Leader Conduct in Training:
Rebooting retired LTG Hal Moore's 'Four Principles

by COL Esli Pitts

In recognition of the renaming of Fort Benning as Fort Moore, I provide the following thoughts on adapting retired LTG Moore's four principles of conduct in battle for armored leaders.

November 1996. There I was — in the box at the National Training Center (NTC) — with my mortar platoon: two fire direction centers (FDCs), six mortar tracks, two cargo trucks, and more than 1,500 rounds of 120mm ammunition. We had limited redundancy in computing mortar missions due to some shortages, but after a frank conversation with the observer/coach/ trainers (O/C/Ts), we did what we could to mitigate the issue.

During the next battalion attack, we quickly lost the primary FDC with the two mortar ballistic computers. Not so fast, O/C/Ts! — we continued to fight from the second FDC, with two serviceable plotting boards. No doubt, the O/C/Ts thought we were finished when the second FDC was also destroyed, but my senior squad leader — formerly a cavalry troop's mortar section sergeant — pulled out a plotting board and ran the FDC from his track. Then he was assessed as a casualty (wow, the enemy artillery sure was selective). Somebody called that we were combat ineffective, but we still had five operational gun tracks and a lot of ammunition. A squad leader dug a charge book out of a dusty helmet bag and we were back in business! Although seriously degraded, we continued firing until the end of the attack. Lesson learned.

Unbeknownst to me, I had just validated LTG Moore's second principle of leader conduct in battle: "There is always one more thing you can do to influence any situation in your favor – and after that one more thing…."

Years later, I had the privilege of hearing LTG Moore speak at a squadron ball. Then, I found a video that captured Moore's "four principles of leader conduct in battle," and I was hooked.[1] I took the video into battalion command and continued to use it as a battalion/task force maneuver trainer, where I found it was an excellent way to stimulate discussion in after action reviews (AARs).

LTG Moore's "Four Principles on Leader Conduct in Battle" follow [in italics]. His words are not a polished staff product, but they are a stand-alone leadership lesson written by a proven combat leader.[2]

[Excerpt] *B. Next, Conduct in battle, Four principles:*

1. The first is: "THREE STRIKES AND YOU ARE NOT OUT!" Two things a Leader can do. Either contaminate his environment and his unit with his attitude and actions, OR he can inspire confidence."

Must be visible on the battlefield. Must be IN the battle; Bn Cdr on down - Bde and Div Cdr on occasion. Self-confident. Positive attitude. Must exhibit his determination to prevail no matter what the odds or how desperate the situation. Must have and display the WILL TO WIN by his actions, his words, his tone of voice on the radio and face to face, his appearance, his demeanor, his countenance, the look in his eyes. He must remain calm and cool. NO FEAR. Must ignore the noise, dust, smoke, thirst, explosions, screams of wounded, the yells, the dead lying around him. That's all NORMAL!

Must never give off any hint or evidence that he is uncertain about a positive outcome, even in the most desperate of situations. Again, the principle which must be driven into your own head, and the heads of your men is: "THREE STRIKES AND YOU'RE NOT OUT!"

2. And the corollary principle interreactive with that one is:

"THERE'S ALWAYS ONE MORE THING YOU CAN DO TO INFLUENCE ANY SITUATION IN YOUR FAVOR – AND AFTER THAT ONE MORE THING – AND AFTER THAT ONE MORE THING, ETC. ETC." In battle, I periodically detached myself mentally for a few seconds from the noise, the screams of the wounded, the explosions, the yelling, the smoke and dust, the intensity of it all, and asked myself: WHAT AM I DOING THAT I SHOULD NOT BE DOING? AND WHAT AM I NOT DOING THAT I SHOULD BE DOING TO INFLUENCE THE SITUATION IN MY FAVOR?"

Figure 1. Task Force Power, 3rd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment mortar tracks in action at NTC, 1996. *(U.S. Army photo by 1LT Esli Pitts in November 1996)*

3. The third principle is "WHEN THERE'S NOTHING WRONG – THERE'S NOTHING WRONG EXCEPT – THERE'S NOTHING WRONG!" That's exactly when a leader must be most alert.

4. And finally, #4 "TRUST YOUR IN-STINCTS." In a critical, fast-moving bat-tlefield situation, instincts and intuition amount to an instant Estimate of the Situation. Your instincts are the prod-uct of your education, training, read-ing, personality, and experience.

"TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS"

When seconds count, instinct and de-cisiveness come into play. In quick-de-veloping Situations, the leader must act fast, impart confidence to all around him, must not second guess a decision-MAKE IT HAPPEN! In the pro-cess, he cannot stand around slack-jawed when he's hit with the unexpect-ed. He must face up the facts, deal with them, and MOVE ON.

Harold G. Moore

LTG, U.S. Army (Retired)

(Commander, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, LZ X-Ray, Ia Drang Valley, Vietnam, 1965)

Moore's words alone are incompara-ble; however, I would like to offer some thoughts on how the armor communi-ty could inculcate these principles in training.

Three Strikes

A leader either contaminates the envi-ronment or inspires confidence. This is all about our demeanor, our presence, how we act as leaders and how our leadership influences those around us.

Particularly at higher echelons, there are few opportunities in the field to provide face-to-face leadership to the entire team (think plans, briefs, re-hearsals, and AARs). How you present yourself at those points will influence the team for better or worse.

As a battalion senior maneuver trainer at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, Hohenfels, Germany, I general-ly saw the battalion's leaders convey three different attitudes to their units during training rotations. Their style was clear to us (the observers) even if it was not always clear to them.

First, some focused on the negative.

They pointed out the artificialities or gaps, insisting that "we would never…" or otherwise emphasized problems, whether coming from higher, lower, or the opposing force. As LTG Moore de-scribed, this attitude directly "contam-inated the environment" as subordi-nate staff and commanders' briefings quickly focused on workarounds, high-lighted "issues," and found reasons why they could not train as they would fight (often expressed in snide com-ments during briefings). These units might do well, but they rarely learned.

The second type involved an un-healthy focus on winning at all costs, which led to expressed or implied pres-sures on subordinates, an unwilling-ness to receive, or report, bad news, a reliance on gamesmanship such as "MILES berms" and contention be-tween rotational and opposing forces on the battlefield (and the O/C/Ts). These units also tended to learn little.

The third type involved leaders that came with an emphasis on learning. They tended to utilize their systems, improve on them, tolerate acceptable risks, lead through mission command, and grow both individually and as or-ganizations. No matter what level they arrived at, *they improved*.

These leader attitudes stem from the tone of the senior leader. Listen to the tone of your subordinates during plan-ning, briefings, and rehearsals — whether positive or negative, they might be mirroring you.

Once across the line of departure, we mainly lead via the radio, a medium that is frequently garbled, stepped on, and "hot mic'd." It is then that, as Moore says, the "tone of our voice" is all we have to convey everything: guid-ance, clarity, vision, and the will to win. The first rule is to keep calm. You don't have to yell over the noise of the bat-tle for others to hear. Keep calm; just speak. The second rule is to be precise. At NTC, referring to "the big rock over there" is useless; likewise, for "that tree" in Germany, so find precise words. The third rule is to be brief. It might be your net, but if you are al-ways talking, others cannot. The last rule, especially when things are going wrong — or you just got jumped on by your higher — is to refer to the first

rule: keep calm. Getting angry on the net simply translates down to the low-er echelons as stress.

You are the leader. When things are go-ing wrong, you owe the organization calm, measured leadership. Make it a habit for yourself and an expectation of your team when you are monitoring their nets during collective training. Just as important, even if your own higher leaders cannot provide calm leadership to you, do not pass their an-ger down on your own net.

Leaders can project this calm demean-or and a will to win because they know…

There is always one more thing you can do. Moore asks, "what am I doing that I should not be, and what am I not doing that I should be?" The answer to this second question is contingent upon actually having options, whether from equipment or depth of training readiness. Having one more thing you can do ("and after that, one more") provides you with flexibility and op-tions. This mindset is a commitment to having the necessary equipment, skills, and training proficiency to enable go-ing to the well one more time.

As an O/C/T, I covered a particular air-borne infantry battalion that jumped into their rotation, but deliberately left their medium and heavy anti-armor systems' thermal optics at home, de-spite knowing there was an armored threat. By the commander's choice, as they hit the ground and rolled up their parachutes, they were already past "one more thing you can do," and "af-ter that, one more thing" and reliant on light weapons at best. They chose to have no options.

I'm a believer that it is better to have and not need than to need and not have. This means train with all your equipment and then bring it to the field. As a mortar platoon leader, that meant bringing not only our new mor-tar ballistic computers but also the old, cracked plotting boards and even the charge books. As a tank company com-mander, it meant bringing out my five decoy tanks and fixing and mounting the broken mine plows I inherited. It also meant training with the dusty M71 Remote Control Units and the Modular Pack Mine Systems and bringing my

own scatterable mine capability to the field. It meant bringing all our individual and crew chemical protective gear and anything else I could think of. Bottom line, all our gear is designed to help us make it past "one more thing" and "after that, one more thing" and all the way to "etc." If we don't train with it, and then leave it behind, it's useless.

In addition to the gear, our training proficiency comes into play. I once participated in a night attack in Hohenfels, during which the battalion executed eleven breaches. This only worked because of the battalion commander's emphasis on flexibility and a depth of training and resources. Do all our crews know required battle drills or only the designated crews? Can all four tanks in the platoon conduct a manual breach (and have a breach kit?) or just the plow tank? Do we have redundancy in drills across the tank sections? Platoons? Companies? Or did we simply designate 1st Platoon as the breach force and not train the others?

Surviving to the third "one more thing" doesn't just mean equipment and battle drills, but also the deliberate planning that enables it. Did planning stop when your exhausted planner finished writing the base order? Or are you now building a course of action for the most likely branch plan? Do your graphics enable flexibility in the operation or only rigidity? Do your graphics support deviating from the plan? Do you have subsequent or supplementary battle positions planned in case your defenses are penetrated? Do you have additional checkpoints designated to support a new attack by fire position or counter-attack route?

Does your battalion staff have sufficient reps at planning and orders production? Do they have additional tools in their kit bag, such as the Rapid Decision-making Synchronization Process and staff battle drills? Do they have an adaptive mindset? Or are they rigid and focused on THIS plan? Is your combat trains command post prepared to take over in the event of the loss of the tactical operations center? Can the field trains command post step up to serve as the combat trains command post? Can they do so right now? Do they know you expect that?

Maybe you are just one new staff officer. Are you waiting for guidance? Or are you already ensuring the depth of planning that offers the commander "one more thing" in your lane? As the S-4, is it sufficient that "everybody topped off this morning?" Or is the standard that, not only did everybody top off, but there is a dedicated refuel and re-arm asset, associated planning priorities, primary and alternate logistics release points, and a plan to reconstitute it — and rehearse it? Do our communications, intelligence collection and fire support plans also have redundancy?

When there's nothing wrong, there's nothing wrong. Except that there's nothing wrong. As a junior captain, I had the pleasure of three combat training center rotations as the brigade's day battle captain. During two of them, the battalions had a bad habit of not reporting when they were in contact — not even "Contact, tanks, east, out." Afterward, they would come up on the net and report themselves as "Black" on combat power. As a staff of jaded pre-command captains, we gleefully chanted "'Green, Green, Black' is the (insert brigade combat team name) motto," but the brigade was routinely in contact while being unaware of it, denying the commander the ability to do anything about it. "There's nothing wrong, except that there's nothing wrong."

How do we, as armor leaders, confirm that there really is nothing wrong, rather than we just don't know? First off, we must actively look for the wrong. At the crew or platoon levels, that might be through preventive maintenance, detailed pre-combat checks and inspections and thorough rehearsals.

A great place to start (at any echelon) is to be in the habit of constantly comparing your actual reality to the reality as stated in the plan. If the lead battalion should have cleared the passage points by 0700 hours and it is now 0745, something's wrong. You thought the breach would take 45 minutes, and it's been 60? Definitely something wrong! Haven't heard from the main effort for a while? Maybe there is nothing wrong, but maybe you are in a "Green, Green, Black" situation. Let's

key the mic and find out. Better: let's instill in our subordinates the habit of reporting problems.

Is radio silence okay during an operation? Or do you mandate "negative reporting" when necessary? Imagine you are a battalion executive officer (XO), and you haven't heard from Company for 30 minutes. Would you rather hear 1) "Sir, Battle is here" (points at a screen) "and they haven't reported any contact;" or, "Sir, Battle is here" (points at screen, and then reads from the log) "and they reported clearing Phase Line RED 5 minutes ago with no contact." One report relies on assumptions ("Well, I guess nothing is wrong"), while the other option provides clarity and evidence that nothing is wrong.

Remember: "wrong" is not just enemy contact. It can be anything that impacts timelines, combat power or mission accomplishment. Your lead tank threw a track while staging in a tight assembly area, but the commander didn't tell anybody because they're trying to just "walk it back on." Now the track and road wheels are chewed up, and he is blocking the route. But nothing is "wrong."

Leaders must come up on the net and report. As they say, bad news does not get better with time. The faster we identify and share when something is wrong, the more time we must deal with the fallout from these things because they WILL occur. Remember our demeanor on the radio? If we berate our subordinates every time something is wrong, they will stop reporting, hoping for a fix just in time.

What enables us to quickly recover when something truly is wrong is skill and experience. That's what LTG Moore was referring to when he said to "trust your instinct."

Trust your instinct

Not counting actual deployments, I averaged about 96 days per year in the field as a company-grade officer. That's a lot of time to build instinct. Fast forward to battalion command, we barely got 53 days per year in the field. Every one of those "lost" training days translated to lost "instinct" in my battalion's leaders. We offset it in other ways, such as simulations or professional

development, but the question remains: how do you build instinct? Think about where you train, what lessons you are learning and what instincts you are building. What you learn in the open, rocky terrain of NTC or the desert will be very different from the rolling hills and wooded terrain of Europe and you must recognize the differences between them.

Learn vicariously. That old-timer's story probably has a useful lesson in it — maybe one you won't have to learn the hard way. Professional development programs are also a great way to do this.

Read. I once read a report from NTC in which a contributor said he knew rotational leaders had reached exhaustion when pencils fell from their fingers. When I saw that indicator in others, I recognized it for what it was. Even lacking a successful unit professional reading program, it's easy to maintain a personal program appropriate to your position. Whether it is the Combat Studies Institute, biography, history, or *ARMOR* magazine, the choices are infinite. Something will stick with you if you just read.

Professional Military Education. As someone who has read almost everything I was assigned at all levels of military education, I'm going to tell the ugly truth. The old joke that "It's only a lot of reading if you do it" is a disservice to the Army and to the Soldiers we lead. We should read … most of it.

Learn by doing. Instinct is the mental equivalent of muscle memory. Fight to get as many training reps as you can in a variety of conditions including terrain, weather, visibility, and chemical contamination so that instinct takes root.

Good instincts come from a solid grounding in time-distance analysis with lots of repetitions in a variety of situations.

How long will the alpha section have to cover the entire platoon sector while bravo section backs down and cross-levels five rounds from the semi-ready to the ready rack? Unless you train it, the answer is "a long time." (Hint: it can be done in less than four minutes.)

How long does it take to uncoil from an assembly area in the dark or refuel a tank company on the move? How long does it take to conduct a passage of lines? Breach two lanes? How long to dig in a company? Tear down the tactical operations center? Emplace five hundred meters of triple-strand concertina wire? Complete pre-combat inspections to standard? Move dismounted in wooded terrain? How long…?

The answers to these, and a hundred other questions, form a baseline of knowledge that enables you to plan *this* fight more effectively and builds instinct for the next fight. This familiarity also lets you recognize when you have exceeded those planning thresholds and recognize that something is wrong, even though nothing seems to be.

Capture it all and build it in your standing operating procedures. By the time you are a mid-grade leader, you should have a bedrock understanding of planning factors that enables you to plan and fight from an instinctual basis.

I periodically detached myself: Though this line comes under his second point, I want to highlight this separately. LTG Moore makes an important point when he said he would periodically step away to think. The armor community does a good job of empowering our executive officers and platoon sergeants to report upwards. Not only does this allow commanders to fight their organizations, but it also allows them to "periodically detach" to think about what comes next. However, we have two other challenges. First, we should also give our battalions' executive officers and battle captains the ability to "detach" and orchestrate the whole of the staff's efforts by handing most routine traffic to staff or radio-telephone operators except when absolutely necessary. Unfortunately, they frequently grab a handset and get consumed in lengthy point-to-point conversations with a resultant loss of their situational awareness. Second, some commanders hesitate to leave the tactical-operations center (TOC), sacrificing mission command with their own main effort to ensure they personally remain in contact with higher headquarters through better connectivity at the TOC

than on their vehicle. Commanders must also physically detach!

January 2013. There I was — in the defense at NTC — with my battalion: two tank companies, two infantry companies, and the first planning priority for the brigade reserve. We were well into the counter-recon fight and had destroyed the first battalion (-) of the main body.

I expected to be in contact with the rest of the enemy's main body soon, but, except for one stale spot report from the cavalry squadron, nobody had contact with the enemy regiment. I assessed this lack of contact, not as "nothing was wrong," but that "something was wrong." My estimate was that if the enemy was attacking but was currently invisible, he must be "about here" [points at the map]. Therefore, what I was not doing, but should be, was re-orienting my defense. My instinct was that if the enemy was where I thought he was, then my companies were sufficiently trained to move quickly and could be established in new battle positions before the enemy could close the distance if I gave quick, calm, clear guidance and used my staff to synchronize it. We made the move and set in the new positions shortly before the enemy showed up. It was a long, hard-fought defense, and we did "one more thing" at least three more times as we adjusted another battle position, re-armed tank companies, and then requested the release of the brigade reserve, but we ultimately stopped a regimental attack in our engagement area. I wasn't asking myself what LTG Moore would do, but I like to think that he would have approved.

The sum of all these thoughts is that we must train as we fight. I'll just leave you with one telling statistic: utilization of vehicle smoke grenades across U.S. Army Forces Command was 9.85 percent in fiscal year 2023. Did you train your tank commanders to salvo smoke and displace to an alternate position?

So, what can YOU do? Regardless of your position, you can do a lot.

The first thing is having the right mindset — a willingness to continue learning and an absolute determination to

prevail. Let's assume that you already have these.

My challenge: Steal LTG Moore's principles. Who could blame you? Model them in your own behavior, manifest it in your plans and training, encourage them in your teams, and then use them to facilitate open-ended questions in your after-action reviews. Please consider the following points.

- **Three strikes**: This is tough; you may need to coach your leaders on the side if you need to adjust their demeanor. You also need to be alert for cues that your own behavior needs to change.

- **There's always one more thing**: Did we effectively use all our tools? What else could we have done? Why didn't we complete our planned turning obstacle? What else could we have done to disrupt the enemy? Did we have redundancy in …? Why did mission command fail after the tactical operations center jumped? Why couldn't the dismounts employ Javelins? What else could they have done? Why didn't we bring ...?

- **Nothing wrong**: Did the TOC know that Company A hadn't …? What was the first indicator that something was wrong? When did we realize that the enemy was in sector?

- **Trust your instinct**: How did you know the enemy was going to …? Why did you take that risk? If you *thought* X, then why did you *do* Y? Would that "lesson" you just learned at NTC work in a wooded — or littoral — environment? What did you learn in this mission that you can take forward to your next mission or next job?

Adopt any or all these points and make them your own. Demonstrate it in your own behavior and reinforce it across the unit, and watch performance improve.

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Notes

U.S. Army, "Leadership by LTG Harold Moore," *YouTube.com*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGNxHMFjigA

[2] Author's note about *LTG Moore's Four Principles of Conduct in Battle*: I retained the original words, punctuation, and capitalization; however, I cleaned up some typographical errors because I am not sure if they were LTG Moore's errors.

FORT IRWIN, CA – The last days of the training rotation begin at the National Training Center (NTC), Fort Irwin, CA. All Soldiers wake up before dawn to prepare for live-fire missions. This training supports the 116th Cavalry Brigade Combat Team during its a month-long NTC rotation that provides more than 4,000 service members from 31 states, including units from 13 National Guard states and territories, with realistic training to enhance their combat, support and sustainment capabilities. *(Photo by: Cpl. Alisha Grezlik, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)*