

Basic Combat Training and the Army Learning Concept 2015

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INTRODUCTION

In a recent Profession of Arms discussion with Company Commanders, many complained that they were professionally disadvantaged by being assigned to Initial Military Training (IMT) duty. According to them, they simply executed the established Program of Instruction (POI) with little to no variation in execution. A few commanders argued that their Battalion Commander planned all training on the final Basic Combat Training (BCT) field training exercise (FTX), removing any opportunity for the Company Commanders to develop their own training. This rigid adherence to execution with little innovation or creativity by leaders begs the question of "how are we doing implementing the Army Learning Concept (ALC) 2015 in BCT?" If some of our Company Commanders are not learning as they should, are our Soldiers learning? This article will explore the importance of the ALC 2015 in BCT, probing how certain ALC principles should be applied on the U.S. Army's newest Soldiers.

TRADOC approved TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-2, the ALC 2015, for implementation on 20 January 2011. ALC 2015 addresses IMT throughout the document, and leaders need to recognize that the ALC principles are equally applicable to BCT units as they are to Officer or NCO development courses. The ALC "is the foundation for the development of individual Soldier and leader learning" (1). It posits that "Soldiering requires a foundation of comprehensive fitness, Army Values, the Warrior Ethos, and professional competence" (6).

BCT units stress these attributes in training now. Unit commanders will find little to argue with in emphasizing these priorities. BCT is foundational for Soldiers. It transforms them from civilians to warriors and begins the process of developing them into professional Soldiers. Currently, BCT focuses on creating foundational building blocks in Soldiers to include Army

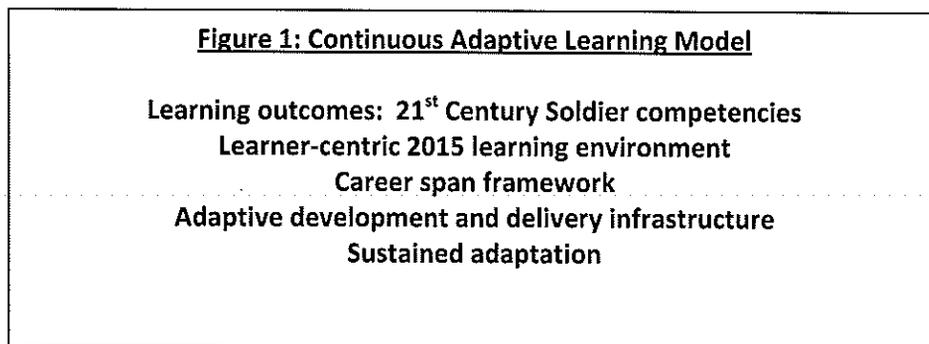
Values, physical readiness, marksmanship, Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills, and medical skills. To improve the BCT product, the training must also improve the operational adaptable mindset in Soldiers and the cadre. By using ALC 2015 learning concepts, adaptability will emerge. Devoid of the technological aspects of ALC 2015, some of which may be able to be piloted successfully in BCT, the real focus of ALC 2015 for BCT is on sharpening the training approach.

The BCT cadre will need to be adaptable and capable of applying elevated learning concepts to draw out adaptability and critical thinking in BCT Soldiers. The BCT POI is not the real target of change as it has enhancement module time built into it for the commander to use reinforcement training time. The focus should be on cadre being able to teach and apply ALC concepts. For this application to occur, the cadre will have to learn what ALC means to training in Victory University or the Drill Sergeant School. The ALC 2015 is not stressed currently in either school. If IMT enters a period of shrinking resources, we will need better cadre teachers to compensate for the loss in resources. Also, to improve, we should focus on improving our approach to training and leader development to maximize all training events.

Recent POI revision efforts have improved what Soldiers learn to develop them mentally and ethically. Drill Sergeants receive Master Resilience Training at the Drill Sergeant School, and some will also attend the Army's Master Resilience Training Course at Fort Jackson. Soldiers receive the benefit of this training as the cadre applies resilience techniques in training. They also initiate their baseline introduction to Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) by conducting the Global Assessment Tool (GAT) early in BCT. New Soldiers have 10 hours of formalized values training in the POI and can use up to 21 Values vignettes developed by the Center for the Army Professional Ethic (CAPE). The Warrior Ethos is stressed in tactical training and explanations of the Soldier's Creed. Professional competence begins as Soldiers learn the fundamental Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills along with Soldier skills and knowledge in *The Soldier's Blue Book* and *Warrior Skills Level 1 (June 2009)*.

These improvements are all highly effective, but the ALC is more than a set of fundamentals and competencies. The central idea of the ALC is adaptability as the “model must develop adaptable Soldiers and leaders” (16). Not only must training process develop adaptable Soldiers, the Soldier development model must also be capable of “sustained adaptation [that] includes a capacity to routinely explore and integrate advanced technologies and learning methods to remain competitive and engage learners” (16). It is hard to measure adaptability in BCT—in Soldiers or in cadre teaching. Currently, there are few if any metrics for measuring adaptability. The ALC calls for “instructional strategies that best fit the learning audience and range of desired outcomes” (17). Our cadre members must be developed in ALC training principles, so they can conduct relevant and engaging training. Commanders’ training guidance must be straightforward, so units have effective training solutions that avoid confusion, improve Soldier performance, and preserve skill retention. Our cadre, however, must also be creative and innovative in the future to adapt to new Soldiers and training requirements from an evolving operational environment. The ALC will drive needed change.

THE CONTINUOUS ADAPTIVE LEARNING MODEL



BCT cadre would be hard-pressed to explain the Continuous Adaptive Learning Model, and maybe that is not such a bad thing. The more relevant task is to apply what is applicable to BCT. The new ALC Learning outcomes, that take the form of the 21st Century Soldier competencies, must be integrated into BCT. Although BCT focuses on the fundamentals, it

must develop the competencies as much as possible. The current training is not off the mark; it will need to be fine-tuned to achieve the desired end states.

IMT has not emphasized exact desired outcomes for new Soldiers in BCT. It has defined the desired Soldier end state of transformation with nine outcomes listed on page 17 of TRADOC Regulation 350-6. These outcomes are hard to measure or quantify, so units tend to focus more on the graduation training requirements delineated on page 20 of TR 350-6 that include passing the physical fitness test, qualifying on an M16, throwing grenades, and completing foot marches. Regardless, the ALC now specifies 21st Century Competencies (see Figure 2 below). These competencies require thinking and greater professional development. They will not be fully developed in BCT, but there can be foundational attributes that begin to emerge by the end of BCT. The cadre needs to point the Soldiers in the right direction as they move on to Advanced Individual Training (AIT) and their First Unit of Assignment (FUA).

Figure 2: 21st Century Soldier Competencies (Page 18 ALC)

- Character and accountability
- Comprehensive fitness
- Adaptability and initiative
- Lifelong Learner (includes digital literacy)
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Communication and engagement (oral, written, negotiation)
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Cultural and joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational competence
- Tactical and technical competence (full spectrum capable)

By merging all stated outcomes into training guidance such as TR350-6 and lesson plans, the cadre knows what to achieve in Soldier development. Future rewrites of these documents should include existing ALC competencies and attributes. Army Values, discipline, meeting standards, and the Warrior Ethos cannot be lost in BCT. There can be no doubt of

their importance and emphasis required by the cadre in training new Soldiers. TR350-6 will need to merge all desired outcomes to ensure there are not multiple lists that cadre are supposed to follow. Victory University and Drill Sergeant School can then tailor instruction to ensure all new cadre know what the desired competencies and outcomes are for BCT.

The Continuous Adaptive Learning Model stresses "improving the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of face-to-face learning experiences through outcome-oriented instructional strategies that foster thinking, initiative, and provide operationally relevant context" (17). The four remaining elements of the model apply in varying degrees in BCT. The last couple years in BCT have emphasized Soldiers learning. If the training is not effective, the Soldier is not learning, solving problems, or understanding the material. The Soldier's understanding of a concept is critical to his or her ability to recognize changed conditions and adapt the task to new situations, to include combat. BCT teaches solid scenarios and tactical basics that Soldiers will someday adapt on future battlefields under their chain of command. The ALC demands that we begin to instill competencies in IMT and "then reinforce at levels of increasing depth and complexity across the career span" (18).

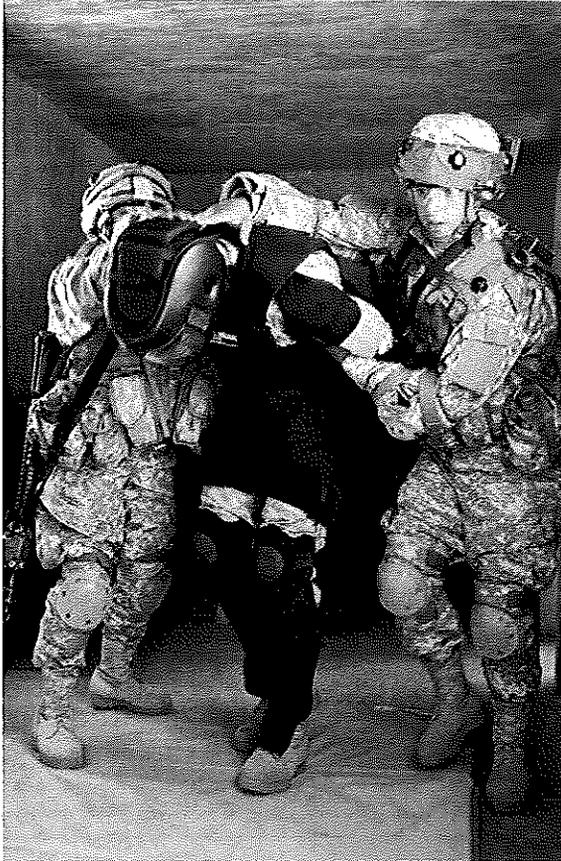
BCT can also implement the Learner Centric 2015 Learning Environment. BCT remains the fundamental building-block in Soldiers' initial development, which needs to be rigorous, tough, and led by Drill Sergeants. Because BCT should be ten difficult and challenging weeks, it should allow the new Soldier to model competencies and attributes from the cadre, avoiding too many digital or virtual replacements. BCT cannot be a correspondence course. But, it can minimize some lecture-based methods that are primarily slide presentations. Putting new Soldiers in small groups to solve problems, such as Values scenarios or a final Squad Training Exercise (STX) lane, enables Soldiers to solve problems with their skill set and learn better. Cadre can then bring out critical learning points in well-run after action reviews (AARs).



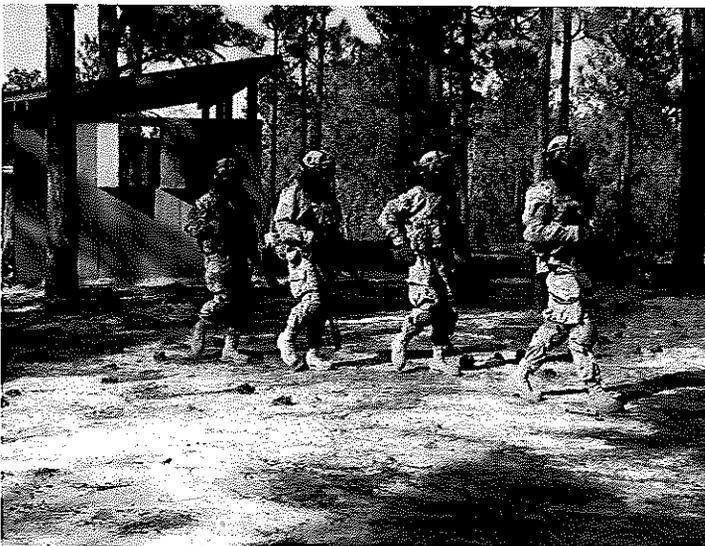
BCT already touches on career span framework. It “combines indoctrination into the Army culture, which rests on the interdependence between the distinctive values, character, and identity that comprise the Warrior Ethos, and basic skill training and comprehensive fitness” (24). IMT also seeks to instill “a lifelong learning mindset in Soldiers that empowers them to take responsibility for their own professional development” (25). Although it is difficult for most new Soldiers to grasp career or professionalism, BCT lays the groundwork for continued development and a desire to be a professional Soldier. They realize there is much they can still learn, but they are beginning to move toward a desire to master Soldier skills and learn what is necessary to survive in combat and contribute to their first unit of assignment.

Cadre must encourage Soldiers to learn more. Given a resource constricted environment, teachers must make the most of every training opportunity. Cadre may be able to use innovation to enable Soldiers to think more within the same training events. For example, some units use Modern Army Combative (MAC) suits in urban training. As a team enters a room, they are surprised by an attacking OPFOR who grabs weapons and physically fights Soldiers. They must remember MAC moves and disable the attacker—Soldiers are initially

surprised when this unexpectedly occurs. They must think and act quickly to eliminate the threat and solve a problem.



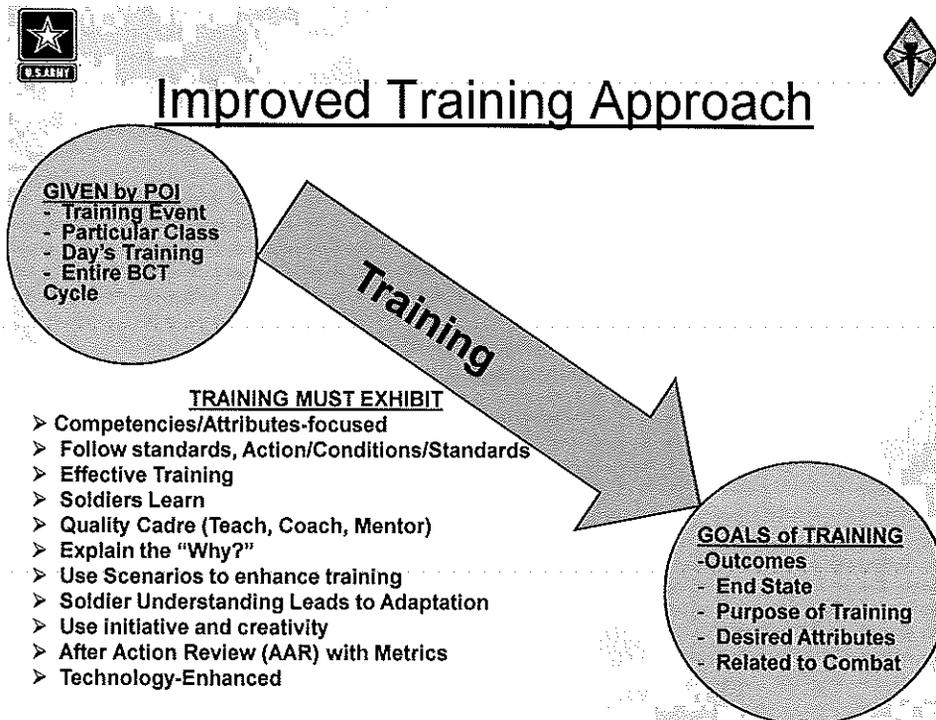
Soldiers can also use Close Combat Mission Capability Kit (CCMCK) on buddy team movement lanes or in MOUT training. Again, Soldiers respond to being hit by a training round, as it hurts. Soldiers will put more effort into their decisions as they really want to avoid being hit repeatedly by a round.



BCT must continue to develop new training techniques that are tough and challenging, so that lessons can be learned more quickly. Everything cannot be virtual, especially when starting the Soldier's development. As they gain more basic knowledge and understanding of skills, virtual and digital solutions gain more attraction. BCT constructs the fundamental building blocks of competencies, skills, and confidence for Soldiers. Soldiers need this basic competency to enable the more advanced ALC concepts to work better in the resource and time constricted BCT environment. As Soldiers are grounded in fundamentals, we can be open to new approaches while exercising some healthy caution in the BCT.

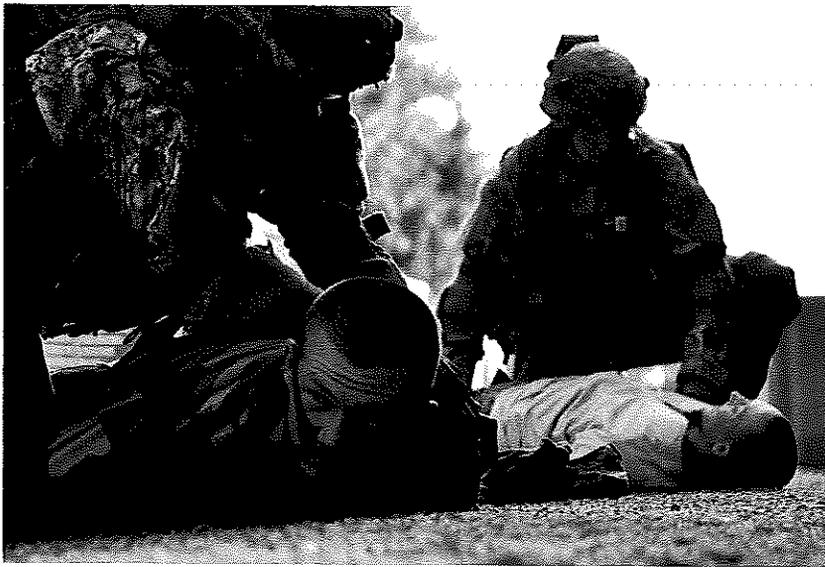
IMPROVED TRAINING APPROACH

Given ALC 2015, the training approach in BCT (and all of IMT for that matter) must be improved. A radical change is not required, but rather an improvement in quality and effectiveness. As we maintain the required action/conditions/standards outlined in the Training Support Packages (TSPs), the focus must be on the training outcome for an event. Although we have stated purposes for the training, we must ensure that we are accomplishing exactly what we desire from the training. The outcome must be relevant to combat, so our Program of Instruction (POI) must be continually revisited to ensure it is relevant to the needs of the Army and the operational environment. Along with the desired end state for the event, we also must analyze which competencies or attributes are being developed. All training should enhance the competencies—we sometimes have negative consequential impacts when we are not careful. Soldier confidence, for example, might be torn down during marksmanship remediation when the goal is to build-up the confidence level.



Soldier learning is the critical focus in all classes and instruction. Long, instructor-centric classes with numerous slide presentations must be eliminated in favor of facilitated training and frequent practice for sustainment. The cadre must be of high quality with extensive unit and school house certifications before they teach in front of the new Soldiers. If they are not good teachers, they will fail with today's brighter recruits. The art of teaching, coaching, and mentoring must be developed before they are in front of the Soldiers and then continued improvement needs to occur afterwards.

The cadre must explain the "why" in training. This neglect has long been evident in IMT as cadre default often to an authoritarian style of instruction. Soldiers that understand the "why" of a task will learn it better and internalize it. They will then understand the task and be able to adapt it as conditions change. The more combat-related and relevant we make training, the better it will be for the Soldier. Realistic live and virtual scenarios can help Soldiers put the training into context and understand its relationship to combat.



As the training is conducted for the cycle or the day, the cadre must conduct thorough after action reviews (AARs) for the Soldiers and separate ones for the cadre alone. By analyzing the effectiveness of the training against established metrics, the cadre can fine-tune the training and improve it for next time. At this point, they will need to apply their creativity and

initiative to improve teaching approaches and scenarios. The more the Soldiers are drawn into the training, the more accountable they will be for their own learning. So even though they are just starting their development as Soldiers, they will recognize the importance of continuous learning and realize they are just beginning their professional journey.

CONCLUSION

The ALC 2015 is important TRADOC guidance that must be incorporated into BCT. Some aspects will apply more than others because of the foundational block that constitutes BCT. The Continuous Adaptive Learning Model principles will influence BCT training into the future. Its 21st Century Competencies are just as valid for new Soldiers as for seasoned Soldiers. Although some of them may be initially harder to train and develop, BCT will need to form the building blocks for professional development. As we integrate the ideas from the ALC 2015, an improved training approach emerges that we can use immediately in BCT and IMT. Improving Soldier learning will become job number one—if it is not working well, replace it with something that is better. For these enhancements, we will need everyone's best creativity and initiative. Better training is not going to be easier in the future as resources diminish—it is going to be harder to obtain and will require our best efforts.