

Running Head: Can We Improve Our Leadership Values During Deployment?

Can We Improve Our Leadership Values During Deployment?

By SGM Gyura Lajos

5/62 Light Infantry Battalion

S3 NCO, HQ

Hungarian Guard and Security Battalion

Headquarters Company, Security Platoon, KFOR

April 2001 through August 2001

20 September 2006

Class 57

Abstract

Leadership is not ability. Leadership is an art to lead and manipulate Soldiers. In stressful environments, Soldiers need guidance to execute their missions. Nobody is “born leader”.

Everybody can become a leader and a leader must have certain leadership traits. You can improve those you already have, and you can learn to use those in which you are not strong.

Direct and personal leadership can take place any time. You have to prepare to lead your Soldiers during field training exercises and combat deployments, too. Being able to pass knowledge to our junior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and lead them by example are the most important things for a sergeant major. The physical and moral courage will help us to reach the ultimate goal: improve our leadership skills any time.

Can we improve our leadership values during deployment?

I started my military career in 1990 when I joined the Hungarian Defense Forces. A military High School was my first experience in the Army. I did basic training and learned a lot about the Hungarian military. After I have graduated, I joined the regular Army. My first assignment was as a sniper in a mechanized infantry company. I completed the Basic NCO training and I became a sergeant and worked as a squad leader in a mechanized infantry company. In 1997 I started to work as a training NCO in an infantry company.

As a training NCO I had to plan the infantry company's training, organize the preparation for the training events and conduct the training. My first priority was to supervise platoon sergeants and squad leaders, who were my number one trainers. After finishing the training, I assessed the results and conducted After Action Reviews (AARs). The assessment was important because I used this experience to plan and organize the next training exercise.

In 1999, I deployed to Cyprus where I was a squad leader at an Observation Post. I served in the United Nations Force In Cyprus (UNFICYP) as a peacekeeper. My deployment was a year length and I learned a lot from this mission. This was my first real experience working with foreign soldiers in a multinational force. My first hand experiences helped me a lot to be a better NCO.

My next deployment was a tour to Kosovo in 2001. I was a platoon sergeant in the Hungarian Guard and Security Battalion, Headquarters Company, Security Platoon. My unit's mission was to provide escort for the battalion's supply convoys and for Very Important Persons (VIPs).

I redeployed to Hungary in the fall of 2001. In 2002, I arrived in the United States of America (USA) to take part in training with the United States Marine Corps (USMC). That

period was the best time in my life so far. I had the opportunity to train with the Marines and I learned a lot. I think most of my leadership style comes from that experience.

My battalion commander assigned me to a light infantry company as a first sergeant in 2002. This job was a challenge for me and helped me to improve my character. I prepared to be in higher positions and in 2005; I became a staff NCO in the S3 section. I had to learn working in a staff and this was a completely new experience for me. One year ago, the battalion sergeant major had to go to a language course and my battalion chose me to be an acting sergeant major. I felt being a battalion sergeant major was my most difficult challenge. I had a 3 week holiday before I started to work and I prepared to do my job. I had been doing this job for 8 months and I am sure that I want to be the Battalion sergeant major after my graduation. My commander told me that he is very satisfied with my job so I was selected to go the United States Sergeant Major Academy (USASMA) to prepare for the future. I am going to repay his faith.

The most remarkable events in my life were my deployments because I learned a lot about being a leader in the Army. In 2001, my unit deployed to Kosovo as an integral part of the Kosovo Force (KFOR). The KFOR is a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) guided multinational force responsible for maintaining the peace in Balkan. After the political decisions, international forces entered Kosovo on 12 June 1999. The role of the Hungarian Contingent was to guard the KFOR Headquarters in Pristina and provide security for Hungarian supply convoys. The Hungarian Force was battalion size task force called Hungarian Guard and Security Battalion. Our base camp was in Pristina, near the Russian controlled international airport.

The political situation had changed at that time. People protested against the KFOR in Macedonia, riots were everywhere. The insurgents attacked Macedonian police patrols and convoys, and bombed the national airport of Skopje with mortars to frighten the inhabitants and foreigners. Unpleasant people has thrown rocks and bricks from bridges on highways and wounded several dozens KFOR soldiers.

My platoon consisted of 29 Soldiers. We had three squads with 9 Soldiers in each, and a platoon leader and a platoon sergeant. BTR -80 and BTR-80/A were our Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) and we had 3 Mercedes G270 jeeps. In a squad, we had an anti-armor specialist, a driver and a gunner, 2 machine gunners and 4 automatic riflemen. Our small arms were PKM machine guns and AMMSZ assault rifles.

My Soldiers were well trained and motivated. They trained hard to execute our missions. We have been taking part in preparation training from February 2001 to March 2001 and my Soldiers did well during the field training and live fire exercises. I was sure that we could do our tasks. The mission in Kosovo was the first mission for 6 of my Soldiers. They were inexperienced but motivated. My platoon leader was not an infantryman. He had no experience working with infantry soldiers. His main Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) was field artillery, and he knew just a little bit about providing security for convoys or escorting VIPs. Fortunately, he did not want to tell me what my job was. He provided me the freedom to act as a platoon sergeant and expected me to run the platoon.

My main mission's objective was to bring home every Soldier in great condition. To reach this goal I conducted vigorous training during the preparational phase and I started to give leadership lessons to my squad leaders. My platoon executed its mission and redeployed to Hungary after 6 months. My Soldiers had two sports injuries. I think we did great work.

My leadership style is simple: I do not expect more from my Soldiers than I can do. I am always ready to help them and my Soldiers know this. I think the best form of taking care of our warriors is providing them everything to execute their missions.

A leader must be an exceptional Soldier. Every leader has to know every aspects of the military life. Leaders have to be good humans, too. Military manuals and books have lot of

information about leadership traits and qualities. These manuals helped me to prepare for the difficulties to be a better leader. I have read a lot about being a good leader, achieving the impossible and I felt I was ready. I tried to share my experiences with my squad leaders to support them. We were talking a lot about the problems of leadership, different characters, and the way of handling difficult situations.

First of all, we had to decided what makes a leader? Courage? Knowledge? Physical robustness? Tactical skills? Decisiveness? Loyalty? Enthusiasm? Humanity? We had no right answers although we had long discussions. My squad leaders thought that a leader has to be physically robust, tactically highly skilled, and courageous. My opinion was that a leader has to have knowledge, decisiveness, and good judgment. Of course, my point of view was different from my squad leaders' opinion. Soldiers from different positions will judge each other's importance in a different way. Physical and moral courage are important to get control over your fears, and stimulate your body to continue your mission.

Decisiveness is important for a tactical leader. If the decision is yours, make it. "Say what you mean and mean what you say"¹. Never make excuses to delay your decisions. As a leader, you have to behave loyal up and down. Respect and loyalty usually come together. If you earned respect, your Soldiers will loyal to you. Set a goal and your enthusiasm is going to help you to reach that objective. You have to be enthusiastic to improve your skills. Show knowledge and enthusiasm about a subject and your Soldiers will want that knowledge. Humanity is important even if you think that a Soldier cannot be human. You must be human with your peers and subordinates to earn their respect and loyalty.

A leader always has to take responsibility for their actions. The leader is responsible for all that a unit does or fails to do. An NCO must set the example. Make a good effect on your

¹ Marine Handbook, 2003, Quantico, VA, page 47.

Soldiers. As a tactical leader, you must make sound and timely decisions. Good tactical knowledge, judgment, and decisiveness are required to make good decisions. To be a better NCO, and a better leader you have to build a team around your Soldiers. First, you are the builder in the first phase. After you have a working team, just supervise them. Be a part of that team.

In July, the insurgents attacked a Macedonian police patrol. They killed eight police officers and burnt their vehicle. Our supply convoy had arrived on that day and we had to use the highway where the attack happened. It was the only route through the Macedonian border. In the morning, our liaison officer got fresh intelligence reports and briefed the battalion's staff. The battalion commander decided that we have to go for the convoy; there was no way to wait. He ordered my platoon leader to organize the escort and prepare for the mission. He was in difficult situation because he had no experience to do this task. He made the possible best solution, ordered me to prepare for the task. His position changed in a minute to solve a situation. He was the platoon leader but everybody knew that he is just an officer who cannot be in charge. He was afraid of the danger and showed signs of fear.

We escorted the convoy and everything went good. From that day, my Soldiers never asked the platoon leader for help. They did not trust him because he was weak and indecisive. I had to do nothing to gain respect but act the right way and do my job.

During combat deployment, it is necessary to behave and act as a confident leader because our Soldiers are watching us. They know, as we do, who is in charge. They need to know if a leader is unable to lead them. My first impression was that I have to take care of my Soldiers so I acted immediately. This calmed them down and helped them to focus to their tasks. Initiative, decisiveness, and judgment, these are important traits of a tactical leader. I believe that leadership is an art. We have to manipulate our Soldiers to fulfill mission objectives and reach training goals. Leader's responsibility is to take care of their Soldiers and lead them.