

Photo by Jim Anderson

Battle Task Training Improves Performance

By Command Sergeant Major Roy L. Burns, Jr.

"Training is the cornerstone of readiness and the basis for credible deterrence and capable defense. Training is the means by which the Army's quality soldiers and leaders develop their warfighting proficiency and exercise the collective capabilities they will require in combat. Training prepares soldiers, leaders, and units to fight and win in war—the Army's basic mission."

FM 25-101, Forward

During the first six months as command sergeant major of the Engineer Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, I observed major inadequacies in the conduct of equipment maintenance and operation. As the Army's first unit to be reorganized under the Engineer Restructure Initiative (ERI), growing pains were expected—but not of the magnitude encountered.

Training Needs

A major concern was the melding of the engineer battalions that formed the brigade. Two battalions, the 16th and the 82nd Engineer Battalions, had recently participated in Operation Desert Storm (ODS), while the 10th Engineer Battalion had supplied platoon-level teams to beef up ODS participating units. The 82nd was reorganized from a corps wheeled engineer battalion into a mechanized division battalion. The poor condition of equipment returning from Southwest Asia and the new equipment provided under the reorganization, coupled with the influx of modernization items, created a maintenance and training situation of significant proportions.

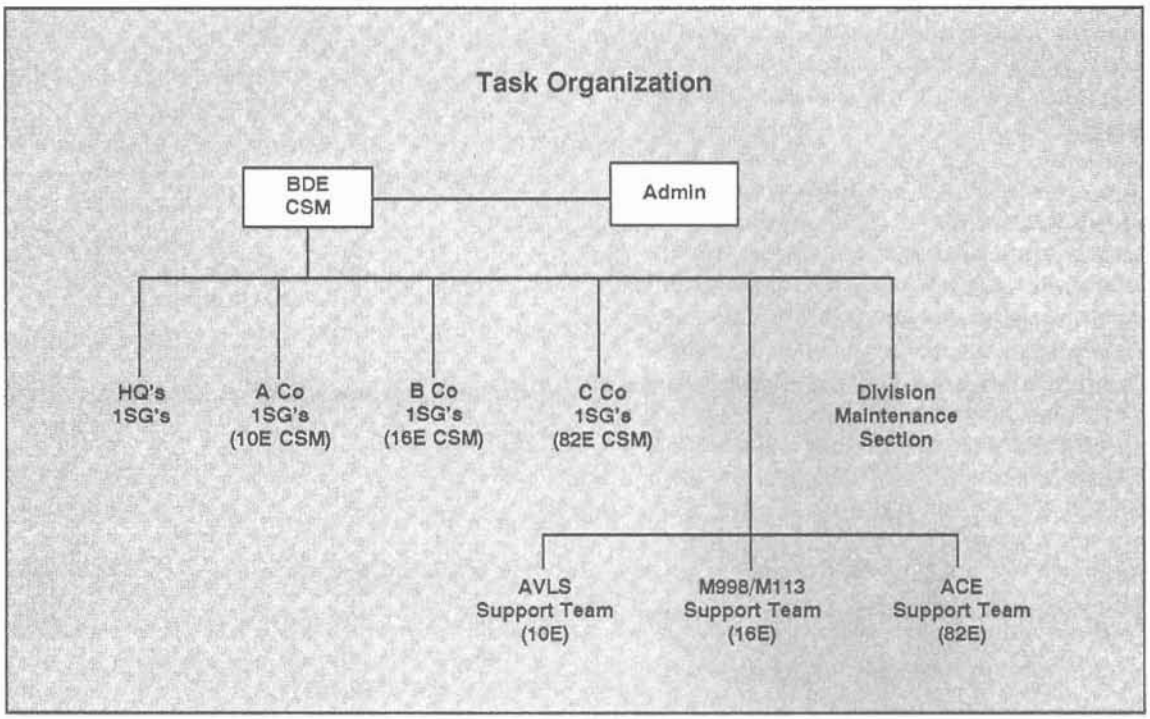


Figure 1

As brigade CSM, I participated with the commander in many in-depth discussions on how to overcome the problems facing the units. The battalion command sergeants major agreed that a serious problem existed which required immediate action. After deliberations, the CSMs developed a training program based on our collective experience.

The objective was to fix problems associated with equipment maintenance and equipment utilization at the operator level. Our solution required NCO involvement at all levels. Of the equipment in the brigade, the majority of vehicle commanders (those riding shotgun) were NCOs. Because each of the brigade's vehicles had an NCO first-line supervisor, it only made sense to ensure that the NCO knew how to adequately maintain and operate each piece of equipment under his control. NCOs lead by example! To do that senior NCOs need to know more than just a little about selected pieces of equipment; they need to be familiar with the maintenance of every piece they control. With this concept in mind, the content of the training program became clear: present a "train the trainer" (in this case, "supervisor") course in vehicle maintenance and operation.

Battle Task Training

The proposed battle task training (BTT) event brief to the engineer brigade commander resulted in a commitment to provide the resources needed to execute the plan. Training was to take place at three separate locations to allow supervisors to train on equipment actually under their control and to avoid too much pressure on any one unit. Those to be trained first included the command sergeants major and first sergeants. The goal was to ensure that the senior NCOs had the hands-on experience needed to supervise platoons, squads, crews, and teams in the proper maintenance and operation of unit equipment. This equipment included the armored combat earthmover (ACE), armored vehicle launched bridge (AVLB), high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV), and armored personnel carrier (APC).

The brigade commander briefed the division commander, who endorsed the event. The long-term goals were improved readiness through maintenance supervised by confident senior NCOs and the evaluation of battle drills. The short-term goals were improved maintenance, increased operator confidence in equipment utilization, battle drill execution, and trained trainers.

The BTT was scheduled over four days. The first three days focused on equipment maintenance techniques, including preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS), safe vehicle operation, tactical employment, and battle drill execution. Training was conducted on each major piece of equipment assigned to the brigade. On the last day, each piece of equipment was used in its operational role as part of a breach

through a complex obstacle comprised of wire, anti-tank ditch, and minefield.

After Action Report

The BTT was a success! It trained the NCOs to maintain and operate assigned equipment in the same environment and fashion as the soldiers. It provided an opportunity for unit leaders to acquire the knowledge, confidence, and skills they needed to effectively supervise the maintenance, operation, and employment of the unit's assigned equipment.

The BTT also provided an opportunity to address other problems common to the reorganized units. The senior NCOs worked together, each sharing from his store of knowledge, and their combined knowledge contributed to a first class event. Their collective strengths, shared in a noncompetitive environment, improved teamwork to master the tasks at hand. Benefits included unit esprit, which continued beyond the session's time limits. The training improved communications, promoted confidence and trust, and fostered a spirit of cooperation. Since that first session, the brigade has expanded the program to train platoon sergeants and squad leaders. More recently it was used to train commanders and platoon leaders.

Training is the Army's top priority. To make training work, a commander must set specific training goals that are clearly articulated to and agreed upon by the unit's other leaders. To make training happen, a commander must allocate the time and resources necessary, shield each session from distractors, and be totally involved in its execution. To make training meaningful, a commander must truthfully evaluate each program and session, build on what works, and discard what does not.

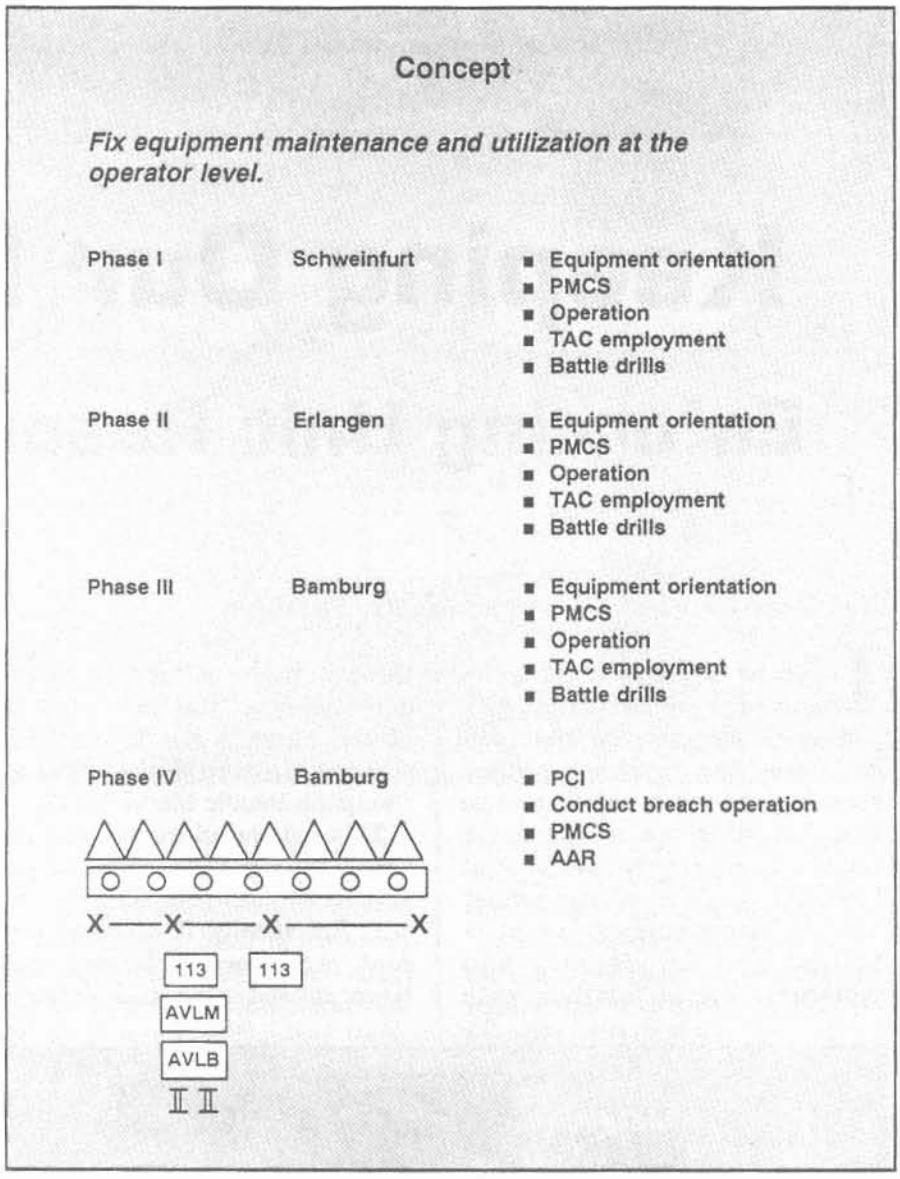


Figure 2

NCOs are primarily trainers and they provide an essential link between commanders and soldiers. To successfully discharge their training responsibilities, NCOs must understand mission requirements, communicate clearly, supervise aggressively, take immediate corrective action, and reward fairly. They must be committed to excellence in all endeavors, lead by example, and accept full responsibility for their actions.

The BTT event planned and executed by the engineer brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division, was a training tool. It can be modified to meet your unit's needs. I challenge you to make a similar BTT work in your unit. Proactive leaders can always detect training shortcomings and then develop safe, realistic, quality training to build competence and confidence. Training is the Army's top priority!

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