

APRIL/MAY PlatoonLeader.org Newsletter.

“The battle is lost only when the leader decides it so”

“The commander must be at constant pains to keep his troops abreast of all the latest tactical experience and developments, and must insist on their practical application. He must see to it that his subordinates are trained in accordance with the latest requirements. The best form of welfare for the troops is first-class training, for this saves unnecessary casualties.” – Erwin Rommel

Commentary – Serving at the Forward Edge of Freedom

It is an incredible Time to be in the Army! Operation Iraqi Freedom, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia, Korea- Platoon Leaders are making huge impacts all around the globe- both in combat, stabilization, and peacekeeping operations. Junior officers are taking decisive action making the world a better place to live for millions of people. You are truly protecting and expanding the Forward Edge of Freedom and your country and the PlatoonLeader support team is thankful for your dedication to building combat ready teams! For those recently back from the front lines, your experiences and lessons learned are critical to preparing your brothers and sisters for future operations.

This month we are witnessing in real time the impact of the leadership and training in our current drive to remove the Iraqi regime. Small unit leadership once again is the decisive variable in accomplishment of our nation’s objectives. Taken as a whole, we can see the battle plan implemented by our senior officers is ground deeply in a trust and confidence in the ability of leaders on the ground to take decisive action within a larger commander’s intent. On the shoulders of small unit leaders rests the success of this operation. Every night we see the scenes on T.V. and every day we read about actions of soldiers and units on the internet, and are constantly reminded of the precarious balance between liberation and self defense – and the importance of training and leadership. Junior company grade officers are leading both combat operations and humanitarian operations – sometimes simultaneously – and all the while having to make split second, life or death decisions. It is evident that the success of this mission rests squarely on the training and leadership our soldiers receive from you, the lieutenant.

Fight Fiercely!

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1. PlatoonLeader Update
 2. Col (R) Tony Nadal - Extended Combat Operations
 3. Current Discussions
 4. Reading Team
 5. A Combat Leaders Speech.

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1. PlatoonLeader Update

PlatoonLeader is experiencing tremendous growth thanks to your professional conversation in helping to build combat-ready teams. Over the course of the last few months, our site usage has increased over 50%. Started as a grassroots project to connect small unit leaders around the world, we have recognized that as the community grows, so should we. Over the course of the next few months, you will see a transition to a new software package that will give you, the user, more flexibility in use of the site. We are currently testing a beta-version, and intend the new software to be fully functional by mid-July. If you have recommendations or suggestions, please post them here:

<http://platoonleader.army.mil/viewtopic.php?topic=3&forum=10&11>

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2. Colonel (R) Tony Nadal - Notes on Extended Combat Operations.

Tony Nadal served in Vietnam as a Rifle Company Commander under LTC Hal Moore in the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley with 1st Battalion, 7th U.S. Cavalry. COL (R) Nadal shared with a group of cadets his lessons learned and reflections about extended combat operations. Here are some of the notes collected:

- Why Soldiers Fight: Young soldiers fight for the following reasons: Buddies, self-esteem, fear of punishment, and ideology.
- Psychological Frames of Reference: Initially soldiers experience a high degree of anxiety asking themselves whether or not they be able to acquit themselves. Once combat begins, there is a realization that someone is trying to kill them. Disorientation, isolation at times, and intense confusion ensues. Soldiers become very malleable due to a loss of their psychological anchors. It becomes extremely important that leaders provide STRUCTURE and LEADERSHIP to combat this disorientation, isolation, and confusion.
- Extended Operations: Soldiers become very smart, wiley, and hardened. At times a disassociation develops towards other soldiers and the enemy. There becomes an 'objectifying' of the enemy where the 'thin veneer' of civilization may breakdown. Critical to combating this is LEADERSHIP. If leadership is not apparent, an informal chain of command will develop. Essentially a functional, rather than an official, chain of command will develop.
- Effects of Fatigue: "Fatigue makes cowards of us all", there may be a rationalization in the mind of the leader to NOT lead from the front. It is critical to extended operations that soldiers see leaders at the front, providing context and structure. They want to see their leaders.

Finally, it all comes down to this powerful statement given by COL Nadal: “Soldiers don’t lose until the leader says so!”

(Side note: From Hal Moore: In battle, I periodically detached myself mentally for a few seconds from the noise, the screams of the wounded, the explosions, the yelling, the smoke and dust, the intensity of it all and asked myself: “What am I doing that I SHOULD NOT be doing?” and “What am I not doing that I SHOULD BE DOING to influence the situation in my favor?” Read more on battlefield leadership here: <http://www.lzxray.com/battle.htm>)

Maj Chris Kolenda gives a contemporary perspective on Resilience Under Fire:

<http://platoonleader.army.mil/article.php?sid=58>

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3. CURRENT DISCUSSIONS

Deployment Advice:

<http://platoonleader.army.mil/viewtopic.php?topic=124&forum=4&12>

Desert Operations: <http://platoonleader.army.mil/viewforum.php?forum=31>

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4. READING TEAM.

Want to start an OPD reading program in your unit? Think about sitting down with your squad leaders discussing some of the great military books and gleaning from them lessons for all leaders. We will send you free 4 copies of a book your interested in (Think: Killer Angels, Men Against Fire, Once and Eagle) if your are willing to facilitate an online discussion mirroring your platoon OPD sessions... let us know! Get your books now and join other units as together we read and reflect on some incredible works in the coming months! If interested in this program, email us at: reviews@platoonleader.org

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5. Combat Leader's Words Draw Tears: Check out this speech by a combat leader who knows how to inspire his troops. On 22 March 2003, The Chicago Tribune (Peter Almond) wrote about LTC Tim Collins, 1st Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment, a Coalition Commander who deliberately provided motivation, purpose and direction to his soldiers prior to crossing the line of departure (LD) into the combat zone of Operation Iraqi Freedom. His words remind us of the importance of our purpose, values, example, and stewardship- especially in combat.

"The enemy should be in no doubt that we are his nemesis and that we are bringing about his rightful destruction. There are many regional commanders who have stains on

their souls and they are stoking the fires of hell for Saddam. He and his forces will be destroyed by this coalition for what they have done. As they die they will know that their deeds have brought them to this place. Show them no pity. "There are some who are alive at this moment who will not be alive shortly. It is my foremost intention to bring every single one of you out alive, but there may be some among us who will not see the end of this campaign. We will put them in their sleeping bags and send them back. There will be no time for sorrow. "Those who do not wish to go on that journey, we will not send. As for the others, I expect you to rock their world. Wipe them out if that is what they choose. But if you are ferocious in battle, remember to be magnanimous in victory. It is a big step to take another human life. It is not to be done lightly.

"I know of men who have taken life needlessly in other conflicts. I can assure you they live with the mark of Cain upon them. If someone surrenders to you, then remember they have that right in international law and ensure that one day they can go home to their family. The ones who wish to fight, well, we aim to please.

"If you harm the regiment or its history by over-enthusiasm in killing or in cowardice, know it is your family who will suffer"We go to liberate, not to conquer. We will not fly our flags in their country. ... Iraq is steeped in history. It is the site of the Garden of Eden, of the Great Flood and the birthplace of Abraham. Tread lightly there."

Reportedly, Collins said the conflict was vital if the West was to curb the threat of Muslim fundamentalists, but he made clear that his men were to respect Iraqi culture and religion.

"You will see things that no man could pay to see and you will have to go a long way to find a more decent, generous and upright people than the Iraqis," he told his troops.

"You will be embarrassed by their hospitality even though they have nothing."

According to the author of the article (Peter Almond), British army commanders are rarely heard talking this way. Historically, most take the approach of: "Well, chaps, this is it. Over the top."

Join the PL.org Moderator/Leadership Team: Please come up on the net (email: manager@platoonleader.org) if you would like to be a discussion forum moderator or would like to provide leadership in any specific way. We are all volunteers who run the site and your leadership makes a tremendous difference.

Leadership Matters!

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The PlatoonLeader Team

www.platoonleader.org

Feedback? manager@platoonleader.org

