



CHAPTER 3

Developing Combat- Ready Teams

The leader must be ready to use the new soldiers as soon as possible after reception and orientation. Although proper integration requires ample time for reception and orientation activities, boredom will set in if soldiers are not put into productive training and work quickly. Therefore, the leader must take the initiative and get the soldiers involved in the team's day-to-day activities as soon as possible.

The soldier's first day in the routine activities of the unit is important. The relationships begun that day set the tone for the remainder of the time a soldier works within the team. It is best for both the soldier and the unit that his integration proceed smoothly. The leader needs to guide the soldier's progress both through training for combat and in combat. To assist the leader, this chapter discusses the development stage of soldier teams. It discusses important leader actions and unit training. Further, it discusses the changes demanded by the combat situation and actions the leader can take in combat to develop his soldier team.

THE DEVELOPMENT STAGE

Team leaders share responsibility for both soldier and team development. After the soldier goes through reception and orientation, he begins to establish relationships of trust with his leaders and fellow soldiers. He begins the journey from outsider to team member. There is no clean break between the formation and development stages. The amount of time required for the process varies, based on such factors as leadership, nature of the group's task, member personalities and abilities, and goals of the team.

The development stage is characterized by questioning and sometimes by resistance. Some have called this the "storming" stage. The soldier exerts his independence during this critical stage, trying to determine just what he can expect from the unit and the leader as well as from the members of the team. His attempt to resolve these issues may take many forms. He may ask "Who's in charge?" As he becomes more comfortable with his surroundings, he also feels more at home challenging and questioning those around him, including the leadership. He may openly criticize leaders and other team members to his trusted associates.

The leader can see this stage occurring when he feels resistance to his leadership. He may notice smaller groups with their own informal leaders forming apart from the leadership team. Team members may disrupt meetings by arguing over minor or unrelated subjects. If soldiers do not like the task they are given, if they do not feel that their needs are met, if they do not understand why they are training the way they are, or if they do not understand the mission they are given, they question, criticize, or resist in some way.

The issues involved in this stage of development will not be restricted to the work place or to dealings between team members. As the soldier becomes more involved in the life of the unit, tensions may arise between his family and the unit. These tensions will cause stress for the soldier who, on the one hand, tries his best to fit into the unit and, on the other, wants to take care of his family.

As time passes and the unit works together more effectively, trust begins to develop and team bonding occurs. The process takes time and happens in predictable steps. First,

the soldier accepts himself as a new member with a new role and set of responsibilities. He then gradually develops trust for the other soldiers and the leader based on their willingness to accept and trust him. The soldier's fear and distrust of other team members disappear as he realizes their competence, worth, and concern.

As members share their thoughts and feelings about the unit and about each other, the initial caution and stiff formal communication turn into more relaxed conversation. The soldier feels freer to express his feelings and ideas. Within the team, individuals begin to pass information more rapidly and accurately to help one another adjust to new situations and requirements.

**TRUST
AND COHESION
INCREASE AS
INDIVIDUAL GOALS
AND NEEDS ARE
MET WITHIN
THE TEAM**

As the soldier sees his goals and needs being met within the team, he begins to depend on other team members, and they on him, thus increasing the level of trust. As members of the team begin to depend on one another, cohesion develops. This process makes relationships become more predictable and motivates soldiers to accept team goals and to contribute to mission accomplishment.

LEADER ACTIONS

As the leader detects signs of team growth in his unit, it is important to exert wise leadership as he guides the developing team. He must retain unquestionable control without alienating soldiers. Firmness of direction and respect for his soldiers will help the leader direct the entire unit toward mission accomplishment. The following leader actions are important during this stage:

- Listen.
- Establish clear lines of authority.
- Develop soldier and unit goals.

Listen. The leader must listen and respond fairly to criticisms or questions while retaining a firm grasp of the situation. When team members question authority or form into smaller groups, conflict is likely to occur within the team. Overreaction to these developments will likely harm more than help. The leader must listen and interfere only when the conflicts become disruptive or when the small groups threaten to destroy the cohesion of the team. By listening, the leader can discover the soldier's individual needs and can attempt to guide him into accepting team goals.

During this phase, the leader has an opportunity to identify and channel potential leaders in ways productive to the entire team. As he observes and listens, the leader can increase his knowledge about the strengths of individual soldiers—what they like to do and what they do well. He can then place them in the jobs they do best.

Establish Clear Lines of Authority. To deal with possible conflicts over team members' responsibilities and goals, the leader needs to establish clear policies about who has what authority and under what conditions each team member can exercise authority or make decisions for the team. The leader should clearly establish these lines of authority with new soldiers immediately and constantly monitor the situation to ensure that they are being adhered to.

The leader should explain that as the new soldiers gain knowledge and experience on the team, their responsibilities and authority will likely increase. In preparing for combat, all team members must know who is responsible to take over if the leader becomes a casualty. Practicing this in training—simulating leader casualties and forcing the new leadership to work effectively—will pay dividends in combat.

Develop Soldier and Unit Goals. Soldiers look to their leadership to establish goals for the unit. They want a positive direction that will challenge them and provide a chance for reaching their potential. The leader also has the responsibility to accomplish the mission and directives given to the team by the senior leader. He must attempt to show the soldiers of the team how their own goals and needs can be satisfied as a direct result of working toward team goals.

To do this, the leader needs to sit down with each soldier and find out what he expects from the team both personally and professionally. The leader must also get the same information from his boss. The team's goals must effectively integrate the goals of the organization and the needs of the individuals, to include the leader. If soldier and team expectations differ, this is the time to find out. If the soldier perceives that his needs are not important to the leader, the process of developing a cohesive team will seriously bog down and may never advance to more productive stages of development.

A personal discussion between the leader and the soldiers serves five important purposes:

- It establishes communication between the leader and the members of the team.
- It lets the soldiers know what goals can realistically be achieved through membership as an active team member.
- It helps the leader know more about the soldiers and their needs.
- It establishes clear goals throughout the chain of command that are achievable and support the goals of the higher headquarters.
- It assures the soldiers that their individual thoughts and feelings are at least being considered by the team and its leadership.

Periodically, the leader needs to get the soldiers together as a team to check on progress. This allows them to share with others what their goals are. As they begin to understand that they share common goals for themselves and their unit, a cohesive team begins to develop. They will establish personal ownership of the unit goals. More and more, they will feel like a family and will think and act as one. This process is important before combat because it lays a foundation for teamwork that will be indispensable when the unit deploys.

TRAINING PRINCIPLES

Training is the heart of soldier team development, and all unit tasks and missions are training opportunities. The good leader capitalizes on every event, from the most exciting to the most boring, in combat and in peacetime. Cohesive teamwork is developed through training activities that motivate and challenge team members. In planning these activities, the leader needs to think constantly of developing each of his soldiers and his unit. Safety awareness should become a “sixth sense” as the soldiers execute this realistic training.

Training is one of the most significant ways the leader can show that he cares. By being concerned enough for the soldier’s safety and survival in combat to provide tough and

challenging training, the leader wins the soldier's respect and admiration. Following are important principles of training that aid in developing cohesive units:

- Train as a unit.
- Train for combat.
- Build pride in accomplishment,
- Develop self-evaluation habits.

Train as a Unit. The only way to develop teamwork is for team members to do things *together*. This applies to training. When a training mission is assigned to a unit as a team, soldiers are given the opportunity to work together; the chain of command is strengthened; and the team is given an opportunity to experience accomplishment and growth. When the team works together to accomplish the mission, soldiers experience a deepening sense of unit identity. As training standards are met, unit pride develops.

**QUALITY TRAINING
THAT DEVELOPS
TEAMWORK
MULTIPLIES
COMBAT POWER**

Involving the total group in a unit activity means that the activity must in some way benefit each part of the unit and ultimately each soldier. Sometimes the benefit may occur in the future, something that the soldiers can anticipate, such as victory in combat. More often the benefit is closer at hand, such as completing the field exercise successfully. Some benefits are intangible, such as the feeling of pride that a soldier has in a job well done. Other benefits may be quite tangible, such as praise from the commander or time off for a job well done.

For leaders and soldiers to learn their part in unit operations, both must be present for training. This means that during training exercises, participation must be first priority for *all* soldiers.

The most tangible benefit of training is the realization by all soldiers that the unit is either combat ready or close to that goal. Combat readiness is best achieved by training exercises that approximate combat, lead to achieving higher standards, and involve all unit members in coordinated actions. When this training is handled well, leaders and team members become more involved in the effort, become more aware of the strengths and competence of one another, and learn more about the particular needs, concerns, and interests of each soldier.

**TRAIN TOGETHER!
FIGHT TOGETHER!
WIN TOGETHER!**

**EVERY GALLON
OF SWEAT
IN TRAINING
SAVES A PINT OF
BLOOD IN COMBAT**

In training, small teams should be given as much responsibility as possible. Combat requires both coordinated action and individual responsibility from the smaller teams that make up the unit. When such training occurs, small-unit leaders develop needed skills to ensure proper action in the absence of instructions from seniors in the combat situation. This kind of training also reinforces the development of the noncommissioned officers, increasing the respect their soldiers have for them. It is primarily in this way that leaders become respected and valued by their sections, crews, teams, and squads.

To achieve maximum cohesion, training goals and objectives must be defined as unit goals and objectives. The pronoun “our” should be used instead of “my.” To achieve “our” objective, “we” have to move through this area and secure this high ground, while protecting “our” flanks from the reported enemy in this area. Or, “we” have to get these five vehicles ready tonight so that “our” unit can move the ammunition to the soldiers who need it. “Our” unit should emerge from the training with the feeling that “we” did this well and “we” have to work on this. Unit members share both the praise and criticism as one.

Train for Combat. Training must prepare the unit for combat. Self-confidence during stressful times, ability to control fear, communication in combat, and initiative in the absence of orders need to be integral parts of the training environment.

One thing that leaders have at their constant disposal is the opportunity for *challenging and realistic training*. The training needs to be hard yet safe. Specific training activities that strengthen teamwork and soldier confidence include obstacle and confidence courses and military skills competition. Other team activities are patrolling; independent squad missions; and survival, evasion, resistance, and escape training. These activities are of special value to combat service support units because they help reinforce the fact that they are soldiers as well as mechanics, clerks, and technicians. On the battlefield, every soldier needs the confidence that he, others on the team, and team leaders have the physical strength and the combat skills to defend each other and the unit.

Challenging and worthwhile training both creates and reflects unit cohesion. The soldier gains confidence in himself, his fellow soldiers, and his leaders, as well as personal competence and confidence in his weapons and equipment, through successful completion of challenging training. Such training results in shared experiences among unit members that directly contribute to increased unit and personal pride. Soldiers need to know that they can depend on their buddies and other units and that together they can achieve objectives and accomplish the mission. Soldiers need to know that as a cohesive team they can carry the fight to the enemy and win.

More experienced leaders may not feel the same sense of excitement and adventure that younger team members feel. However, the experienced leader should never forget the lessons of his own youth and work hard to provide the excitement that can shape younger soldiers into a cohesive team.

An important aspect of training for combat is to help the soldier learn how to deal *with fear*. The leader can first teach the soldier about the physical effects of fear. Each soldier must consciously think about what happens to him when he is afraid so that when he feels fear in combat, he will know what to expect. He must be trained to recognize fear as a normal reaction that prepares the body to respond to a threatening situation.

**UNITS WHICH
CONSTRUCTIVELY
DEAL WITH FEAR
MULTIPLY
COMBAT POWER**

Second, when planning training, the leader can develop training tasks that require moral and physical courage. The soldier should face situations in training that generate fear and anxiety so that he can learn to deal with them.

Third, the leader should tell the soldier that extreme fear occurs in combat and he must prepare for it in advance; that fear is greatest just before the action; that fear is greater when in defense, when under artillery attack, when under bombing attack, when attacking at night, when helpless to retaliate, or when uninformed about the situation. Knowing what the symptoms of fear are and when to expect fear makes the soldier's situation more predictable. He can determine in advance how to cope with it. All men feel fear in combat; it is a normal human response.

Soldiers should also practice in training the type of *communications* required in combat. Person-to-person communication is perhaps the first familiar element of the training environment that is lost in the combat situation. In the midst of deafening noise, the voices of other soldiers are extremely difficult to hear. The new, inexperienced soldier may find himself alone in a hostile and dangerous environment, out of contact with those who directed his movements in training. Such loss of contact can only be practiced in training, but it needs to be done. The soldier must be aware that loss of communication may occur, taught what to do when it occurs, and given a chance to react to it in field exercises.

During training, the leader needs to *assign increased responsibility* to soldiers who will take it. On the battlefield of the future, the successful accomplishment of a mission may very well hinge on the actions of isolated teams led by new leaders. Leaders must be soldiers who have shown a willingness to assume responsibility in training. Training gives the leader the opportunity to identify potential leaders.

The soldier who gives his best on the battlefield does so, in part, because he feels responsible for the success of his unit. To the extent that soldiers feel such responsibility for winning, they actually feel that the danger is less—and it is! A crucial task of the leader is to instill and develop pride and spirit in the unit by building personal responsibility through assigning responsibility and holding the soldiers accountable for their actions.

Build Pride in Accomplishment. Pride comes from respect for the unit's ability. Being part of a team that performs well in challenging training instills confidence and pride like no other experience short of combat. Thus training must be *unit* training that all soldiers can be proud of.

Performance must be rewarded on a unit basis. When it is good, the unit should be rewarded as a unit. When performance is not good, the unit should work together as a unit to improve. The leader must instill the belief that it is important for all soldiers who are performing well to help those who are having difficulty so that the team, as a unit, can perform better. The leader must further instill the belief that all soldiers have the responsibility to *accept* assistance if it helps the unit do better.

The measurement of successful training should be meeting an attainable, realistic standard rather than just completing a block of training hours. Even if a unit must stay on the range or in the woods for an extra half day to achieve a training goal, the unit pride that results is well worth the disrupted schedule. Or better yet, if the unit accomplishes all training objectives before the planned time, the soldiers can come home early.

Finally, for the soldier to respect the unit, he must feel that the unit respects him. A soldier who lacks pride in himself and his own performance feels no pride in his unit or his leaders. Thus, it is imperative that the leader show respect for each soldier to encourage self-esteem and pride so that the soldier can have a sense of pride in his unit.

**UNIT PRIDE
COMES FROM
RESPECT FOR THE
UNIT'S ABILITY**

Develop Self-Evaluation Habits. In training, the unit works toward specific performance standards. Unit self-evaluation that focuses on these standards is a must. Cohesion can be enhanced if the unit conducts its own after action review with individual soldiers participating in problem-solving situations. After action reviews conducted on a unit basis, especially those in which team members discuss their own performances, help develop the feeling that improvement is important to leaders and soldiers alike.

TEAM DEVELOPMENT IN COMBAT

Combat adds new and complex dimensions to team development. S.L.A. Marshall counsels soldiers to keep their eye on the critical place of the team in successful combat execution:

The emphasis should be kept eternally on the main point: *His [the soldier's] first duty is to join his force to others!* Squad unity comes to full cooperation between each man and his neighbor.⁴

DIFFERENCES IN COMBAT

The dimensions of time and space, the feelings of soldiers, the level of critical information, and the environment affect the development stage in combat. In terms of time and space, the team literally develops under fire. In peacetime, the unit has time to practice training missions. In combat, the time available to practice for an actual

mission is greatly diminished or even nonexistent. The leader must use any available time to sharpen basic combat skills. Rarely, if ever, will the team be far enough from the combat zone for concentrated training and practice.

In peacetime training, the soldier learns technical and tactical skills and has time to apply them to unit operations. In wartime, he brings these skills when he joins the unit, but he has to learn their application in the specific unit and battle environment. The soldier will have to learn what the realistic threat is, how the enemy thinks and operates, and how to react in the real situation in response to enemy movement and activity. Training in combat usually involves conducting actual operations. The quicker the soldier learns specific techniques, the quicker he will be accepted as a team member.

The soldier will find it difficult at times to be accepted. The more experienced soldiers have shared difficult and dangerous times that have created a bond between them. The *new* soldier will gradually be accepted as he also shares experiences in the unit and proves his competence.

There is a sense of urgency about the battlefield. Time is critical; soldiers' lives are at stake. One fear of the soldier is that he will somehow cause serious injury or death to other soldiers. He also fears being wounded or killed himself.

All the dynamics of this new situation cause stress on the soldier. The leader and other soldiers can help him find ways to cope with this stress. Normal outlets for tension and stress may not be available to him, thereby requiring stress reduction efforts on his part. Some soldiers will become hardened to the situation. Others will talk about their fears and concerns to a buddy or a leader. Yet others will try to put these fears and problems out of their minds. The key is that they deal with the stress in some manner. (FM 26-2 provides information on dealing with stress.)

LEADER ACTIONS

The leader plays a key role throughout the development stage. By attentiveness to the team and individual soldiers, he can make a significant difference. The leader actions that

were discussed earlier for the “storming” stage of development in peacetime apply in combat as well. The major differences are that the focus of the soldier’s needs changes in combat; the time span for team development is highly constricted; and the increased rate of personnel turnover places a larger burden on the orientation and reception process as well as on the fire team, crew, or section leader.

The realities of combat suggest several leader actions that will assist the leader in developing effective fighting and supporting teams in combat. The easy way out would be to say that team building cannot be done in the confusion of combat. The most effective leaders will realize that team building can be, and must be, made to work in any environment if the leader follows some basic principles.

Know the Job. The primary concern of most soldiers is the leader’s competence—“Does he know what he is doing?” It is the responsibility of the leader to know the tasks required of his level of rank and experience as well as the tasks of his subordinates. When he can demonstrate such competence in combat, he gains the confidence and respect of his soldiers.

**DEMONSTRATED
COMPETENCE
INSPIRES
CONFIDENCE**

Know the Soldiers. As the leader gets to know the soldiers, he determines their reliability. He discovers those he can turn to in a crisis. He gives them responsibility where possible to develop them as potential leaders. He identifies those soldiers who may need more intensive training to increase their competence and self-confidence. He also encourages those few soldiers who do not seem to fit in by pointing out that being effective team members is important to their survival and to the survival of the unit in critical war situations.

Develop the Soldier. In combat, the soldier’s job expectations will be strongly influenced by his need to survive. The leader needs to establish a phased program that gradually works the soldier into his combat role without endangering his life or the lives of those around him. On the basis of his own experience, the leader considers the time it takes to get used to the combat environment and gives the soldier time lines within which to develop. He paces the integration process based on the soldier’s progress. It is critical that the leader get feedback from soldiers with whom the new member is placed as well as that he personally observe the

**THE SOLDIER
WILL BE ACCEPTED
AS HE LEARNS
HIS JOB WELL AND
PROVES TRUSTWORTHY**

soldier's progress. Continual feedback to the soldier from both the leader and the team members is also essential during this process to ensure orderly integration into the team. Guiding this progress is the responsibility of the leader.

Structure the Situation for the Soldier. When in contact with the enemy, the soldier's greatest need is the feeling of structure that his team members and leaders provide. This group solidarity and coordinated team action are possible only if the soldier knows where his buddies are, what they are doing, and what the leader wants each soldier to do.

The leader structures the situation by ensuring that soldiers are adequately informed. The soldier wants to know all he can about his situation. As time permits, the leader needs to tell the soldier as much as he can about the *what* and *why* of his situation to counteract the fear and uncertainty of the unknown. There will be enough inaccuracies and inadequate information on the battlefield. It is no place for poor transmission and reception of information because of lack of aggressiveness in communicating.

The leader must use every possible means to structure the situation. He must make his presence known by moving among his soldiers, issuing verbal instructions, using arm and hand signals, using flares, or simply standing up and leading his soldiers when appropriate. Soldiers feel structure when they know that all share the dangers and burdens equally. Dangerous jobs must be rotated among all the men. And it must be evident that leaders share the dangers too. After any disorganization occurs, no matter how slight, the leader must restructure the situation as quickly as possible.

Finally, the leader can structure the situation by realistically minimizing the perceived threat. The soldier must be calmly and convincingly reminded not to overdramatize critical situations. The leader cultivates calmness in the soldiers by personal example. He can use existing feelings of pride in accomplishments under fire to build unit confidence. The leader and the men must be constantly aware that suppressing fearful behavior during combat is critical because it can spread from soldier to soldier and paralyze an entire unit.

Charles B. MacDonald tells the story of Lieutenant James V. Christy whose decisive action regained his soldiers' focus on their mission. Lieutenant Christy found himself in command of an infantry platoon reconstituted with support troops after days of battle. Sergeant Stanislaus Wieszyk, a former mess sergeant, was his platoon sergeant.

Supported by two Sherman tanks, Christy's platoon was making a night move in order to engage the enemy in battle in the village of Fouhren the next day. The men were tired and hungry. The casualties taken during the day's fighting weighed heavily on their minds. Christy knew that his soldiers were uneasy. With battle noises in the distance, the column led by the two tanks ground to a halt.

Arriving at the head of the column, Christy was told by the lead tank commander that he could move no further without infantry out front to protect against antitank rockets. When the lieutenant ordered Sergeant Wieszyk to deploy a squad out front to lead the tanks, the sergeant told him that the guys wouldn't go, that they had had enough that day.

Although faced with this challenge to his leadership, Christy realized the importance of moving out. MacDonald writes:

The young lieutenant gulped, but he quickly turned to the commander of the tank. "How many men do you want in front of this tank to move it?" The tank commander said one good soldier would do. "You've got him!" said Christy, "Follow me."

With pounding heart, Lieutenant Christy stepped out in front of the Sherman and started walking into the darkness. He had gone only a short way and the tanks had scarcely begun to rumble forward behind him when Christy made out a figure on his left. It was Wieszyk. "OK, Lieutenant," said Wieszyk, "You made your point." Close behind him was the entire First Squad.⁵

Lieutenant Christy set the example by his bravery and by his insight into his troops. He gave structure to a critical situation and saved the day for his team.

SUMMARY

This chapter has described the development stage in which team members gradually move through a questioning phase to trust and effective teamwork. During this stage, the leader must listen, establish clear lines of authority, and lead in developing soldier and unit goals. Unit training is the most important asset that the leader has to develop teamwork. Through training he develops the unit into a team, prepares the team for combat, builds the unit pride necessary for cohesion, and establishes self-evaluation habits. Finally, the chapter turns to the changes in the development stage that occur in combat. It discusses the process the leader uses to guide the new soldier as he becomes a team member in combat and the importance of the leader providing structure to the combat situation.
