THE AGILE-LEADER MIND-SET:
Leveraging the Power of Modularity in Iraq

Colonel (P) Robert B. Brown

Truly successful decision making relies on a balance between deliberate and instinctive thinking.

—Malcolm Gladwell,
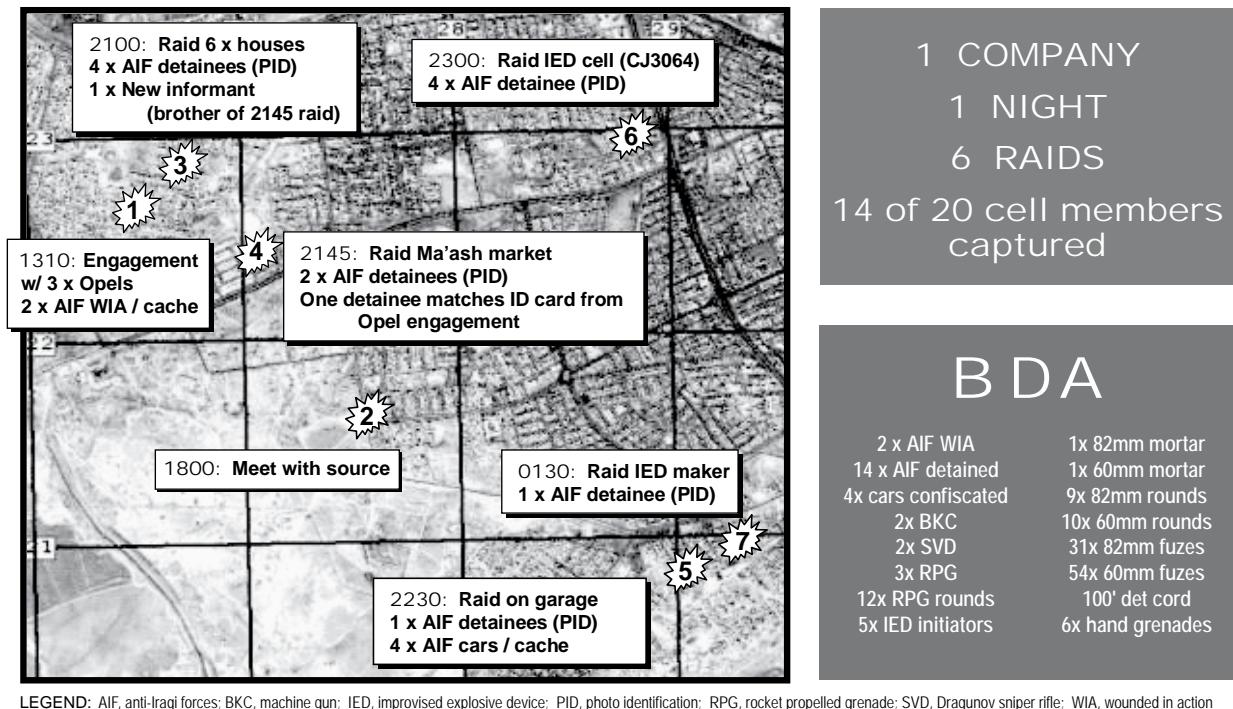*Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, 2005[1]

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PHOTO: 1-25 SBCT Strykers on patrol in Mosul, Iraq, spring 2005. (U.S. Army)

Insurgents in two cars sped through the heart of the crowded city of Mosul, Iraq, firing wildly at a U.S. Army patrol from Bravo Company, 1-24 Infantry. The patrol gave pursuit, but was unable to engage as the insurgents exited their vehicles, blending into a marketplace crowd that included women and children. Over the next six hours, the patrol's parent company would conduct six separate raids in a complex urban area with a population of over 2 million, capturing 14 of the 20 terrorist cell members involved in the shooting and uncovering significant amounts of explosives, weapons, and supplies.

OPERATIONS LIKE the one described above (see figure 1 below) are common in Iraq for a modular brigade that trains to develop agile and adaptive leaders in a climate that demands empowered decision-making at all levels. The ability to respond as these Soldiers did—to consistently demonstrate more agility than the enemy—requires leaders with an "agile-leader mind-set." Developing such a mind-set requires extensive training. To acquire it, leaders must be empowered, and they must be able to quickly convert large amounts of information into actionable intelligence.

Over the last five years, warfighters have become reacquainted with the axiom that they need to be more agile than their enemy. We have revalidated and reemphasized the enduring value of issuing mission-type orders, empowering subordinates, and decentralizing planning and execution. Successful commanders have learned to exploit the power of information not by increasing centralized control of operations, but by decentralizing information flow so that those at the tip of the spear can access information directly and share it horizontally. Traditional walls between military and civilian stakeholders and between intelligence and operations have come

2100: Raid 6 x houses
4 x AIF detainees (PID)
1 x New informant
(brother of 2145 raid)

2300: Raid IED cell (CJ3064)
4 x AIF detainee (PID)

1310: Engagement
w/ 3 x Opels
2 x AIF WIA / cache

2145: Raid Ma'ash market
2 x AIF detainees (PID)
One detainee matches ID card from
Opel engagement

1800: Meet with source

0130: Raid IED maker
1 x AIF detainee (PID)

2230: Raid on garage
1 x AIF detainees (PID)
4 x AIF cars / cache

1 COMPANY
1 NIGHT
6 RAIDS
14 of 20 cell members captured

BDA

2 x AIF WIA	1x 82mm mortar
14 x AIF detained	1x 60mm mortar
4x cars confiscated	9x 82mm rounds
2x BKC	10x 60mm rounds
2x SVD	31x 82mm fuzes
3x RPG	54x 60mm fuzes
12x RPG rounds	100' det cord
5x IED initiators	6x hand grenades

LEGEND: AIF, anti-Iraqi forces; BKC, machine gun; IED, improvised explosive device; PID, photo identification; RPG, rocket propelled grenade; SVD, Dragunov sniper rifle; WIA, wounded in action

SUCCESS =
- **Train the agile-leader mind-set**
- **Force leaders to work at higher levels**
- **Focus training on the leaders and staff**
- **Train with all assets that will be used in combat**
- **Train in the most demanding and difficult situations**

Figure 1. Agile and adaptive leaders—B/1-24 raids, 12 March 2005.

down as inclusive, rather than exclusive, thinking has permeated our leader ethos.

Without a doubt, the U.S. military is at a turning point in its history. We risk losing our status as the greatest military power in the world if we do not rapidly institutionalize fundamental changes in the way we train, fight, and lead. In short, we need to develop a force-wide agile-leader mind-set. This article will discuss how to cultivate that mind-set. At the same time, we will examine lessons learned over three-and-a-half years while transforming a traditional combat brigade into a modular brigade combat team (BCT) performing combat operations in Iraq. Because many former division assets (e.g., intelligence, lethal and nonlethal fires, and reach-back capabilities) are now at brigade level, the modular brigade design offers both challenges and opportunities. The lessons addressed here are primarily tactical in nature, but strategic and operational leaders must understand them to properly support the training and fighting of the modular brigades and to ensure future combat success.

What Has Changed

Warfare today bears little resemblance to warfare yesterday. In the past, we generally knew who we were up against: our enemies wore uniforms, fought according to a doctrine, and were for the most part willing to engage us on battlefields. All that has changed, and so have we. We have gone to the modular brigade design, with its much enhanced combat power and digital assets, a move that many have decried as hearkening back to conventional warfare, but that we are attempting to take advantage of to defeat a ruthless but ingenious enemy.

The enemy. We are facing a multifaceted enemy, one who does not follow the conventions of a nation-state or of a responsible non-state actor. This enemy adapts continuously to exploit our weaknesses, and he capitalizes on a variety of technological and media tools to influence target populations. The enemy uses the same information available to us, and his decentralized organizational structure and unconventional operations complicate our ability

to predict his actions. The result is a significantly tighter decision cycle than in previous conflicts. In fact, we can expect the enemy's decision cycle to become even more compact as he makes increasing use of information-age capabilities.

Information flow. In the past, leaders had problems obtaining enough information to make an informed decision, but today's warfighter has a wealth of information at his disposal, much of it near real time. Now the problem is being able to sort quickly and efficiently through overwhelming amounts of data to find the nuggets of critical information that lead to good decisions. At brigade and below, leaders now have the assets needed to make the types of decisions that were previously made one or two echelons higher. Because the modular brigade has an extensive digital capability, information flows into the brigade at an amazing rate. Furthermore, the brigade has the ability to reach back instantly to a host of locations and national-level assets to obtain information. As a result, BCT leaders at all levels have an unprecedented level of situational awareness.

The key to harnessing the power of information is developing an organizational climate that encourages *horizontal* information sharing in lieu of old-think *vertical* information sharing (figure 2). Horizontal information sharing among an ever-increasing number of contributing entities requires a cooperative organizational attitude that empowers subordinate decision-making. The brigade staff must ensure that it develops an effective battle rhythm that promotes information fusion meetings to share critical intelligence, targeting, and information requirements in a timely manner. Staffs and commanders must analyze collected information to determine its relevance and importance. Units must learn to save time and resources by focusing their efforts primarily on information needed for a particular decision or to divine enemy intentions or patterns.

Organizational barriers that slow the sharing of information both internally and with external organizations must be demolished or at least lowered. For example, we currently use an array of digital systems that are not completely interoperable with each other. The modular brigade must make every available digital system share information when needed; it must make a concerted effort to force interoperability. Legacy brigade systems such as FBCB2 or Blue

Force Tracker have to be made to work with other systems such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) or Command Post of the Future (CPOF).

System interoperability and other barriers that impede information sharing negate the advantages of being able to attain the information in the first place. They prevent the effective exchange of time-sensitive information and must be overcome.

Another major impediment to attaining and sharing timely information is a commander with an exclusive rather than inclusive mind-set toward modular brigade operations. A commander who will not allow subordinates the initiative to work with other organizations or who does not emphasize the importance of constantly sharing information within the organization will never get ahead of today's adaptive enemy.

One of the keys to successful horizontal information sharing is to use liaison officers (LNOs). While changes in technology may appear to have reduced the need for effective LNOs, the opposite is true: these officers improve coordination and information
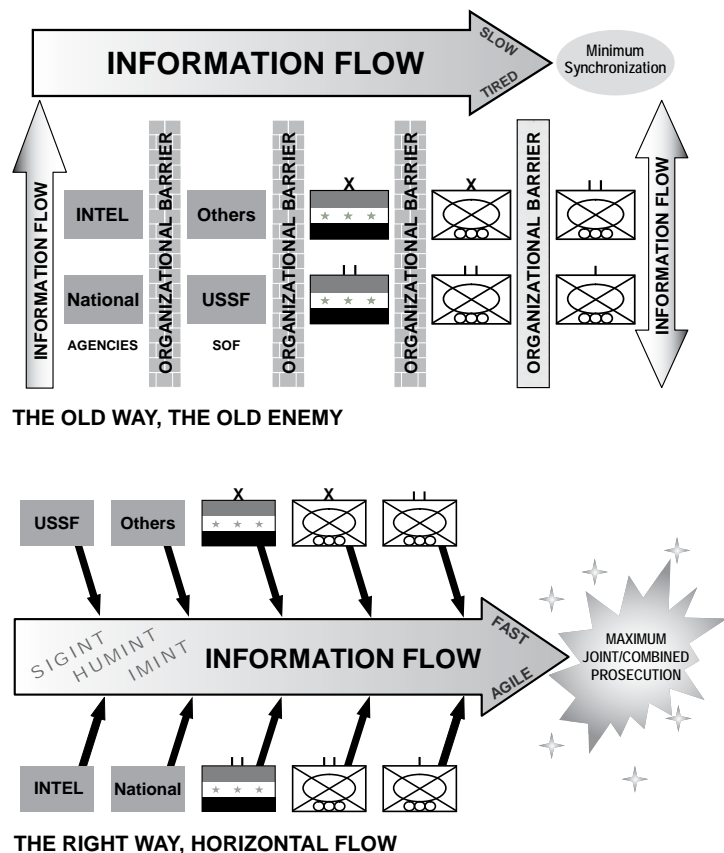

THE OLD WAY, THE OLD ENEMY

THE RIGHT WAY, HORIZONTAL FLOW

Figure 2. Transforming information flow.

sharing between echelons and organizations. In the past, commanders could afford to take risks by sending average officers to work with other organizations. Today, LNOs must be among the best Soldiers in the organization, because it falls to them to filter and prioritize what can be an overwhelming amount of information and then disperse only what is relevant to internal and external organizations.

The Benefits of Horizontal Information Flow

One of the capabilities horizontal information flow provides is the ability to react promptly to the enemy. During our time in Iraq, this became apparent after two actions, one a thwarted vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attack in our area of operations (AO), the other our capture of a high-value target. In both cases, intelligence obtained at multiple echelons was immediately shared among the brigade's units, enabling quick responses that led to enemy defeats. If we had been bound to traditional vertical information methods, the brigade would eventually have received the intelligence, but well past the time to react. In each instance, horizontal information sharing allowed us to *see first*, *understand first*, *act first*, and *finish decisively*.

Thwarting a VBIED. The brigade used a variety of assets organic to its new modular organization to see the enemy and figure out his intentions. After receiving information about a possible threat in our area, we rapidly analyzed the situation and intuited the enemy's plan: to explode a VBIED on a busy street. The brigade's task might seem to have been fairly easy, with one VBIED positioned to inflict casualties. However, such tasks are more complex than they seem because the brigade must conduct analysis that higher levels used to do. The better trained and more agile the brigade and battalion staffs, the better the chance that they will acquire information, turn it into intelligence, and then share that intelligence horizontally, and quickly, to defeat the enemy. In this example, the brigade staff got its information, analyzed it speedily, then immediately alerted subordinate units to the possible presence or imminent arrival of a VBIED. Forewarned, the units picked up the VBIED as it moved into the AO, determined its exact location once parked and guessed the enemy's intentions, then passed that information across the brigade. Thanks to horizontal

information sharing and our new assets, we were able to act first, positioning forces to keep civilian and military personnel away from the VBIED danger zone and destroying the VBIED before the enemy could use it to produce casualties.

We were even able to exploit our success by telling the population about what the enemy had sought to do and how we had foiled his plans. It was very important for them to understand that terrorists were attempting to use the VBIED and possibly harm innocent civilians. If the brigade had not gotten the information about its operation out quickly, the enemy could have acted first and lied about what had occurred to gain an advantage. In this case, our swift exploitation of the VBIED's destruction helped gain the population's confidence and trust. Sharing information quickly across all echelons enabled the brigade to plan and develop nearly simultaneous, effective nonlethal responses and gain an advantage over the enemy. For example, our nonlethal cell worked to exploit the event with the mayor, who appeared on television that evening and explained the VBIED situation, in the process demonstrating the effectiveness of the coalition and government security forces.

This type of quick-response operation is common in Iraq. On numerous occasions we used the same methods to disrupt enemy operations. While the *structure* of the modular brigade enables leaders at all levels to use the organization's assets to defeat the enemy, the *power* of the modular brigade is realized only if the entire organization understands the value of sharing critical information horizontally and expeditiously.

Capturing a high-value target. A more complex example of effective horizontal information flow was the close coordination among the brigade's units and external agencies that led to the capture of the most wanted Al-Qaeda leader in northern Iraq. This man, an expert at exploiting the slow response time of our traditionally vertical information flow, had avoided capture for over two years. But we had empowered lower echelon leaders to coordinate freely and share information with internal and external organizations, and their activity led to several key breakthroughs in the search for the Al-Qaeda leader. Our goal—to allow a consistent exchange and analysis of information—produced rapid results.

Battalion-level leaders initiated an exchange of information with special operations forces in their sector, as well as with national agencies supporting their efforts. Liaison officers hustled information between echelons, commands, and agencies, enabling the prompt exploitation of data. The Iraqi Army and police were added to the loop. Units closely coordinated operations that helped refine information without worrying about who was in charge or who would get the credit. Supporting and supported relationships for operations were coordinated at the lowest levels, and leaders sorted out the best relationships based on the circumstances. Combining human, signals, and image intelligence assets enabled friendly forces to gain valuable intelligence and get inside the enemy's decision cycle. In the end, empowered leaders in all of the participating organizations broke down many vertical barriers to information sharing and made the capture possible.

Increased information flow and a modular design that incorporates all of the battlefield operating systems while adding additional brigade dynamics (i.e., a robust nonlethal operating cell) have changed the capabilities at brigade and below. This change requires junior leaders to function at higher levels. At the end of the day, it is about trusting and empowering the "edges" (Soldiers, sergeants, and company-grade officers), training, and leader development.

What We Learned

The twin challenges of modular transformation and combat with a resourceful, mutable enemy made for a steep learning curve. We had been given a powerful new organization; our task was to figure out how to make it work to the utmost detriment of our enemies in Iraq. Our lessons learned follow.

Getting structural leverage. If we want to preempt enemy actions and turn the complexities of modularity into benefits, we must adjust our methods. For example, intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) is still a useful tool, but we need to modify it to account for the modular brigade's ability to gain near-real-time intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) information. We have to spend more time and analysis on real-time ISR data that can tell us what the enemy *is* doing, and less on IPB that merely predicts what he *might* do at some point in the future. The modular brigade's ability to

rapidly cross-reference human, signals, and image intelligence—and its greatly improved ability to conduct such traditional IPB tasks as terrain analysis—can significantly enhance the efficacy of the IPB-ISR process and provide an effective means to analyze and portray relevant enemy data.

With the addition of a robust nonlethal element, the modular brigade can significantly affect the enemy in ways that were previously restricted to higher echelons. It is important that nonlethal capabilities have the same focus and priority as lethal options. An effective nonlethal section can develop proactive messages and themes that we can broadcast via television, flyers, radio, websites, etc. Nonlethal options require more thought, but the payoff can be significant. For example, in Mosul the Iraqis capitalized on local hatred for foreign suicide bombers by producing a television show, *Confessions* (initially *Mosul's Most Wanted*), that highlighted captured foreigners who admitted they were terrorists. It became one of the most popular shows in Iraq, provided a multitude of tips against terrorist organizations, and significantly reduced the terrorists' ability to intimidate the populace.

Agile and adaptive training. The modular brigade's new capabilities significantly affect the way the brigade should train. Because the new brigade has many more personnel who need specialized training, it must periodically include many external agencies in its training if it wants to maximize training benefits. Thus, the brigade's coordination with external agencies increases tenfold. But the old method of training one simple task at a time, discretely, doesn't push Soldiers and leaders to become the kind of agile, adaptive thinkers who can perform successfully across the entire spectrum of operations. They might have the talent, but if they're not forced to exercise it, they will not develop it. That would be a recipe for failure in a contemporary operating environment (COE) whose threats demand that we be agile and adaptive. What we need is a new way of training Soldiers, leaders, and staffs (figure 3).

Training Soldiers. We must continue to work the fundamentals that we have trained for centuries, but good basic skills alone will not guarantee success. This means we must incorporate tasks into every training event that force us to be agile and adaptable. We must take our Soldiers out of their comfort
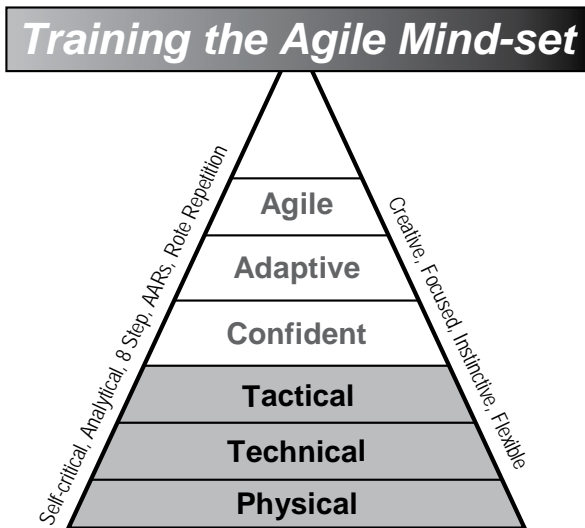
Training the Agile Mind-set

Agile

Adaptive

Confident

Tactical

Technical

Physical

Self-critical, Analytical, 8 Step, AARs, Role Repetition

Creative, Focused, Instinctive, Flexible

Figure 3. Training for agility.

zones from their first day of training by replicating the fog of war even during rote tasks. Soldiers must see training as a set of evolutionary experiences, not just a place to go to.

A simple example of how to train properly might involve a weapons range. Previous ineffective methods have had Soldiers show up at the range and perform the repetitive task of firing at targets until they are proficient. Some advanced weapons techniques and concurrent training for NCOs may have been included, but overall, the training only got at the fundamental task of qualifying with a weapon.

The agile mind-set leader would conduct the weapons qualification training in a much different manner. Soldiers would not only qualify on their weapons system, but would also prepare themselves for combat in today's unpredictable environment. The movement to the range would include several events that forced Soldiers (and leaders) to deal with complex situations; for example, a squad leader could be declared injured and a team leader forced to move up one position. Movement to the range could be by convoy, with a training IED exploded to add complexity to the mission. Soldiers could be required to provide security at the range and to cope with civilians who discover a cache in the area. Qualification itself would occur under realistic conditions, with NCOs supervising their units as they would in combat. There would be no safe areas where personnel could wait around out of harm's way; instead, the unit would practice the difficult task of always

being postured for protection even when it is boring and uncomfortable to do so. In short, all decisions leaders make would have distinct consequences. This would help prepare them for the ambiguity they will face in many combat situations.

Some suggest that we have always trained in this manner. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Many units and schoolhouses continue to train using rote methods only, fostering a checklist mentality among those who receive the training. Certainly we must attend to the fundamentals, but our training should also include the unexpected aspects of warfare that develop the mental agility required in conflict. Agility can no longer be a training afterthought. To truly train as we fight, we must make Soldiers exercise mental agility consistently, for any contingency, and across the spectrum of operations.

Training leaders. For junior level leaders, taking the initiative used to be much easier. Remember the old saying, "Do something, lieutenant, do *anything*, just make a decision"? With the amount of information available to junior leaders in the modular brigade, the meaning of taking the initiative to make decisions has changed significantly. Junior leaders now receive an overwhelming amount of information, and we must train them to quickly convert that information into knowledge so that they can make good, fast decisions.

We have found that junior leaders will do one of three things with the increased information they receive:

● They will be overwhelmed by the information and completely disregard it when making decisions.

● They will attempt to acquire more information and become paralyzed by the data.

● They will sort through the information briskly and select the key portions that enable them to make a solid, timely decision.

To help junior leaders get comfortable with making fast, informed decisions in complex environments, we must place them in training situations that consistently generate overwhelming amounts of information. Only then will they develop the proper decision-making skills needed for actual operations. As with Soldier training, events must expose them to the multitude of factors they will face in actual combat. We must consistently produce information from the modular brigade's many capabilities (unmanned aerial vehicles, human and signals intelligence capabilities, the shared common

operating picture, and current, digitally received situational reports) and make our young leaders deal with it. Because they are keenly aware that they can be micromanaged with today's technology, these leaders need to train with the support of higher headquarters, so that they will know when their senior leaders are most likely to drill down to their level to assist them. We must also build the confidence of these young leaders by letting them know that senior leaders will not interfere with their actions at inappropriate times during operations.

Leader training is essential for developing the initiative required for the agile-leader mind-set. All levels within the modular brigade need a regular program of leader training that cultivates confident leaders who can think agilely and adaptively in complex situations. Leader development events such as staff rides, tactical exercises without troops, leadership scenarios, and professional development classes remain an integral part of a training program and require the entire chain of command's support. Some of this leadership training will entail complex simulation exercises, but we can complete other events with resources that have been around for years, such as the standard leadership reaction course.

During these leadership events, it is critical that commanders at all levels reward initiative and creativity and underwrite honest mistakes. Nothing will stifle initiative more than chastising a leader for a bold move or punishing him for an honest mistake.

Leadership-focused training properly planned and executed at multiple echelons within the brigade will yield positive results during future combat operations. In Iraq, our post-combat after-action reviews regularly found that the extensive leadership training we had conducted was a key ingredient to our success. Moreover, the majority of leaders within the brigade said that, despite an extraordinary emphasis on leader training, we should have conducted even more.

Training staff. Staff training in the modular brigade also requires a break from the old way of doing business. It takes extensive training to make the new brigade's relatively junior staffers competent enough to handle the requirements of the COE. For example, on today's brigade staff, a pre-command captain has access to more information than a lieutenant colonel on a division staff had in the past, yet the captain is obviously much less

experienced, and his time to train is relatively short. So how do we overcome this experience gap? We do it by using simulations and other training methods that consistently work the brigade staff toward scenarios it will face during actual operations. The trick is to build training efficiently and seamlessly into everyday occurrences, and to use technology to leverage real-time operational challenges.

One effective method is to train the staff prior to deployment by using a near-real-time link with a unit deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan. The brigade staff can receive operations orders from a higher headquarters in theater, then plan actions without knowing how the brigade in theater responded and fared. Later, after we run our plan through a simulation or discuss the scenario, we can consider the actual results in theater. The brigade can thus practice operating with real information at all levels for months prior to deployment. Such training has many advantages, but two stand out: the entire staff learns enemy techniques and becomes familiar with enemy personnel, and junior staff officers, in particular, become seasoned by being exposed to real-world experience prior to deployment.

Keys to success. In *Principle Centered Leadership,* Stephen R. Covey claims that "an empowered organization is one in which individuals have the knowledge, skill, desire, and opportunity to personally succeed in a way that leads to collective organizational success."[2] Commanders seeking to instill an agile-leader mind-set across their organizations will do well to heed Covey. They must set the conditions for wholesale adoption of agile leadership by empowering their subordinates, by resisting the urge to centrally control everything, and by cultivating a culture of cooperation within their units (see figure 4).

Empowerment. Soldiers empowered to make decisions are the foundation for success on today's and tomorrow's battlefields. Modular brigades with sound fundamental skills that aggressively incorporate agility and adaptability across the tactical spectrum can get inside the enemy's decision cycle and dominate operations. The empowered operating environment will be uncomfortable for leaders used to the old vertical command-and-control decision-making structure, and they may fall back on previous training and habits, especially under pressure. We must therefore encourage empowerment throughout

the entire organization and practice it relentlessly so that it will work when the unit is under pressure.

How a leader responds to his subordinates' mistakes is also critical. A proper response can encourage learning and confidence; an improper one can undermine efforts to empower Soldiers and rapidly stifle initiative within a unit. Experience has proven that empowerment, when properly supported, will lead to unprecedented and impressive results. If a senior leader overreacts to a mistake, his unit may never undertake bold initiatives again. To maximize the benefits of empowerment, Soldiers require a freedom of thought that only comes from training that has consistently emphasized trust and confidence among unit members.

The Soldier-centric organization. Effective empowerment leads to a "Soldier-centric" organization whose Soldiers, freed from unnecessary constraints, can apply the brigade's myriad capabilities. Gone are the days when a commander could require that he approve every operation or event. That type of control leads to organizations with a vertical information flow, a slow decision cycle, and little chance of staying ahead of the enemy. The days of pushing both responsibility and authority as close to the tip

of the spear as possible have arrived. Commanders at all levels must clearly define their subordinates' decision-making authority and then back them up with action. This is not easy. Some commanders will feel uncomfortable about giving up the control that has traditionally been restricted to higher levels.

Commanders must also fight the temptation to surround themselves with excessive amounts of data so that they can micromanage subordinate units. These leaders create a "control-centric" environment that stifles initiative and produces disastrous results on the battlefield. By assuming that they can interpret and act on information faster and better than anyone else, control-centric commanders signal that they do not trust their subordinates to make good decisions. They slow down the decision-making process, allowing an agile and adaptive enemy to change the operating environment before their decisions make their way to those responsible for action. Leaders who use data and their unit's digital capabilities to stifle initiative and micromanage subordinates will never defeat an adaptive enemy on a consistent basis. Only a Soldier-centric organization that empowers Soldiers at all levels will be able to exploit the information
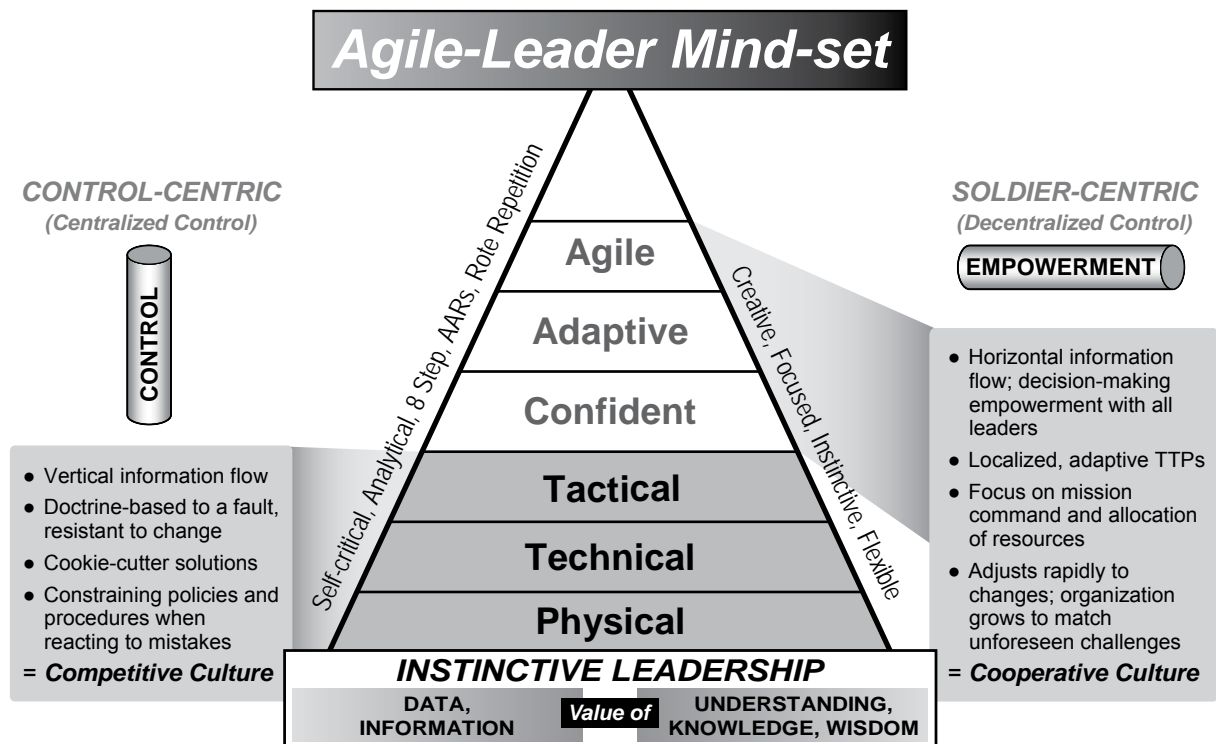

Figure 4. Agile-leader mind-set expanded.

advantage fully. It will consistently defeat an enemy who can adapt, but who does not have the training or foundation to be routinely agile.

Cooperative culture. A genuinely empowered organization deemphasizes competition in favor of a culture of cooperation. The only place for competition is against the enemy. A cooperative culture shares information; its units do not compete with other units or agencies during operations. In the competitive interagency environment we inhabit today, this team-first attitude does not come naturally; to achieve it, leaders at all levels must constantly stress the importance of cooperation to mission success. Unit or interagency competition creates organizational seams that the enemy can exploit. It weakens all concerned.

We must use training events and sustainment events during combat to ensure that the team attitude does not erode. Unlike in the past, when attachments would arrive just before deployment, modular units train and fight together full time. In a modular unit, every Soldier must understand how his role contributes to unit success, so that he will always feel like a valuable member of the team. While the modular structure lends itself naturally to teamwork, it is important to focus on teambuilding at the brigade level. Battalions practice teamwork almost daily, but the commander of a modular brigade must look hard for opportunities to build his team.

Sponsoring periodic leader events with all E-7s and above can help build an effective brigade team. These events should mix personnel who do not normally associate with each other into groups and present complex problems whose resolution requires quick critical thinking. The activity could be as simple as an expanded leadership reaction course scenario or as complex as an off-site training event. It should include mentoring by senior leaders. A multi-layered approach to team building is essential to ensure that a spirit of cooperation pervades the organization's culture. A genuinely cooperative attitude is tough to build at the brigade level, but well worth the effort.

Flexibility. An empowered, Soldier-centric organization relies on localized, flexible tactics, techniques, and procedures. The best way to fight an adaptive and devious enemy is to give leaders at all levels the freedom to adjust to changes quickly and out-think the enemy. Given the proper command climate, leaders will readily share their lessons learned and the techniques they used with others. Doctrine is an excellent guide, and we should always consider it, but too rigid an application of doctrine makes a unit predictable and, hence, vulnerable. Those who resist change are doomed to failure. By definition, flexible leaders are adaptive leaders.

The Agile-Leader Mind-Set at Work

When a unit trains to produce a cooperative team environment, one that empowers Soldiers to make rapid decisions and to act on those decisions without unnecessary interference from higher, the rewards, as we learned in Iraq time and again, are plentiful. This became especially clear to us during one particular operation against Al-Qaeda.

Our human intelligence (HUMINT) capability discovered that an Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) leader planned to assassinate the successful Iraqi police chief of a critical town. The infantry unit responsible for the town immediately worked to get inside the enemy's decision cycle and to use the information to neutralize the AQI leader (see diagram 1).

Predeployment training in which HUMINT personnel worked with infantry and reconnaissance units had led to a mutual understanding that it was critical to get the intelligence collectors out of the forward operating bases and in with the infantry, among the people. The battalion that received the HUMINT collection team was empowered to use it, along with other assets in its sector, to take immediate action against the enemy. Within several hours of receiving the assassination intelligence, the battalion shared the information with a special operations unit and developed a plan to capture or kill the enemy. Subsequently, when the original human source of the report linked up with the AQI leader, U.S. and Iraqi forces were able to intercept the latter and neutralize him and two other members of his organization.

During this operation, a variety of assets enhanced unit situational awareness and made success possible. The Air Force provided close air support and aerial monitoring, several unmanned aerial vehicles provided specialized tracking (diagram 2), a special operations element interdicted the AQI cell and the infantry used their Stryker vehicles'
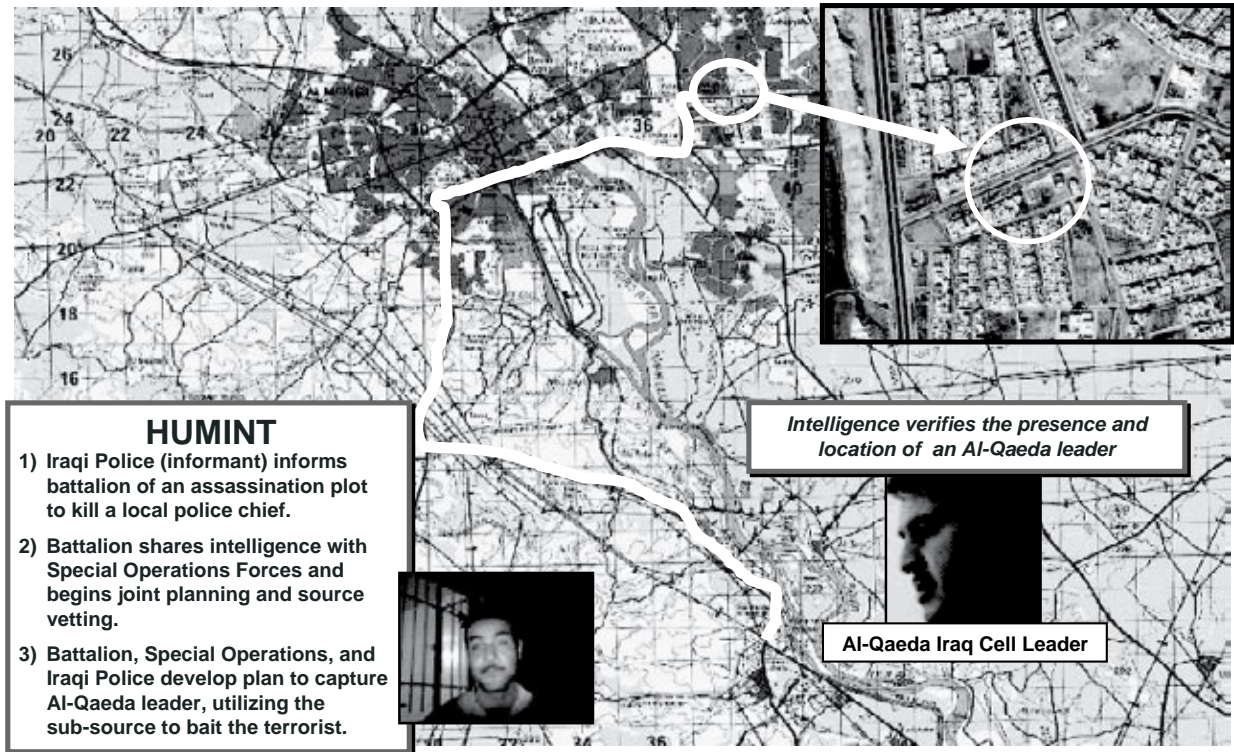
HUMINT

1) Iraqi Police (informant) informs battalion of an assassination plot to kill a local police chief.

2) Battalion shares intelligence with Special Operations Forces and begins joint planning and source vetting.

3) Battalion, Special Operations, and Iraqi Police develop plan to capture Al-Qaeda leader, utilizing the sub-source to bait the terrorist.

Intelligence verifies the presence and location of an Al-Qaeda leader

Al-Qaeda Iraq Cell Leader

Diagram 1. Sharing intelligence, developing a plan.

SBCT

UAV imagery is used to plot icons on FBCB2, creating a "Common Operating Picture."

Air Force assets help track terrorists.

IMINT

UAV assets allow unit to track Special Operations and sub-source movement through IMINT.
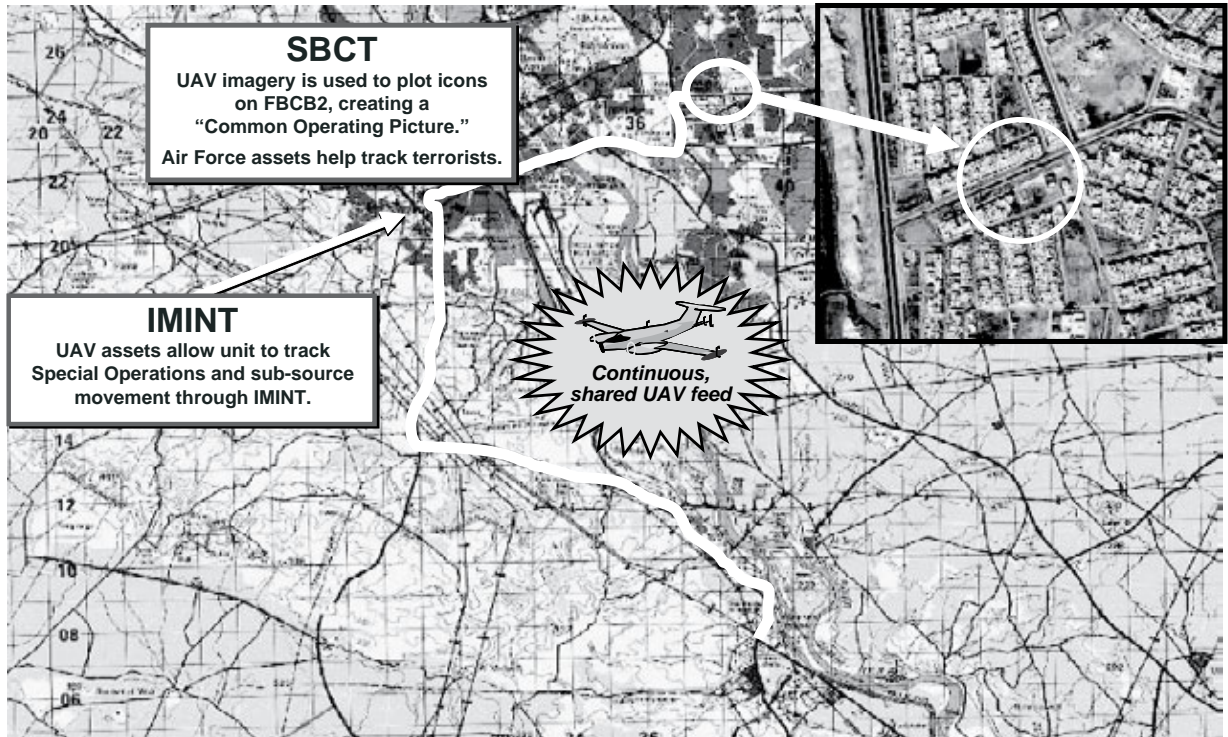
Continuous, shared UAV feed

Diagram 2. Tracking the enemy and friendly forces.

LEGEND: EOD, explosive ordnance disposal; FBCB2, Force XXI Battle Command, Brigade-and-Below; HUMINT, human intelligence; IMINT, imagery intelligence; KIA, killed in action; SBCT, Stryker brigade combat team; SIGINT; signals intelligence; UAV, unmanned aerial vehicle; USSF, U.S. Special Forces
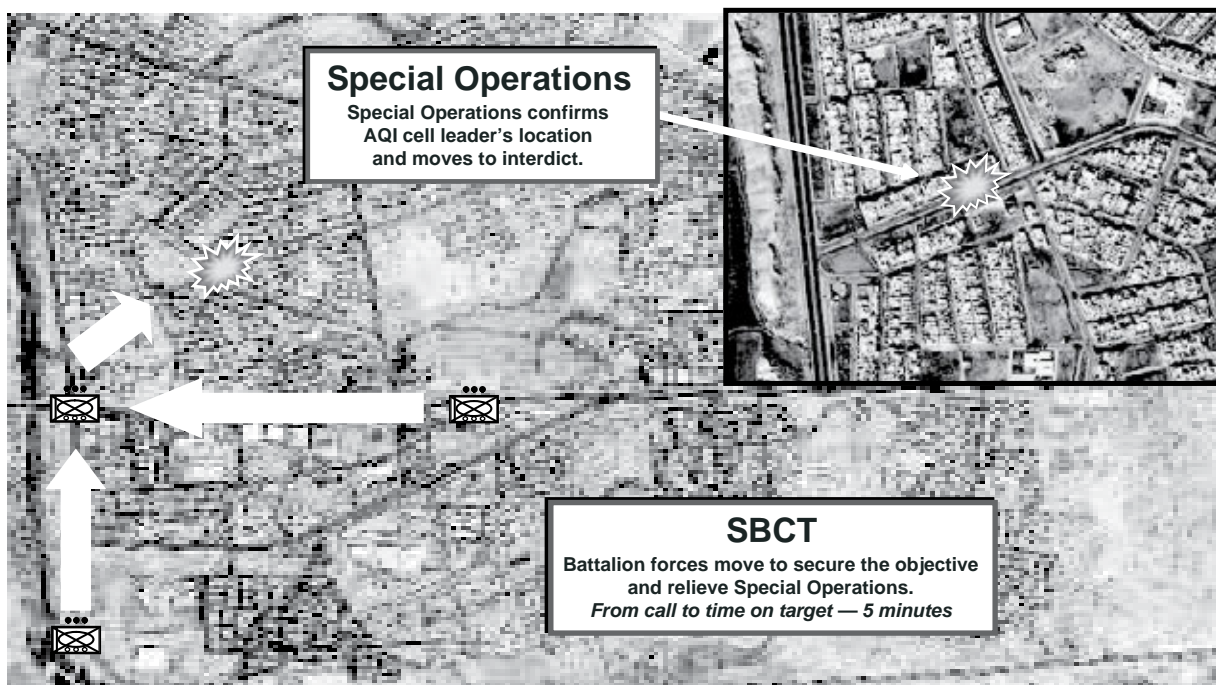
Special Operations

Special Operations confirms
AQI cell leader's location
and moves to interdict.

SBCT

Battalion forces move to secure the objective
and relieve Special Operations.
From call to time on target — 5 minutes

Diagram 3. Taking down the target.

SBCT

● Battalion secures site and escorts Special Operations element from target.
● Battalion finds suicide belt on AQI cell leader's body.
● EOD and engineers reduce suicide belt, recover remains, and return source.
● Battalion exploits documents and pictures found by chase vehicles, shares with partners. Passes additional intelligence and information to another battalion for exploitation.

AQI Security

AQI Cell Leader

AQI Cell Leader's Suicide Vest

Diagram 4. Consolidating the objective, exploiting the operation.

speed and mobility to seal off the area and close the deal (diagrams 3 and 4). The entire operation was planned and executed within 12 hours by an empowered group of leaders who coordinated and cooperated to defeat three AQI personnel, one a key leader. This result would not have been possible in a competitive culture or under a commander who had to personally approve every operation.

Instinctive Leadership

The commanders of empowered units that apply the agile-leader mind-set will eventually reach a level of decision-making we might call "instinctive leadership." Unlike the commanders of completely data-centric units who rely on volumes of information that may not lead to any meaningful action, instinctive leaders cultivate an overall understanding of the environment, the enemy, and the enemy's leaders. This knowledge enables them to make the right decisions in complex situations. Commanders at all levels use instincts they have developed over years of experience, but the real question is, Do they listen to those instincts when they make key decisions that will disrupt and defeat the enemy? Commanders who have long relied on school solutions or who feel they must have all the facts at their disposal first will feel uncomfortable making instinctive decisions at first. They may even feel as if they are guessing on important issues. However, the ability to intuit the best course of action is part of the art of war. It is what makes a commander successful in the first place.

Of course, it takes practice to develop the right instincts. Commanders must learn how to manage the wealth of data that the staff provides before they put their instincts into play. It is very easy for the modular brigade staff to inundate the commander with information and paralyze the entire organization. The staff needs to review and organize data carefully to determine what is actually important, so that the commander gets as clear a picture as possible prior to engaging his instincts. Often, staff officers or subordinate commanders will pressure the commander to rely on the data and ignore his gut instincts. In this case, it is important for the commander to recognize that because of his experience, he has a unique view of the situation.

The modular brigade's superior digital capabilities have another potential drawback: they can tempt the commander to rely too much on the operations center for information and thus reduce his battlefield circulation. The operations center will often have the best information and means of unit control in the brigade; however, it is a huge mistake for a commander to stay in the center and skip the battlefield. Soldiers need to see their commander "taste" the action on the ground. It tells them that he is willing to share their risk and really wants to understand what they are up against. In turn, commanders gain an invaluable perspective from circulating on the battlefield. Sometimes, that perspective provides a nuanced insight that engages the commander's instincts and leads to effective decision-making.

In Iraq, we made many instinctive decisions after reviewing staff data and walking the ground with units. One key decision involved the use of combat outposts (COPs) in Mosul's most violent areas. Early on, there were many insurgent-controlled areas that caused problems for coalition forces. Based on input provided by our robust brigade staff and information gleaned from daily visits with friendly units to those areas, we decided to occupy the toughest areas. We established COPs with approximately a platoon's worth of Soldiers inside each outpost and others who patrolled the surrounding areas. Altogether, we established 23 COPs in the worst areas of Mosul, a city with a population of 2.1 million. That decision changed the entire situation. It enabled us to get inside the enemy's decision cycle and significantly disrupt his operations. The outposts made enemy actions predictable because, as we had rightly assumed, the insurgents attempted to regain control of the areas by attacking our COPs. The COPs also led the local residents to trust and confide in us when they realized we were in their neighborhoods to stay.

The decision to establish the COPs was based on information and instincts. Well-informed commanders were empowered to make the decisions they thought best. Eventually, Iraqi forces took over our outposts, and their presence stabilized the situation in Mosul so well that the January 2005 elections could occur and some sense of civility could return to the city. The decision to establish COPs was just one of many instances of effective instinctive leadership during Operation Iraqi Freedom. The most important point to remember from it is that instinctive leadership requires leaders who have the confidence and freedom to go with their instincts.

Final Thoughts

Clearly, transforming the Army to a modular brigade design has set the conditions for success across the force. However, any transformation in unit structure must be reinforced by an even more essential transformation in the way we train, lead, and fight. Centralized operational execution and micromanaged subordinate formations are now

obsolete; we must train and encourage leaders to act independently and apply the agile-leader mind-set during all missions. Our Soldiers and junior leaders fighting the war on terrorism understand the training they need to do and the combat adjustments they need to make to defeat the enemy. However, above the junior leader level there is a general lack of understanding about the level of empowerment necessary to be successful. Senior leaders must realize that for the modular structure to work best, they must be comfortable with less control of the decision-making process. Leading today means creating a command environment that empowers Soldiers at all levels to make decisions and take immediate action. It means drawing upon the best information and ideas regardless of the source. It means making the problem statement the leader and not letting one's ego and need for control get in the way of fast, effective decisions.

Application of the agile-leader mind-set will create organizations that harness the power of their structure and operate at unprecedented levels of performance across the spectrum of conflict. Soldier-centric organizations that emphasize a cooperative attitude and horizontal information flow will be able to defeat the ruthless, decentralized enemy we will continue to face. Our challenge as leaders will be to leverage our past experience even as we break free from it. If we do not, and we fail to make the adjustments we must make to be successful, we will be neither relevant nor ready to win the long war. *MR*

NOTES

1. Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (New York: Little Brown, 2005), 141.
2. Stephen R. Covey, *Principle Centered Leadership* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 212.

This article is dedicated to a true American hero, CPT Bill Jacobsen, 1-25 SBCT. Bill was the perfect example of an Agile Leader and his exemplary courage, dedication to his soldiers, and selfless service during combat operations in Iraq will never be forgotten. We miss you Bill!