Artillery Tag

By Capt. Derek F. Bartlett

The United States Army’s Field Artillery training doctrine does not cultivate confidence at the platoon and battery level of leadership. The Training Circular 3-09.8 (Dot Eight) is confined to routine, mechanical drill, using a numbered checklist to assess the proficiency of sections, platoons and batteries. Psychology proves that this method of assessing does not cultivate confidence by taking away a sense of control, destroying motivation, and not helping Soldiers learn from mistakes. The artillery community needs to assess our platoon and battery level leadership with Mission Command in mind, combine centralized intent with decentralized execution. There are three separate audiences for this article, even though my English teacher always told me you should only ever have one: section chief, officer and tech savvy civilian.

Section chiefs, I understand that the Dot Eight makes you execute the same tasks no matter if you are on Table V, CH-47 Chinook helicopters of the Combat Aviation Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division transport M777 howitzers of the Georgia Army National Guard’s 1st Battalion, 118th Field Artillery Regiment during training at Fort Stewart, Ga. (U.S. Army)

“No general can accustom an army to war. Peacetime maneuvers are a feeble substitute for the real thing; but even they can give an army an advantage over others whose training is confined to routine, mechanical drill.”

– Carl Von Clausewitz, “On War.”
VI, XII, XV and XVIII. We, as an artillery community, have failed at an effective method of how to assess you. Our actions show that we are not confident in your abilities to train your section. The “table methodology” comes from tank gunnery, when at each table they add a level of complexity for the individual section. The Army decided it might as well work for everyone, hence why we use the “table methodology” now. Psychology shows the need for control is a biological imperative. Columbia University’s Department of Psychology stated in a paper: Trend in Cognitive Sciences (2010), that when people are in control, they tend to work harder and push themselves more. On average these people with a sense of control are more confident and overcome setbacks faster. The artillery community needs to utilize Mission Command and give control to the section chief, and then assess accordingly. The purpose of this article is to convince the officers of your plight with the Dot Eight and get the tech savvy civilians to come up with a better method on how to establish confidence at the lowest level.

Artillery officers, I understand we fell in on the Dot Eight and we make it work the best way we can. Our goal is to connect the technical experts (section chiefs) to our commander’s vision. We, as officers, have been taught that the Dot Eight is the bridge to make that happen. Train the confident section chiefs so all the technical experts look alike, and any commander’s vision can be accomplished. Psychology proves this is wrong. It all falls in the difference between extrinsic motivation versus social motivation. Extrinsic motivation is using punishments or rewards to get a subordinate to complete a task. Fail a section chief for not following the correct procedure in the Dot Eight and get the tech savvy civilians to come up with a better method on how to establish confidence at the lowest level.

The goal of the artillery is to shoot, move and communicate. Place an accurate round down range as fast as possible and kill the enemy. The thought process up until now is that to prepare us for combat we need to become more prescriptive in our doctrine. Our sections, platoons and batteries don’t look the same, therefore they are failing. Our doctrine tells our Soldiers exactly how to operate, so we can synchronize and mass Fires. The idea that Battery Artillery Readiness Tests, Division Artillery Readiness Tests, National Training Center and Joint Readiness Training Center need to test on a prescriptive numbered checklist will solve our problems is an old and outdated way of thinking. We need leaders that give a sense of control to the lowest level leadership, inspire purpose in each and every action through competition, and let Soldiers become confident and learn from their mistakes through assessments.

Capt. Derek F. Bartlett spent his lieutenant time in the 101st Airborne Division, deploying to a small combat outpost on the Pakistan border. He called for fire from a M777 Battery 20 km away, which gave him the idea of training through Artillery Tag. Once in command, he began to explore and experiment with different ideas and found that the best way to motivate Soldiers is building intrinsic motivation through unit competitions.