

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH STUDENTS FROM THE U.S. ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE SUBJECT: ADAPTING TO BATTLEFIELD EXPERIENCE IN AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ TIME: 1:00 P.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 14, 2010

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ASHLEY MCCALL-WASHINGTON: Thanks again, everyone, for calling in. This is Ashley Washington. I thank everyone for their participation today.

Again, we have students from the Command and General Staff College, and they will be discussing and taking questions on Army military training and how it prepares soldiers for combat; more specifically, how to prepare soldiers for combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Major Dugger (sp), if you wanted to begin or anyone of the other participants wanted to begin with just some opening statements, and then we can open the call for questions.

MAJ. DUGGER (sp): Sure, not a problem. This is Major Dugger (sp).

Our opening statement: The Army's revamp of basic combat training focuses on areas that train soldiers on critical tasks that are required for combat operations in Iraq or Afghanistan. Some of the changes are the addition of resiliency training, changing the standards for physical training from five-mile runs to sprints and core muscle conditioning, the addition of combatives, and a revamp of the first aid training. Such changes will allow soldiers to better face the rigors of combat.

Lieutenant General Hertling, the TRADOC commander, said that training is the least sexy and most important job in the Army, and he is 100 percent correct. These changes will better prepare our soldiers for the challenges on the battlefield.

Subject to your questions, that's where we're at.

MS. MCCALL-WASHINGTON: Okay. Thank you, sir.

Sandra, you can -- we can start with you. Do you have a question?

Q Yes. I wonder if I can address this question to the military intelligence officer. I didn't get his name. But I was wondering if you can talk a little bit about what's happening with the company-based operations as far as the collection and gathering of intelligence, particularly in Afghanistan, and what kinds of changes do you see happening?

MAJ. ERIC BUTLER: I think the biggest change we're making is that we're going down to the company level a whole lot more than we used to in the shops. The shops are a lot -- the F2 shops at the battalion and brigade level are a lot bigger than they used to.

I'm Major Butler, by the way.

Q Okay.

MAJ. BUTLER: My experiences are a little different from the average student here at school because I've been off doing some unique assignments over the last 10, 15 years, but when I was a Battalion F2, the shop was pretty small, and the amount of support we got was limited, and the access you had to national-level intelligence was limited as well. A lot of it was hampered by clearance issues and just manning. Manning was a concern. You didn't have a -- (inaudible) -- down at the company level.

But this was before we started operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and I think the changes that Major General Flynn, who's the two out in ISAF now, has made or is making right now -- a focus on company intelligence support teams down at company level, a focus on not only kinetic, but non-kinetic operations at the company level.

I think the biggest pitfall or the biggest gap we have in the intel picture right now is that we have soldiers -- infantry soldiers, armor soldiers, logistics soldiers -- out there on the battlefield every day that see intel and don't really either know how to process it or don't know where it fits in the picture or whether or not it's valuable or not.

So I think the biggest goal we have right now is focusing on those company intel support teams and focusing on gathering that information. That is not necessarily find the IED and get left of the boom, as you hear a lot of people saying, doing that, but, at the same time, figuring out a lot of the white information, figuring out about the politics of the area, figuring out about the infrastructure of the area, and why the kinetic events are happening and the local population is not getting involved.

So I think that's the focus today or the route we're trying to go down.

Q That issue that you mention about processing the intelligence -- is that something that you would fix with experience and

just time, or is this something that you need a specific capability to be able to do?

MAJ. BUTLER: I think -- I think the capabilities are there. There are -- there's been a lot of systems we've gone through over the years. I think we're getting better at it. The collective databases -- there's a lot of focus on downgrading the classification of material that we get from the field. We've always had a tendency to overclassify information, and I think we've gotten better at producing intelligence that we can share with everyone, not just the intelligence community or the commander level, but -- and a focus -- the focus on getting soldiers used to identifying information that could be useful to the intelligence section or to the civil affairs community, I think that might -- that may take some time, but as far as getting the data together in a shareable manner across a large unit, we have those capabilities. We just need to leverage them better than we have in the past.

Q Thank you.

MS. MCCALL-WASHINGTON: And Dan from MilitaryAvenue, do you have a question?

Q And who was that for again? I'm sorry.

MS. MCCALL-WASHINGTON: Dan, do you have a question from MilitaryAvenue?

Q This is Dale from MilitaryAvenue.

MS. MCCALL-WASHINGTON: Oh, I'm sorry.

Q I do have a question. I recently interviewed Lieutenant General Keen, the Joint Task Force commander in Haiti, and he said that the reason that some of the relationships down there with the nationals and the NGOs, et cetera, was based on experience in Afghanistan and Iraq. I wondered if any of those lessons learned have been put into the training plan for basic training for the Army.

MAJ. DUGGER (sp.): Not that we're aware of at this time. That's not an -- NGO-IGO integration is a very complex issue. There's a lot of things we would love to cover in the 10-week time frame of basic training, but it has to focus on critical events to get soldiers ready for combat.

Q Okay, but the relationship between the combatants and the people that they might be involved with, such as in Afghanistan or Iraq, are not being addressed, such as social issues and things like that?

MAJ. REGISTER (sp): Sir, this is Major Register (sp).

I just came from the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, which is where most brigade combat teams and other units conduct their final exercise prior to deploying, and I can speak to

collective training that the Army is conducting at the JRTC, and there is a focus at the soldier level on conducting engagements with local leaders, with local shop owners, and interacting with the civilian population.

We have what we call situational training exercises there that specifically focus at the soldier level in teaching them or giving them the tools so that they can then be successful, you know, whether it's in Haiti or Afghanistan or Iraq, in dealing with those types of situations. But I cannot speak specifically to whether they're receiving that training at basic training.

Q Okay. Well, thank you. I appreciate it.

MS. MCCALL-WASHINGTON: Jeff, Stars and Stripes, do you have a question?

Q I'd actually like to wait until the end if that's okay.

MS. MCCALL-WASHINGTON: Yes.

Richard, do you have a question?

Q Yes, I do. Throughout history, it seems that the force on the losing side have the generals that have been looking backward, and the victors are usually the ones that have been looking forward. What are you doing at the Staff College to look forward toward our next engagements instead of focusing on Iraq and Afghanistan?

MAJ. DUGGER (sp): Sir, the course of instruction at the Command and General Staff College focuses on creating critical and creative thinkers to be able to address any challenges that we may face. It focuses on full-spectrum operations planning, not just focusing on counterinsurgency. So a lot of the planning and the courses we are addressing are getting into the areas of full-spectrum operations, again not just looking backwards into COIN. So that's -- that's a good news story, and that -- this is Major Dugger (sp).

MAJ. GRUBB (sp): If I could just tag along on that as well. This is Major Grubb (sp). I'm the one logistician here. We spend a lot of time here at the college exploring and going through the other instruments of national power, other than just military.

We actually have a lot of government, civilian, interagency students along with us now that I don't think they've had in the past. So we get a lot of different perspectives concerning soft power than our normal conventional operations that we're used to studying.

So that, in my opinion, has been a huge benefit, especially when we're talking about relationships with other departments at the Department of State. So that's a -- that's been a big positive here so far, in my opinion.

MS. MCCALL-WASHINGTON: Okay. And Christian from military.com, do you have a question?

Q Hey, guys. Thanks. And sorry that -- I guess it's part of your course of instruction, you get thrown to the wolves like this, and I can hear sort of the silence sometimes when we throw it out to the group. You're sort of looking at each other, going, all right, who's going to answer this ridiculous question.

But I'm actually going to target two people there for my first question, and that would be Major Favor (sp) and Major Brewster (sp). Both of you, according to your bios, have some Afghanistan experience.

And I guess my question is, you know, we talked with General Hertling about a month ago, and he talked about basically paring down the so-called warrior task list that's taught at basic training. It almost seemed as if the pendulum swung way too far in one direction, and the recruits were being taught how to fire 50-caliber machine guns, Mark 19s, M, you know, 249s. They were learning how to call in a medivac and set up a claymore mine and all that kind of stuff. And one of the most high-profile things that is being contemplated to be done away with is bayonet training.

From your experience in both Iraq and Afghanistan, has the pendulum swung too far to the other end in cutting too many of these skills out of the basic training pipeline? I mean, you know, obviously, 50-caliber or Mark 19 experience is good if your gunner gets shot and you've got to jump up and man that weapon. What's your -- what are your thoughts on that, Favor (sp) and Brewster (sp) specifically for this one. MAJ. FAVOR (sp): Sir, this is Major Favor (sp). Major Brewster (sp) isn't here today. He couldn't make it.

Q Oh, okay.

MAJ. FAVOR (sp): My experiences -- I don't have -- I guess I don't know how much I can add to this. When I was both in Afghanistan and in Iraq, being a comms officer, I worked at the corps level or that higher level dealing with comms. But we didn't deal so much with, you know, bayonet training or even M60 training, although we did it and went over it. It wasn't part of our core competency, if you will, for our -- for us to establish comms and put in comms and maintain networks.

For us, I think the biggest training we get out of our soldiers comes from their AIT and then any additional training we can do with industry, the civilian side, Cisco, for example, or some of the other satellite providers. That training is more useful for us even in these environments. So we --

Q Well, what -- okay. Well, then what about you, Major Register (sp)? Since you were working at JRTC, you obviously -- you've seen guys who've come out of basic training, are doing -- then doing their pre-deployment training and going over. Are there some of those things -- some of those warrior tasks that you think might need to stay

to prepare them better for their pre-deployment training, or is -- are they overloaded in basic training already?

MAJ. REGISTER (sp): Yes, sir. I'll just tell you because I had the -- you know, I was prior enlisted for about seven years. So I've actually gone through basic training, and while I'm sure it's changed somewhat, you know, I'll just tell you in my own opinion, you know, for example, bayonet training -- you know, it's great training for the soldier, you know, from an esprit de corps standpoint.

However, you know, having been in Afghanistan and in Iraq, I'll tell you that, you know, from a practical standpoint, that training can probably be substituted for something more relevant to the current fight. You know, based on that, you know, eight-week timeframe that that soldier is going to be, you know, given -- you know, in basic training, you know, such as combatives where they're receiving, you know, hand-to-hand instruction that they can then in turn, you know, directly use or possibly use during, you know, their upcoming deployment, and we do -- or we did --

Q But wait. I'm going to -- I'm going to stop you there for a second.

MAJ. REGISTER (sp): Sure.

Q So you're saying that learning how to fight with your fists is more effective than learning how to fight -- is -- could prove more useful in a deployed environment than fighting with a bayonet. I mean, when has there been a time when it's actually gotten down to that where you're fighting with your fists?

MAJ. REGISTER (sp): Well, I don't want to, you know, go into specifics. I'll just tell you, you know, from my own experience --

Q Right.

MAJ. REGISTER (sp): -- in Iraq. While we did have our bayonets -- each soldier is issued and does carry a bayonet -- in the COIN-type environment where it is must less likely that you are going to be in a -- in an engagement where it is going to come to bayonet fighting, you know, I would just say that there are probably as, you know, General Hertling, you know, said, you know, kind of dropping some of these outmoded drills and focusing on, you know, what soldiers can, I guess, use that's more relevant to the current fight in basic training. Because again, you're dealing with a very condensed timeline there. And a lot of that training, I will tell you, is done at AIT or is done at the unit.

Q Can you explain what AIT means? I don't know what --

MAJ. REGISTER (sp): Advanced individual training.

Q Check, okay.

MAJ. REGISTER (sp): And a lot of that training is also done at the unit before they -- before they deploy. You know, basic training internally is not the be-all, end-all of soldier training prior to deployment.

MAJ. DUGGER (sp): And sir, this is Major Dugger. A lot of the combative training is a very good way to teach soldiers how to deal with situations because with the bayonet, I mean, you're basically trying to kill that individual. With combatives, you're not only protecting yourself but you are also trying to subdue that individual, because you can get a lot more intelligence out of a live detainee rather than out of a dead combatant.

Q That makes sense. Okay, thanks.

MS. MCCALL-WASHINGTON: Okay. Does anyone else have any additional questions?

Q Yes, I do.

Q I do. Q I said I'd go last so I'll go last.

MS. MCCALL-WASHINGTON: Okay. (Laughs.) Well, you all can just go ahead.

Q This is Dale at MilitaryAvenue.com again. Can I ask a question about the Command and Staff General College curriculum, if you guys don't mind? Are they using a section now on social media such as Twitter, Facebook, blogs, et cetera, to get the word out about the Army mission and how to help military families, et cetera?

MAJ. DUGGER (sp): Yes, sir. This is Major Dugger (sp). There are STRATCOM or strategic communication requirements that every officer has to accomplish while being here to get the word out. And one of those requirements is blogging about the Army's current status and issues that are going on -- in addition, conducting interviews like this so that we are able to get the Army's message out. So it's a very good thing, and it's one of our graduation requirements that has to be met prior to us moving on, so that we get this experience dealing with media prior to getting into country and having to react to media in theater. So it's a very good event.

And one addition, Major Brewster is also here, if there's any other questions for him for Afghanistan.

MAJ. BREWSTER: Sorry I was late, guys.

Q Thank you. And do you use Facebook and Twitter and things like that as part of the course, and do you learn how to use those things?

MAJ. DUGGER (sp): No, sir. Not as part of the course. It's encouraged but it's not a specific program of instruction during our curriculum.

Q Okay. Thank you.

Q I'm sorry, can I ask really quickly Major Butler's first name?

MAJ. BUTLER: Eric.

Q Eric? Thank you.

MR. DUGGER (sp): He's on Facebook. (Laughter.)

MAJ. BUTLER: To the Facebook question, we've also had a few speakers come to the school specifically focused on talking about Facebook and Twitter and social media and how it changes the environment. And the decision has come up a number of times in class about how to leverage that and how to -- (inaudible) -- use of it versus leaders' use of it. And if you go on websites nowadays I think, even for the -- like the unit I'm going through, they have Facebook pages. They have Twitter pages. Commanders out in the field at the general officer level have them. So I think we're all -- not that we don't get instruction on them in class, but we're all so familiar with them, I don't think we necessarily need it.

Q Okay, super. I thought Lieutenant General Keen has been using it very well in Haiti to get the word out about the great mission we're doing down there. So I just wanted to see if it had been added to the curriculum.

MAJ. BUTLER: It has, but it's not a formal thing. It's just something that we're doing as a class. The entire class is on there at some point during the day. I would say the average student is very familiar with it. Some more than others.

Q Actually, I have another question.

MS. MCCALL-WASHINGTON: Not a problem. Go ahead.

Q Christian Lowe, military.com.

Back to the Afghanistan -- guys with Afghanistan experience there. So I'm not sure if you guys have heard about or read this paper from SAMS written by a guy named Major Ehrhart, Thomas Ehrhart, called, "Increasing Small Arms Lethality in Afghanistan: Taking Back the Infantry Half-Kilometer." But it's sort of done the rounds around here and down at Benning and at Tampa.

And one of the things he talks about in there -- he addresses both the equipment shortfalls and training shortfalls in engaging enemy forces in Afghanistan which often engage beyond the range that most soldiers are comfortable with shooting accurately with their M4, and, you know, in the 500-meter range kind of thing. And I'm curious to get your impressions, especially -- Major Register (sp) who was out of JRTC and others who have combat experience in Afghanistan. I mean, does the

portion of basic training that deals with marksmanship need to be revamped to better train for engaging accurately at longer ranges over varied terrain?

MAJ. BREWSTER (sp): All right. Hey. This is Major Matt Brewster (sp). And I've been to Afghanistan. And I was an OC at JRMC. That's the one in Germany. But in terms of the paper, I'm not actually familiar with the paper, but you've described it. I think I have the concept.

I can tell you that Afghanistan -- you're dealing with -- you can see a long way. And generally if you can see something, then you can probably shoot it. And if you have a squad out there that has direct fire weapons and -- (inaudible) -- mortar as well probably, maybe, you want to be able to range whatever targets you're shooting at that you'll be able to see. So if you're able to engage targets out further and further then you can gain advantage over your adversary there. So certainly having training and familiarity with engaging in beyond 300 meters is beneficial. Is it best to do that during basic training? I don't know. I know they've gone and looked at the training again, and a lot of basic training is -- you know, you learn in the muscle memory of how to use the weapon.

I know -- I'm a pilot so we do -- the way we work our training in the helicopter is you train up all of the basic skills in flight school, and then you go get advanced skills when you're at the unit because there's only so much the schoolhouse can do. There's some things you just kind of need to learn at the unit you go to. Anymore, they try and -- certainly in the aviation world, but I think also in basic training they try to, oh, give you a good foundation to be able to graduate into better team skills and better skills at the unit. But I don't know if you can get there with everyone during basic training. I don't know if you can just get there. You have to draw the line somewhere.

Q Yeah, okay. Anyone else want to weigh in on that one.

MAJ. BREWSTER (sp): Or ramble off and beyond what I did.

MAJ. DUGGER (sp): I will say, sir, that looking back World War II time frame, you know you've got a lot more population of folks that are used to hunting and dealing with weapons. And a lot of the soldiers nowadays don't have the familiarity with weapons or they've never even been in a fist fight. So there's certainly some benefit as they look at redoing marksmanship training. But getting to a level where you're proficient out past 300 meters requires a lot more time than they will potentially have in basic training. So I mean, focusing on the task at hand is a good thing. And allowing -- just focusing on the individual tasks and pushing some of these tasks to the unit to fine tune is a good thing.

Q And who was that was just speaking?

MAJ. DUGGER (sp): Major Dugger (sp).

Q Okay, thanks. Great.

Q I have a quick question if it's okay. This is Jeff with Stars and Stripes. One of our -- one of the people on staff is a former National Guardsman, and he said he was in a situation where he was told he didn't have to learn how to use the grenade launcher. Then he got downrange and of course he was suddenly told, guess what; you have to learn how to use the grenade launcher. So he had had zero training on it. So what this goes to show is that it does help to have at least a little bit of training on all weapons in case you're suddenly forced to use them. So I guess the question is if that's -- given that scenario, why not make people at least a little familiar with the MK19 and other weapons in basic training?

MAJ. REGISTER (sp): Hey sir. This is Major Register again. I agree, sir, that, you know, weapons familiarity with any potential system that you could be using, you know, during an upcoming deployment is certainly prudent. However, I think that just looking at -- you know, just looking at one individual situation can kind of, you know, maybe skew their perception.

You know, just looking at a BCT, for example. Most soldiers will transition to -- you know, from advanced individual training to their unit and be in their unit for a period of time prior to deploying to Afghanistan or Iraq or to Haiti. And during that time, they're going to become very familiar with any weapons system that they could possibly be employing during that upcoming deployment. You know, any weapons system that that company or that platoon or that squad has the potential for employing, they are going to more than likely be familiar with it, and if not qualified on that individual weapon system.

Q Well, for one thing, when they get over there, their mission may not be exactly what they trained for in the classic case of the artillery folks who are now running convoys. And the second, as my colleague Christian mentioned, you may have people who aren't supposed to be in this positions who may very well have to take up that position. If the gunner gets hit, suddenly they have to be on the 50 cal.

MAJ. REGISTER (sp): Right. And I'll tell you, sir, that if you have those -- those are contingencies or possibilities. And I will tell you that if you have the potential for employing, for example, a 50 cal or a mark 19, and you have access to those weapons systems, the prudent commander is going to ensure that every one of his soldiers that might find himself in that situation is familiar with that weapons system, if not qualified on that weapons system. And you can't eliminate every situation, but I will tell you that most commanders do ensure that their soldiers have some kind of training on those weapons systems.

MAJ. DUGGER (sp): And, sir, this is Major Dugger (sp). I'm artillery man. I understand the challenges with transitioning from your core tasks to other missions. Major Register (sp) is 100 percent right. The big thing you have to consider is your time to train. If you're on a very short deployment time, you're going to focus on getting

your critical gunners qualified and your assistant gunners qualified. So a lot of that is time-dependent. If you've got time to qualify more and conduct more familiarity ranges, we do so. But I'm not sure the timeline of the National Guard officer you were referring to, sir, as far as how much time he had during deployment -- you know, the pre-deployment training. But a lot of that will drive what you can get to and what you can't. And you have to focus on the critical tasks. And one of those are qualifying your primary gunner and your assistant gunners. And then like Major Register (sp) said, being smart about how you plug those people into convoys or your mission set. And I agree that it's great to get everyone as familiar as you can to be able to adapt and be flexible in situations as they occur.

Q Okay, thank you.

MS. MCCALL-WASHINGTON: And are there any other questions?

Okay. Well, I'd just like to once again thank all of our participants. And Major Dugger (sp) and another other participants if you had any closing remarks or statements.

MAJ. DUGGER (sp): Ashley, thank you for your help in setting this up, and it's good to talk to all of you. And I look forward to seeing your comments on the blogs. Thank you.

Q Thank, guys.

Q Thank you.

MS. MCCALL-WASHINGTON: Thank you. This ends our roundtable for today.

END.