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# **The Squad Leader Makes the Difference**

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**Readings on Combat at the Squad Level  
Volume I**

Lieutenant M.M. Obalde and Lieutenant A.M. Otero

**United States Marine Corps**  
Marine Corps Warfighting Lab  
Marine Corps Combat Development Command  
Quantico, Virginia 22134

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**FOREWORD**

In combat, the actions of individual leaders affect the outcome of the entire battle. Squad leaders make decisions and take actions which can affect the operational and strategic levels of war. Well-trained squad leaders play an important role as combat decisionmakers on the battlefield. Leaders who show initiative, judgment, and courage will achieve decisive results not only at the squad level, but in the broader context of the battle. Without competent squad leaders, capable of carrying out a commander's intent, even the best plans are doomed to failure.

This publication illustrates how bold, imaginative squad leaders impact the outcome of a battle or campaign. The historical examples here represent some of the cases in which squad leaders were able to change the course of history. In each case, the squad leader had to make a quick decision without direct orders, act independently, and accept responsibility for the results.

Short lessons are presented at the end of each story. These lessons should help you realize how important your decisions are to your Marines and your commander. In combat, you must think beyond the squad level. You must develop opportunities for your commander to exploit. Your every action must support your commander's intent. You must be competent in the combat skills required of a combined arms leader. ***You are the primary warfighter of the Marine Corps.***

**“The most brilliant plan... depends for its tactical execution on the [squad] leaders. Poor [squad] leaders may ruin the best-laid plans; first-rate [squad] leaders... often save badly devised plans...**

**The [squad] leader is the sole level of command that maintains... direct contact with the men who [do] the actual fighting. It follows, then, that *the [squad] leader is to be trained as a tactical commander and as an educator of his men.* [Emphasis added]**

**[In the IDF]...[squad] leaders are trained to command independently in the field...Modern...armies...operate in small, dispersed formations...All levels of command must... be trained to think and act independently...Modern weapons, which provide small groups of men... greater firepower and... flexibility of movement, call for a high standard of command at all levels.**

**The [squad] leader is therefore to be trained technically as an officer, not as a corporal.”**

**— Yigal Allon  
Field Commander  
Israeli Defense Force**

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# Corporal Alvin York

## U.S. Army

### France, 1918

The Meuse-Argonne offensive was the last important battle of the First World War. On the night of 25 September 1918, over one million American soldiers moved up to relieve the French forces on the front lines. The American advance that ensued swept easily through the first two lines of German trenches, and then progress slowed. Facing stiff resistance, the reserve division was called up.

Cpl Alvin York served as an infantryman in the 82nd Division. York's company started across a valley at six in the morning. As they began to move, the company came under heavy fire. From behind a hill, enemy machine guns mowed down the first wave of advancing Americans. No one knew where the deadly fire was coming from, so York's Platoon Sergeant decided to take the platoon on a mission to find it.

The platoon found a gap in the enemy lines and circled to the rear of where they thought the machine guns might be. The group of Americans stumbled across two German litter bearers, whom they followed back to the headquarters of the machine gun battalion. The Americans walked right into the German machine gun command post, opened fire, and the Germans immediately surrendered.

Upon hearing the firing behind them, the Germans that were dug in near the command post swung their weapons around and began firing at the Americans. Caught in the open, in a hail of automatic fire, the Americans instantly took casualties. Cpl York took aim at the nearest machine gun, about 25 yards away, and killed the man behind the gun. He continued to fire at each German who popped his head out of a foxhole. After watching his troops being massacred by this lone sharpshooter, the German Major in command yelled to York, "If you'll stop shooting, I'll make them surrender."

Within minutes, the remaining American troops had captured ninety German prisoners, but they were behind enemy lines. Cpl York took charge, and quickly organized his platoon. He decided to move back towards friendly positions, straight through the German lines. York ordered the German prisoners to carry back the American wounded. Every time the group came upon a German position, York told the captured German Major to order the troops to surrender. The well-disciplined German soldiers never questioned the order, and by the time York's small band reached friendly lines, they had acquired 132 German prisoners. In their wake, York's

platoon left thirty-five deserted German machine gun positions and a significant gap in the German defenses.

This gap which York had created was a vital element to the success of the division's advance. This advance gave momentum to the American forces, and contributed to the success of the Meuse-Argonne offensive.

## **Lessons**

- Cpl York was quick to exploit the opportunity which had been created. He realized that his actions would affect the outcome of the battalion's advance and made decisions which supported his commander's intent. His strong situational awareness guided him in taking action which had decisive results.
- After taking charge of the platoon, Cpl York led his unit back to friendly lines. His plans changed as the situation developed, but his decisiveness, improvisation skills, and leadership abilities enabled him to lead his withered platoon back to friendly lines while capturing 132 prisoners.

# **Sergeant Henry Hanneken**

## **U.S. Marine Corps**

### **Haiti, 1919**

Following serious rebel uprisings, the United States began a prolonged occupation of Haiti in 1915. Charlemagne Peralte was the leader of the rebel army, known as the “Cacos.”

The 2d Marine Brigade spent several months in unsuccessful attempts to topple Charlemagne’s group. Henry Hanneken, a sergeant in the brigade, devised a bold plan to separate Charlemagne from the bulk of his troops and ambush him. Sgt Hanneken sent one of his most reliable men to become a member of the Caco band. In a short period of time the infiltrator had earned the outlaws’ trust. Then Sgt Hanneken had his spy feed the Cacos the location of a Marine unit that was vulnerable to attack. Hanneken’s spy soon returned with information of a rebel plan to attack these Marines, as well as Charlemagne’s location during this attack.

On 31 October 1919, Sgt Hanneken led 22 local militiamen in an attack on Charlemagne. Disguised as rebels, Hanneken and his unit moved through several guard posts and boldly walked into the unsuspecting rebel camp. When he was within fifteen yards of Charlemagne, Sgt Hanneken drew his pistol, and shot and killed the rebel leader. In the fire-fight that followed, the small raiding party captured the rebel position and defended it from a series of counterattacks.

The Marines who were the target of the rebel attack had been warned by Sgt Hanneken of the impending strike and were well prepared for the rebel attack. The rebels were thoroughly defeated. The morning after the actions, Sgt Hanneken reported his exploits to his commanding officer. Hanneken’s actions had routed more than a thousand outlaws, killed their leader, and virtually shattered the entire bandit resistance movement in northern Haiti. For his actions, Sgt Hanneken was awarded the Medal of Honor.

# Lessons

- Sgt Hanneken displayed outstanding initiative and tactical proficiency in devising and acting upon a plan to defeat a large rebel force. This plan supported the brigade's mission in Haiti. Sgt Hanneken accepted great risk, but displayed the courage and nerve to see his plan through. His bold action achieved decisive results.
- With a small band of men, Sgt Hanneken was able to defeat a larger rebel force by adhering to tactical fundamentals. His 22-man Main Effort attacked the enemy Center of Gravity, the rebel leader. Without leadership, the rebel force quickly disintegrated.
- Sgt Hanneken used the elements of surprise and deception to execute his attack. Surprise is one of the most important tactical fundamental and was essential to this tactical undertaking.
- Sgt Hanneken's actions illustrate how tactical decisions *at the squad level* can impact the operational and strategic levels of war, and can ultimately affect U.S. policy. Sgt Hanneken's attack greatly affected the balance of power in Haiti, lessening the turmoil in the country. It was a major step towards ending the rebellion on the island.

**“The prospect of surprise is always the surest guarantee of victory.”**

— von Mellenthin

**“No tactical action should ever be undertaken without the element of surprise.”**



# **Sergeant Wenzel**

## **German Army**

### **Belgium, 1940**

The German plan to invade France included the invasion of Belgium and Holland. The French had not defended their border with Belgium, leaving it open to attack. The Belgians, however, had constructed a series of forts along canals throughout the countryside. The most formidable of these was Eben Emael, manned by 1,200 Belgian soldiers. The powerful guns of Eben Emael commanded the eastern approaches to the Belgian border. If this fortress was not eliminated, the German Army would have significant difficulty crossing the Belgian border.

Sgt Wenzel was a member of Germany's parachute forces. On 10 May 1940, his paratroop company daringly landed on top of Eben Emael in gliders with the mission of silencing the guns of the fortress in order to allow the German Army to capture the bridges to the east. When Sgt Wenzel landed atop the fortress, he realized that his commanding officer's glider had not made it to the objective. This left Sgt Wenzel in command of 80 parachutists.

In four man teams, the Germans used flame-throwers and special shaped charges to attack each gun turret. Sgt Wenzel commanded his unit from a captured pillbox. The situation became tenuous when the Belgians prevented the German reinforcements from arriving by blowing the bridge on the main route of the ground attack. The paratroopers were cut-off. The Belgians were also calling artillery on the Germans, and enemy infantry could be seen preparing to counterattack the paratroopers.

Sgt Wenzel continued to lead the parachutists for three more hours as each Belgian gun position was eliminated. After the sun had set, Sgt Wenzel linked up with German forces from the east. Eben Emael had fallen.

Sgt Wenzel's actions allowed German forces approaching from the east to advance unmolested across the canals. With a force of 80 men he had subdued 1,200 of the enemy. The defense of Belgium was broken, and the German Army was able to rapidly defeat Belgium and move into France. The northern wing of the German Army rapidly outflanked the French Army and brought about the defeat of France in a mere six weeks. For his heroic actions and outstanding leadership, Sgt Wenzel was awarded the Knight's Cross.

# Lessons

- Sgt Wenzel realized that it was his responsibility to complete the mission after his commanding officer's glider failed to land on the fortress. He worked with the existing plan and took advantage of the element of surprise that his airborne landing had given him.
- Taking charge of 80 men, Sgt Wenzel showed outstanding leadership and courage as he commanded the efforts against the fortress for three hours against great odds.
- Sgt Wenzel's understanding of the plan allowed him to shoulder the burden of responsibility of *leading* the assault force. He clearly understood his pivotal role in the invasion of Belgium, and his actions fully supported his commander's intent.
- Sgt Wenzel's company-level raid permitted a regimental river crossing, which in turn allowed the German Army to rapidly pour into Belgium. This eventually led to the fall of both Belgium and France.

**“It is not the big armies that win battles,  
it is the good ones.”**

— Field Marshall Maurice Comte de Saxe  
*My Reveries, 1732*

# **Sergeant Rubarth**

## **German Army**

### **France, 1940**

In the spring of 1940, the German Army invaded France. As the campaign progressed, the German 10th Panzer Division was directed to cross the Meuse River and continue to attack toward Paris. The French realized that the river provided a natural obstacle that could be used to halt the advancing Germans.

Sgt Rubarth, the leader of a squad of assault engineers, was attached to the German 69th Infantry Regiment. The Germans controlled the east side of the river and the French were dug in on the west. The French defenses included artillery and machine gun bunkers all along the river.

After a violent Stuka air attack, Sgt Rubarth's squad attacked with the infantry. As his rubber boat reached the far shore, Sgt Rubarth's squad attacked and destroyed the nearest bunker. On reassembling his squad, Sgt Rubarth realized that only two boats had successfully crossed the river, leaving only his squad and one infantry squad on the west shore to create a breach in the French defenses.

Undaunted, he ordered his unit to attack another bunker with grenades and a satchel charge. The French soldiers inside surrendered, and their white flag was replaced with German colors. This drew cheers from the Germans on the far side of the river, and demoralized the French defenders. Sgt Rubarth then advanced and aggressively took two more bunkers, creating a 300 meter gap in the first line of French defenses. More German forces then followed him across the river.

After receiving a fresh supply of ammunition and four more men, Sgt Rubarth continued his attack. As enemy artillery started raining down on them, Sgt Rubarth moved his squad quickly so that the artillery fire could not adjust onto them. His squad overtook three more bunkers, and broke through the second line of enemy positions.

After seeing several of their bunkers blown up, the French forces assumed that they were being overrun. Their spirit crushed, the French began to withdraw. The action became a rout as the advancing Germans pursued the French forces. For his achievements, Sgt Rubarth received a battlefield commission to lieutenant and was awarded the Knighthood of the Iron Cross.

# Lessons

- Sgt Rubarth clearly understood the importance of a rapid crossing the Meuse River. The commander's intent at all levels, from squad to division, was to cross the river quickly in order to maintain the momentum of the attack. A delay at the river would have given the French time to strengthen positions closer to Paris and possibly halt the German offensive.
- Taking on the role as the Main Effort of the German attack, Sgt Rubarth displayed outstanding leadership, shouldering the responsibility of creating a breach in the French defenses. Though greatly outnumbered on the far shore, the squad followed their courageous and decisive leader. Sgt Rubarth's bravery and judgment allowed him to succeed despite being isolated and under attack by French artillery.
- Sgt Rubarth did not wait for reinforcements, but continued to attack the enemy, deciding that rapid action was necessary. His actions created an opportunity which his commanders took advantage of by pouring forces through the breach and decisively defeating the enemy. Sgt Rubarth's actions contributed directly to his battalion's crossing, his division's attack, and the eventual defeat of France five weeks later.

**“Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory or defeat.”**

— Teddy Roosevelt

# **Sergeant John Basilone**

## **U.S. Marine Corps**

### **Guadalcanal, 1942**

In August, 1942, the 1st Marine Division landed on Guadalcanal, encountering stiff resistance from the Japanese defenders. Sgt John Basilone served as a machine gun platoon sergeant in support of Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines.

On the night of 24 October, Sgt Basilone's platoon occupied a key position in the battalion's defensive perimeter on a jungle ridge. Just past 2130, the Japanese began a ferocious attack. In the dark rainy night, intense fighting followed, and soon the machine gun unit on Basilone's right was overrun by screaming Japanese soldiers hurling grenades and firing rifles. At the same time, Basilone's machine guns started running low on ammunition. Basilone knew that the enemy that had broken through on his right were between him and the ammunition dump, but he decided that if his gun teams were not resupplied, the positions would fall.

Sgt Basilone took off his heavy mud caked boots, stripped himself of all unnecessary gear, and sprinted down the trail. After returning with several belts of ammunition, he set out for the unmanned gun pits to his right, knowing that those heavy weapons were vital tools in the defense of the ridge.

When he got to the gun positions, he found the two unoccupied machine guns jammed, and ran back to get one of his own. He ordered a team to follow him. After Basilone's gun crew reached their destination, he immediately put them into action. Basilone lay on the ground and began repairing one of the damaged weapons. Once the gun was repaired and loaded, he got behind the gun and began engaging targets. The fight raged on, and Japanese bodies began to pile up in front of the machine guns. At one point, Sgt Basilone had to direct his Marines to push back the piles of bodies to maintain clear fields of fire.

Several more times during the night, Sgt Basilone made trips back to the command area for desperately needed ammunition. Eight separate attacks were sent against the Marines that night, and Basilone's platoon fired over 25,000 rounds. They were credited with killing an estimated 300 enemy soldiers, playing a major role in thwarting the Japanese attack. This successful defense reestablished the perimeter of the 1st Marine Division, protected the vital airfield, and led to the conquest of Guadalcanal, the first island taken from the Japanese. For his initiative,

resourcefulness and leadership in defense of the ridge, Sgt Basilone was awarded the Medal of Honor.

## Lessons

- Tactically, Sgt Basilone understood his role in the defense of the ridge and the intent of the company and battalion commanders. His machine guns served a pivotal role in the company and battalion defense plan. He took numerous actions necessary to ensure his battalion's success. This included making the decision to weaken one position in order to fortify an adjacent unit's position to his right.
- Sgt Basilone exhibited great leadership during the defense. He went to great lengths to provide his unit with whatever tools were necessary to maintain the defense of the ridge. His courage in braving enemy fire to deliver ammunition set an example for his Marines.

**“Be active and indefatigable;  
cast off all indolence of body and mind.”**

— Frederick the Great

# **Sergeant Jacob Pavlov**

## **Russian Army**

### **Stalingrad, 1942**

In the fall of 1942, the German 6th Army was pushing into the Russian city of Stalingrad. The Russian strategy was to draw the Germans into the city and fight from building to building.

Sgt Jacob Pavlov, of the Soviet 13th Guards Division, was called into his battalion map room and ordered to recon a four-story house in order to develop a company plan to attack the building. That night, Sgt Pavlov selected three men from his squad and set out on the reconnaissance.

When the four-man team reached the objective, Sgt Pavlov realized that the house was occupied by only a few German defenders. He decided to seize the house immediately with his small team. He quickly devised a plan, and within minutes had attacked and taken control of the house. Using captured German machine guns and their own tommy guns, Sgt Pavlov led his men in fighting back wave after wave of German counterattacks.

The next night, Sgt Pavlov sent a messenger back to his battalion. By morning, his group was reinforced with sixteen men, three antitank rifles, two mortars, and more machine guns.

His defensive preparations continued. He directed the placement of a mine field around the building. He ordered his men to take out the interior walls of the building to allow freedom of movement. He posted sharpshooters and observers in the top of the building and fortified his command post. A 200-yard trench was dug for resupply.

When the Germans sent larger armored forces against him, Sgt Pavlov improvised new tactics to fight them. Due to the limited elevation of the German tank guns, Pavlov sent his machine gunners to the top floors and his antitank crews to the basement. From these positions, his men put accurate suppressing fire on the German infantry while destroying the armor.

“Pavlov’s House” proved to be a key Russian position in the battle for Stalingrad. The building’s height allowed Pavlov’s observers to call accurate artillery fire in any direction, and snipers chalked up hundreds of kills from the attic.

# Lessons

- Upon finding his objective lightly defended, Sgt Pavlov ignored his orders and used his initiative to take the house by surprise. This key decision fully supported his commander's intent.
- Sgt Pavlov showed exceptional leadership skills while defending the house. He organized and led an effective defensive position for over six weeks. He showed tactical improvisation and skill as a combined arms leader.
- Sgt Pavlov's actions show how one leader's actions can contribute to the overall battle. His platoon-sized defensive strongpoint became the key position for his battalion, which in turn became the main effort of the division.

**“It is better to be on hand with ten men  
than to be absent with ten thousand.”**

**— Tamerlane  
Mongol Emperor, 1336-1405**



# **Sergeant M.C. Thornton**

## **British Army**

### **France, 1944**

Vital to the success of the 1944 Allied invasion of Europe was the capture of the valuable bridges inland of the beaches. This was to be done by parachute forces the night before D-Day. If these bridges were not taken, the German Army would be able to counterattack the landing forces and push the Allies into the sea.

Just after midnight, in the early morning hours of 6 June, the 5th Parachute Brigade of the British 6th Airborne Division landed in Normandy. One glider company was tasked with the vital mission of seizing and holding Pegasus Bridge, which crossed the Caen Canal and secure the east flank of the British landing beaches. If this bridge was not secured, the Germans would be able to launch a flank attack into the exposed left wing of the British invasion forces.

After seizing the bridge in a daring night assault, the company established defensive positions facing east toward an intersection. At 0130, two tanks of the 1st Panzer Engineer Company, with infantry support, crept towards the bridge as the lead element of a German counterattack. The only antitank weapon available to the platoon covering this approach was a small Piat rocket manned by Sgt Thornton. The paratroopers were fearful that a tank attack could not be stopped.

Sgt Thornton lay hidden in a pile of equipment. Knowing the limited range of the Piat and the vulnerability of his platoon's position, he decided to wait until the tanks were a mere 50 yards away before firing.

Thornton fired the Piat gun and scored a direct hit on the lead tank. The round penetrated and caused a magnificent explosion. Shells inside the tank began to cook off, creating a fantastic light show. The German company commander was mortally wounded as he tried to flee the burning hulk.

The display and numerous explosions acted as a beacon for other paratroop forces lost in the dark. They converged on Pegasus Bridge, believing that British forces had come under severe attack.

The second German tank immediately reversed course. The lieutenant in the tank reported that the British had occupied the bridge in force and were equipped with six-pound anti-tank guns. The German commanders decided to wait until daylight before

launching another attack. As morning approached, the Allied forces were able to land on the Normandy beaches protected from a strong German counterattack. The German delay allowed the Allies to build up combat power on the beaches and rapidly strike inland. The invasion of France and the drive across Europe led to the defeat of Germany in less than a year's time.

## Lessons

- Sgt Thornton knew that his Piat gun was the only defense the paratroopers had against German armor. He decided to hold his fire until the lead tank was danger close, luring the Germans into a trap.
- When Sgt Thornton's round hit the tank, it set off a chain of events which helped ensure the success of the D-Day invasion. The British were able to reinforce and reconsolidate in the dark. The Germans decided not to risk a night attack against strong, unknown forces. The burning tank itself prevented the Germans from approaching the bridge.
- With the bridge in British hands, the paratroop company held an entire Panzer regiment at bay. If that Panzer regiment had been able to penetrate into the Normandy beachhead, the Allied invasion might have failed. The company's pivotal position supported the Airborne Division's mission, and allowed the British landing forces free access to the beaches. One shot potentially saved the left flank of the Allied invasion.

**“A tactical success is only really decisive if it is gained at the strategically correct spot.”**

— von Moltke

# Sergeant Stephen Gregg

## U.S. Army

### Italy, 1944

In August of 1944, the Allied offensive in Italy was stalemated. An amphibious landing at Anzio was executed in an attempt to outflank the German defenses and capture Rome. The landing units became stalled on the beachhead, allowing the Germans to reinforce their area defenses.

The day after the landing, “L” Company of the 143d Infantry was moving north towards Rome. The Germans were waiting in ambush and the company was quickly pinned down by enemy fire. Realizing that the fire was too heavy for the medics to tend to the wounded, Sgt Gregg, a mortarman, picked up a .30 caliber light machine gun and advanced on the enemy position. His measured, accurate bursts suppressed the enemy long enough for the casualties to be evacuated. Unfortunately, Sgt Gregg ran out of ammunition and was captured.

While Sgt Gregg’s captors took cover from incoming American artillery, Sgt Gregg grabbed a machine pistol and fought his way back to friendly lines.

The next day, the Germans counterattacked. “L” Company was ordered to hold the line on a hill captured the day before. Acting as a forward observer, Sgt Gregg directed over 600 rounds onto the enemy until he lost communications with the mortar section. Knowing how important the mortar fire was to the defense, Sgt Gregg took the initiative to find out what had happened to the phone line.

Upon nearing the mortar section, another soldier yelled that the Germans had seized the mortar position and were dropping rounds on the Americans. Sgt Gregg assaulted the Germans, taking two prisoners. He quickly put the mortars back into the fight by gathering up a handful of American troops and teaching them how to fire the mortars. “L” Company held the line.

Sgt Gregg’s bravery, initiative, and situational awareness contributed to his unit’s successful defense. The defeat of the German counterattacks led to the Allied breakout from the beachhead and the eventual capture of Rome.

# Lessons

- Sgt Gregg displayed keen situational awareness during combat at Anzio. While acting as a forward observer, Sgt Gregg realized the importance of his unit's role in the company defense, and did everything in his power to keep the mortars firing.
- When ambushed, Sgt Gregg displayed the bravery and decisiveness needed to take action. His individual attack on the Germans lifted the pressure on his unit and allowed the wounded to be evacuated.
- Sgt Gregg's leadership abilities and strength of character allowed him to take a handful of Americans not under his command and train them while under enemy fire. Sgt Gregg's improvised section maintained the supporting fires which were so critical to the company's defense.

**“I see many soldiers. Could I but see as many warriors!”**

— F.W. Nietzsche  
*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

# **Corporal David W. Lamb**

## **U.S. Army**

### **Korea, 1951**

In October 1951, “G” Company, 23rd Infantry Regiment, was battling for Hill 520 of Heartbreak Ridge. The company had been withered by repeated fights with the North Korean forces. Cpl Lamb was the acting platoon commander of 3d Platoon, a unit of about twenty soldiers.

Following heavy bombardment and supporting fires, Cpl Lamb’s platoon made a direct assault on Hill 520. Upon nearing the enemy, Lamb’s platoon was halted by enemy fire and began taking casualties. Lamb called back for reinforcements.

Lt Gano gathered his 1st Platoon and moved towards Lamb’s position. Gano’s platoon began to take casualties, and halted when the young lieutenant was killed. Pvt High stepped into the role of platoon commander and rallied his platoon.

While under fire, Cpl Lamb directed the use of supporting fires and planned a new route for the company attack. After a bitter fight, the two platoons breached the enemy defenses. During the assault on the position, Cpl Lamb was wounded. Pvt High was now the Main Effort of the attack. He directed the remaining soldiers in taking out the bunkers in the enemy defenses using grenades and flame-throwers.

Three hours after the attack had set off, the enemy position was secured. Cpl Lamb’s leadership had pulled his platoon and the remainder of “G” Company forward through withering fire and into the enemy’s position. The attack pushed the enemy off of Hill 520, an important step in removing resistance from Heartbreak Ridge.

# Lessons

- Cpl Lamb displayed tremendous leadership abilities. His fellow soldiers benefited from his competence when he assumed command of the platoon and led a company-sized attack. When the time came for him to command at a higher level, he was able to shoulder the responsibility.
- Tactically proficient, Cpl Lamb had learned the necessary skills for commanding a platoon in combat. He was able to coordinate supporting fires with his company commander, direct the actions of other platoons, and inspire the men under his command by his personal leadership. His knowledge and ability met with success on the battlefield.
- Cpl Lamb was able to change the plan of attack while under fire without seeking guidance from the company commander because he knew his commander's intent. This situational awareness allowed Lamb to adjust his tactics to the situation and find a route to victory.

# **Sergeant First Class**

## **U.S. Army**

### **Vietnam, 1966**

In May of 1966, "C" Company of 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, established a mortar firebase at LZ Hereford in the Vinh Than Valley. The position was 150 meters long and 40 meters wide. The upper slope was covered in six foot high elephant grass.

The mortar section was led by a Sergeant First Class. His position lay on a hill which had previously been occupied by Viet Cong (VC) guerrillas. He formed his men in a weak perimeter, arranged in a "U" shape, with the curve facing uphill, and set up the mortars in order to provide support for the company.

The main body of the company went off to patrol the valley below, leaving the 22-man mortar section to defend their own position.

The men fired off a few rounds to seat their baseplates. The Sgt decided to give the men a break, and did not order anyone to dig in or examine the area around the perimeter. No security patrols were sent out. The men lounged, ate C-rations, and walked around in the open. In the jungle heat, it seemed like a day at the beach.

At 1330 an enemy machine gun opened up at a range of 50 meters from the elephant grass uphill of the mortar position. A 200-man unit of VC had been waiting to ambush the lax mortar unit. The machine gun fire was followed by rifle fire and grenades attacks.

The rest of the company took 35 minutes to rush back to the devastated mortar position. The enemy had withdrawn and left only a handful of dazed survivors.

The failure of the Sgt to properly lead his unit, enforce basic security measures, or prepare for enemy contact, led directly to disaster. With its support element eliminated, the company was not able to accomplish its patrol mission, which in turn negatively affected the battalion's mission in the Vinh Than Valley.

# Lessons

- The failure of the Sgt to properly lead his unit caused the devastation of the section, the failure of the mortar mission, and the failure of the company and battalion missions.
- The best form of troop welfare is quality training, enforcement of strict security procedures, and tactical discipline.
- Every unit on the battlefield is responsible for its own security. Supporting units especially cannot become lax on the battlefield and rely on other units for security.

**“Discipline must be habit so ingrained that it is stronger than the excitement of battle or the fear of death.”**

**— General George S. Patton, Jr.**



# **Sergeant David C. Freeman**

## **U.S. Army**

### **Vietnam, 1966**

During Operation Crazy Horse in the Vinh Than Valley in June of 1966, a company of Montagnard troops led by Special Forces advisors, landed at LZ Monkey for a search and destroy mission. Sgt Freeman, a member of the command element, was the fourth senior man in the unit.

Soon after landing, the company attacked and secured a bunker complex. The company suffered some casualties, and a helicopter medevac was requested. The company moved back to LZ Monkey with their wounded.

At the LZ, the company began receiving heavy small arms fire. The command element around Sgt Freeman was devastated. The situation demanded rapid action. Sgt Freeman grabbed a radio and took command of the company. He called in helicopter gunships, coordinated supporting arms, and reorganized his defenses. The helicopter pilots flying above the battle were amazed at his coolness under fire. Under Sgt Freeman's competent command, the perimeter held all night and the enemy eventually withdrew.

# Lessons

- Sgt Freeman, a well trained NCO, was prepared to lead his company in combat. He knew the techniques and procedures for air support, supporting arms, medevac, and company defensive operations.
- In addition to his technical knowledge, he was able to match these abilities with strong leadership and cool competence in the face of disaster.
- Because of his experience and situational awareness, Sgt Freeman knew that rapid action was required. He immediately took control of the situation, making decisions and issuing orders, and extricated his company from a perilous situation.

**“The end for which a soldier is  
recruited, armed, and trained,  
the whole object of his  
sleeping, eating, drinking, and marching,  
is simply that he should fight  
at the right place at the right time.”**

— Carl von Clausewitz  
*On War*

# **Sergeant Stephen Bouchard**

## **U.S. Marine Corps**

### **Vietnam, 1967**

In July of 1967, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines took part in Operation Buffalo, designed to defend the border between North and South Vietnam, known as the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). During this operation, the battalion was ambushed by an entire North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regiment and took very heavy casualties. 1st and 2nd Battalions, Third Marines were sent to rescue 1/9 and stabilize the area.

Sgt Bouchard served as Right Guide for 2d Platoon, "A" Company, 1/3. The platoon's mission was to clear the area where 1/9 had left their dead. As "A" Company moved out of its positions, 2d Platoon came under heavy shell fire. The platoon commander was wounded and had to be medevaced. The platoon sergeant took command.

The NVA began firing from bunkers in the far treeline. The platoon sergeant froze with fear, leaving the platoon without leadership. Sgt Bouchard unhesitatingly took command of the platoon and played an important role in the company's subsequent actions.

Sgt Bouchard's strong leadership pulled the platoon through the horrible task of retrieving the corpses of 1/9 while under enemy fire.

While manning a defensive position, a breach in the battalion line was created between Bouchard's platoon and the adjacent "B" Company. Bouchard's platoon counterattacked into the breach and sealed off the NVA who had infiltrated the perimeter. His unit then made contact with approaching forces wearing Marine gear. Sgt Bouchard ordered his Marines to hold their fire until the figures had come to within hand grenade range. At that time Bouchard decided to open fire on the approaching soldiers, who were NVA wearing gear stolen from the dead of 1/9. Bouchard's tactical actions broke the enemy attack, and the Marines went onto the offensive.

Sgt Bouchard remained in command of 2d Platoon until the unit was ordered to pull out. "A" 1/3 was the last unit to leave the battlefield before B-52 strikes leveled the area.

# Lessons

- Sgt Bouchard was both willing and able to take the responsibility of leading the platoon. His tactical skills allowed the platoon to play a major role in the company's combat operations.
- Sgt Bouchard was able to take charge by being decisive. The squad leaders did not respond to the platoon sergeant, who was too fearful to lead. Sgt Bouchard took decisive action and was not afraid to make tough decisions and carry out difficult tasks. His decision to open fire on the individuals in Marine uniforms required decisiveness and acceptance of responsibility.
- Sgt Bouchard led his platoon by example. Many Marines were devastated by the sight of the Marine dead left behind by 1/9. Sgt Bouchard's capable and firm leadership held 2d Platoon together.
- Realizing that his unit had to be at the right place at the right time in order to make a difference, Sgt Bouchard led a counterattack to plug the gap in the lines between "A" and "B" companies. This platoon-level tactical action secured the company flank, and prevented the battalion from being split and overrun.

**“It is better to have a good sergeant in command  
than a bad officer.”**

**— German Army saying**

# **Corporal Lester A. Tully**

## **U.S. Marine Corps**

### **Vietnam, 1968**

The 1968 Tet offensive took American forces in Vietnam by surprise. Hue City, the ancient imperial capitol of Vietnam, was quickly overrun by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). Given the mission of relieving the 1st ARVN Division Command Post, “G” Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, advanced on foot through the city. The 1st ARVN Div CP was located at the northern corner of the Citadel, a historic fortress. “G” Company’s route of advance would take them right through the Citadel.

The company advanced along Highway 1 with 2d Platoon in the lead until it became necessary to cross a bridge over the Perfume River. Just as the lead squad crested the center of the span, an NVA machine gun, emplaced in a fortified bunker, opened fire. The company was pinned on the bridge, and the lead squad took multiple casualties.

An M-60 was set up to counter the NVA position, but the team leader was killed moments later. As sparks flew from enemy rounds hitting the bridge structure, Cpl Tully decided to take matters into his own hands.

Cpl Tully was 2d squad leader of 2d Platoon. On the bridge, his squad was located directly behind the lead squad. Assessing the situation, Cpl Tully decided upon a course of action that would allow his company to advance. Realizing that his squad was protected from fire, and was nearest the enemy, Cpl Tully charged up the walkway and threw a grenade into the enemy position, killing five NVA and silenced the position.

The company followed Cpl Tully’s squad, crossed the bridge, and advanced upon the Citadel. As the company neared the Citadel, it met heavy resistance from Northern Vietnamese Army regulars. While forced to withdraw, Golf 2/5 clarified the situation around the Citadel. American commanders had gained a much clearer picture of how strong the enemy was in Hue City. Now the American commanders could concentrate on what to do rather than wondering what was going on.

# Lessons

- Cpl Tully knew the mission of the company was to relieve the 1st ARVN Division Headquarters. When the company was halted by fire, he took decisive action in support of the commander's intent to free up the movement of the company so the mission could be continued.
- Cpl Tully acted on his own initiative. Being the second squad in the company formation, he was in the best position to evaluate the situation, and take advantage of the opportunity developed by the point squad.

# Sergeant Joe Hooper

## U.S. Army

### Vietnam, 1968

Sgt Joe Hooper was a squad leader with “D” Company, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 501st Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, near Hue City. In January of 1968, Hue was captured by the North Vietnamese in the Tet Offensive. U.S. forces fought desperately to liberate Vietnam’s ancient imperial city.

On 17 February, “D” Company was assaulting a defended position along a river bank outside Hue city when it was attacked by rocket and machine gun fire. The company had run into a defensive position manned by two North Vietnamese companies in dugout bunkers. With the company pinned down by fire, Sgt Hooper located the source of the enemy fire. He rallied his squad and attacked across the river, overrunning several enemy bunkers. This bold maneuver inspired the rest of the company to join the attack.

During this attack, some members of Sgt Hooper’s squad had been wounded. He ran out into the open to retrieve them, but was seriously wounded himself. Sgt Hooper refused medical treatment and returned to his men.

Enemy fire continued to hamper the attack. Sgt Hooper led his squad through bunkers and buildings, clearing a path for the company and mortally wounding a North Vietnamese officer. When his squad came under direct fire from a building to their front, Sgt Hooper assaulted the building himself and killed the enemy with grenades and rifle fire.

Upon reaching the final line of the North Vietnamese defenses, Sgt Hooper destroyed four bunkers by running the length of the position, tossing grenades into each of the dugouts. The enemy soldiers began to withdraw from their positions.

Sgt Hooper then led his squad in destroying the last two North Vietnamese bunkers with White Phosphorous grenades. After the last pocket of resistance was eliminated, Sgt Hooper organized his unit into defense positions. When the remainder of his company had caught up, Sgt Hooper allowed himself to have his wounds treated.

Sgt Hooper played a major role in defeating a large force of North Vietnamese. “D” Company’s attack forced the withdrawal of North Vietnamese reinforcements attempting to enter the city. This action outside the city weakened the NVA defenders

inside Hue, easing pressure on the besieged city, and leading to the eventual liberation of the imperial capitol.

## Lessons

- Sgt Hooper displayed exceptional leadership. His endurance, despite being wounded, served as an example to his squad and his company.
- After taking the initiative to assault across the river, Sgt Hooper's squad assumed the role of the company's main effort and spearheaded the attack. His exceptional courage under fire inspired the remainder of the company.
- Sgt Hooper's combat decisions and tactical leadership at the squad-level contributed to his company's success in this bitter fight. With the North Vietnamese attempt to reinforce the city halted, other forces were able to clear the city.

**“Four brave men who do not know each other will not dare to attack a lion. Four less brave, but knowing each other well, sure of their reliability and consequently of mutual aid, will attack resolutely. There is the science of the organization of armies in a nutshell.”**

— Ardant du Picq  
*Battle Studies*



# **Corporal Gregory**

## **U.S. Marines Corps**

### **Vietnam, 1971**

Cpl Gregory was a squad leader assigned to the 1st Combined Unit Pacification Platoon, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines. This unit was the northernmost Marine unit in Vietnam. Cpl Gregory's combat experience had made him an extremely proficient infantry leader. He placed strong emphasis on training in the field. He took every chance he had to conduct opportunity training with his Marines.

There were numerous duties required of Cpl Gregory's squad. Each day, Cpl Gregory assembled the squad and instructed them in a single practical infantry skill. While in a patrol base, Cpl Gregory instructed his men in such skills as helicopter medevacs, close air support, and call for fire. Cpl Gregory required that his squad members continue their professional development. Every day, after returning from patrols, Cpl Gregory's squad would work on their Marine Corps Institute correspondence courses. PFC Kirby, a member of Cpl Gregory's squad, finished his Marine Corps NCO MCI in the field, in Vietnam.

Cpl Gregory took the initiative to train his Marines in skills required by his unit's mission and environment. His training exceeded the basic requirements established by the Marine Corps and created a squad that was particularly well prepared for combat. The corporal used scenario-based training to run his men through multiple repetitions of probable combat situations. He made sure that each Marine in his squad understood their commander's intent, their role in the missions, and how each man affected the outcome of events during battle.

It was not long before Cpl Gregory's training proved vital. On the night of 14 February 1971, Cpl Gregory and his unit came under heavy attack. Cpl Gregory was killed. Yet, because the squad was so well trained and understood what had to be done, the squad was able to meet the challenge and skillfully engage the enemy. Cpl Gregory's exemplary leadership in the weeks prior to the attack had prepared his Marines for this firefight. The enemy was repulsed and the squad held its position. In the morning, over thirty dead NVA were found in the area surrounding the squad's position. Every Marine in the squad realized that it was Cpl Gregory's training emphasis that had won the battle and saved their lives.

## Lessons

- Cpl Gregory displayed outstanding initiative in training his Marines. He assumed the responsibility for preparing his Marines for the demands of combat. This training greatly exceeded the established standards of the Marine Corps and directly contributed to the combat success and survival of the unit after Cpl Gregory's death.
- Cpl Gregory used whatever time was available to instruct his Marines and hone their professional skills. This aggressive opportunity training was necessary because few units could conduct formal training in the combat zone.
- Cpl Gregory realized that combat is a dynamic environment, which takes a heavy toll on leaders within an infantry company. He trained his subordinates to be able to assume his role. This saved the lives of his men during the chaos of battle.
- After his death, the men of Cpl Gregory's squad performed well because they had confidence in their training and in themselves, a confidence that was instilled by Cpl Gregory's leadership.

**“The very worst night of my tour in Vietnam, when we were involved in a major firefight and we were losing Marines, our squad survived as result of the Corporal's training . . . We are alive today because of him.”**

**— SgtMaj R.B. Kirby  
1998**

# **Corporal Abols**

## **British Army**

### **Falklands, 1982**

In 1982, Argentina invaded the Falklands Islands in the South Atlantic Ocean. The islands had been a British territory since Britain's days as an imperial power. Not willing to give up its territory, Britain sent a task force to the islands in order to reclaim them. After an amphibious assault, British forces pushed their way across the islands.

The 2d Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, known as "2 Para", of the British Army was ordered to attack the Argentinean defenses of Goose Green. It was to be the first pitched battle between British and Argentinean forces. The land bridge between Goose Green and the town of Darwin was the only way for forces to move between East Falkland Island and Lafonia Island. If 2 Para could not break through to Goose Green, the British would have to spend valuable time mounting another amphibious assault of the Falkland Islands.

Cpl Abols was a section leader (equivalent to a squad leader) in "A" Company, 2 Para. "A" Company's mission was to attack along the battalion's eastern flank and assault the town of Darwin.

On the night of 27 May 1982, 2 Para attacked Goose Green. The Argentineans were well prepared for the attack, and the paratroopers could advance only yards at a time. As the sun rose, the battalion was left in a precarious position. 2 Para was stalled, pinned down in the open by Argentinean mortar and machine gun fire.

"A" Company was trapped in a crossfire between the Argentineans on Goose Green and those in Darwin. Realizing that the trap could only be broken by persistent aggressive action, Cpl Abols decided to continue to lead his squad in assaulting enemy positions.

Seeking to break the deadlock himself, the commanding officer of 2 Para, charged a machine gun nest, and was shot dead. The commander of "A" Company kept the event quiet, not wanting to demoralize the troops, whose predicament seemed to worsen at this critical point in the attack.

At that moment, Cpl Abols led an assault upon an Argentinean position. He decided to fire a 66mm shoulder-launched anti-tank rocket into the bunker. The penetration of

this rocket caused a magnificent explosion which was followed by silence. The first flags of surrender then began to surface from the Argentinean positions. The Argentineans had been demoralized by the utter destruction of this single bunker and the ruthlessness of Cpl Abols' resolve. This allowed "A" Company to turn its full attention towards Goose Green. Momentum gathered behind the British attack. In the next 24 hours, 2 Para opened the isthmus to Lafonia Island.

Cpl Abols' persistent aggressiveness had broken the will of the defenders. This action proved to be pivotal in "A" Company's attack. 2 Para's victory at Goose Green assured a British victory for the Falklands campaign.

## **Lessons**

- Cpl Abols' squad-level action effectively turned the tide of the battle at Goose Green. This is an example of how an aggressive tactical action can have effects out of all proportion to the size of the action. His command decisions fully supported both his company and battalion commanders' intent.
- His spectacular assault of that particular bunker affected the morale of both sides, crushed the spirit of the Argentineans, passed the initiative and momentum to the British forces, and proved to be the action needed to continue the British advance. After this action, Argentinean soldiers began to surrender rather than die in combat.
- Cpl Abols' courage, leadership and determination propelled him to persevere and achieve decisive results in extricating his unit from a desperate situation.

**“When all else fails, perseverance prevails.”**