



CHAPTER 2

Forming Combat-Ready Teams

The first events in the new soldier's life in the unit make critical and lasting impressions. Good impressions created by an effective reception begin to build the soldier's trust and confidence in his new team. This chapter discusses what the leader can expect during the formation of a combat-ready team, what actions the leader can take to guide this process, how combat changes the process, and what the leader can do in combat to form a combat-ready team.

THE FORMATION STAGE

Initially, the new soldier is concerned about fitting in and *belonging*. He wants a place on the team, but he is not sure how others will accept him. Any person who moves into a new community with new schools and new friends experiences these growing pains. Every soldier experiences this adjustment when he enters the Army and learns to live with many different types of people. He goes through a process of checking out other soldiers and his leaders. The more he gets to know them, the more he realizes how much they have in common and the more comfortable he feels with them. He reexperiences the same feelings and uncertainty every time he moves into a new unit.

Each soldier adjusts to this new experience differently. Some soldiers “come on strong,” bragging about past exploits or telling “war stories” from past Army experiences. Others adjust by withdrawing and watching quietly until they begin to trust others in the unit. As trust develops, they participate more actively. Others achieve a balance somewhere between. Some adjust quickly while others fit in more slowly. A few need considerable help from the leader; occasionally, a soldier is not able to adjust to the team at all. But all soldiers go through some concern about whether or not they belong in the unit.

LEADER ACTIONS

The leader assists a new soldier’s entry into a team by realizing that the soldier is searching for answers to some basic questions concerning the team’s activities. What are the goals of this group? To be the best in the field? To have the lowest deadline rate? To be the best in post softball? Where do I fit in? What is going to be required of me by my friends and by my leaders? How much effort am I going to have to put in to accomplish my daily duties?

The leader also understands the soldier’s concerns as he attempts to become a team member. With these questions in mind, the leader develops a systematic reception and orientation program designed to ease the new soldier’s transition into the team.

Work Concerns. For the leader, it is not enough to simply give each new soldier a quick in-briefing and assign him to a sponsor and a duty position. The leader takes the time and effort necessary to coordinate the reception of the new member into the team. This concern for the processing of the soldier takes place from the fire team or section level on up and requires that the leader speak to the new soldier daily to see if he is doing the assigned tasks as energetically as required.

The leader spends time talking to the new soldier in a systematic manner for weeks after the initial reception to ensure he is developing the appropriate goals and understands how his actions contribute to the overall performance of the team. This may require that the leader sit down with the soldier after duty hours or during lunch breaks to ask him questions about the standards of the team. The soldier

may have questions or suggestions concerning the operation of the team. They may discuss the new soldier's responsibilities and how they fit into the overall goals of the team. This exchange of information ensures that the new soldier understands what the team is trying to accomplish.

Further, the leader checks on the new soldier to see if there is a problem with fitting in or abiding by formal and informal rules, such as meeting appearance standards, yelling unit mottos when saluting, or joining the unit's athletic teams. Time spent by the leader on these activities helps the soldier become a functioning member of the team. It also allows the leader to check on the team to see if the group is maintaining its motivation to be the best and to accomplish the organization's goals.

Personal Concerns. Leaders recognize that most soldiers have an initial desire to contribute to the team, to be part of the team effort. They build on this personal motivation by realizing that each soldier is different. Each has different abilities, and each learns things in different ways at different speeds. Some soldiers are challenged by progressively more difficult, yet achievable, goals. As they become more competent and reliable, leaders reward their achievements and give them more responsibility.

**GOOD LEADERS
DEVELOP
INDIVIDUAL
SOLDIER STRENGTH
INTO TEAM
STRENGTHS**

The leader who looks for positive contributions and gives praise, who takes the position that every soldier is a good soldier until proven otherwise, and who understands that each soldier has strengths that can fit in with the strengths of others to form a strong team, establishes a climate for success.

The new soldier is concerned with whether the leader really "cares about me and my situation." If seemingly uncaring things are done during the soldier's first days in the unit (being left out of major training events, brushed off by supposedly "busy" leaders, left waiting for days to be unprocessed), they will be remembered and could harm the soldier's integration into the team. When it is said that the "leader cares for his soldiers," it means that he is *genuinely* concerned about the problems that the soldier faces from day one. He cares "bone deep" not just "skin deep."

If the soldier has personal problems, caring means that the leader strives to assist him in dealing with them, whether they are uncovered during his reception or occur

during his stay in the unit. FM 22-101 helps leaders develop the necessary skills to assist soldiers in their development and to help them solve their problems. Assisting soldiers in dealing with their feelings and concerns not only reflects caring leadership, it also enhances their effectiveness.

TEAM FORMATION ACTIVITIES

Whether the group has been together for some time or is concerned with inducting new members, the above principles apply. Leaders at every level must take the time necessary to properly receive and orient the members of the team toward the agreed upon goals while balancing individual needs of team members. Well-developed reception and orientation activities make the leader's team building efforts more efficient.

Reception. A well-planned reception is an important first step in creating a cohesive team. Although often thought of as primarily a family program, the reception should address the needs of *all* soldiers. It is true that the presence of family members adds to the complexity of "getting settled," but the single soldier who lives in the barracks has questions, problems, and concerns that are equally important. Units must reinforce soldier confidence so that no matter what happens, soldiers feel they can always depend on their leaders for assistance for themselves and, if appropriate, their families. If they trust the leader, confidence begins to build immediately.

Personnel and administrative problems associated with moving into a new unit are handled promptly and successfully by assigning sponsors to assist new members. Effective leaders recognize that sponsors do more than ensure that the personal needs of soldiers are met. Sponsors also model for new soldiers what the team leader expects of members of the team. The team leader selects and briefs the sponsor in such a manner that he realizes the importance of the assignment. The leader tells the sponsor exactly what is to be done and that being chosen as a sponsor means he represents what members of the team should look and act like. Anything less than proper behavior is unacceptable.

A successful reception includes being sure that the soldier's pay is accurately processed in a timely manner; that his personnel, medical, and other records are in their proper

place; that he has all his personal equipment; that he has an adequate place to sleep; that he knows where key places such as the dining facility, hospital, chapel, and recreational facilities are located; and that he is shown the kind of caring essential for developing his loyalty to the team.

The Army family is linked to the unit not only by the soldier but also by the opportunities it has to participate in unit activities. The unit leader should strive to develop bonds between the families in the unit to enhance each family's identification with the unit.

It is important that family members understand the service member's duties and the unit's specific mission. They should have the chance to learn about the uniqueness of life in the military, to include information about the unit and its history and about available services and benefits. Such activities as family day programs or organization days allow the family to visit the unit and learn firsthand about soldier and unit activities. A well-informed family is usually more willing to make the personal sacrifices required to adequately support the soldier and his unit. An uninformed family is likely to see itself as an unwilling victim of military life. An informed family is more likely to view itself as contributing to the service member's career and the unit's mission.

A family's attitude toward the Army is often based on perceptions of how the leader treats the soldier and his family. Therefore, the unit leader develops and conveys to the soldier and his family an attitude that clearly recognizes the importance and legitimacy of family needs. This begins with the leader's appreciation of the impact of unit and mission requirements on family life. It also includes his awareness of how family needs affect the soldier and the unit.

The Army family can expect to make sacrifices in support of the soldier's career and even of the unit's mission. But the unit and family relationship is a partnership, and the leader takes every opportunity to promote family well-being. This is more than saying the right words or expressing good intentions. Actions which clearly express the leader's commitment to family well-being must be implemented. The more welcomed family members feel and the more informed they are about the unit, the more likely the soldier will commit himself to the unit's goals and missions.

Orientation. Early in his time in the unit, after accomplishing most of the administrative and family details, the soldier goes through an orientation process. During orientation he receives information that is common knowledge among the soldiers already in the unit. Orientation varies from unit to unit, depending on the time, leadership, and situation. But no matter how it is done, this is a time for the unit to tell the soldier about life in the unit and explain the rules.

Orientation may be done in a group or individually. If a leader uses a group method, it is important that he also spend time in face-to-face conversation with the soldier. Getting to know each soldier begins to build the trust necessary for team membership. Also, information communicated by the leadership team is reinforced by unit members as the new soldier begins to fit into the unit. Some important areas to cover in the orientation include—

- Unit values and *standards*.
- Unit mission and goals.
- Unit standing operating procedures.
- Unit heritage.

The leader begins to communicate the *values and standards* of the unit during the orientation process and reinforces them often during the soldier's stay in the unit.

Values such as courage, candor, competence, and commitment are communicated to the soldier directly or indirectly during initial entry training. Research has shown that during IET, values that enhance teamwork become more important while values that reflect individual accomplishment become less important. IET begins to instill team values, and the process continues as the soldier moves from unit to unit. It is a process of leadership.

Teaching such values is not an attempt to drastically change the soldier, but to instill in him values that history has proven necessary for developing cohesive, combat-ready teams. They work! For example, honesty is the basis for trust, and trust is necessary for the kind of teamwork needed on the battlefield. Such trust increases the chances of survival and winning in squads, sections, crews, and platoons. If soldiers think that their leader or fellow soldier cannot be trusted to tell the truth in a critical situation, they will

only take care of themselves when a crisis occurs. If soldiers are going to become productive team members, they must begin to share the values that enhance team performance.

How does the leader transmit these values? Generally speaking, he does it by example. But the leader can choose two or three critically important values and clearly communicate them to the soldier during the orientation process. For instance, he can transmit the importance of competence, honesty, and teamwork by simply telling the soldier that he is expected to learn his job, tell the truth, and work closely with other soldiers. However, this is only a beginning. The leader must then set the example by doing these things himself, organize and run the unit so that the values are reinforced, and reward those soldiers who show that they share the values.

**SHARED VALUES
ARE NECESSARY
FOR COHESIVE
TEAMWORK**

These values will become the *standards* of the unit. Standards are those principles or rules by which behaviors and tasks are measured as successfully accomplished. If honesty is practiced by soldiers and leaders alike, all in the unit will begin to expect it. Soldiers will measure other soldiers by it. It gradually becomes a *criterion* for acceptance into the team.

Other standards of behavior to which soldiers are held are saluting, promptness, proper haircuts, and proper wear of the uniform. These standards support the value of discipline. They are important for cohesive teamwork because they encourage self-discipline in the soldier. When he takes pride in his appearance as a soldier and feels like a soldier, he will act like a soldier. When members of a squad, section, or platoon share these values and adhere to the standards that flow from them, they are a more cohesive team.

The leader clearly states the standards of the unit to the new soldier. He ensures that the standards are simple, easy to understand, attainable, and support the goal of combat readiness.

Once soldiers know the standards, the leader is responsible to enforce them fairly through both rewards and punishment. Soldiers who develop discipline and live up to high unit standards deserve reward. Often, oral recognition is enough to let soldiers know that they are appreciated for sharing the values and standards of the unit. Soldiers who

do not uphold unit standards and values need counseling, or punishment. The goal of both rewards and punishments is to enhance teamwork and thus combat readiness.

**SHARED UNIT
STANDARDS BECOME
A CRITERION OF
TEAM MEMBERSHIP**

As the unit develops into a cohesive team, members themselves require unit values and standards for acceptance into the team. Both the appointed leader and the informal leaders set examples that influence new members to adopt the standards of the unit. By leaders sharing in the unit's day-to-day experiences, always available to their soldiers, they communicate their example as quality leaders and soldiers to all unit members.

It is important to remember that unit values and standards are not developed in a vacuum. They need to conform to those of the parent unit and other units with whom the soldiers work. If soldiers perceive differences in the way standards are applied in different units, morale and teamwork suffer. Rather than lower unit standards, the leader needs to explain the importance of high standards so that soldiers can take pride in meeting them.

Unit mission and goals need to be firmly established in the soldier's mind so that he has no question about what the unit is trying to accomplish. As each soldier accepts and commits himself to the mission and goals of the unit, cohesive teamwork will develop.

**TEAMWORK REQUIRES
COMMITMENT TO
THE UNIT MISSION
AND GOALS**

The soldier's contribution to mission accomplishment is learning, practicing, and becoming proficient in his job. When he joins the unit, the soldier wants to know what his assignment is. He wants to know exactly what is expected of him and what the standards are by which he can measure his accomplishment. These questions are best answered during orientation in a personal conversation with his immediate leader. In discussing job expectations, the leader can highlight aspects of the job that will help the soldier meet his own professional military goals. In every case, duty expectations should be related to team accomplishments. This allows the soldier to begin thinking as a team member and reinforces the leader's commitment to team development.

Another area the leader must explain during orientation is the unit's *standing operating procedure*— the way the unit operates. The company has a written SOP that each soldier reads when he first enters the unit. It describes how the unit conducts day-to-day business. Beyond that, the platoon and squad have added requirements that help accomplish the mission. These are communicated directly by the platoon sergeant and the squad leader. This process is important because it shortens the time needed to become a working member of the team. If the leader communicates clearly in the beginning, fewer problems will arise later. The more routine knowledge the soldier has in the beginning, the quicker he feels comfortable in accomplishing the task at hand—preparing for combat.

Instilling *unit heritage* can begin during the orientation process. This heritage, which includes the unit's symbols and history, is the heart of its spirit and identity. It develops morale and *esprit* and it builds pride and loyalty.

Traditionally, *unit symbols* such as unit insignia, mottos, colors, and guidons serve two purposes. First, they identify the soldier as a member of an exclusive group. Second, and more important, they instill a “we” feeling among members and help instill within each team member a commitment to a unit with its own unique identity. In short, symbols instill and maintain unit cohesion.

In the Army, the leader's task is to lead each new member to identify with and become a contributing part of the unit. It is not enough for a soldier merely to do a job for the unit; he must want to *join* the unit. At each level, these symbols assist units in developing a sense of being different from all other units with whom they come into contact.

Knowledge of *unit history* is also important to the soldier's membership in the unit. The more positive things the soldier knows about his unit, the easier it is for him to identify with it, but these need not focus only on easy success. To sustain soldiers in the crisis of combat, it helps to include examples of “when things went wrong.” Such examples can emphasize how predecessors did not give up and showed

remarkable endurance, flexibility, and, when necessary, self-sacrifice to gain the ultimate victory. Discussions, pictures, award rooms, pamphlets, classes, and ceremonies are appropriate ways to “get the word out.” The following information is important for inclusion in unit histories:

- Origin of the unit.
- Participation in battles and significant results.
- Major accomplishments.
- Heroes and their *achievements*.
- Development of customs and traditions.

Some companies can trace their heritage through several wars. Smaller units (platoon, section, squad, or team level) that do not have established histories, customs, and traditions can identify with units at higher levels, such as regiments or battalions, that have illustrious histories. Identifying with the exploits of a type of unit such as infantry in the Battle of the Bulge, transportation in the Red Ball Express, or the “Damned Engineers” of the 291st Engineer Battalion of World War II can also be helpful. In addition, a smaller unit that has a distinguished soldier such as Eisenhower or Patton as a former member has a valuable resource for developing pride and commitment to unit goals.

While older history is important, more recent history should not be overlooked. There may be times in the recent past when the unit or an individual soldier excelled in mission accomplishment, performed an heroic act, or led the unit to overcome great difficulty and hardship to achieve outstanding performance in a critical training exercise.

Communicating unit heritage causes members to appreciate the units’ significant history and symbolism. A soldier who appreciates his unit’s symbols and its past deeds and heroes will want to live up to its excellence and maintain the proud traditions. He will not want to let those past heroes down.

TEAM FORMATION IN COMBAT

Combat presents unique challenges to team formation. While the formation process remains basically the same, combat alters the way it is accomplished. Variations because of type of unit, type of battlefield, and combat situation make exact predictions difficult. But the goal of the process

remains the same—to help the soldier become a member of the team as quickly as possible. This benefits both the team and the soldier. S.L.A. Marshall, eminent military historian, records the importance of these first few hours in the combat situation:

It has happened too frequently in our Army that a line company was careless about the manner in which it received a new replacement. The stranger was *not* introduced to his superiors nor was there time for him to feel the friendly interest of his immediate associates before he was ordered forward with the attack. The result was the man's total failure in battle and his return to the rear as a mental case.³

To preclude such a disastrous situation, the leader must consider the different dimensions that combat introduces. First, the time that the unit has to receive the new soldier is compressed. That which occurs in hours and days in peacetime is shortened to minutes and hours in combat.

Next, the space in which things happen is altered. For instance, in peacetime the formal orientation process takes place close to the soldier's company. In combat, the place of his first orientation to the theater of operations may be far removed from his company. Furthermore, the soldier feels more restricted in his movement in combat than in peacetime.

The soldier's concerns and feelings are also different. In peacetime, he is concerned with getting physically settled in his home, be it in the barracks or in an apartment with his family. In combat, although he remains concerned about things back home, his focus shifts to the fear and uncertainty of war. He fears the unknown as well as death in a strange place among strange people. Getting himself emotionally settled with friendly faces in his new unit is very important.

Further, the environment is different. Death and injury are commonplace on the battlefield. The real noises and confusion of war and isolation from friendly faces are not easily simulated in peacetime.

Finally, the level at which important information is transmitted is different. In peacetime, information important to the soldier is transmitted at post, division, battalion, and

company levels. In combat, however, this may not necessarily be the case. As the new soldier processes through the theater, division, brigade, battalion, and company levels, leaders need to be actively involved in the orientation process to ensure that the soldier is provided with the most important information—what he needs to know to be effective in the combat zone. This will make the jobs of the company commander, platoon leader, squad leader, and team leader easier. These leaders will ultimately be the ones who ensure the success of the soldier's orientation.

RECEPTION AND ORIENTATION

Let us now discuss what might be covered at the various levels of command as the soldier passes through the integration process. The soldier will probably begin at the theater level once he enters the overall combat area. The information the soldier receives here will be very general, covering the mission, overall situation, and theater policies such as leave and hospitalization procedures. As the soldier moves from theater to corps to division and on down, the information will become more specific. A key point, however, is that the messages presented should be *positive* and show concern for the *soldier's well-being*. Commanders, staff officers, and leaders must also check with each other to make sure that the information they present at the various levels is not contradictory.

When the new soldier joins his company in combat, he comes with a variety of questions. He is thinking of such things as “What will the people be like? Will the leaders and other soldiers be people whom I can trust and depend on? Will they take care of me? Will they accept me? What will my job be like?” There may not be a great deal of time available before the unit faces combat, so a quick, positive welcome from the entire chain of command is crucial. A positive reception and welcome to the unit will help the soldier feel secure.

The company commander should greet the new soldier personally if at all possible. He should welcome the soldier and cover several topics with him. For example, it might be useful for the company commander to discuss the current tactical situation, the company's recent activities, and the upcoming events. He should reassure each soldier that he will be taken care of in all areas, including mail and proper

medical care and evacuation in case he should be wounded. The first sergeant could assist the company commander by explaining various company SOPs to the soldier.

The company commander or first sergeant then assigns the soldier to his platoon and hands the soldier off to his platoon leader and platoon sergeant. The platoon leader covers platoon SOPs and basic information the soldier needs to know to work and survive in the platoon. Of course, at platoon level and below, the leader will get right down to the basic information the soldier needs to know to stay alive. The squad leader will cover the numerous details the soldier needs to know to operate in the squad.

The squad leader is the key individual involved in successfully orienting the new soldier, for he probably has more direct influence on the soldier than anyone in the unit. The squad leader must present a calm, unhurried, and confident presence that will help calm the soldier down and make him feel at ease in this new situation. The squad leader must also be alert to the many thoughts and feelings that are probably churning inside the new team member. The squad leader should encourage the soldier to talk about his concerns; he should *listen* to the soldier and reassure him. Further, the squad leader needs to give the soldier *specific* guidance about how the squad operates SOPs and safety tips on how to minimize his chances of being killed or wounded. The squad leader needs to stress that the squad works *together* and that he must do his job well in order to protect other squad and team members.

**THE SQUAD LEADER
IS THE KEY
TO SUCCESSFUL
ORIENTATION**

The squad leader can use other experienced, positive soldiers in the squad to work the soldier into the unit. It is critical that the members of the squad *personally* welcome the new soldier and help him “learn the ropes.” They must understand that everyone’s safety is at stake. The soldier must be quickly brought “on board” to develop the teamwork necessary for combat survival.

THE BUDDY SYSTEM

The squad leader will probably be extremely busy in the midst of combat operations. To help with the integration of the new soldier, he can use a “buddy system” approach. He must be careful to place the soldier with a buddy team who will be *positive* role models. They should be experienced

combat soldiers who will teach the new soldier the right things to do to stay alive. They should be soldiers who wholeheartedly support the chain of command. This buddy team should also teach the soldier how to work as part of the overall team. These experienced soldiers are actually serving as mentors to the new soldier.

When the soldier is ready to pull his weight, he and another soldier will become a buddy team. They will assist one another in many ways on the battlefield. In the NBC environment, for example, they will assist one another in putting on protective equipment and in conducting decontamination activities. Administering first aid in case of injury and sharing security duties during periods of rest, eating, and personal hygiene are other examples.

Soldiers will work with their buddies and, at the same time, actively function as part of the larger squad team. They will go to others in the squad for support based on each soldier's unique skills and strengths. As time passes, both the pairs and the squad will develop more cohesive teamwork.

Buddies will intimately know each other and pick up cues from one another just by watching. When a soldier on patrol moves a certain way, his buddy will know what it means and react accordingly with no words being said. This is just as true if the buddies are working together to repair a burned-out transmission on a tank or using forklifts to load supplies from the depot onto a truck. Buddies will know the other's strengths and weaknesses and will complement one another, the strengths of both enhancing combat power and team effectiveness. They can exchange data to make accurate judgments quickly. They will cross train each other in their specialized skills, each expecting the other to pick up and use those skills if one is disabled.

A properly selected buddy team causes several positive things to happen. First, the new soldier begins to develop close ties of loyalty and friendship to the buddy and other squad members and sees how he and his buddy are part of the team effort at fire team and squad levels. He develops a strong sense of commitment to his unit from the bottom

up: buddy team, fire team, squad, section, and platoon. If the chain of command has done this right, the new soldier will rapidly become “combat smart,” committed to his fellow soldiers and his unit. In the long run, this should greatly improve his effectiveness in combat.

Leaders in combat *support* and *combat service support* units should also practice these principles. They are key to ensuring successful integration of *all* soldiers into combat situations.

SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed the formation stage of soldier team development. Through understanding the needs of the soldiers, the leader can act to ensure they achieve the sense of belonging necessary for a combat-ready team. This formation process involves two important steps, reception and orientation. Although the context and some aspects of these two steps change from peacetime to combat, the importance of the process remains. In fact, because of the changes in combat, the process becomes even more critical. The buddy system is important to the formation process in combat. The foundation for teamwork developed during this process guides the soldier through the first critical days in the unit and prepares the unit for the important tasks that lie ahead. When the soldier and unit emerge from this formation stage, they are ready to further develop into a cohesive, combat-ready team.
