

Small Unit Leadership: A Commander's Primer



This article is part of the [Antistasi Commander's Handbook](#).

Battle Quotes

“The most important quality in a leader is that of being acknowledged as such. All leaders whose fitness is questioned are clearly lacking in force.”

— André Maurois

1. PURPOSE

To provide a foundational framework for individuals assigned to or assuming positions of leadership within a combat element. This document outlines the core responsibilities and essential tools required to lead effectively, transform chaos into order, and maximize the combat effectiveness of your assigned fighters.

2. SITUATION

Our operational environment is defined by chaos, dynamism, and extreme lethality. In this environment, a lack of clear, competent leadership will result in mission failure, unnecessary casualties, and the degradation of unit morale. Effective leadership provides purpose, direction, and motivation in the face of mortal danger. **Any fighter may be called upon to lead, either by design or by the attrition of battle. All must be prepared for that responsibility.**

Battle Quotes

“The most important thing I learned is that soldiers watch what their leaders do. You can give them classes and lecture them forever, but it is your personal example they will follow.”

— General Colin Powell

Battle Quotes

“The three most important ways to lead people are: by example... by example... by example.”

— Albert Schweitzer

3. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A leader's primary function is to make timely decisions and communicate them with clarity. Leadership is not about possessing omniscience; it is about providing decisive direction based on the best available information. This is accomplished through personal example and effective communication.

a. The Two Pillars of Small Unit Leadership

graph TD; subgraph Small_Unit_Leadership; A[Command Presence & Responsibility]; B[Communication & Clarity]; end

(1) Command Presence & Responsibility

A leader leads from the front. You must project confidence and remain calm under fire. Your demeanor sets the tone for the entire element. If you are calm and decisive, they will be as well. If you panic, the unit will disintegrate. You must take absolute ownership of your team's mission, their actions, and their welfare. Their failures are your failures; their successes are their own.

Battle Quotes

“The commander is responsible for the training, discipline, and morale of his troops. He is responsible for their health, welfare, and readiness for combat. He is responsible for the successful accomplishment of every mission. If his men fail, it is he who has failed. If his men succeed, it is he who has succeeded.”

— General Douglas MacArthur

Battle Quotes

“The leader is truly and ultimately responsible for everything.”

— Leif Babin

(2) Communication & Clarity

A perfect plan is useless if no one understands it. Orders must be clear, concise, and delivered in a timely manner. Crucially, you must ensure your *intent*—the “why” behind the task—is understood by every member of your team. Understanding the intent allows your subordinates to exercise disciplined initiative and adapt to changing circumstances without direct orders.

Battle Quotes

“No plan of operations extends with any certainty beyond the first contact with the main hostile force.”

— Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke the Elder

Battle Quotes

“If you want to build a ship,
don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders.
Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.”

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

4. TACTICAL APPLICATION: THE 5-PARAGRAPH ORDER

The 5-Paragraph Order (SMEAC) is the standard military format for communicating a plan. It ensures all critical information is covered in a logical sequence. For our purposes, a brief, verbal version is the standard.

Battle Quotes

“The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.”

— Max De Pree

(1) S - Situation

A brief summary of the battlespace.

1. **Enemy:** "We have an enemy patrol, squad-sized, halted at the gas station."
1. **Friendly:** "High Command wants them eliminated. No other friendlies are in the area."

(2) M - Mission

A single, clear sentence stating your task and purpose.

1. "Our squad will conduct an assault on the gas station NLT 1400hrs **in order to** destroy the enemy patrol and recover intel."

Battle Quotes

"If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there."

— Lewis Carroll

(3) E - Execution

The "how-to" of the plan. This is the longest section.

1. **Commander's Intent:** A simple statement of your goal. "My intent is to fix the enemy from the south with machine gun fire, while an assault element flanks from the east to destroy them in place."
1. **Tasks to Subordinates:** "Alpha team, you are the support-by-fire element. Set up on this ridgeline. Bravo, you are the assault element. I am with you. We will move along this covered route."

Battle Quotes

"Never tell people how to do things.
Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."

— General George S. Patton Jr.

(4) A - Admin & Logistics

Key supply and medical information.

1. "Everyone top off on ammo and grenades. We're low on AT, so make your shots count. Casualty Collection Point (CCP) will be back at this intersection."

(5) C - Command & Signal

Location of leaders and key signals.

1. "I will be with Bravo team. Alpha's team leader is in charge of the SBF. Signal to initiate fire is my command. Signal to shift fire is purple smoke. Questions?"

Insurgent Commander's Note



You do not need to write a formal document. A quick, verbal SMEAC before an operation takes 60 seconds and ensures every fighter understands the plan, their role, and the key contingencies. This simple habit prevents catastrophic failure.

5. THE POST-MISSION CHECKLIST: THE AAR

The After-Action Review (AAR) is a professional, blame-free discussion of an operation and is how we learn from our mistakes. As a leader, you must conduct these to ensure continuous improvement.

Battle Quotes

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

— George Santayana

(1) What was supposed to happen?

Quickly restate the mission and the plan.

(2) What actually happened?

Create a chronological timeline of the key events.

(3) What went right, and why?

Identify successes so they can be repeated in the future.

(4) What went wrong, and why?

Identify failures or shortcomings. Focus on the “why,” not the “who.”

(5) What will we do differently next time?

Develop concrete, actionable steps to improve performance on the next mission.

graph TD A(What was supposed to happen?) --> B(What actually happened?); B --> C(What went right, and why?); C --> D(What went wrong, and why?); D --> E(What will we do differently next time?);

Battle Quotes

“We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.”

— John Dewey

6. SUMMARY

Leadership is the single most decisive factor in combat. A good leader can make an average team perform to a high standard, while a poor leader will cause a superior team to fail. You must lead by example, communicate clearly using standard formats like SMEAC, and foster a culture of continuous improvement through honest After-Action Reviews. The lives of your fighters and the success of our revolution are in your hands. Lead well.

Battle Quotes

“The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and the will to carry on.”

— Walter Lippman

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Last update: **2026/01/04 06:42**

