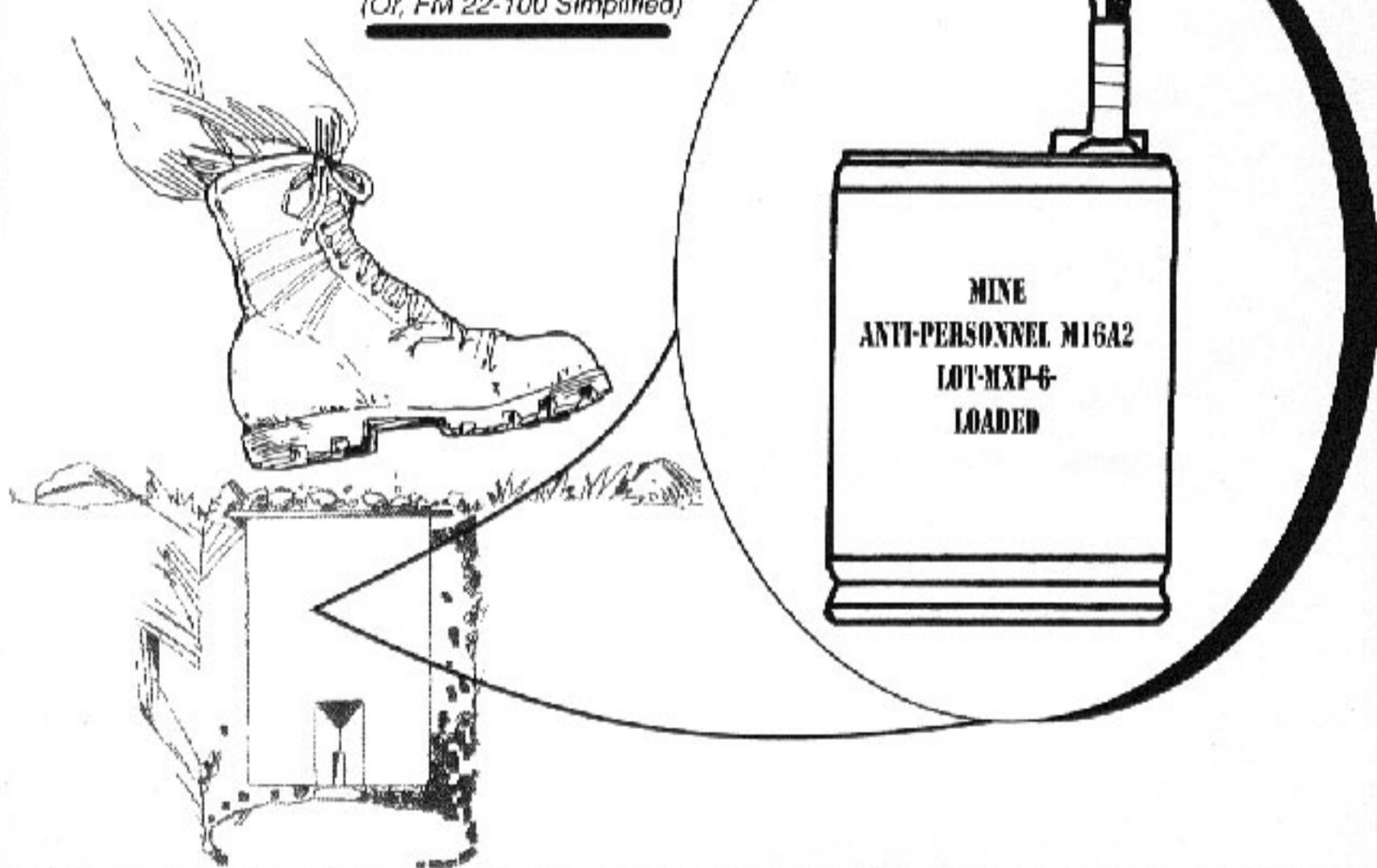


“Bouncing Betty” and the “Three-meter zone”

(Or, FM 22-100 Simplified)



By CSM J. D. Pendry

I'm sure you've all read FM 22-100, *Military Leadership*—it's full of great information. Sometimes, it's *too much* information for me to sort out and use when I need it. I've simplified it to make it work for me and to show you what I think it takes to lead and understand the soldiers you are trying to lead.

First of all, if you want to be consistent as a leader you need rules to go by. I picked two rules that work for me. My first rule is something we all do every minute of the day—lead by example. The second rule—always remember what rule number one is.

Besides rules, leaders need priorities to give them direction. My priorities are high standards, a high state of discipline, self-discipline, a high state of soldier and equipment readiness, professional development for NCOs and leaders who are positive role models.

To go with rules and priorities you need a leadership style or technique. FM 22-100 gives you three. Directing, participating and delegating. Knowing them and then just pick-

ing one out to follow won't work. You have to consider other things before you select a style. Primarily, you have to consider the individual soldier you're leading. I call my technique for selecting a style the “three-meter zone.”

You can categorize soldiers in your mind any way that works for you, but three-, 50- and 100 meters is a context I can easily visualize and understand. It helps me know who I'm dealing with and helps me pick the style I need to use.

When I went through basic training a lot of emphasis was placed on mines and booby traps used in Viet Nam because they were causing a lot of casualties. I remember a demonstration that dealt with an anti-personnel mine called a “Bouncing Betty.” When stepped on, this mine bounces up as much as waist high before it detonates. As you might expect, the results can be devastating. The instructor told us if you're within three meters when it detonates you probably won't survive. At 50 meters, he said, your chances of survival improve dramatically. At 100 meters you're relatively safe from this weapon.

After listening to that instructor and seeing pictures of intestines hanging out, I was sure I never wanted to be caught

in Bouncing Betty's three-meter zone. Much like Bouncing Betty, leaders also have a three-meter zone.

Three-meter soldiers require constant *attention*. If they don't get it they will do something that causes you to give them some attention. They'll get a DUI, beat on a spouse, take drugs, write bad checks or forget to come to work. Or, when they finally do come to work they will be on endless appointments. Most of them continue to extend their temporary "No Physical Training" medical profiles. You can't give these soldiers the attention they need unless you keep them in your three-meter zone.

When you give them a mission, give them *detailed* instructions. Make sure you tell them who, what, where, when, why and how. Then tell them all the negative things that will happen if they fail to complete the mission. Keep reminding them of the dangers of being in *your* three-meter zone.

You never have to highlight the positive to three-meter soldiers, because they fully expect to receive an impact award for any mission they complete. Even if someone else completes it for them. You have to constantly check on three-meter soldiers to remind them of their mission, because they like to lose track of what they're supposed to be doing.

On the other hand, if you lose track of them, they will wander out of your three-meter zone. The problem with that is they usually wind up in the first sergeant's three-meter zone. This means *you* have to go into the first sergeant's three-meter zone to get them back. And spending too much time in first sergeants' three-meter zones may soon have them questioning *your* maximum effective range.

By design, life in the three-meter zone is extremely unpleasant—life expectancy can be very short. In fact, no one survives the three-meter zone because the intensity of the fragmentation when a leader detonates is too much for three-meter soldiers to survive.

Your job, though, is to help them survive. To get them out of the three-meter zone, you give them two survival options.

First, tell them what actions they must take to get out of the three-meter zone. You have to make it very clear that all of the negative attention-getting activities have to stop. No more DUIs, spouse beatings or writing of bad checks. Next, tell them what the standards are and what your expectations are. Then, tell them to concentrate on accomplishing their duties to the utmost of their ability. Finally, you tell them if they do those things they'll get out of the three-meter zone and be headed for the relative safety of the fifty-meter zone.

If three-meter zone soldiers don't respond to the first survival option by taking the actions laid out for them, then you have to resort to a second option. The second option meets your obligation to the Army and to other soldiers. That option is to end their Army career and to do it as quickly as possible. *Whichever option is chosen, the end result must be that they leave the three-meter zone.*

Next is the 50-meter soldier. Some soldiers start out in the 50-meter zone and some come there by the three-meter

or one-hundred-meter zone. No matter how they got to be 50-meter soldiers, they require the same leadership style.

I just told you how three-meter soldiers get to the 50-meter zone. One-hundred-meter soldiers usually get there because of some negative experience. It could be anything from a soured marriage to not being selected for promotion.

With the right kind of leadership and positive encouragement you will get them back to the 100-meter zone. With the wrong kind of leadership, they could just as easily be headed to the three-meter zone.

When you give 50-meter soldiers a mission you still need to give detailed instructions by describing the positive things that will come from successfully completing the mission. Fifty-meter soldiers look for positive things to happen in their lives. The desire to have something good happen and their willingness to work for it is what moves them to the 100-meter zone.

Once you've given a mission to 50-meter soldiers you need to check on them once in a while, because sometimes they may need a little direction or re-direction or a pat on the back. They need to know that you're interested in whether or not they successfully complete the mission.

Remember, when they complete the mission they expect something positive to happen. That positive action can be as little as a pat on the back and some kind words. But it needs to be *something*. Your goal is to move these soldiers out to the 100-meter zone where the survival rate is very high.

One-hundred-meter soldiers are what we want in the Army. One-hundred-meter soldiers are grown by positive leadership that teaches them to do their jobs while constantly reinforcing positive habits required to be an effective leader or soldier.

When you give 100-meter soldiers a mission, all you need is to tell them the desired result, provide them with a time line, the necessary resources and point them in the right direction. You can be confident that the job will get done. That's because the way they were brought up constantly rein-

forced the importance of getting the job done. They also know, without being told, that positive things come from getting the job done. They also know, without being told, about the three-meter zone. All these soldiers need from you is a glance in their direction once in a while—just to let them know that you know they're there and you care about the job they're doing.

One-hundred-meter soldiers aren't driven by the fear of the negative or the possibility of reward. They're driven by the satisfaction of successfully completing the mission.

There you have it. FM 22-100 simplified. Two solid rules, some priorities and a technique for selecting a leadership style. ■

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