Building the Team:

Creating Time and Space for Leader Development in Organizations

MAJ JARED NICHOLS

"Whenever I find these fellows who seem to have ability and a certain amount of disagreement with what we are doing, I am always interested in seeing them, and getting firsthand impressions." — **GEN George C. Marshal**[1]

Noticeably irritated, the battalion commander walked into the executive officer's (XO's) office holding a multi-page print out. The first command climate survey following the battalion change of command was ready for review. They read comments from various sections of the survey:
"This organization does not care about me;"
"This organization does not help me achieve my goals;" and
"This is the worst unit I have ever been a part of."

The battalion commander muttered, "We have to fix this." Then he looked up at the XO and said, "Tell me what you think."

There is a choice commanders face when they receive feedback from their units' junior leaders: write off the comments as "millennial" complaints or to take action. As a field grade officer, you can improve the leaders across your organization, but will your organization create space for leader development? In 2016, my battalion faced some harsh criticism from junior officers in its first command climate survey after the battalion change-of-command. Stepping into the battalion with a new command team and new field grades, we understood that we faced a daunting challenge. We did not know what the exact problem was; it was ill defined and appeared complex. After parsing through the command climate survey, we identified trends and then separated responsibility for addressing those trends. The command sergeant major (CSM) assumed responsibility for the junior enlisted and NCO comments, and

Soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment participate in a military skills team PT event during the unit's rotation to the Republic of Korea. The battalion used this time in isolation to conduct heavy leader development programs and to get the most out of the time outside of normally scheduled training events. (Photos courtesy of author)

I, as XO, assumed responsibility for developing a program for the junior officers. The command climate survey served as a mechanism to identify a problem and show other leaders in the battalion that we had to address the issue.

This article provides some steps on how to discuss leader development of junior officers in your organization and offers techniques for establishing a leader development program that meets the needs of your organization. It is paramount to solicit feedback from junior leaders in your organization, to vary the programming you provide, and to provide direction and structure for a successful program.[2] This is a synthesis of what we experienced and how we approached the establishment of a leader development program in the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry "Iron Rangers" of the 1st Infantry Division from 2016-2018. It is clear from our experience that every organization needs a deliberate leader development program. Development has to be a deliberate event that incorporates feedback from those individuals in the program.

Sources of the Problem

Unless you are fortunate, you will never have the number of people you need or the expected quality of the individuals assigned to your organization. We can either complain about it or do something about it. Developing junior leaders is the responsibility of leaders at every echelon in an organization. Many leaders and organizations talk about leader development but do not take deliberate action to provide a framework to support a successful program. We owe it to our junior leaders to provide them with development and prepare them for future responsibilities. Deliberate planning efforts have to be part of running a successful leader development program. By definition, "Leader development is fundamental to our Army —leader development is the deliberate, continuous, sequential, and progressive process..."[3]

While we all learn from professional development and our day-to-day duties and responsibilities, it is not enough to contribute to the actual progressive development of the individual. Every organization is different in its responsibilities, its specialization, and its mission. Every individual is different in how he or she learns and synthesizes information and experience. Every developmental experience has to take into account the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization. To balance these factors, it takes an organized operational approach to develop a successful leader development program.

We understand that "an Army leader, by virtue of assumed role or assigned responsibility, inspires and influences people to accomplish organizational goals."[4] The Army leader accomplishes this through the act of leadership: "the purpose of the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization."[5] Whether you believe that leaders are "born" or "made," we can assist individuals in developing to reach their highest potential. With all the competing requirements on the mission and on our people, how do we make them better? The push and pull of daily unit operations results in leader development normally coming off training calendars to meet requirements of the daily grind. We have to look toward the future!

We all want the same thing: to run effective organizations that are agile and adaptive and can accomplish any mission assigned. There will always be shortages of equipment, competing requirements, and taskings, but we have to find a way to invest in our people. If we focus on meeting day-to-day requirements and do not remain focused on the long view of the improvement of individuals, we are missing the long-term improvement of the organization. The failure to invest in leader development is at the risk of running an organization into the ground. "Leaders want to serve in an organization that values camaraderie and teamwork and improves the capabilities of others."[6] If you value your organization, you evaluate the development of every leader within that organization. You do not write anyone off — you seek their improvement and look for ways to make the individual better. Meet your organization where they are and work from there.

Understand the Operating Environment

Organizations are dynamic living organisms that do not exist in a vacuum. While the world around your organization is ever changing, most organizations resist change. If you do not already have a formal leader development program, it is difficult to implement an effective program without developing a need to change. The organization as a whole has to buy into the leader development program. This article will not address all the reasons why development is important or attempt to sell you on one specific way to do things. It will provide ways to implement change and provide a formal framework to ensure that the change sticks. Since organizations do not like to change, you have

to create the space to enable change. Commanders are responsible for the performance of the organization as a whole. This, of course, means that they have a significant impact on the performance of your leader development program. Our battalion commander directed that the program focus on the "Three C's" — character, competence, and commitment — that were essential characteristics of programs when he was a junior officer.[7] The three C's construct was foundational to the development of the professional ethics of the 1990s-era Army. We linked the lines of effort to the three C's based upon developmental themes for the science of the profession, the theory and history of why we exist, and the human dimension. Our end state was the development of well-rounded leaders who are agile, adaptable, and inculcated with the esprit de corps of our regiment. Simply put, we wanted people who know who they are and what they are about.

In our own organization, we used the feedback solicited from the command climate survey to show the company commanders what their junior officers said about the current state of the organization. We focused the discussion on how to address these issues and what we could do to improve as a whole. This gained the support of the company commanders and helped to build a guiding coalition that saw the need to change. Every organization must admit that it needs to change and then build the guiding coalition that will see the change through.

Develop a Framework

While you inspire the need to change within your organization, you can start to develop a leader development framework. The developing framework begins with research in standing leader development doctrine and balancing that with the needs of your organization. In our organization, we used Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Leader Development*, as the outline for our own framework. FM 6-22 synthesizes modern leader development research into a short-format 65-page document. The first portion focuses on theory, and the second portion provides useful steps to develop a functional, cohesive program. We utilized several of the methods from FM 6-22 to develop our own program. We realized that we did not have several of the features of successful leader development programs in place. Using FM 6-22 as a guide, we established a vision for our program with supporting lines of effort. This vision nested with desired outcomes for our leaders as well as echelons of assigned development responsibility. The result was the Iron Ranger Leader Development Plan, which established our desired outcome along our supporting lines of effort (see Figure 1). We allocated two weeks from the start of research to the development and approval of the plan by the battalion commander.
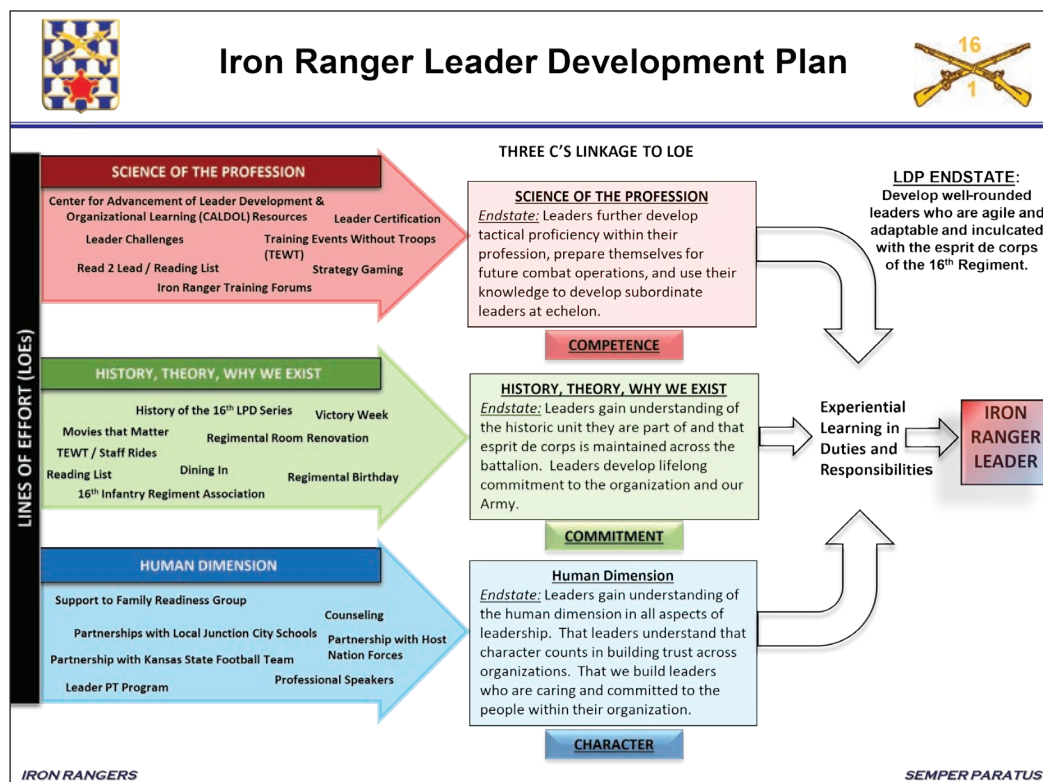

Figure 1 — Iron Ranger Leader Development Plan

Develop an Operational Approach and Establish Lines of Effort

After we determined our desired outcomes, we determined who was responsible for what within the organization. It was readily apparent to us that responsibility for development had to be spread between what the battalion is the lead on and what the company or individual is responsible for (see Figure 2). Leader development, we quickly realized, was a big all-encompassing task, and we had to spread responsibility across the organization if the program was going to be successful. This allowed us to separate the lines of effort amongst the organization so that the onus was on everyone at echelon.

Out of this framework, we sorted out the various ideas for leader development. We used ideas from FM 6-22 as well as solicited ideas from across the leaders in our battalion to generate a list of possible types of efforts and events. Simple discussions like "What is leader development to you?" or "What does good leader development look like?" provoked a battalion-wide crowdsourcing of ideas. We also incorporated into this a list of local partnership programs, forecasted developmental events, and higher develop-mental initiatives. These ideas generated options that we sorted through and provided the feasible and acceptable options to the commander.

Crowdsourced ideas ranged from team sporting events to formal book-reading clubs with everything in between. We realized two things from this crowdsourcing process. First, our junior leaders had some great ideas! Second, we had to admit that we could not do all of the great ideas that were generated, either due to lack of time or resources. It is a balance. The great benefit of crowdsourced ideas is that junior leaders feel that they have ownership of the program and are excited about the process. We then had to find the time on the training calendar and get that time dedicated to our selected programs.

Our initial focus was to select events and then set those events on the calendar so that the junior leaders saw progress in the program. During the first 30 days of programming, we introduced a monthly officer physical fitness event and a leader professional development (LPD) session hosted by the battalion commander.[8] We used a gradually increasing approach of events to get some quick wins with successful events without inducing program fatigue. To ensure continued success, we realized that we had to establish a standing coalition to guide future event planning and implementation.

Establish a Leader Development Council

Maintenance of a leader development program can be a time-consuming process if just one individual manages the program. Our best practice was the establishment of a Leader Development Council (LDC) as a guiding coalition within the unit. Instead of leader development as a topic in the training meeting, the LDC forecasted events, and then those events were back briefed as part of training schedules. The LDC included junior officers from each subordinate company and attachments as well as junior officer staff representation with the battalion XO serving as the LDC chair. The LDC met monthly to forecast the outlook at 60-plus days and beyond assigning responsibility; it then reviewed events within the next 60 days to finalize details or make adjustments. The LDC also served as the after action review (AAR) forum for events completed in the past 30 days. Figure 3 shows the 30/60/90-day outlook from an LDC meeting. As our program matured, we forecasted out to 180-plus days if the information was available for known upcoming events.

Based upon the type of events, we divided the battalion-wide events between those that a company could host and those that the battalion staff had the lead on. The company-led events were typically officer physical training (PT) and social events, while battalion-led events were larger initiatives that required resources outside of the ability of the companies. Iron Ranger initiatives involved outside organizations and resources that the battalion staff sourced for leader development events.[9] Allowing junior officers in the battalion to host events provided developmental opportunities for each officer and increased the interaction between officers across companies and the staff.

The onus for managing events passed to companies in a predictable manner, and events were scheduled a year out. Each company rotated hosting and running events for the rest of the organization. The average workload for each company was running one event every two months which allowed enough time to plan and execute our officer PT events, social events, or collaborate on larger events like a dining in. We ensured that monthly officer PT and quarterly "hail and farewell" events were always on the calendar. This partitioning of responsibilities allowed the battalion staff to focus on programs and initiatives that required more time and resources in order to execute.

Echelon	Events	
Battalion	1) Regimental Day 2) Dining In 3) Officer PT coordination 5) Iron Ranger Talks 6) Partnership with Regimental Association	6) Read2Lead Facilitation 7) Movies that Matter Facilitation 8) Manage new officer welcome/inbrief 9) Kansas State Football Partnership
Company/ Staff	1) Counseling 2) Mentorship 3) Cultural Tours 4) Company Level Military Education 5) Partnership with local schools	6) Community Service 7) Enforce MSAF in Evaluations/Counseling 8) Read2Lead Mentorship/Small Group 9) Planning and execution of BN Officer PT and Social events
Individual	1) Maintain positive command climate 2) Lead by example 3) Conduct Counseling with subordinates 4) Participation in Leader Development Events at the BN and CO levels 5) Participation in community service or volunteer hours 6) Complete your Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback (MSAF) Annually 7) Complete MSAF for personnel who send you their MSAF forms 8) Professional Reading on history, military, leadership, and other topics. 9) Continuing Education for military or professional training	

Figure 2 — Iron Ranger Leader Development at Echelon

Iron Ranger Leadership Initiatives

Based upon time and resources, we settled on several Iron Ranger initiatives that we thought were feasible and fit our training schedule. We stayed away from large events to scale our program to our operational tempo and our limited financial resources. Instead of one or two major events, we realized we required more frequent touch points with junior leaders. The major programs managed by the battalion and executed across the organization were the Read2Lead, Movies That Matter, Iron Ranger Talks, and our history initiatives. Drawing from feedback from leaders in the battalion, we resourced programs that we felt were engaging, multifaceted, and different from other programs we experienced.

For the Read2Lead program, we resourced books, developed a reading guide, and conducted small group discussions based upon readings. For each selected book, a guide would read the book in advance and develop a discussion question list based upon themes in portions of each chapter of the book. Discussion groups then met weekly at the company and were led by one of the officers who used the discussion questions as a guide to talk about themes from the book or to guide the small group into other unit-related issues. Field grade officers rotated between groups to provide other views of the same reading. By using this method, we increased personal interaction across the battalion and facilitated an open dialogue between officers of all grades.
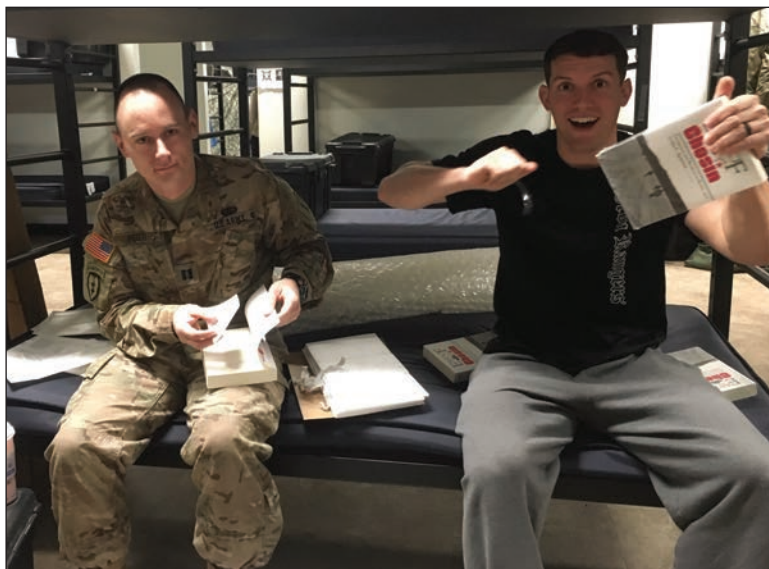
CPT Alan Pesti (left) and CPT Kurt Zimmerman unbox a shipment of the book
East of Chosin at Camp Casey, Republic of Korea. The book was the first
selection for the unit's Iron Ranger Read2Lead program.

Month	Events/Leads
30/60/90 Leader Development Horizon	
January (Next 30)	1) Leader Development Council Meets 1st week of January 2) 12JAN Officer PT – Staff – CPT Zimmerman lead – Functional Fitness 3) 12JAN Leader Challenge – Small Unit Tactical "LC: BDA" led by IR5 (moved) 4) 17JAN 12JAN – LPD for Officer on Platoon Fire Commands led by the Battalion MGs 5) Read2Lead Initial Meeting: Pass out "East Of Chosin" to Company Commanders and Staff Officers of the Battalion. In order to allow them to read ahead. Develop discussion questions
February (Next 60)	1) Leader Development Council Meets 20FEB 2) Read2Lead Execution (Start). Company level discussion groups once a week, and a final closing event. Execution window runs for Staff/Companies 18FEB-01APR. (reference the Read2Lead Leader's Guide) 3) Officer PT - 26FEB – HHC Lead (1LT Scarminach/1LT Richards). Mount Soyosan Hike 4) Movies the Matter: 27 1930 FEB The Lost Battalion. – Chaplain/IR5 setup and execution. 5) Community Outreach – TBD - B Co Local School Sponsorship Event
March (Next 90)	1) Leader Development Council Meets 1st Week of March 2) Officer PT – 06MAR – B CO Lead – Sports Focus 3) Iron Ranger Talk – 06MAR History of the 16th Infantry (PT I: 1861-1918) – B CO lead. 4) Read2Lead Event (Ends) 5) Movies that Matter: 12 1900 MAR: The Lost Battalion. 6) Platoon Leader Briefs to IR6 on Services Plan for Semi-Annual Services 7) Table XII OPORD Briefs to senior mentors **Dates for Consideration:** Training Holidays More than 75% of BN in the Field Local or community Events

Figure 3 — 30/60/90-Day Leader Development Horizon

Reading programs normally hit two roadblocks: What book do you select and how do you pay for it? In our first effort to get a reading program off the ground, we worked alongside the Center for Junior Officers (CJO), which supported the initial purchase for our inaugural reading. There are hundreds of possible books to select for a reading program, but to keep it fresh and to create a space for learning, we selected a book that the majority of officers were not familiar with. Since we were deploying for a rotation to the Korean Peninsula, we decided to find a book that would speak to the challenges we might face. We selected *East of Chosin: Entrapment and Breakout in Korea, 1950*, the story of the maligned 39th Regimental Combat Team and its fate in the Korean War.

Working alongside CJO, we were able to resource enough books for all the officers in the battalion and have them shipped to us through CJO funding. We conducted our multi-week program and then provided CJO feedback from our experience. As part of the final week of the program, we had participants write reflective essays on their experience. Our experiences in the program, and our training materials, are available at the CJO-supported website (https://juniorofficer.army.mil/).[10]

The initial success of the *East of Chosin* program enabled our officers to see the value in reading, group discussion, and reflection. What we thought was a one-time event resulted in a book discussion program that was funded by the officers within the battalion. We solicited book ideas through the LDC and selected *The Energy Bus: 10 Rules to Fuel Your Life, Work, and Team with Positive Energy* and the quintessential *Team Yankee: A Novel of World War III*. While we saw success with this reading program, we also recognized that not everyone is a bibliophile and that we needed to find other ways to provoke discussion and create a learning environment.

The LDC created the Movies That Matter initiative in response to meeting a need for our leaders who are not necessarily bibliophiles. Movies That Matter was a program that incorporated movies from different genres to provoke discussion and collaborative learning. Instead of a multi-week event, Movies That Matter was a one-time group watch of a selected movie that incorporated discussions at the start of the movie, the midpoint, and the end. Throughout several months, we interspaced Movies That Matter events in between Read2Lead to diversify the experience. The movies we focused on were an effort to address issues ranging from developing effective teams, ethics, and military decision making. The guide for the event would watch the movie beforehand, develop a discussion list to provoke conversation, and then serve as the host for the event.

The themes in the selected movies addressed issues we thought we collectively faced in the battalion. Throughout 18 months, we incorporated the movies *The Lost Battalion*, *Remember the Titans*, and *Zulu*. The themes we derived

from each movie ranged from race relations, overcoming insurmountable odds, and even NCO/officer relations. The reading guide served as a start point, but based upon the group watching the movie, the discussion can range to almost any topic on the mind of the leaders present. The goal was to provoke the audience and have discussions on diverse topics to facilitate group learning. The selected Movies That Matter reading guides we developed are available through CJO at https://juniorofficer.army.mil/discussion-tag/movies-that-matter/. The key for every organization should be to select movies that speak to themes or challenges within the organization.

The intent of our Iron Ranger Talks program was to inspire young leaders to present in front of peers. The common inspiration for these events was the popular TED Talk series. A frequent problem with LPD series is that many programs are lecture-format presentations. Lectures work for some individual leaders but not for many others. Tapping into the cultural trend of the TED Talk-style allowed space for more creative presentations on topics ranging from the multi-domain battle, unit history, and even how to manage your career. Changing our approach to presentation allowed for a more permissive space for engagement with our junior officers.

One of our biggest initiatives was inculcating all officers of the battalion in the esteemed traditions and history of our unit. All Army units have history and traditions that tie into the fabric of that organization and provide a connection to the past. In many cases, this sense of being part of something larger gets lost in the daily grind. We made a consistent effort to tie history to everything that we did. We focused on using teachable moments from our unit's history to connect to the present, celebrating history through ceremony, and engaging with our veterans association on common goals.

For many organizations, it can be a challenge to tie the past and the present together. We looked across the organization and found individuals who were passionate about history and allowed them the time to work on projects to meet our end state of increasing esprit de corps. During the course of 18 months, we renovated our conference room into a proper regimental room, established better relations with the 16th Infantry Regiment Association, and developed historical education programs to train on our unit history. Overall, these initiatives built pride in the organization, and when times got hard, remembering those who came before us provided reflective moments that things really are not that bad.

Keep the Program on Course

As we alluded to earlier, leader development opportunities are the first things that fall off training calendars in many organizations. It is vital that we first find the time to develop a leader development strategy, implement that strategy, and then keep the program on course. Leader development is an investment in your organization and in

The 16th Infantry Regiment Association presents a piece of commemorative artwork celebrating the 1st Infantry Division's 100th anniversary to LTC Jon Meredith, commander of the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment. Facilitating bonds with the association provided opportunities to interact with veterans of the regiment and develop an admiration for the unit's past accomplishments.

the future of our profession. It is not a one-time event, and the results of leader development are not necessarily readily apparent overnight. It takes several months of programs to see the changes around you. You have to be consistent and patient with the program. It takes time to make things a habit and develop a new organizational culture. As our junior leaders developed over the course of 18 months, our organization improved, and the culture of learning spread throughout the battalion. The NCOs started programs that paralleled themes from junior officer programs; senior NCOs began attending events… voluntarily. Our performance in training improved across the board, and our confidence in each other increased. We were a fitter and better-prepared organization than the other organizations around us. In a world that wants agile and adaptable leaders, we found a way to meet people where they are and then improve both the individual and the organization as a whole. You can do it! You can build your team. You just need to create space for change, develop a program, and make time for events.

Notes

[1] Field Manual (FM) 100-1, *The Army* (1981), 8.
[2] Peter Schirmer, James C. Crowley, Nancy E. Blacker, Richard R. Brennan Jr., Henry A. Leonard, J. Michael Polich, Jerry M. Sollinger, and Danielle M. Varda, "Leader Development in Army Units: A View from the Field," (Washington, D.C.: RAND Arroyo Center, 2008), accessed on 4 March 2019 from https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG648.sum.pdf.
[3] FM 6-22, *Leader Development* (2015), 1-2.
[4] Ibid, 1-13.
[5] Ibid, 1-13.
[6] Ibid, 1-4.
[7] FM 100-1, 7.
[8] Informally, we referred to these events as "Iron Ranger Talks" in order to break some of the stigma associated with the term LPD.
[9] Reference Figure 1 (Iron Ranger Leader Development Plan) for lines of effort and how our events incorporated underneath lines of effort. We did not execute a staff ride because it was resource intensive, and we did not have the resources to properly execute. We focused on events that we had control over and did not necessarily need to rely on outside funding.
[10] Organizations interested in a similar effort can contact CJO at info@cjo.army.mil for information.

MAJ Jared Nichols is an Armor officer and the former executive officer of 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division. He deployed three times as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom and once as part of a rotational unit to the Republic of Korea. He holds a bachelor's degree in history from West Virginia University and a master's degree in organizational psychology from Columbia University. He is currently a student at the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS), Fort Leavenworth, KS, completing his requirements for a master's degree in military operations.

If you are interested in learning more about the 1-16 IN program, search for their leader development documents at https://juniorofficer.army.mil/.