



PFC Shania Woodhurst, paralegal specialist, 30th Medical Brigade, receives grid coordinates during the land navigation event on day two of the USAREUR Best Warrior Competition at U.S. Army Garrison Hohenfels Training Area, Germany, in July 2020. (Credit: SPC Kaden D. Pitt)

Practice Notes

Tactically and Technically Proficient Balancing Lethality with Technical Competence in a Comprehensive Field

By Command Sergeant Major Michael J. Bostic

The title of this article remains a constant aspiration for many military paralegals within our Corps. We must find ways to remain ready in our field craft as Soldiers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) just as much as we need to remain relevant in our technical trade as paralegal specialists.¹ This article explores a Judge Advocate General's (JAG) Corps paralegal's participation in both technical and tactical assignments; how those two proficiencies relate to each other; and why paralegal leaders must be, know, and

do both kinds of work in order to achieve legal mastery and career success. I use examples from my own career to illustrate my belief that technical competence and tactical proficiency go hand-in-hand in every paralegal assignment, no matter what level of tactical, operational, or strategic job is involved. Building on all types of experiences at each of these levels results in a true dual professional—the Soldier-paralegal—who enhances any type of mission with both technical and tactical skills.

From junior enlisted to senior NCO, we have creeds, mottos, reference doctrine, and organizational experiences that we leverage to aid us in our journey of service in the U.S. Army. However, in a highly technical field, most do not get opportunities to experience broadening assignments that test our leadership and competency in Soldier skills. As dual professionals, we need to leverage our experiences, training, and technical expertise—as well as our education—to support *lethality*. Simply being familiar in one discipline will not suffice in a new generation of talent management.

We follow organizational leaders toward one common goal—mission success. We recite: “I will always maintain my arms, my equipment, and myself”⁷² or “I will strive to remain technically and tactically proficient.”⁷³ These two stanzas provide expectations—starting a career as a junior Soldier or NCO with an enlisted culture that runs deep with expectations. Regardless of our technical Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), our field craft is our foundation for service. We serve to fight and win our Nation’s wars. Whether or not that opportunity presents itself, our day-to-day constant is our technical trade, which is our vehicle to service.

The Army sets out tactical and technical knowledge in its doctrine, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, *Army Leadership and the Profession*.⁴ The section discussing expertise is worth reading in its entirety for a better understanding of how the two work together toward our professional goals as experts in our dual-professional field of Soldier and paralegal:

Army leaders must know the fundamentals of their duty position related to warfighting, tactics, techniques, and procedures. Their tactical knowledge allows them to employ individuals, teams, and organizations properly to accomplish missions at least cost in lives and materiel.⁵

In contrast to tactical knowledge, the same doctrine discusses technical knowledge:

Technical knowledge relates to equipment, weapons, systems, and functional areas. Leaders need to know how the equipment for which they are responsible works and how to use it. Subordinates generally expect their organizational leaders to be technically competent, and their direct leaders to be technically expert.⁶

I firmly believe that you must understand technical knowledge in order to apply and develop tactical knowledge in every job the Army assigns you. Take me, for instance: One morning, in April 2017 at Fort Bragg, my phone rings as I sit in my office; it is Sergeant Major (SGM)/Command Management branch on the line. I am told that I am to assume duty as a battalion command sergeant major (BN CSM) at Fort Drum with a June 2017 report date. About a week prior, the published CSM slate revealed my initial assignment would be October 2017—so you can imagine my surprise. That day, I had a long phone call with my wife, spoke with my rater, and later called my mentor.

The next day, we contacted a realtor, and I started preparations to achieve better technical proficiency that I knew I would need in this new challenge. I began studying Army programs, refreshing my Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) awareness, and reviewing my knowledge of Soldier Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills (WTBD). I would not be the first 27D SGM to be a unit CSM, just the first to serve in the specific type of unit I was designated for. This was daunting and exciting at the same time. This was also not the first time I had to serve outside of the normal 27D key and developmental assignments; but this time, it mattered more—at the organizational leadership level, more peoples’ lives would be my responsibility. I would have an important role in a garrison environment and an even more impactful role if we ever needed to operate in a tactical environment. Beginning this assignment with as much technical knowledge as I could gather in the little time I had to prepare to move was pivotal, I felt, to mission success.

My first 100 days as a BN CSM were very stressful, and I realized how

much I would rely on the technical skills I attempted to refresh prior to taking on this job. Since we supported brigade and division elements throughout the world, I averaged about four hours of sleep most nights—keeping a turbulent organizational operational tempo. We found ourselves with a potential U.S. Central Command deployment on the horizon and countless field exercises (company, battalion, brigade, and division level) every other month. I had to leverage my tactical field craft often. Officially, I was the senior trainer and enlisted leader in the battalion. I was trusted to know what right looked like in terms of setting up unit assembly areas, operator level maintenance of equipment and vehicles, professional development of NCOs, company sergeants’ time training, WTBD, unit mission essential task list training, and mentoring first sergeants (1SGs) to run life support operations in a field environment. I was supposed to know exactly where to place everyone on the battlefield in support of Reception, Staging, Onward-Movement, and Integration (RSOI). I recount all this in an effort to explain the technical knowledge I had to have (and build from scratch) as a foundation to ensure my unit and I could be tactically successful at our mission.

Because of the type of unit that I was assigned to, I was required to be an advisor to a battalion and brigade staff—I was expected to know MDMP and ensure courses of action met the commander’s intent or end state long before he could make a decision. We had many junior officers with between two and three years of service, and our battalion had over sixty different MOSs assigned. I found myself creating binders with MOS charts and information that I would study prior to any office calls or open door sessions with leaders and Soldiers. I used a miniscule amount of my 1SGs’ time in meetings and required them to be out with their platoons and squads rather than in an office. I had information everywhere to enable me as a leader to ensure my organization could achieve success. I empowered the staff NCOs to support their officers in charge and quickly reach shared understanding of the mission. I made it my purpose not to miss an opportunity to learn about everyone and offer advice or influence a decision.



27D Advanced Individual Training students put their new knowledge into practice under the supervision of NCO paralegals at the JAGEX in June 2021 at The Judge Advocate General's Legal Center and School in Charlottesville, Virginia. (Credit: Jason Wilkerson, TJAGLCS)

These technical-type practices helped me to improve upon my role as an organizational leader and fulfill most of my responsibilities to my commander and my organization. At my level, I shared counsel and best practices with my 1SGs, platoon sergeants, and staff section NCOs in charge. It is no secret that most units are manned below seventy-five percent—thus, many times, I was called to serve at the operational level as the brigade CSM. And, due to our operational tempo and requirements, one of my 1SGs or platoon sergeants would follow suit and serve in a higher capacity. We had a “next man up” mentality, a practice of “train your replacement,” which allowed us to eliminate most of the single points of failure within the organization. There was typically

a primary and alternate for every additional duty and responsibility on the books.

I practiced many of these functions long before I ventured into a broadening position as a BN CSM. Technical versus tactical has always been part of our dual professional. In some assignments, you might begin to wonder, “Which side am I on?” Service in the Army in a technical leader capacity can include some tactical leader roles. A senior paralegal NCO serving at a brigade combat team (BCT) legal office or a senior or chief paralegal NCO serving at an office of the staff judge advocate (OSJA) still has to get to know their Soldiers. They still have to ensure training happens; they have to assist the unit commander and 1SG with personnel readiness of everyone in the BCT

legal office or OSJA. Many times, I have heard of legal office personnel not attending unit training events because there is so much work to be done; yet, most times, unit leaders try to micromanage legal personnel because of this exact assumption. They want ownership because they are not sure of the availability and readiness of the legal team.

Senior paralegal NCOs are primarily enablers to the unit leadership. They provide progressive reports of the readiness of their small team and they must fulfill training requirements. They share the responsibility with the OSJA leadership on a technical level since they are usually the liaison to the operational unit. However, these technical roles sometimes go ignored. I served and liaised with many units in my

career. Most unit leaders appreciate our technical (advisory) role. Yet we add more value when we can share more in common with our unit (client). When assigned to the 82d Airborne Division, jump and run often; at the 101st Airborne Division, complete air assault school; at the 10th Cavalry Division, complete your spur ride . . . the list goes on and on. We have to embrace organizational culture, regardless of the type of unit or role we serve in. So the answer to where you belong—technical versus tactical in our dual profession—is, of course, both. You may combine those roles at times, you might exclusively do technical work for a period of time, but then switch to a more tactical role. The ability to combine these approaches is the embodiment of our role as paralegal and Soldier/NCO.

The Judge Advocate General recently spoke about principled counsel⁷ and being able to advise on the law and still provide genuine counsel. Like many of you, I had to learn this technique early in my career. You have likely experienced how unit leaders do not always want to hear the “legal guy” recite black-and-white rules. Sometimes they know you, as the person sharing the law, are not supportive of their risky plans. Most times, they just want to affirm that their gut decision to do (or not do) something that may be supported by another leader—not just negated by law or policy. A prime example of this is unit fundraisers. Units always need more money to support unit activities. When confronted with these questions of what they could or could not do to raise funds, I was the good idea fairy. I sought out my legal team to affirm what I already knew: that the rules were quite restrictive. Yet, through their principled counsel, the legal team understood my dilemma as a unit leader, and we all learned. We pushed the envelope a lot but, because I was technically proficient, I knew where to draw the line.

I recently told a company commander that he could not have Soldiers pay \$10.00 to wear civilian clothes to work on Fridays as a fundraiser. My simple response was, “Sir, you are the commander, you can make the uniform of the day whatever you want it. It’s not safe [to your career] to have your Soldiers pay you to make that decision. Go see legal.” Here, I leveraged my technical

knowledge to support my organizational leader role. The commander had to listen to me because we shared the same boss—and he wanted to keep his job. A few days later, a member of the legal team told me that they squared the young company commander away.

Throughout our Army, there are highly desired positions that require poise, confidence, tact, knowledge, skills, and a certain level of trust and competence. Whether tactical or technical knowledge, experience incorporates those two types of skills. Our professional development model suggests we should pursue operational assignments, generating force, or broadening assignments. I do not believe there is a balance. I prefer to believe it is exposure.

In our field, we must expose ourselves to all three types of assignments to be better leaders—people who provide tasks, purpose, direction, and motivation to others to accomplish something that they otherwise would not do. A senior paralegal NCO does this as well as a unit platoon sergeant or drill sergeant. Exposure to these different levels and types of leadership allows us, as technical professionals, a better understanding of our organizational leaders as our clients. To that end, master sergeants should have the desire to be 1SGs. Most 1SGs share the responsibility with a company commander to directly lead units and have to know everything about their sixty-five-plus-person company. Most chief paralegal NCOs have to know everything about their forty-five-person office (the OSJA). They are both leaders, yet most times, the 1SG has more opportunities to leverage tactical knowledge and responsibility that is inherent at the organizational level. Exposure at these levels allows one to step out of each role as needed and allows talent managers to assess Soldiers’ potential for future assignments.

Field craft or tradecraft—tactical or technical proficiency. All NCOs need to know both. We need to inculcate in our junior Soldiers the obligation and desire to maintain themselves, their arms, and their equipment. The more that we expose our junior Soldiers to, the more prepared they will be when they fall into roles that influence decisions. When the opportunity arises for them to put on a leader hat versus

a legal hat, they will be ready to wear both simultaneously because, through lifelong learning, they get exposure to various opportunities that will build them as multi-dimensional leaders.

Ask yourself—when was the last time you, your junior Soldiers, or your judge advocate actually found a packing list, loaded a tactical vehicle, strapped on a forty-five-pound ruck, drove or walked to a field site, spent at least seventy-two hours without the comforts of garrison to set up a tent, and executed WTBD field craft?⁸ We owe it to ourselves to practice these perishable skills to maintain military readiness. We dual professionals need our minds to enable us to leverage our knowledge, skills, and experiences to enhance lethality within the Army. Our leadership and technical counsel allow our clients to focus on their mission while we address the administrative legal distractions that detract from readiness. We should avoid the potential identity crisis: “balancing tactical or technical leadership.” Instead, we should be certain of who we are and create a paradigm of exposure to leadership in organizational and technical roles that yield lethality with an appreciation of competence from such a unique and storied career field. **TAL**

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Notes

1. “Fieldcraft is an essential element of tactical knowledge that leaders must understand, teach, and enforce during both training and operations. Fieldcraft encompasses all of the techniques associated with operating and surviving in austere, hostile field conditions.” U.S. DEP’T OF ARMY, DOCTRINE PUB. 6-22, ARMY LEADERSHIP para. 4-19. (31 July 2019) (C1, 25 Nov. 2019) [hereinafter ADP 6-22].
2. *Soldier’s Creed*, U.S. ARMY, <https://www.army.mil/values/soldiers.html> (last visited Dec. 4, 2020).
3. *NCO Creed*, U.S. ARMY, <https://www.army.mil/values/nco.html> (last visited Dec. 4, 2020).
4. ADP 6-22, *supra* note 1.
5. *Id.* para. 4-18 (describing tactical knowledge).
6. *Id.* para. 4-20 (describing technical knowledge).
7. Lieutenant General Charles N. Pede, The Judge Advocate Gen., U.S. Army, Address at the Worldwide Continuing Legal Education Course: Principled Counsel (Sept. 28, 2019).
8. ADP 6-22, *supra* note 1, para. 4-19.