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WARRIOR DEVELOPMENT

Finding the Warrior within the Modern Soldier

By

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Note: The following paper was motivated by the author's first hand observations and experience in Afghanistan (2001-2003) and the studying of after action reports from Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Excluding special operations forces (SOF), Rangers and Marines, many military units, including components of the US Army, have lost focus on their primary purpose – to fight and win wars. Where modern basic training is still churning out soldiers, it is not turning out warriors or war-fighters.

This begs the question – **What is the difference between a soldier and a warrior?**

A soldier is merely a man or woman in uniform serving in the armed services. In contrast, a warrior is a fighter. A warrior is a soldier with the training and motivation to seek out and kill the enemy, to destroy his equipment and to win battles.

This loss of the warrior mindset in the modern army can be attributed to several factors.

1. We as a people are evolving and becoming more civilized – and as such we aspire to a time when all conflict will be solved by talking and not fighting. However, in the light of history and human nature, it would be naive to model military training around the assumption that war is a thing of the past.
2. With an all-volunteer military each branch competes to fill recruiting quotas – and in the process they lower the standards of basic fitness and education to bring more recruits into the system. We have all met the young recruit who is borderline illiterate and can barely do one pull-up. There is a lot to be said for the crusty old drill sergeant who growls, “ You aren't tough enough or smart enough for my army, son!”
3. Another problem is basic motivation. Soldiers are being recruited with promises of “travel and education”, with little emphasis on the fact that they will one day be required to risk their lives in defense of their country. I doubt recruiters even cover the physical rigors of basic training let alone the harsh brutality and reality of war.
4. The introduction of women into many aspects of military training and operations has necessitated a lowering of many essential war-fighting standards such as basic fitness, upper body strength and close quarter fighting. This softening of standards in turn has trickled down to their male counterparts in a now “kinder

- and gentler military” (this should in no way minimize the critical role that women can and do play in the armed services)
5. There are those in the military who aspire to higher standards and who firmly believe that components of the military are no more than “welfare in uniform” – in that the military will recruit those who cannot make it in any other job or profession. This can be seen in the individual recruits who are substandard in fitness, are totally lacking in personal discipline, and functionally illiterate.

Much can be learned from the US Marine Corps philosophy and practice that ALL Marines are first and foremost “riflemen” with an underlying warrior ethos. Any Marine, immaterial of military occupation, clerk, typist, driver or cook, must be able to pick up their rifle and fight when needed. While this may be a stretch from reality, at least the underlying ethos is sound.

The army on the other hand seems to take the attitude that after basic training many individuals will serve in support positions and therefore need no significant levels of fitness or weapons skills. This was evident in the poor showing of soldiers in Iraq when their support convoy came under ambush. Had that been a Marine convoy, with a philosophy of aggressive counterforce, there may have well been a different outcome.

This problem also extends to the US Air Force who puts very little emphasis on weapons training during basic training – no more than a day or two. These same AF recruits will eventually become airmen and find themselves deployed to forward operating basis with elevated threat levels. They will still wear the uniform and carry the rifle, but few if any will be competent in its use.

(Note: The author has personally experienced these deficiencies with officers during pre-deployment training who had not fired a weapon in over four years. The same was true of enlisted who had not had an opportunity to fire their M60s, SAWs or M240Bs. Two weeks before an officer or enlisted goes to Iraq or Afghanistan is not the time to be learning how to shoot, move or communicate)

Solution

This core belief that **every soldier is a warrior** should permeate every level of recruiting, fitness, education, training and readiness. If what the recruit or soldier learns does not contribute in some way to the destruction of an enemy, then it is time wasted. Granted, this contribution may be indirect as in those who work in the logistics chain, but those logisticians must also understand the importance of their fitness and efficiency to the war effort. In addition, when forward deployed in that support role, they must realize that every support base and every convoy could come under enemy attack, and they will be required to take up arms and fight back. Every soldier must feel and act as a warrior, even if his or her tasking is not in a frontline position

Four core requirements that must be emphasized in all levels of military training, and for all ranks, are:

1. Individual Fitness – stamina and strength
2. Skill at Arms – primarily small arms rifle training (pistols for officers)
3. Individual Fighting Skills – unarmed combat
4. Small Unit Tactics – focused on basic fire and maneuver drills

1. Fitness & Confidence

There are a number of ways to generate, or re-generate, this warrior mindset and attitude. The first is through basic confidence – a confidence that begins with the physical fitness to participate in all aspects of military training. Any soldier who is able to run with the unit; do the required number of push-ups, pull-ups and sit-ups; and carry a fully loaded combat pack on a 10 mile route march, will automatically gain confidence and peer respect.

The military has also long understood the value of obstacle courses to develop stamina, upper body strength and confidence in an individual. This needs to be taken to the next level with courses that better replicate the conditions found on the modern (urban) battlefield.

2. Skill at Arms

The second, and woefully neglected in the modern military, is skill at arms. Many military units and even entire branches of the armed services, have reduced small arms weapons training to a mere day or two in basic training with little to no serious sustainment or re-qualification training.

Shooting is a perishable skill, and one that needs to be practiced on a regular basis. Not merely once or twice a year. Yet commands are not given sufficient budget, ammunition allocations, or range time to develop and hone these skills. Recruits and soldiers are trucked out to the range to fire the required 60-100 rounds, to be yelled at by range staff with little motivation to actually educate, and then trucked back to clean their weapons after a totally unproductive and dissatisfying shooting experience.

Skill with a rifle, or any weapon, is a core source of personal pride and peer respect within the military. An individual who shoots well will again, automatically be granted an element of respect by his or her instructors, NCOs, officers, and more importantly, squad members (peers). But training must go beyond basic marksmanship and into the reality-based weapons training not commonly found within the military.

To accomplish this, greater emphasis must be placed on developing good foundational shooting skills at the basic training level; even if this requires additional time and remedial training for the “Gomer Pyles” in the class. Recruits should not be graduated without this essential skill and accompanying self confidence.

Once assigned to a unit, tactical weapons training should be a monthly or at the worst, bi-monthly training evolution. Incentives should also be developed to encourage soldiers to aspire to a higher level at each range shoot. If scores are not slowly but steadily improving, then the overall program is flawed. This requires that remedial programs not only be created but mandatory for all slow learners.

3. Fighting Ability

Developing a true fighting spirit and warrior ethos is the most difficult of the four requirements, but relatively simple. One only has to look at history and to study the methods of past warrior casts to understand the process of taking young men and

turning them into hardened soldiers. There are significant similarities in the methods used by the ancient Spartans, the Samurai, and even today's more progressive tactical training institutions – and these all center round individual fighting skills.

Whether it is skill with a sword, martial arts, or basic milling (boxing), these training methods all force the individual to stand up and be counted. This close quarter fighting has been all but eliminated from the modern battlefield where long-range strategic and tactical weapons systems maximize the lethal reach of our military. This technological “video game” warfare has depersonalized combat to the point where the individual soldier (or more accurately computer operator) has lost contact with his warrior self.

To create hardened soldiers with a warrior mentality and fighting spirit requires a step back to the basics of individual combat. Militaries that incorporate martial arts and unarmed combat training as a core part of their basic training and fitness program all benefit from turning out soldiers with a more developed fighting spirit.

Martial arts have the added benefit of putting the smaller man on equal terms with his larger adversary. With fighting forms such as karate, taekwondo, judo, ju jitsu or Krav Maga, the man who trains harder, demonstrates greater speed, technique and controlled aggression will invariably win. Many soldiers will also stay involved with these sports on their own time for both fitness and a sense of personal accomplishment.

Additional Recommendations

4. Force-on-Force Training

An essential element missing from military training is a force-on-force experience where soldiers can come close to experiencing combat or at least getting shot at. In a risk-averse, budget conscious modern military, the concept of force-on-force training with weapons has been all but lost.

Force-on-force training can be easily organized with low velocity ammunitions specifically designed for this purpose such as Simunitions and UTM. These Man Marking Rounds (MMR) allow units to test their tactics, particularly urban and counter-ambush drills, with some sense of reality.

Even though these rounds are non-lethal, they do require full clothing and safety equipment such as goggles, face guards, neck guards and gloves. When a soldier is stung by one of these rounds, he will quickly re-evaluate his tactics, use of cover and shooting technique. He will also walk away with the realization that his error could have cost him his life in combat.

But more importantly, the soldiers will come to appreciate the effect on their “enemy” when they utilize reality-based tactics, immediate suppressive fire, accurate marksmanship, and maneuver.

5. Required Reading

To help correct the problem of minimal education and lack of communication skills amongst enlisted personnel, recruits and soldiers should not only be encouraged to read

selected military history texts, this should be a requirement. Just as fitness and skill at arms should be encouraged, so should the reading of texts related to the significant campaigns and battles of history and more importantly recent conflicts. This not only improves basic education but also gives a solid grounding in tactical thinking.

Command personnel should be encouraged to select texts that will be of value to their personnel. These can range from Greek military history to more recent after action reports from current operations. There are currently numerous military books and autobiographies of an inspirational nature being written by former officers and senior enlisted who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

With the current war on terrorism, all military personnel should be required to read and study material related to the current theaters of operation, local custom and culture, and even basic language. Although many officers and senior enlisted are well read and in tune with local customs, US military personnel as a whole have a reputation for cultural insensitivity. This can be attributed to the lack of formal training given prior to deployment, and the lack of continued education once troops get on the ground. Depersonalization of the enemy in time of war is acceptable military practice, but this same depersonalization and lack of cultural sensitivity in the peacekeeping and reconstruction process only serves to alienate the troops and slow the process.

Finally, troops at all levels should be encouraged to learn the local languages of the regions in which they are to be deployed, or are currently deployed. However, even though we have been on the ground in Afghanistan for over five years, we have very few soldiers who grasp even a few words of Dari or Pashto, let alone attain any fluency in these languages. The same is true after almost four years in Iraq and the problem extends all the way up to command personnel and intelligence officers.

This lack of proficiency in languages, or even a sincere effort to learn, sends a message to the local population and leaders that we are not there for the long haul – just another group of ugly Americans passing through.

6. Leadership

If senior NCOs and Platoon Leaders do not currently possess the above mentioned attributes then it will be difficult for them to encourage these in their own men. All military personnel who serve in a leadership, supervisory or command capacity should be able to demonstrate a level of fitness and skill at arms above their soldiers.

Unfortunately, with all the other responsibilities of leadership, officers and senior NCOs often have little time to participate in actual training or maintain their own warrior skills. The soldiers in their command quickly recognize the “leaders” who shy from actual participation in training – and those leaders lose significant respect.

7. Forward Deployed Training

Another place where the modern military often losing training momentum is in forward deployed areas of operation (AO). Many units are deployed quickly to the world’s hot spots lacking adequate pre-deployment training. The readiness reports will all indicate that the unit is ready for deployment, but in reality those forms have been massaged to meet the exigent need.

Appreciating that this is a common occurrence, commands must budget for both ammunition and training resources in forward deployed areas. Most units will take 2-4 weeks after arriving in theater for transfer of command, in-country indoctrination, and theater specific training. This time should also be used to hone weapons skills and upgrade small unit tactics.

Conclusion

Developing a warrior ethos and skill sets within any army is not a difficult task. But it is one that requires a command commitment at the highest level to overhaul recruitment, basic training, fitness, weapons training, and individual professional development. Given suitably trained and motivated individuals, the operational unit capabilities will automatically improve. By instilling a warrior ethos at all levels, every armed service would reap benefits at the individual and unit level for generations to come.

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