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Tomorrow's fight trusts NCOs with more power

By **Lance M. Bacon** - Staff writer
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Noncommissioned officers will soon get more leadership and combat training, better intel and gear on the battlefield — and a lot more responsibility as leaders shape the Army for the battlefield of tomorrow.

The way forward places squads right at the tip of the spear. Brigades will push capabilities and responsibilities down the chain as the battlefield becomes decentralized.

Low-intensity counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations will likely dominate the future force. Battlefields will present “hybrid” threats of conventional forces supported by insurgencies. And don't expect another war in which you work with village leaders while fighting guerrillas. Humanity has an urban future, according to Pete Singer, senior fellow in foreign policy at the Brookings Institution.

This means your future fights will be unified operations in the full spectrum, specifically offensive, defensive and stability operations.

Soldiers must be trained, equipped and trusted to operate autonomously. Although the squad has become the most important asset in this new doctrine, it is the weakest link.

“There is overmatch at just about every level, but when you get down to the squad it is too fair a fight,” said Maj. Gen. Robert Brown, who commands the Maneuver Center of Excellence. “We don't want a fair fight. Boots on the ground is the most strategic thing we do, and it is absolutely critical that we get it to overmatch.”

The Army's focus is the effectiveness of the squad as a formation. Its mandate is a networked, mobile and lethal squad that knows its environment and is strengthened by mission command. Its purpose is to enable soldiers to be proactive rather than reactive.

Brown pointed to Medal of Honor recipient Staff Sgt. Salvatore Giunta. Although his actions were heroic, his squad would not have been ambushed had it been provided the level of intelligence squads will soon have.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey led the Army in a “bottom-up” review that looked from the squad up instead of the brigade down. Dempsey has established his “left and right lateral limits” as the strategic squad is developed. First, the design will focus on the infantry squad, then broaden its reach. Second is in regard to size.

“There is some controversy about whether the nine-man squad is right,” the chief said. “Let me end that controversy. The nine-man squad is the



TECH. SGT. EFREN LOPEZ / AIR FORCE

Soldiers with the 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 5th Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division and Afghan National Army soldiers conduct a patrol in Zabul, Afghanistan, in 2009.

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center of our universe.”

The new approach also looks to build a squad that is:

- More lethal.
- Better informed with real-time intelligence.
- More expeditionary.
- Lighter.
- Autonomous.
- Better trained.

New squad-centric gear in the works includes everything from hand-held blue-force trackers and unmatched surveillance capabilities to lighter and deadlier weaponry. There is talk of putting operationally adaptable fires in the squad, and there is a concerted effort to lighten your load with things such as conformal batteries. The average platoon now carries 450 pounds of batteries for a 72-hour mission, Brown said.

Yet it is access to intelligence that is arguably the greatest aid to lethality and survivability, and the plan is to provide squads with an amount of intelligence that would make some battalion commanders drool.

“Dominant everywhere is unrealistic,” Brown said. “You have to be dominant at a given place and time. We must establish favorable conditions while retaining the squad’s ability to react. We are surprised way too much.”

The Army is working toward a universal device that provides a convergence of operations and intelligence, said Brig. Gen. Gregg Potter, commandant of the Army Intelligence Center of Excellence and commanding general of Fort Huachuca, Ariz. There are a few obstacles on this path.

Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance is focused on brigades, divisions and battalions. The critical information a squad needs is but a small piece of the mountains of data continuously fed by secret satellite imagery, audio intercepts, aerial surveillance and ground communications. The soldier must therefore have equipment that can dissect the info he needs, securely transmit that info and present it in a way that is easy to read and understand in the heat of battle.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

“When we promote someone to colonel or sergeant major, we send them to school for a year,” Dempsey said to a gathering of senior leaders in July. “When a soldier goes to squad leader, he goes for 17 days. Have we got the pyramid upside down, maybe?”

The Army has responded with a threefold strategy to build the adaptable soldiers and units it needs. This strategy puts a greater emphasis on self-development, it helps units build leaders from within and it opens key school seats to the right people at the right time. It also embraces the “digital comfort” the young generation has, and the Army often disconnects (see story below).

The soldier will have greater responsibility for self-development.

“The best NCOs have always done that, but the Army has always approached it as ‘if you really need knowledge or skills, we will provide it to you,’” said Jay Brimstin, deputy director of MCoE’s directorate of training and doctrine.

No more. Each NCO will know what is expected and available. Those who wish to become better warriors who wear more stripes will be known by their initiative.

Forthcoming training support templates will help those strong NCOs instill leadership qualities into young soldiers moving up the ranks — a deficit bemoaned by many young soldiers today.

Army leaders do not dispute that the demand for leaders in the fight, coupled with tendency of selection boards to reward those with combat experience, has kept many of the best and brightest from schools on the past 10 years. Army Training and Doctrine Command commander Gen. Robert Cone said the reality is an “understandable but very bad trend for

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the long-term future of our Army.”

“At some point, brilliant, well-experienced tactical leaders have to transition to become operational or even strategic leaders and thinkers,” he said. “It is very hard to do that if you have not attended the schools that provide the education needed to refine and broaden your thinking.”

Promotion and selection policies will re-establish the importance of attending Professional Military Education. The Advanced Leader Course is likely to undergo an overhaul to accommodate the additional responsibility headed your way, and more NCOs will be headed to Ranger School.

The Army hasn't done a good job of aligning Ranger School seats with the Army Force Generation model, said Brimstin, who called the school “the best leadership training in an institutional course that you will find.” A change is in the works, so more seats will be offered to units during reset. A redistribution of seats, namely a reduction of noninfantry officers to increase the number of infantry NCOs, is also on the table.

Officials also look to take advantage of the innovative leadership skills taught at the Recon Surveillance Leader Course, Army Reconnaissance Course and the Asymmetric Warfare Adaptive Leader Program.

TRUST AND RESPONSIBILITY

The Army is not diminishing the role of brigade commanders as it empowers small-unit leaders. Like the squads responsible to them, the commanders' roles are evolving.

Brigade commanders once achieved success by integrating combat power at a precise point and the operational depth of the battlefield, said Lt. Gen. Robert Caslen, commander of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. Things are not so defined today.

Commanders must understand “the critical complexity” of battlefield. They must build relationships with indigenous peoples, the modular Army and joint and coalition forces, even though they may not directly control many of the elements and resources they will marshal. They must also understand power to inform and influence, and the power of information.

A brigade commander, in some ways, is like a symphony conductor standing before a group of musicians who have never met — and may not be on the same sheet of music. It takes the right person to synchronize all the parts to ensure they operate in harmony. And the baton the Army has handed its battlefield conductors is called “Mission Command.”

This construct replaces command and control, as well as battle command, and allows rapid transition from centralized to decentralized operations. The commander has the bird's-eye view of the battlefield and all the unfolding factors. He issues his intent and trusts that “subordinate leaders at all echelons exercise disciplined initiative, acting aggressively and independently to accomplish the mission within the commander's intent,” according to Field Manual 3-0.

THE 'UNFLINCHING EYE'

The network stands as another key element of change. It is a system of software, radios and sensors that receive and pass data from unmanned systems to provide a common operating picture of the battlefield. Although its primary customer is the brigade combat team, soldiers at the squad level will be able to connect.

The network will bring “18 silos of excellence” into one common operating environment, said Maj. Gen. Steven Smith, who heads the Army's Cyber Directorate. One key result, he said, is squad overmatch through the “unblinking eye” of situational awareness.

“Our Army is 80 percent [continental United States]-based,” he said. “In the next conflict, that combat commander will have to plan while en route and attack upon arrival.”



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The Signal Corps is moving quickly to do its part. On paper, it is "still a Desert Storm-vintage signal corps" that can only provide about 34 percent of communications required, said Maj. Gen. Alan Lynn, commander of the U.S. Army Signal Center of Excellence. Now it is turning to commercial, off-the-shelf technology to expedite its overhaul.

This approach is necessary because the current network is not sustainable, said Col. (p) Charles Flynn, director of the Mission Command Center of Excellence.

"When a Brigade Combat Team goes to a [combat training center], it takes eight to 10 days to get the network up and operational," he said.

Officials want to duplicate the quick-hit acquisitions seen in the Rapid Equipping Force and its use of "colorless money" that can be spent where it is needed.

"It's not about pushing things down now, it's about pushing things up," Dempsey said. "Now the really good intel comes from the bottom up, and we've got to spin the paradigm on its head and build the network to deliver it."

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Kevin Muhlenbeck · Excelsior College

As a Senior NCO, I see alot of things that I have to correct even though many other NCO's have walked by and ignored. Alot of NCO's, and not just junior ones, are having issues just enforcing basic standards of Soldiering out of not wanting to be the "bad guy". Until we get the corps motivated on fixing this, is could be another initiative that we end losing back to the Officer corps. We need more NCO's not just Sergeants!

9 · [Reply](#) · August 20 at 3:28pm



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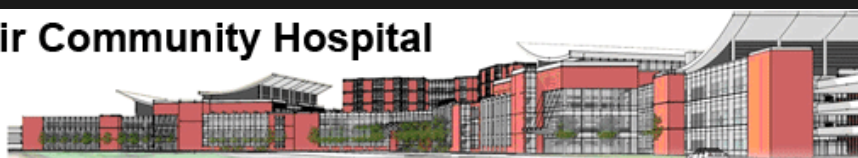
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