



U.S. Army Spc. Owen Cyr, assigned to Regimental Support Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, fires an M2 Browning .50 caliber machine gun during a Soldier of the Month Board at the Grafenwoehr Training Area, Bavaria, Germany, March 12, 2021. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Javan Johnson)

Expanding the Soldier/NCO of the Month Board

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Leadership development has never been more important. The contemporary operating environment (OE) is defined by chaos and ambiguity with near-peer threats and non-state actors continuing to challenge American interests (Department of the Army, 2019a; Mattis, 2018). The obstacles facing today's Army continue to expand as technological innovations redefine the OE. Upholding the *Warrior Ethos* must remain a priority to ensure the force is ready to meet any challenge.

One way leaders can emphasize the *Warrior Ethos* is by expanding the Soldier/NCO of the Month Boards to focus on not just textbook knowledge, but also combat skills. As Nobel Prize-winning physicist Archibald Hill discovered in the 1920s, you can scientifically measure

and predict a person's peak performance capability in a controlled setting, but it means nothing when stress, fatigue, and chaos kick in (Housel, 2018). This article discusses ways in which expanded Soldier/NCO of the Month Boards can add dynamic challenges to better prepare Soldiers for future combat.

Shaping Operations

Soldier/NCO of the Month Boards are a vital part of the leader development process. Traditionally they have served as rehearsals for promotion boards, preparing Soldiers to answer common core questions consistent across most units. According to *Army Regulation (AR) 600-8-19: Enlisted Promotions and Reductions*:

“The board, utilizing a question and answer format, will test the preparedness of the recommended Soldier to determine their potential to serve at the recommended rank. Hands-on tasks are not authorized. Questions should focus on leadership, awareness of military programs, and knowledge of basic Soldiering and world affairs. (Department of the Army, 2019b, pg. 42)”

The promotion board is an integral part of leader development and provides a platform for senior leaders to validate a Soldier for the next rank. Usually consisting of the command sergeants major and first sergeants of an organization, it has historically served to test a Soldier’s ability to answer questions under pressure, allowing them to demonstrate knowledge and highlight accomplishments. The Soldier/NCO of the Month Board has typically been the primer for a promotion board, but I would argue not enough emphasis has been placed on it and it has not been maximized to achieve its full potential. If the goal of leader development is to create Soldiers capable of operating in chaos and ambiguity, then every opportunity should be leveraged to create conditions that will enable Soldiers to rapidly develop skillsets needed to dominate in the contemporary OE.



U.S. Army Spc. Jordan Herring, 35th Air Defense Artillery Brigade, reads a map to determine the best way around a pond as part of a land navigation course during the Eighth Army Best Warrior Competition at Rodriguez Live-Fire Training Complex, South Korea June 1, 2020. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. James Whitaker)

Seize the Initiative

Expanding the Soldier/NCO of the Month board to a more combat-focused event includes adding Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills while simultaneously assessing basic knowledge. The regulations for promotion boards prohibit “hands-on” testing, but there are no such restrictions for Soldier/NCO of the Month Boards (Department of the Army, 2019b).

With this concept in place, the president of the board

should be a first sergeant and the board members should be platoon sergeants. The room would be set up in a round robin format for Level 1 and 2 tasks. Stations should include, at a minimum, a weapons testing station on as many of the unit’s organic weapons as possible, map reading station (recommend a testing scenario), communications station, and a night vision device station. This set up is consistent with the command priorities of shoot, move, communicate, and own the night, a popular U.S. Army mantra and philosophy.

In the second phase, as Soldiers and NCOs are tested on their Warrior Tasks and Battle Drill skills, they are asked general knowledge questions testing their ability to

think under pressure. The uniform for this board should be full field uniform to include face paint, body armor, personal weapon, and protective mask. The sponsor would also be involved and in the same uniform, creating a team-building opportunity. Board members would quick fire questions at both the Soldier and the sponsor to create stress during the proceedings while testing cognitive abilities and motor skills.

An Example: A Soldier sets up and conducts a radio communications check with their sponsor, who is on another radio in the room, this tests both the Soldier and sponsor creating a learning and team-building event, all while reciting the Soldiers Creed.

Conclusion

Leader development is paramount to sustaining a strong force able to dominate any adversary. Upholding the Warrior Ethos should be a priority for every leader to ensure Soldiers are prepared for tomorrow’s challenges. An upgraded and expanded Soldier/NCO of the Month Board would prepare Soldiers to operate in chaos while staying focused on the tasks and mission at hand. ■

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