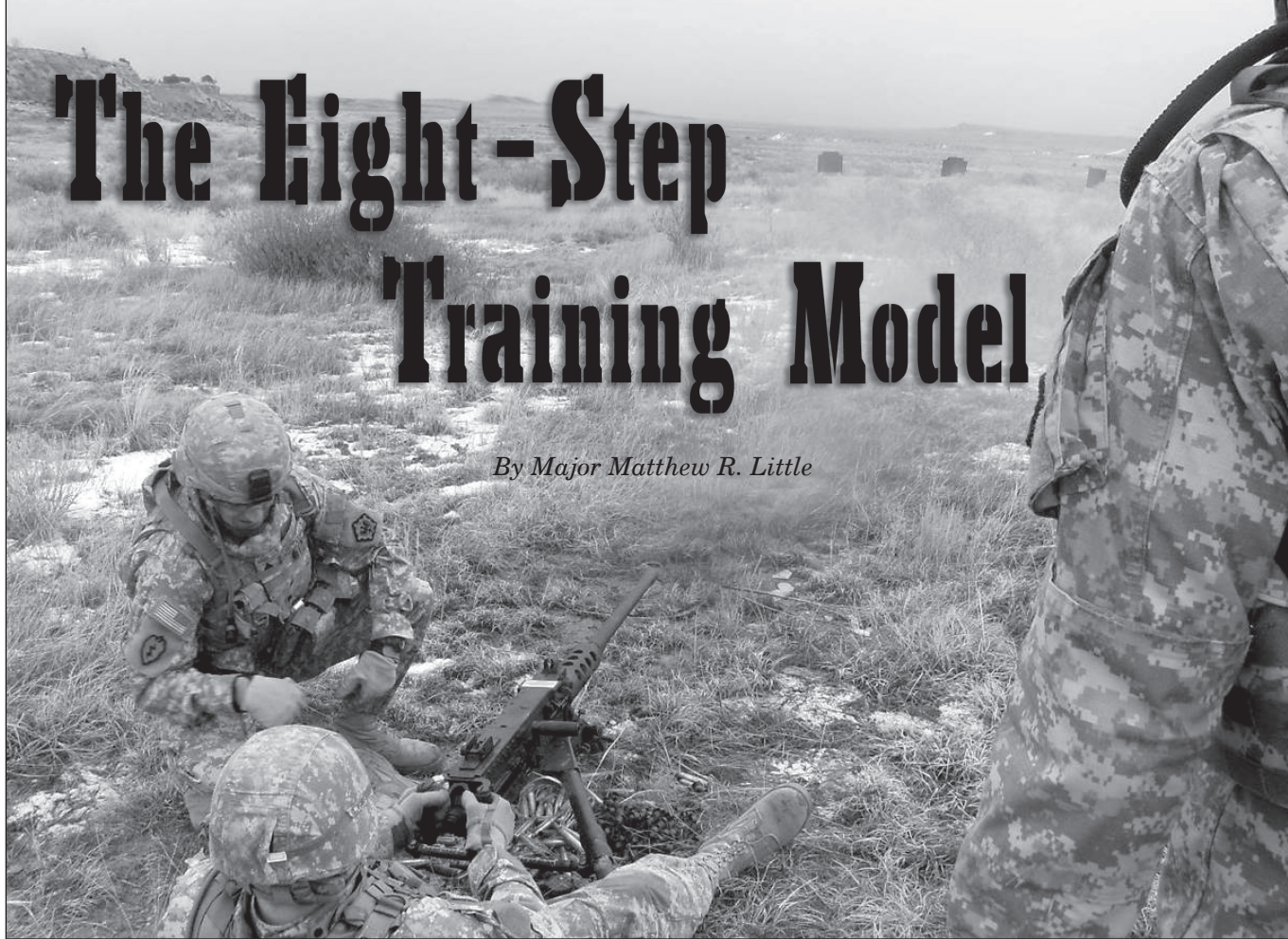# The Eight-Step Training Model

By Major Matthew R. Little

The battalion executive officer gave "Captain Smith" a selection of field manuals (FMs) and described in detail the importance of a mission-essential task list (METL). Captain Smith had served as a platoon leader in Iraq and was a very competent leader. After digesting the reading material for a week, he said, "I think I understand this whole METL thing. I wish I'd had this as a platoon leader to help us get ready for our year in Iraq."

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The U.S. Army has adapted extremely well to repeated deployments in the last 10 years. All things come with tradeoffs though, and one relative weakness that has resulted from a decade of frequent deployments is the lessened ability of the Army's junior leaders to prepare for and conduct training. The Army needs to look at ways to train leaders to conduct training, and the eight-step training model is a proven and effective method to accomplish this.

The Army's primary role is to fight and win the Nation's wars. During peacetime, the Army's role is to train for this wartime mission. As the Army draws down in Iraq and Afghanistan, training will be increasingly important. However, there will also be fewer resources available to conduct training, which means that leaders need to be more effective—especially at the small-unit level. A simple improvement would be to emphasize the Army's eight-step training model. Developed by U.S. Army Europe in the mid-1990s, this technique is a proven method of preparation for units and leaders.[1, 2] Unfortunately, many junior leaders are unfamiliar with it. It is not a formal part of the Army's doctrine, but it is worth reviewing, using FM 7-0, *Training Units and Developing Leaders for Full Spectrum Operations*, as a doctrinal anchor.

Step 1—Plan the training.

Planning the training starts with the unit METL. Leaders assess the unit performance to evaluate its proficiency. Units focus their training by developing a METL and establish long-range training plans that describe events and resources required to increase METL proficiency. Units plan backwards to prepare for deployments or other significant training events. These plans reflect the commander's intent and end state, with more refined training agendas developed in cyclic or quarterly training briefings. The most important thing a small-unit leader can do in this step is to identify critical items that must be trained and to explicitly accept risk in other areas where training does not occur. This helps leaders focus their time and effort on training the important tasks identified by the commander.

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Too often, leaders complete their plan but neglect the preparation required to execute quality training. Completing the plan is necessary for good training, but is not sufficient by itself. Planning and preparation are two of the training management phases outlined in FM 7-0. The most difficult work is preparation, where the detailed integration is completed. If you've ever attended a substandard training event, chances are that the leadership had a plan but didn't prepare for it. FM 7-0 describes preparation in several parts (such as training the trainers and rehearsals) that overlap with the eight-step training model. Several parts of the troop-leading procedures (TLPs) described in FM 5-0, *The Operations Process* (such as conducting reconnaissance, issuing the order, and supervising and refining) also overlap with the eight-step training model (see figure). The preparation steps are essential skills that small-unit leaders must know and demonstrate.

Step 2—Train and certify leaders.

Training the trainer is a critical step during the preparation phase. This allows commanders to ensure that their subordinate leaders are knowledgeable and qualified to evaluate the training. It also allows leaders to extend their influence by empowering subordinates to achieve clear standards. Failure to complete this step results in Soldiers who are not confident in their leadership and leaders who are not clear on the training standards.

Step 3—Conduct a reconnaissance.

Found in the eight-step training model and in TLPs, conducting a reconnaissance is an important task whether conducting training or executing a mission. Leaders not only review the location where the training will be conducted, but check to ensure that resources are coordinated and prepared for execution.

Step 4—Issue an order for the training.

Leaders issue orders to establish clear tasks, conditions, and standards. This includes a concept of operations that describes how training objectives will be met, a concept of sustainment that lists the resources required and the individuals tasked to lead different parts of the training, and a timeline. Although verbal orders can be issued, written orders are more effective. Written orders become a reference for all and can be quickly disseminated and reviewed. Verbal orders require leaders to constantly repeat information, which becomes less clear with dissemination. Writing down the details of a plan avoids this problem.
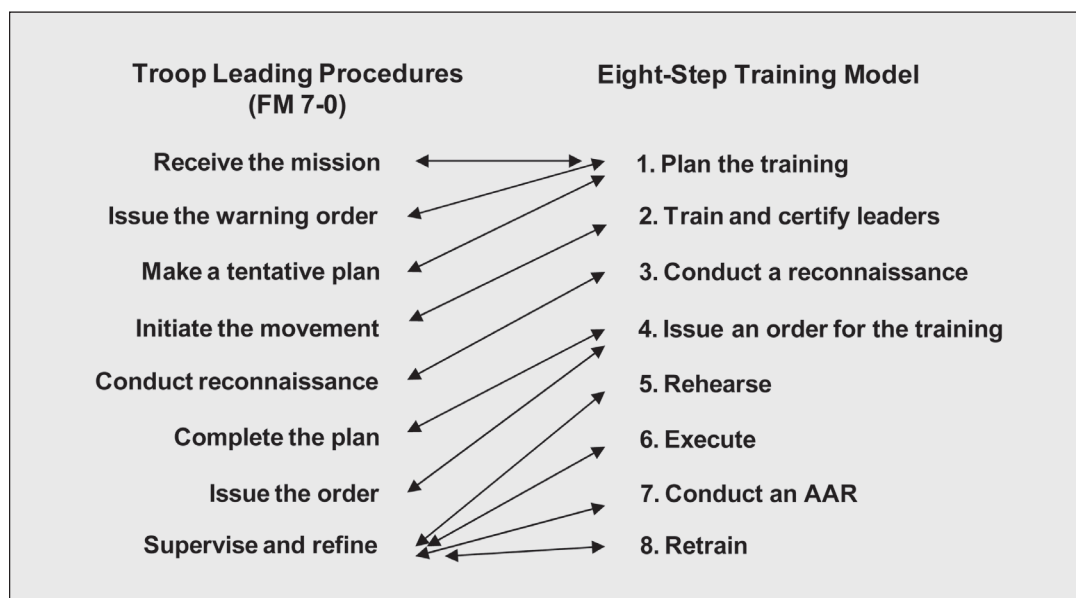
Step 5—Rehearse.

Rehearsals are critical steps in the eight-step training model and in TLPs. The four types of rehearsals described in Appendix I of FM 5-0 are—

■ Backbrief.

■ Battle drill/standing operating procedure rehearsal.

■ Combined arms rehearsal.

■ Support rehearsal.

Rehearsal techniques are limited only by leader creativity and available resources, but FM 7-0 describes six common methods:

■ Network.

■ Map.

■ Sketch map.

■ Terrain model.

■ Reduced force.

■ Full-dress.

Troop Leading Procedures (FM 7-0)	Eight-Step Training Model
Receive the mission	1. Plan the training
Issue the warning order	2. Train and certify leaders
Make a tentative plan	3. Conduct a reconnaissance
Initiate the movement	4. Issue an order for the training
Conduct reconnaissance	5. Rehearse
Complete the plan	6. Execute
Issue the order	7. Conduct an AAR
Supervise and refine	8. Retrain

Overlap between TLPs and the eight-step training model

During a 48-hour squad stakes exercise, Soldiers detain a suspect while an evaluator looks on.

Leaders select the type and technique of rehearsals and are most effective when they combine and integrate them into their timeline.

Step 6—Execute.

Leaders and units learn best by doing, not by being lectured. Classroom environments or online training can be effective in limited circumstances, but they are not appropriate for most Soldier training. Commanders should allow their units the freedom to make mistakes and learn through experience, rather than through a lecture. As units improve, leaders can increase training complexity by having Soldiers perform tasks under new conditions. The same task can be done at night; in a nuclear, biological, or chemical environment; with a different leader in charge; or with any combination of these variables. These differences will reflect the changes that units may face downrange.

Step 7—Conduct an after action review (AAR).

With contractors and other outside trainers conducting more Army training in the last 10 years, junior leaders have less experience conducting AARs. I was surprised to be approached by a company commander who asked for help conducting the AAR that would follow an upcoming training event. This reinforced the importance of the eight-step training model. One of the best references available for AARs is *A Leader's Guide to After Action Reviews*. It is available on the Army Training Network at *<https://atn.army.mil>*.

AARs can be formal or informal. Formal AARs are typically held at the company level and above, although they might also be conducted for small-unit gunnery or platoon situational training exercises. Informal AARs are usually conducted at the platoon level and below. Informal AARs can be done at any time during any training and have the advantage of giving Soldiers and units immediate feedback. Soldiers and units can learn from their efforts and quickly adapt to future operations.

There's an art and a science to conducting an AAR. *A Leader's Guide to After Action Reviews* describes the mechanics, but does not describe the interpersonal skills necessary to make an AAR truly effective. I've seen many AARs where the audience is silent, reluctant to talk, or quick to shut down discussion. Like any task, conducting AARs is a skill that can be improved with practice. Preparing for this as a part of the eight-step training model will lead to improvement.

Step 8—Retrain.

The eight-step training model is often reduced to just seven steps, with retraining completely ignored. This is a significant error, since retraining allows units to demonstrate competency and confidence in themselves and their leaders. Dedicating time to retraining allows even the best units to sustain their strengths, improve their performance, or expand their skills through adding a layer of complexity by performing the training at night, with a junior leader in charge, or some other variation to challenge the unit.

A large-scale terrain model helps the 52d Engineer Battalion prepare to construct a C-130 airfield at Camp Guernsey, Wyoming.

The eight-step training model has significant overlap with TLPs, making it especially effective for leaders at the company level and below. Leaders can implement the eight-step training model to develop effective training and simultaneously implement TLPs.

Although the eight-step training model is numbered, leaders must realize that it is not meant to describe events in sequence. As with TLPs and the military decisionmaking process, the eight-step training model is not linear. Leaders most effectively implement these approaches incrementally, by thinking through all the steps and identifying where and how information is related. Leaders frequently revisit these steps to ensure integration. For example, leaders need to identify the type and technique they will use for their rehearsal. This specific guidance needs to be published in the written order, and leaders must be trained and certified to ensure that they are adequately prepared for a specific task. A leader who follows the eight-step training model in a lock-step manner will miss this integration.

As the Army transitions from frequent deployments and adjusts to a more limited budget, effective training will become increasingly important. Preparing junior leaders to train is essential, and the eight-step training model is a simple and proven technique that can be applied to a wide spectrum of training. Engineers have applied it successfully to construction operations, and units have used it to train coalition partners in Iraq.[3, 4] It's time for a new training circular that describes a way to prepare for training events. It might be called *A Leader's Guide to the Eight-Step Training Model* and would make explicit what Army leaders have been doing for years. ▉

Endnotes:

[1]Walter L. Sharp, *The Eight-Step Training Model (Part One of Two),* TALON: Operation Joint Forge Task Force Eagle, 3 February 2001, p. 4, *<http://www.tfeagle.army.mil/tfetalon/talon_archive/2001/talon%202001-02-03.pdf>,* accessed on 4 January 2012.

[2]Walter L. Sharp, *The Eight-Step Training Model (Part Two of Two)*, TALON: Operation Joint Forge Task Force Eagle, 17 February 2001, p. 4, *<http://www.tfeagle.army.mil/tfetalon/talon_archive/2001/talon%202001-02-17.pdf>,* accessed on 12 December 2011.

[3]Matthew Luzzatto, "Cobra Gold '99," *Engineer*, April 2000, *<http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0FDF/is_2_30/ai_64732416/>*, accessed on 4 January 2012.

[4]Julian T. Urquidez and Paul L. Yingling, "2-18 FA: Training the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps," *Field Artillery Journal*, January–February 2004, pp. 34–37.

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A Leader's Guide to After Action Reviews, September 2011 *<https://atn.army.mil>*, accessed on 5 January 2012. (This replaces Training Circular 25-20, *A Leader's Guide to After Action Reviews*, 30 September 1993.)

FM 5-0, *The Operations Process*, 26 March 2010.

FM 7-0, *Training Units and Developing Leaders for Full Spectrum Operations*, 23 February 2011.

Training Circular 25-30, *A Leader's Guide to Company Training Meetings*, 29 April 1994.

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