



Dynamic Training

Conference on Training Armies for the 21st Century

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Remarks by General Paul F. Gorman, U.S.A. (Retired)

I have been asked to comment upon certain events in 1971, when the United States Army was in turmoil, and its future was quite unclear. The American role at war in Southeast Asia was being reduced. The Army was being downsized. Our government had set a date for the end of conscription. As the Army realigned priorities to its NATO mission in Europe, and to recruiting an all-volunteer force, high-ranking officers in the Pentagon became alarmed that Army training in units could support neither. In particular, they held that the Army's junior leaders, because of "the Vietnam straitjacket," had neither the know-how nor the motivation to conduct sound training.

In that year of 1971, for reasons still mysterious, the U.S. Army decided to elevate me to the rank of brigadier general. I was notified of the impending promotion just before I left Vietnam, where for the previous year I had been commanding 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. I was also told that until the promotion became effective I would be assigned to a comfortable job in which I could reflect, write, and get reacquainted with my family.

But, of course, my usual luck with assignments held. No sooner had I returned home that summer than I was summoned to the Pentagon to report to General Westmoreland, then the Chief of Staff of the Army. He told me that he had been sorely disappointed with training that he had recently inspected in U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR). What he had seen, he said, confirmed what his staff had been telling him. He directed me to convene a Board of Officers to determine what could be done to bring about dynamic training. He charged me with estimating the state of training in units of the combat arms — infantry, armor, field artillery, and divisional air defense artillery. I was to tell him how to foster training tailored by each commander for his mission. I was to flag ways to overcome constraints of time and money. And I was to present a plan to initiate and to support

training in units of the combat arms that was for the trainer imaginative, innovative, and professionally stretching, and that was for the soldier a stimulating learning experience, and a strong contributor to his job satisfaction. “That is what I mean by dynamic training,” he said. ”I will expect your recommendations in 120 days.”

Needless to say, I found that tasking daunting. The word “stunned” fits. Eleven years had passed since I had served in a unit engaged in peacetime training, and I knew almost nothing about presiding over a board of officers. I saluted the Chief, then walked down the hall to the office of the Assistant Vice Chief of Staff (pronounced A-VICE), a general with whom I had once served, to ask his advice. He used a parable:

In October 1918, he said, the American Expeditionary Force was engaged in a great battle in the Argonne Forest of eastern France. A recently promoted brigadier general, ordered to lead an infantry brigade in an attack, decided to go aloft in an artillery observation balloon to study the terrain. He and a captain of artillery climbed into a basket beneath the balloon, which was sent aloft at the end of a long tether. The pair had no sooner reached altitude than hostile artillery struck and the tether was severed. A wind came up, blowing in a dense bank of fog that engulfed the balloon. With each minute that the two officers drifted along out of sight of the ground, their alarm grew. What if they landed behind enemy lines? Or in No Man’s Land?

Thirty minutes of anxiety later the fog dissipated momentarily, enough for them to see that the balloon was quite low and approaching a large chateau, surrounded by a high wall. As they drifted over the wall, there came into view two officers in impeccable dress uniforms, with polished Sam Browne belts and riding boots, drinking Martinis. The new brigadier leaned out of the balloon’s basket and called down to them: “Where are we? Where are we going?” One of the officers below shouted back: “Your are in a balloon. You are drifting away from us.” With that the fog closed in again. The new brigadier exclaimed, “[Expletive deleted.] That told us nothing!” The captain replied, “To the contrary, general, that told us exactly where we are. We must be passing over

Headquarters, U. S. Army Europe. It is 3:30 in the afternoon, and cocktails have already been served.

Moreover, the information provided was instantly forthcoming, quite precise, and utterly useless.”

The AVICE pointed out that I could roam the corridors of the Pentagon asking questions like those posed by the brigadier general in the balloon, and receive only responses like those from the tipplers in the garden: “You are in the Army, and it is drifting.” With that, he said, the fog will close in, and all you really will know is that you are in the Pentagon. The true answers lie on the ground, with troops, and you will have to navigate yourself.

He gave good advice. I went to Fort Benning, pinned on a star, and formed a Board comprised of ten officers supported by an Administrative Committee of some forty officers, plus a small staff of noncommissioned officers and civilians. However, the Board also solicited participation from combat arms units throughout the Active Army and the Reserve components, and conducted a three-week conference for 99 representatives from those units. Additionally, teams from the Administrative Committee visited 103 Active Army units, and 35 units of the Reserve Components. A scientifically designed survey, a questionnaire, distributed to individuals of all ranks throughout the Army, produced 2084 valid Active Army responses, and 587 responses from Reservists. Also, members of the Board exchanged views with sixteen foreign military establishments, and consulted with nine senior retired generals, each with a reputation for his accomplishments as a trainer of soldiers.

Just before Christmas of 1971 I reported back to the Chief of Staff. I told him that he was quite right: there was indeed a problem with training in units. Only a handful of respondents to the Board’s inquiries considered such training to be “dynamic,” as he used the term. However, I said, the Board perceived no problem with the motivation, qualification, or dedication of company grade officers, and found little evidence that lack of experience was an obstacle to dynamic training. While the Pentagon believes problems in training stem from company-level leadership, company-level sentiment attributes training ills to the Pentagon. The Board, I said, agreed with the company-level view.

Specifically, the Army Training Program (ATP) then in force was essentially the model for training designed during World War II by genius to be executed by idiots. The model bifurcated the Army between training in CONUS, and units overseas, managing intensely the one, and leaving the other to theater commanders. The ATP of 1971 updated this WWII model only by adding the “peacetime” notion of operational readiness training, “undertaken by units that have completed the formal phases of training and are responsible for maintaining the highest state of combat proficiency possible.” The ATP prescribed highly centralized management of a fixed-sequence curriculum by blocks of hours, subject by subject for five formal steps or phases: basic and advanced individual training, then basic and advanced unit training, culminating in field exercises and maneuvers. Generals and general staff officers usually presumed that Active Army units were in the sixth step, especially those in overseas commands like USAREUR. Company commanders knew that their units were in step one, individual training, and could demonstrate that there was not enough time available to them in the training year to advance their company through the other formal steps to achieve operational readiness. As the Board’s Final Report put it, “Active Army seniors and juniors do not see eye to eye on key aspects of training, especially on its importance relative to other requirements. Throughout the Army there were substantial indications of over-commitment and under-resourcing to the detriment of training. The company commander...over-committed ...beset with acute problems of personnel turbulence and under-trained cadre, sees...’Individual Training’ as the focal point of most ...training problems. Therein lie the kinds of training he finds toughest to plan, to manage, or to influence personally. This is the training he finds most difficult to make ‘dynamic.’ There too is a major source of communication difficulty between the company commander and senior officers on the subject of training: when colonels and generals talk training, they usually refer to unit or mission training, whereas captains refer to individual training. Hence, there is a widespread conviction among company commanders that senior officers have little appreciation of the magnitude and complexity of the individual training task they confront daily.”

The Board, I said, recommended that the Chief set aside the Army Training Program. As the Board put it:

- An Army should train as it will fight. On any future battlefield, as was the case in Vietnam, a high degree of dispersion and decentralization will characterize tactical command, and battalion and company commanders will manage their own battle. Hence they should manage their training themselves, per a mission-type order.
- The U.S. Army must be entirely honest with itself...
- “The Army’s whole approach to training in units...needs rejuvenation and revision. Change will require firm support for better training management, better training techniques, and better devices at the highest echelons of Department of the Army, among its major commands world-wide, and within the CONARC service schools....The problem in dynamizing training is less the message than the medium – less what to do better than to support the trainer, than how to communicate improvements to him.
- The Army should establish the Deputy Commanding General of the Continental Army Command (CONARC) as the principal advocate for unit trainers of the Total Army, empowered to represent them in the Army’s highest councils and among its major commands, and to coordinate the numerous offices and agencies that impinged upon their ability to manage and to conduct effective training.

It is to the great credit of General Westmoreland that he formed the Board for Dynamic Training in the first place. The Army is further indebted to him not only because he tolerated the Board’s telling him that he and his advisors in the Pentagon were mistaken in their diagnosis of the training problem, but also because he acted, against the advice of many contemporaries, courageously and forcefully on the Board’s advice. Generals Palmer and Abrams, who succeeded him as Chief of Staff, followed through. In 1973 General Abrams activated the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), and instructed its commander to foster better training of the Total

Army worldwide. Results were evident within seven years. Time-managed, process-centered training gave way to decentralized, performance-oriented training. The Army Training Program yielded primacy to each commander's Mission Essential Task List, from which he derived tasks for training, and appropriate conditions and standards. Research called for by the Board led to TRADOC's developing devices for laser-based simulation of direct fire, and for emulation of indirect fire, prototypes of the devices that enable today's Combat Training Centers. Combat arms training was revitalized by the introduction of tactical engagement simulation in which units tested themselves against thinking opponents in free-play exercises, with casualty assessment on both sides. Leaders at all levels learned to submit to After Action Reviews in which their own shortcomings, among others, were frankly evaluated to identify ameliorative further training. Per the Board's findings, constructive simulations of war, theretofore used mainly for analytical support of materiel acquisition, were transformed into exercise-drivers for battle staffs, and for operational planning and rehearsal. The Army Training Support Center came into being to proliferate and to sustain these mechanisms, and to enhance individual and collective training and evaluation Army-wide. An arm of the materiel acquisition command, closely tied to TRADOC, was set up to pursue further R&D for support of individual and collective training. Periodic Training Conferences among TRADOC, FORSCOM and USAREUR built consensus among the Army's leaders on the substance and the quality of unit training, always with higher combat effectiveness in view —in one memorable TRAINCON, held here at Grafenwöhr in 1976, a tank company fired live at advancing arrays of targets representing an attacking battalion. Training tasks became harder, conditions more realistic, standards higher.

Let there be no mistake. TRADOC was the instigator, the coordinator, and the change agent. Without a proactive TRADOC, whose mission embraced training and doctrine for the entire Army, the sort of proficiency that you heard about today and will see tomorrow would not exist in the Field Army.

We all must accept that change is quite inevitable. Every army, anywhere and in any year, is on a journey, undergoing change. Sometimes the change is slow, almost imperceptible. At other times it is dramatically fast. Each of us has observed in small units how long it takes to transform a group of soldiers into a cohesive and effective team. We all know of the months of careful leadership and hard training required: the magnifying of small achievements, the containment of setbacks; the words of encouragement and the stinging criticisms; the long hours under stress, cold, and darkness, and the occasional moments of sunshine and celebration. It is people that make a military unit truly effective, not its tanks or its guns. Transforming a group of soldiers into an effective team takes good training, patience, leadership, and above all else, time.

But each of us has also observed how swiftly a good unit can be rendered ineffective by poor leadership: the best of units, one built upon generations of tradition and years of solid experience, can have its effectiveness negated by a few hours of command incompetence. We all know too that it is not possible for a unit simply to rest on its laurels. The dynamics of small units are dictated within the human breast, and as no man can stop growing save in death, so collectives — soldiers with bonding and interdependence — must continue to grow: slowly toward betterment, or precipitously toward ineffectiveness. I believe that this is true of large collectives as well as small, and indeed, to apply to military institutions as large as a national army.

I suspect that profound change in the U.S. Army's current training model is about to occur, change driven by the information revolution. Training is essentially communications. As commercial enterprises and modern means of command and control assure more pervasive and robust communications, the Army's ability to train itself is bound to increase proportionately. So also will the Army's ability to contribute to the individual and collective training of allies. The Army should do all it can to capitalize on modern technology to support advances in training technique and training management. For example, the U.S. Army is on the verge of an era in which TRADOC's Army Training Support Center (ATSC) will be able to assist individual and collective training in any unit, anywhere in the world, at the time and place requested by the unit commander. The very

concept of Army training support is expanding to embrace interactive job aids, consultation with remote experts on demand, widely-available continuing military education for self-development of officers and non-commissioned officers, and exported constructive battle simulations for training, planning, or rehearsal. In this sense, at least, the future is promising, provided that the “Field Army” embraces the role of TRADOC as encompassing not only institutional instruction, but also support for training in its units.

But let us return to 1971. The Assistant Vice Chief of Staff at that time was Lieutenant General William E. DePuy, he who told me the parable of the balloonists. The Board for Dynamic Training was the Chief’s idea, but it was DePuy who proposed me as its President, and who masterminded the follow-up Army staff action on the Board’s recommendations. In 1973, DePuy was the architect of the reorganization of the Army that did away with CONARC, and was promoted to become the first commander of the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). With activation of the latter, a training revolution got underway in earnest, and the U.S. Army entered a new era. TRADOC, under DePuy’s vigorous leadership, launched a broad effort to devise and field improved training methods and training support for both individual and collective training. It is worth noting that DePuy commanded in a period not unlike the present: the Army was down-sizing, and institutional training budgets were austere. Some few here may remember that President Carter ran for office in 1976 on a platform that promised American voters that he would reduce funds for military training. Army units were under-strength, personnel turbulence was high, non-training missions were frequent, junior officers and young NCOs were opting out of service, recruiting was faltering, and the Army was plagued with societal problems like drug abuse and racial tension. Despite all that, the Army’s collective training got better — slowly, painstakingly, but better day by day, month by month, year by year. I find it hard to believe that the “Field Army,” of its own resources, could have brought all that to past.

What Bill DePuy put together in TRADOC was a command that fashioned the Army’s future by emphasizing support of training in units of the Field Army, and by mandating within its schools coordinated

combat developments and training developments. TRADOC's mission, often reiterated by General DePuy, was to conceptualize both improved materiel, and improved ways to train soldiers. "Doctrine," DePuy insisted, was not what was written into manuals, but what is taught to soldiers wherever they may be training. All training, he held, should be aimed at creating and maintaining "doctrine," which he defined as an Army-wide consensus, a fusion of minds, that would make possible cohesive action in battle.

The agenda for this conference stated that the U.S. Army now has a "model" that bifurcates training between the Institutional Army and the Field Army, the former responsible for institutional training, the latter accountable for collective training. That formulation dismayed me, because it foreshadows a turning back to the CONARC misapprehension. If true, it allows the generals of TRADOC to focus on being schoolmasters, to concentrate on training recruits, or on herding officers and NCOs through the gates of resident professional education, to the exclusion of concern for USAREUR's collective training, and for provisions for supporting allies.

It is true that TRADOC suffers from substantial down-sizing, and there are many, some in high places, who believe that the Army has a proven model for training that obviates providing for improvements. In their view, TRADOC today need not concern itself with research and development for improving collective training, nor trouble itself with how better to integrate training of the Active and Reserve components, nor be concerned that there are no Army Science and Technology objectives related to collective training beyond the current Army planning cycle. If that view of a narrowly-missioned TRADOC is allowed to prevail, the Army as a whole will be the poorer, and the Field Army will have to engineer its own future-fashioning mechanisms. If that view prevails, I predict that the day will soon come when another Chief of Staff will convene a second Board for Dynamic Training, leading to the reinvention of TRADOC.

Institutional training the Army must have. Superb unit training the Army must also have. As the 1975 version of FM 100-5 pointed out, most soldiers spend most of their time in units, and it is in units that most of

their professional growth occurs. Devising new ways to make the most of unit training, individual and collective, for the Total Army demands of generals what Bill DePuy termed a “fire in the belly” to show units how to train regardless of obstacles and distractions — now, and in the future; with today’s weapon systems, or with tomorrow’s. The Army needs a major command with an Army-wide training mission, like that of the original TRADOC.

I urge you, as Bill DePuy urged me, to side with a pervasive TRADOC. Come down out of the fog of complacency; seek ground-truth; act accordingly.

And remember what Abraham Lincoln taught: “the best thing about the future is that it comes only one day at a time.”