

Leadership

The principles of leadership are unaffected by the weather, but challenges for leaders, can be profound during cold weather. To accomplish their mission, leaders must contend with not only the enemy soldier, but also the stress of the environment. The preceding sections have focused on the effects of cold weather on the soldier's biological functioning. However, the stress of cold can also adversely affect attitudes and morale, and leaders must recognize and cope with these effects to maintain their unit's effectiveness.

Leadership Challenges During Cold Weather Operations:

1. Many soldiers come from regions where winters are not severe, and few have experience in living outdoors during cold weather. Initially, these soldiers may lack confidence in their ability to cope with and survive in cold weather.
2. The cold can seem inescapable. Even when soldiers are able to stay warm, the effects of cold are felt in awkward cold weather clothing, confinement to small shelter and problems with vehicles and equipment. These effects can lead to anger, frustration and depression, which can be intensified by fatigue, periods of isolation, and shortened daylight hours.
3. When conditions are extremely cold and soldiers have been out for a long time the need to stay warm tends to become the individual's most important concern.
 - a. Soldiers may appear confused or forget how to do things they are trained to do.
 - b. Some soldiers may attempt to shirk their duties in order to avoid the cold and stay warm.
4. The need to wear multiple layers of clothing or remain bundled in sleeping bags and blankets when it is cold, combined with extended periods of darkness can intensify the sense of isolation soldiers often experience when they are separated from home, family and friends. Some individuals respond to these feelings by "huddling up" to keep warm, and withdrawing within themselves away from the unit. This will lead to mental sluggishness, increased susceptibility to cold injuries and degraded individual effectiveness, unit discipline and cohesion.

Positive Leadership and the Right Attitude:

1. Leaders are responsible for prevention of cold injury among their troops.
 - a. Susceptibility to cold injury varies considerably. Safe exposure times for different soldiers exposed to the same cold-weather conditions also varies considerably.
 - b. Newly assigned individuals, who have little or no cold weather training or experience, often sustain cold injuries.
 - c. Individuals with considerable cold weather experience (often those in leadership positions) can become nonchalant or desensitized to the threat of cold injury. Leader must be alert for carelessness even in soldiers experienced in cold weather operations.
2. **Soldiers need to be taught that when it is cold, tasks may be more difficult, but they are not impossible.** This knowledge comes from confidence in their abilities to survive and perform their mission during cold weather.
 - a. Leaders can build this confidence in their men by having them practice tasks and survival skills in the cold, and by conducting cold weather training exercises.
 - b. After several weeks of training and experience in cold weather, most soldiers learn to cope fairly well.
 - c. Leaders must be alert and avoid the common trap of allowing cold weather training exercises to become a camping trip. If this occurs, soldiers will become distracted from accomplishing their mission. Leaders must remind soldiers that their job is to fight, and the purpose of the training exercise is to teach them how to carry out their mission under cold weather conditions.
3. A positive "can do" attitude helps in coping with cold weather problems. Leadership must be aggressive and emphasize personal example to demonstrate that cold conditions are beatable.
 - a. Direct supervision should be emphasized.
 - b. Ensure duties are properly performed and work is equitably distributed among all unit members.
 - c. Be alert for individuals who have withdrawn from the group. Leaders should talk to their troops and encourage them to talk among themselves. Use the buddy system to maintain communication, and to watch for cold injuries.
 - d. Keep soldiers busy and physically active.
 - e. Use hot food to improve morale.

f. Allow soldiers more time to accomplish tasks and discretion regarding how to do them. However, do not allow them to use the cold as an excuse for failing to carry out orders, comply with unit SOPs or properly perform their duties.