



Training for Lethality and Retention in the

Army National Guard

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The Army National Guard (ARNG) and the United States Army Reserve (USAR) are integral to our national defense. In fact, the active duty, also known as the regular army (RA), force is currently operating with about 48% of Army Service members (SMs) (for a total of 482,416) as of January 2023.^{1,2} The preponderance of the Army fighting force is cultivated, developed, retained, or languished and lost within the ARNG (about 34%) and USAR (about 18%).³ Despite this, media sources of all types are replete with articles and journal entries that bemoan the current retention problem within the ARNG.^{4,5,6,7}

The problem is, *how do Army leaders at the tactical and operational level positively affect dwindling ARNG retention rates while improving lethality for the modern combat environment?*

I am writing this article to offer five potential solutions to one variable of the problem, from the perspective of a company-grade leader. I am deliberately writing to an audience with emphasis on combat arms military occupational specialties (MOSs) in component (COMPO) 2 (ARNG), although much of this could apply to COMPO 3 (USAR) or other MOSs. The recommendations involve the following:

1. Additional unit training assemblies for battalion and company command teams;
2. Prerequisite training development course for commanders and first sergeants;
3. Formal expansion of external expertise, opportunities, and local resources;
4. Validation at each echelon through force-on-force engagements;
5. Annual survey for training management best practices and improvements.

Background: Lethality

There is no shortage of articles and essays related to Army lethality and readiness. Senior leaders espouse the critical importance of improving lethality at the tactical level, but either focus on technological advances or large-scale exercises. The internet is replete with articles about ARNG training for new equipment, but few talk about training outside of equipment fielding and force modernization.

It is critical to note that modernization is a different line of effort from collective training. In my opinion, the Army tends to invest in technology at the detriment of training infrastructure and training management.

Of the published and doctrinal “Six Army Modernization Priorities,” only one is related to something other than a specific technological advancement, namely “Soldier lethality.”⁸ However, the codified approach to improving Soldier lethality is predicated on technological advancement through such technologies as the Next Generation Squad

Weapons (NGSW), Integrated Visual Augmentation System (IVAS), and Synthetic Training Environment (STE);⁹ but yet training is only discussed in the context of the STE.

Senior leaders are clearly investing resources into the technology of tomorrow's fight, but technological advancement is only as good as the people using it, applying and modifying it to tactical and mission, enemy, time, terrain, and civilians on the battlefield (METT-C) requirements. To be effective, tactical implementation of technology must be based on a firm foundation in tactics and experience that can only be built in realistic, relevant, and engaging training (or combat experience). There *is* a difference between a trained force and an effective one. Although an *effective* force must be *trained* to be so, the opposite is not always true.

So, if the Army talks about lethality through the lens of technology, how does it talk about retention?

Background: Retention

The majority of articles found related to ARNG retention quote senior leaders discussing retention challenges that fall within areas of large public contention; Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), defense support of civil authorities (DSCA) mission increases, and lack of health care benefits within the ARNG,¹⁰ to name a few. However, several additional factors exist that most ARNG SMs can describe; these include, but are not limited to: competing interests with civilian career; increasing family life demands; lack of health care or other benefits; and the lack of promotion opportunities or schooling.

Although these are large contributing factors, my experience over the past 17 years serving in all three components (RA, ARNG, USAR), and as both enlisted and officer, consistently illustrated that the biggest contributing factor to retention woes is the lack of well-planned, relevant, realistic, and engaging training, particularly in the ARNG.

In 2021, the Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey (DACES) reported 44% of all SMs across the RA listed training opportunities in their "extremely important" category for retention, making it the *third* most critical driver for retention (behind "opportunities to serve my country" (first), and "retirement benefits" (second)).¹¹

National Guard Bureau (NGB) Training Regulation 350-1 identifies the role of training and its relation to recruiting and retention in the description of the "Role of Leaders in Training," where it says, "Leaders conduct high quality fundamental training *attracting and retaining* quality Soldiers."¹²

In order to understand training at the tactical and operational level it is imperative to understand the strategic training model. So, how does the ARNG conduct training?

Training Methods in the ARNG

At the strategic level the approach to training management is generally the same across all components. The Army --and by extension the ARNG-- training model has changed to adapt to the multi-domain/multi-geographic combatant command demand signals that the ARNG needs to effectively operate. To meet demand, the Army currently structures its

training based on the “Regionally Aligned Readiness and Modernization Model (ReARMM).”^{13,14}

The process for determining what will be included in training is top-down, and cyclic:

1. Director, Army National Guard (DARNG) publishes annual training guidance to set the conditions for achieving objectives directed by the Army;¹⁵
2. United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) exercises training and readiness oversight (TRO) through delegation to First United States Army (FUSA) commander, with whom each state and territory’s TAG (the adjutant general) works;
3. TAGs are responsible for issuing command training guidance (CTG) for all ARNG units, reviewing and approving the mission-essential task lists (METLs), and the yearly training plans (YTPs) of each subordinate unit.¹⁶
4. Units use the CTG and develop METL priorities for subordinate units, ultimately submitting a proposed YTP to TAGs for approval.

It is in this last step that command teams have real opportunities to affect lethality and retention. YTPs and METL are broad-stroke proposals of what subjects training will cover, and roughly when across the training year. So long as the METL end-state training objectives are achieved and brigade/division/state leaders are willing to support innovative training models, command teams that have the time and resources are capable of preparing training that will improve lethality and retention. But what is the role of commander in this process?

NGB Regulation 350-1 asserts that the training cycle builds readiness through “enduring, progressive, cyclic training model that builds training proficiency over multiple years, gradually increasing in complexity” with the role of commanders to “serve as the primary trainers for their units. Commanders must fully invest in the planning, preparation, and execution of quality training.”¹⁷

In section 1-11 *Training Management*, it states that “Leaders and Commanders drive the Training Management process (...) defining training priorities that enable planning choices based on the risk and resource management to shape their training plans. (...) Leaders must continue to innovate, prioritize, and maximize Home Station Training opportunities, creating the conditions for companies, platoons, squads, and crews to achieve training readiness.”¹⁸

In short, it is the job of company and battalion-level commanders to ensure that SMs are retained and trained at the individual and collective levels. In order to be successful, it is incumbent upon the brigade and state leaders to provision and support training environments and scenarios that encourage and enable tactical leaders to train appropriately.

While the ARNG attempts to operate in accordance with this doctrine, the reality of implementation is somewhat more troublesome and directly impacts retention and lethality.

Training Management Capacity

This is where the gap between AD and the ARNG's reality of training management begins to widen. Reserve Component (RC) training requirements are complicated, starting with attendance. ARNG Soldiers below the rank of O-7 all have the same quantity of unit training assemblies (UTAs), which combine to be referred to as multiple UTAs, or MUTAs. Each Soldier is authorized for up to 48 UTAs per fiscal year and 15 days within domestic-based annual training (AT), per individual state's yearly training guidance (YTG). This is commonly referred to as 48/15.¹⁹

The theory of 48/15 does not match the reality within units. Time is required for the development of relevant training subjects and curriculum (if it isn't evolving with warfare trends and gaps, it is not relevant). Training management is a group effort that requires innovation, resourcing, and copious amounts of internal and external support. Commanders and senior noncommissioned officer (NCO) command teams have the same limitations on their time that every other Soldier has, 48/15 MUTAs. As a direct result, command teams must either conduct the training management workload during their family and civilian career time or during UTAs when they should otherwise be the "primary trainers for their units (...) planning, preparing, and executing quality training."

ARNG command teams that invest in good training management do so during free time and is contingent on civilian career and family flexibility, as well as willingness of SMs to work significant hours with no pay and without the potential for accruing retirement points, a significant factor over the course of a career. As a direct result many, if not the majority of training planning and resourcing is done by the readiness NCO (RNCNCO), who is the full-time SM responsible for administration. Aside from the readiness NCO not having the bandwidth to support training management as they have a significant workload associated with readiness, the readiness NCO does not have the formal authority or rank to push back on staff officers, nor formally request external resources. This is not to say that the RNCNCOs as a broad category are ineffective at getting results for training management, but that it is not their doctrinal role and it is largely based on personality or charisma versus an authoritative base of power or position.

ARNG leaders see this on a daily basis and any observer will clearly see which command teams choose to work for free and which choose to not lead training. My experience has shown to me that during each of my command positions, I anticipate spending 15-25 hours per week on training management outside of drill weekends. This is not realistic for most people, but one full day a week is a necessity while in command.

In order to fulfill the training management time requirements, I propose that ARNG command teams, at echelon, be provided with an additional 104 UTAs annually to ensure adequate training time is incentivized. 104 UTAs provides the command team one day's worth of UTAs per week, the bare minimum required for adequate training management and command responsibilities.

While many command teams will see this as an opportunity, it is also a burden that further complicates the duality of leadership while serving in the ARNG. Nonetheless, this is the

burden of command and is a reflection of the commitment that most command teams already display. SMs deserve leadership at each level that will prioritize training management and not “waste Soldiers’ time” on drill weekends. Soldiers deserve leaders who will invest the time into training management. By providing UTAs to command team billets, ARNG leadership will not only afford those tactical-level leaders the incentives to invest into training, but it can hold them accountable to it, instead of relying on abusing a leaders’ personal time with uncompensated duty requirements.

Basic figures verbally retrieved and unconfirmed from ARNG indicate that the average cost of retaining one SM is roughly \$14,000, whereas recruiting one SM costs are approximately \$50,000. If these figures are remotely accurate, even a two percent increase in ARNG retention across company or battalion formations would cover the costs of 104 MUTAs for command team members to the ARNG and, by extension, a better investment for American taxpayers.²⁰

My personal experience as a company commander with a highly supportive battalion commander and operations officer who supported high degrees of innovation in training management led to a retention increase from 23% to 74% in two years. While this increase cannot be directly contributed to just training management, command climate survey results and exit surveys indicate that training management is a primary driver.

Training Relevancy: Resources

Unfortunately, time to plan is not enough for training to be relevant and relevancy is necessary for lethality. Training must be well-planned, relevant, realistic, and engaging. To be relevant, leaders must first know what to train and how to get current trend and gap data. One of the critical components to training *relevancy* is the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL). Command teams at every echelon can glean excellent information from resources such as current Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) after action reviews to studies on global conflict trends and gaps that can and should inform their training guidance and plans.

Trends and gaps are critical to augmenting the METL to ensure the respective collective task is discussed and implemented in a manner that befits the modern combat environment. It takes considerable resources and innovation to create relevant training environments such as ranges, training aids, subject matter experts (SMEs), and combined arms augmentation.

While AD units are collocated with ranges and training aids are often pushed through capability briefs and advertisements on bases like Fort Liberty, ARNG command teams often are located prohibitively far from training destinations. The reality remains, that the ARNG has an almost incalculable gap of available local training resources at the disposal of command teams due to the quantity of local armories spread across the United States.

In the article “*Army National Guard 4.0 Transformation*”, MAJ Roye Locklear writes, “The 2017 *Army National Guard Vision & Strategy* document identified installations as a critical

area of focus. There are over 25,000 buildings and 3,000 sites that support Soldiers and Soldier training across the nation (...) The Regular Army spends hundreds of millions to billions of dollars every year to improve training facilities, housing and other Soldier support facilities. The National Guard spends a fraction of this, and it shows. Armories across the 54 states and territories are outdated and inadequate for current weapon systems and vehicles.”²¹

MAJ Locklear points out an accurate deficiency that most of the ARNG is trying to rectify. This is a herculean task, considering most armories do not even have Wi-Fi. Rather than engaging in the argument for increased funding for training infrastructure expansion, I propose that an emphasis be placed on expansion of training aid and expertise resources.

Resources that support training are available across the Army and individual states, but they can be very poorly advertised, engaged, or encouraged (state dependent). As an example, each state I have worked in has had a regional training institute (RTI) staffed with superbly capable SMs, but rarely have adequate headcount to support requested training blocks of instruction outside of MOS advanced individual training. Several RTIs have full-time senior NCOs and contractors serving as SMEs who can directly support command teams in the development of relevant training plans, scenarios, or ranges; however these SMEs are too few and are not appropriately staffed to engage home-station armories in support of training.

Each state I have served in has at least one regional training installation fielded with a robust complement of very advanced and capable training aids, devices, simulators, and simulations (TADSS) by the Department of the Army,²² but the full complement and catalog of available assets are hard to advertise and push out to command teams.

The capabilities TADSS and regional training installations bring to bear are exceptional, but generally are funded at levels that only support platoon-level collective training, relying on external support for larger echelons.

Numerous resources are available from sister branches. I have frequently made use of United States Air Force (USAF), United States Navy (USN), United States Marine Corps (USMC), and local federal agency resources in order to support training requirements -- particularly from AD Service units. Support generally requires leadership approval to pay travel and per diem for instructor SMEs, but often they can support by offering ranges and advice from a fresh perspective. Furthermore, local law enforcement, fire and rescue, federal agencies, and other organizations are generally very amenable to interagency training concepts and usually can bring resources to bear. Using these resources provides an enormous amount of external knowledge and differing perspectives to each training scenario, not the least of which keeps Soldiers engaged in the subject matter at hand and reinforces that they work on a collective team of professionals in a larger community. I have found a direct correlation with bringing in diverse external subject matter expertise and retention.

I propose that state and National Guard Bureau (NGB) ARNG leaders conduct a survey polling SMs for ideas on how to expand local training areas around regional armories (for example, state and national parks) across the entirety of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF). The inclusion of more RTI SME personnel capable of traveling to local armories, or simunitions and memorandums of agreement to use the local law enforcement organization's close-quarters-battle training facility are two examples of ideas that may be helpful and could be generated through a survey.

Training Relevancy: Expertise

NGB Regulation 350-1 states that commanders must know how to “innovate, prioritize, and maximize Home Station Training opportunities.”²³ Just like AD, ARNG leaders are highly capable and committed, but ARNG leaders simply do not have the same training management experience, or opportunities to maintain training management currency.

AD has a significant advantage over the ARNG in that AD benefits from a cohort of individuals who plan, staff, and most importantly, who *experience* good training management as they come through the ranks. AD training management involves daily synchronization meetings, weekly training meetings and constant training resource allocation discussions at echelon, often including junior and mid-grade NCOs. Officers and NCOs are constantly exposed to training best practices, directly enabling command teams to refer back to their own experiences or those of peers and replicate or adjust effective training programs of instruction.

In contrast, many ARNG key leaders do not benefit from a full-time staff, nor have they all had the opportunity to deploy, attend combat training center (CTC) rotations, or witness training management across multiple bases and units.

This issue is so significant that the United States Marine Corps assigns AD Marine officers to support training plan preparations for their Reserve Component commanders to execute, a precedent that may be worth studying for the ARNG.

I cannot speak to variations in mission, culture, capabilities, or any other aspect of the USMC, but in the case of retention in the Reserve Components, they have achieved 110% of retention goals in 2023 and have continued to show the highest retention rates amongst reserve Services, year over year.²⁴

Clearly, the USMC is seeing a relationship between availability of planners, resources, experience, and effective training on retention. Understanding how to shape a training experience is essential to ARNG leaders, particularly if they are to conduct home-station drills with no ranges or maneuver areas available.

Headquarters Department of the Army (HQDA) requires states to adopt a pre-command course for incoming commanders and first sergeants that focuses on the legal roles and responsibilities of the command team through AR 350-1, known as the School for Command Preparation. Training is often discussed within the

parameters of unit training management by discussing system use and why inputting individual events is so critical in the Digital Training Management System (DTMS).

I propose an additional program of instruction be added to the pre-command course that specifically is designed to address the full scope of training management in the ARNG environment, state by state, that discusses and encourages command teams to reach out to resources providers and expertise through both formal and informal channels. Adding a specified list of points of contact, local training resources, and organizations local to the specific unit that are not organic to the Army would be highly beneficial to incoming command teams (e.g. the local police in County A are frequently supportive of wet gap crossings on River Y, where they can concurrently practice their maritime interdiction skills.)

The combinations of paid, dedicated staff time, improved education on training methods, and awareness of resources available can provide well-planned and relevant training. However, in pursuit of lethality, the training must be realistic.

Training Realism

The Army prides itself on realistic training, and rightfully so. The CTCs like the JRTC and the National Training Center (NTC) set the global high water mark for brigade combat environments. While CTCs are unquestionably excellent training environments and are arguably the best replicated operational environments in the world, they are focused on providing feedback that *supports readiness validation*, not focused on training. The ARNG has a requirement for brigade combat teams (BCTs) that battalions and brigades build unit proficiency and are “validated” before arrival at a CTC.

The nature of exactly how a unit (squad, platoon, company) is validated in the limited training time available leads to the easy button: rinse-repeat situational training exercises (STXs) where units move through the same terrain, against the same targets, in the same scenario. This provides the safety parameters required to support a squad and platoon live-fire exercise (LFX).

While in theory this may look like a linear model, the reality is somewhat troubling. There is no doubt that LFXs can be highly engaging and can provide great training to tactics that are already proven to be sound, and thus should be a desired end state. However, LFXs should only be the end state if the risk-mitigation effort of doing so doesn't outweigh the training value of the validation.

In other words, a squad that is validated through a heavily “canned” and rehearsed live-fire situational training exercise lane that uses a crawl, walk, run methodology may be far better trained and validated through force-on-force engagements against a thinking enemy with ultimate munitions (UTMs) or simulated munitions (simunitions).

In the former scenario, the unit will fire live-fire against static targets that do not adapt or shoot back. In the latter, if the unit can shoot, move, and communicate in a force-on-force environment while demonstrating effective command and control with adequate fire

control measures, it is far more likely to be successful in a real combat situation. Realistic training includes dealing with the issues that arise in combat outside of tactical problem sets like fear, pain, anger, dealing graciously with victory, and in some cases, developing resilience through hard fought defeat.

The Army validation program already has the infrastructure necessary to adapt to a force-on-force validation change along the way to the currently prescribed live-fire validation table. Training Circular 3-20²⁵ Integrated Weapons Training Strategy defines a glidepath that incorporates a field training exercise (FTX) that qualifies the unit as mission-capable, otherwise known as “collective task proficiency” during table IV. This event is almost always conducted through the use of blank ammunition and against the same target array as the upcoming LFX. However, this course of fire could be readily modified to be the validating event and require UTM force-on-force munitions instead of blank rounds against a peer-sized threat.

In a 2013 study, Mr. John Thomasson found that firearms training with simunitions replicated the physiological combat stress associated with a great degree of realism, compared to live fire against inanimate targets.²⁶ Further, Grossman and Christensen report that tactical training associated with simulated munitions provided a “significant improvements in hit rates” in California Highway Patrol and Salt Lake City Police Department’s police-involved shootings.²⁷

When training occurs that is not consistently validated through and reinforced by force-on-force feedback, it is unrealistic training that risks reinforcing bad habits and tactics. This is proven in multiple studies, not the least of which is Siddle’s 1995 study of the Shanghai Police Department’s training methodologies to increase officer survivability rates in “combat,” where it was concluded that scenario-based training involving combatants with “non-lethal, plastic bullets” was the most effective.²⁸

I have been fortunate enough to experience and survive the outcomes of the “canned” training model on several occasions in Afghanistan, alongside 173rd ABN, 10th MTN, and 82nd ABN in separate engagements. While my experiences are a very small sub-segment of our larger force, they resonate with most leaders in combat arms.

Upon contact with the enemy, squads or platoons drop to the prone, get on line, call the “three Ds” (distance, direction, and description) and provide overwhelming firepower. However, as we frequently do not train against a moving and thinking enemy, our tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) are not honed to adapt under duress. The result is almost always static suppressive fire in a general direction, even if the target is well outside of effective range. After some time and if the unit has not yet run out of ammunition, the squad or platoon leader will yell out “New York” and will lead an assault force approximately fifty to two hundred meters to the right, and either become bogged down or the support by fire element will run out of ammunition. Inevitably, the unit leadership will request close air support (CAS), break contact, or request reinforcements and wait for resupply.

These “validated” squad tactics generally kept SMs alive during the Global War on Terrorism but could hardly be called effective. More importantly, these tactics are less likely to produce lethality and results in a large-scale combat operation against a peer or near-peer adversary with limited air support.

This hypothesis is proving to be highly accurate within the confines of the conflict in Ukraine, where every military leader in the world is observing how rapidly tactics must evolve to be effective during large-scale combat operations. Western-trained Ukrainian forces are pushing hard in the 2023 counteroffensive, met by new Russian infantry tactics that intentionally send small groups of “disposable” infantry in small trickles, rather than waves, to skirmish Ukrainian positions and “use up Ukrainian ammo.”²⁹

In the 1986-published Air Land Battle Operations Field Manual 100-5 states, “Since combat developments and doctrine are dynamic, and weapons systems are constantly evolving, and since tactics and techniques are constantly changing, training methods must change apace. Readiness for modern battles means training methods must pay off now. Training methods must challenge assumptions held as fact in previous battles.”³⁰

Training methods that do not emphasize force-on-force engagement, preferably with at least one force able to task organize and fight however it sees fit, will either reinforce bad habits based off of sound tactics from a past conflicts or ingrain false expectations about combat that may be to the detriment of our military’s combat resilience.

Force-on-force training is *critical* to the lethality of the ARNG and should be implemented during the vast majority of training within the combat arms. The fact that it has at least a *strongly-correlated*, albeit anecdotal, impact on retention is an important side benefit.

ARNG leadership has seen this gap and implemented the Exportable Combat Training Capabilities (xCTCs), a brilliant and critical component that is capable of training and validating platoons. The xCTC program is a tool to provide a venue for platoon STX lanes to prepare them for CTC rotations.

Unfortunately, these programs require an enormous cost in both human and financial resources, involving hundreds of external personnel. As a result, these opportunities are available for units on a cyclic and infrequent basis. ARNG units are lucky if they can attend xCTC and JRTC once every four to five years, which means that with current retention levels, the majority of personnel have rotated out.

State and ARNG leaders must find a way to bridge the gap to ensure that realistic training is affordable and readily available for command teams to plan against at home-station armories. Many of the mechanisms to conduct force-on-force training are also eligible for utilization away from regional training installations (a significant advantage due to transportation durations and costs), such as simunitions and UTM. Both rounds are exceptionally effective at providing feedback to training participants and magnify the realism of training by a large margin. I contend that all small-unit tactics training should

culminate with the use of force-on-force munitions, both for validation of concept, and for morale.

Therefore, I propose that validation of any unit, at any echelon below battalion, be done in an environment simulating where that formation is expected to operate; namely, against a thinking enemy that can shoot, move, and communicate in return.

Engaging Training

Lastly, training must be engaging. I have frequently conducted expiration term of service (ETS) counseling interviews with Soldiers that have recently been discharged and discussed what drove them to decide to leave the Army. Without exception, the conversation either focused on, or included frustration about conducting repetitive and disengaging training. Due to the above conflicts with attendance and lack of leadership experience planning and executing innovative training, the preponderance of command teams will fall in line with whatever their parent unit is conducting each month.

Poor training management leads to large groups of personnel waiting for their turn to go through centralized training, such as zeroing their rifle or individual weapons qualification. Often, the command team will not have additional training planned concurrently. As a result, and due to attendance and turn over, the unit will conduct the same hip-pocket and unresourced classes for new personnel year after year, repeating the same skill level 10 and 20 warrior tasks in environments that do not challenge assumptions or provide variables, further reinforcing bad habits.

Nevertheless, this is preferred to the disheartening reality that many command teams do not put in the work to hit these minimal requirements, observed easily through an objective tour of most armories on drill weekends. This is not entirely due to a lack of experience or time investment from leadership. Units that are operating at 45-60% staffing and choose to conduct lead internally resourced training must contend with the fact that they have to provide range, safety, instructor, or administrative personnel. This further reduces the quantity of SMs that can train on the curriculum, compounding the problem set.

If the training must be internally resourced, staffing levels are short and leaders must “check the box” on training gates in order to be considered “validated,” it is almost inevitable that training becomes boring, unrealistic, and disengaging to SMs. Battalion and brigade commanders and staffs can have a very significant impact on this. Commanders should remain curious, eagerly pursuing opportunities for unconventional training plans, remaining flexible and adaptive on unit training calendars, and actively incentivize and empower junior leaders that propose innovative training solutions. There is risk in breaking away from the mold; however, the risk is often worth the reward.

I have been fortunate enough to serve under and alongside a number of passionate, knowledgeable, and rational leaders who have accepted prudent risk when presented with a well-thought-out training plan accompanied by a comprehensive risk assessment.

It is because of those leaders, particularly in the Virginia and Kentucky Army National Guard, that I have been able to apply and test my theories.

Engaging training is memorable. Memorable training leads to recruiting and retention, as AR 350-1 clearly articulates as critical to “attracting and retaining Soldiers.”³¹

Given these constraints, it is important to call out that even if the proposed solutions in this article are not fully supported or implemented by leadership, engaging and memorable training can still be achieved (to a lesser degree) without large policy changes or resource commitment. Many times, engaging training requires creativity and the ability to think outside of the box.

As an example, my battalion commander required a change of command ceremony when I assumed command of my second company. Due to the limited training time available, he approved a request to conduct the ceremony during a dismounted wet-gap crossing (poncho-raft) training event. The only variation to the training plan made allowed for the command teams to swim across the wet gap river, with the guidon flag, ahead of the main body to conduct the ceremony on the opposing side beach. Not only did this ceremony not impede training, but it engaged the company.

Summary

I believe that by providing ARNG command teams with additional compensated time to conduct effective training management, bolstering their education on how to reach out to resources, encouraging resource-enabled training (like force-on-force), and allowing command teams the freedom to demonstrate how they will achieve the end state (e.g. validate squads and platoons other than through rehearsed live-fire exercises) that training will rapidly become more relevant, more realistic, and more engaging.

My experience has demonstrated that effective training is the key to effective retention, which ultimately drives readiness and lethality. With these actions, I propose that the ARNG may find a way to keep each Soldier engaged and excited about drill weekend, rather than dreading it.

Author Biography

CPT Knight enlisted in the Army in 2006, serving in on active duty in the 10th Special Forces Group (SFG) (A) until he commissioned into the Army National Guard. CPT Knight has served in multiple states, to include Tennessee, Kentucky, Maryland and Virginia, in both National Guard and Reserve capacities.

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Endnotes

- ¹ (Statistica, 2023)
- ² (Center, 2023)
- ³ (Army, Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey (DACES), 2021)
- ⁴ (Beynon, National Guard having Nightmarish Time Keeping Soldiers and Recruiting New Ones, 2022)
- ⁵ (Beynon, Army National Guard Can't Retain Enough Soldiers Even Active Duty Meets Goals, 2023)
- ⁶ (D'Iorio, 2023)
- ⁷ (Associated Press, 2022)
- ⁸ (Bates, 2022)
- ⁹ (Bates, 2022)
- ¹⁰ (Beynon, National Guard having Nightmarish Time Keeping Soldiers and Recruiting New Ones, 2022)
- ¹¹ (Army, Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey (DACES), 2021)
- ¹² (Bureau, Army National Guard Training 350-1, 2021)
- ¹³ (Congressional Research Service, 2022)
- ¹⁴ (Freedberg Jr, 2020)
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- ¹⁹ (Bureau, Force Management ARNG Force Program Review Regulation 71-1, 2022)
- ²⁰ (Federal, 2023)
- ²¹ (Locklear, 2022)
- ²² (Army, Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey (DACES), 2021)
- ²³ (Bureau, Army National Guard Training 350-1, 2021)
- ²⁴ (South, 2023)
- ²⁵ (Army U. , 2019)
- ²⁶ (Thomasson, 2013)
- ²⁷ (Grossman, 2008)
- ²⁸ (Siddle, 1995)
- ²⁹ (Economist, 2023)
- ³⁰ (Army, Air Land Battle Operations: FM 100-5, 1986)
- ³¹ (Bureau, Army National Guard Training 350-1, 2021)



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