

Leadership on the Move:

Leader Development in an Experiential Learning Environment

By Captain Amy E. Wallace

Since 11 September 2001, the operational tempo (OPTEMPO) in U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) has affected an entire generation of junior MP leaders by negating traditional collective training at the company level. According to Field Manual 7-0, *Training the Force*, “The three core domains that shape the critical learning experiences throughout a soldier’s and leader’s career are the operational, institutional, and self-development domains.”¹ This article focuses on how learning through real-world mission experience is occurring before junior leaders can experience traditional operational and institutional collective training. We do not yet know how skipping this crucial step in leadership development will affect the Military Police Corps in the long term; however, it is necessary to try to capture the aggregate education resulting from the experience thus far. From team leaders to platoon leaders, experiential learning has superseded traditional leader development, as OPTEMPO and short-fused missions frequently leave little time to train. Forward-deployed MP companies in USAREUR are attempting to mitigate the detrimental affect of this reality in several ways by—

- Capitalizing on institutional knowledge from the commanders and senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs).
- Taking credit for the missions our soldiers execute in lieu of formal training.
- Embracing thorough after-action reviews and leader development training.

Mission execution is the name of the game. In-transit security missions, port security operations, critical-site security, response-force operations, and cordon-and-search operations are just some of the missions that USAREUR MP companies have been asked to perform on a moment’s notice. These missions are added to the daily community law enforcement, installation quick-reaction force, and force protection duties that training and tactical operations sections routinely juggle.

What does this mission task list have to do with junior MP leader development in USAREUR? Everything! Mission execution *is* their training. For the USAREUR military police, this quote from FM 7-0 is pertinent: “Training continues during the time available between alert notification and deployment, between deployment and employment, and even during employment.”² Unfortunately, we often don’t have the luxuries of time and

collective training. Commanders must be innovative and evaluate real-world missions according to unit mission-essential task lists (METLs) and mission training plans (MTPs) to take credit for training and ensure their compliance with Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Education*, and USAREUR Regulation 350-1, *Training in USAREUR* (see the table on page 30). The bottom line is that our junior leaders are developing and refining their skills through mission preparation and execution before taking part in formal collective training—they are the product of putting the cart before the horse. I call this process *reverse-cycle development* (Figure 1, page 30). In FM 25-101, *Battle Focused Training*, Chapter 1, Figure 1-5, the training management cycle depicts the traditional standard for training and wartime mission preparation (Figure 2, page 30). FM 25-101 was superseded by FM 7-1 in September 2003.

A gap between individual readiness and mission execution often exists at the company level because traditional red, amber, and green collective training cycles cannot be accomplished before deployment. Typically, soldiers are in-processed, assigned to a position in a platoon, and then deployed to execute a mission. How do units in USAREUR still achieve mission accomplishment with this new trend of reverse-cycle development? Units mitigated the short-term effects of missing collective training at the company level by capitalizing on the institutional knowledge of the commanders and senior NCOs who remained after 11 September 2001. Since collective training at nearly every level is missing, on-the-job training and leader development is replacing dedicated training cycles. Unit commanders are constantly trying to exploit training opportunities and educate junior leaders in nontraditional ways. This is an attempt to bridge the gap between practical experience and the senior leadership’s grasp of doctrine and collective training.

Experiential learning is good! Educationist Kurt Hahn said, “There is only one thing more painful than learning from experience and that is not learning from experience.” Soldiers are certified by completing the following training to prepare them for the myriad of missions they will execute while assigned to USAREUR:

- Community in-processing
- Force protection training, levels I and II
- USAREUR individual readiness training

Experiential learning correlation

Doctrine-Based Training		Experiential Learning Examples
Team	Team certification	In-transit security executed by 3 to 6 soldier teams on classified supercargo mission
Squad	Squad situational training exercise	Quick-reaction force consisting of 10 soldiers providing first response combat/lifesaver and outer perimeter security for a bomb threat
Platoon	Platoon external evaluation	Platoon operations in support of the Kosovo Force/Stabilization Force, and Operation Enduring Freedom
Company	Company Army training/evaluation program	Operational center for managing all dispersed and specialized small-unit missions above, simultaneously

- Community law enforcement training
- Emergency Vehicle Operators Course
- Driver training
- Common task training
- Rail certification training

At the team level, mission orientation is instilled almost immediately. MP teams are sent on in-transit security missions throughout the USAREUR area of responsibility. They act as agents of the U.S. Army, representing the intent of their highest level of command to foreign agencies. The team leader on the ground usually commands with contact and guidance from higher headquarters (limited by geography and cellular telephone coverage).

Platoons and squads deploy and serve in general and direct support roles for MP commanders, combat tactical ground force commanders, and combat service support task force commanders. Lieutenants and noncommissioned officers make direct coordination with host-nation support, advise and brief commanders at the highest echelons, and are subject matter experts in every area of interest necessary to provide a safe and secure environment for mission success. Companies are using experiential learning through detailed after-action reports and leader development training to mitigate the inevitable effects of reverse-cycle development.

What are the long-term side effects on the future of the Military Police Corps if the USAREUR OPTEMPO doesn't slow down long enough to resume a traditional training cycle? This hasn't been determined yet. The development of our future MP leaders may be at stake. Eventually, the institutional knowledge in the units will cycle out, and the lack of

doctrinal training that should be inherent in the system will catch up to us. What will remain are future company commanders, platoon sergeants, first sergeants, and staff leaders who have a lot of mission experience but a weak training paradigm. Forward-deployed MP companies in USAREUR are doing what they can to reduce the short-term consequences of the post-11 September OPTEMPO by passing knowledge from senior leaders down to the most junior. The short-term fix is in place at the unit level; however, the Military Police Corps may need to examine solutions to long-term setbacks to reconnect the missing link between evaluated collective training and experiential learning.

Endnotes

¹ FM 7-0, *Training the Force*, 22 October 2002, pp.1-5.

² FM 7-0, pp. 1-3.

References

AR 350-1, *Army Training and Education*, 9 May 2003.

FM 25-101, *Battle Focused Training*, 30 September 1990.

USAREUR Regulation 350-1, *Training in USAREUR*, 18 February 1993.

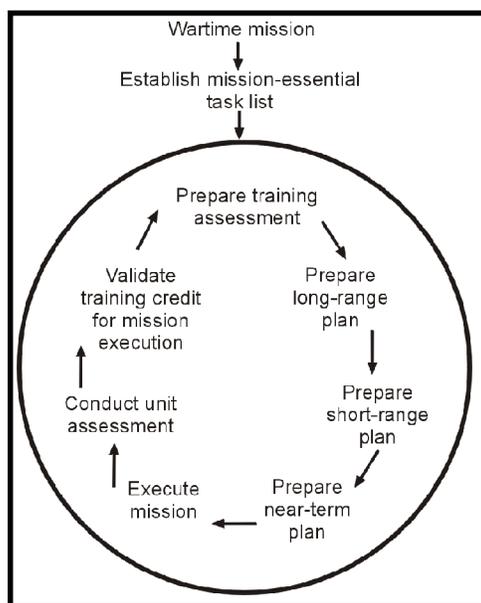


Figure 1. Reverse-cycle training

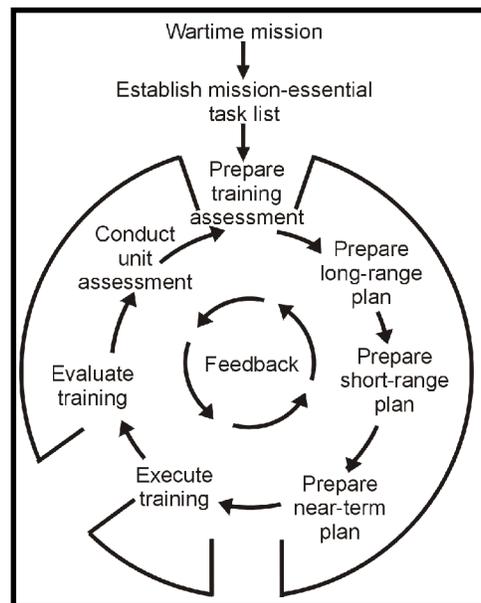


Figure 2. FM 25-101, the training management cycle