

Training for the Right Fight

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The mission of the U.S. Army is to “fight and win the nation’s wars through prompt and sustained land combat, as part of the joint force.”¹ Maneuver leaders do this by “training Army forces for prompt and sustained combat incident to operations on land.”² The doctrine, techniques, and procedures which are used to train maneuver warfighters, then, must be sufficient to prepare them to achieve the Army’s mission to fight and win wars. Laser-like focus on maneuver live-fire training and Combat Training Center (CTC) rotations prevent Infantrymen from mastering fundamental skills. This ultimately reduces the light fighter’s capacity to fight and win wars. The Army cannot fight and win in a complex world unless the development of experts is made a priority in unit training plans designed to prepare units for their specific missions.

To illustrate the challenges associated with current practices allow me to describe a traditional combined arms live-fire exercise (CALFEX) progression. Soldiers employing the M4 Carbine must complete:

Table I: Preliminary Marksmanship Instruction;

Table II: Pre-Live-Fire Simulations;

Table III: Drills (Pre-Combat Checks, Load, Carry Positions, Fight Down, Fight Up, Go to Prone, Reload, Clear Malfunction, Unload/Show Clear);

Table IV: Zero;

Table V: Practice (engagements simulating record fire qualification); and

Table VI: Qualification (Day/Night).³

When Soldiers achieve sufficient marksmanship proficiency, evidenced by their completion of the aforementioned progression, they begin maneuver live-fire exercises — another progression of training that looks something like the following:



Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 41st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, pose for a group photo while deployed to Helmand, Afghanistan, on 28 March 2018.

(Photo by SFC Jasmine L. Flowers)

- Additional “**Stage 1**” training to include familiarization with the hand grenade, M203/M320, and other organic weapon systems;⁴
- **Stage 2** — crew qualifications and rehearsals;
- **Stage 3** — buddy team live-fire exercise (LFX);
- **Stage 4** — fire team LFX;
- **Stage 5** — squad LFX;
- **Stage 6** — platoon LFX; and
- **Stage 7** — company CALFEX.⁵

Each stage requires the execution of the eight-step training model, deliberate use of training areas, forecast and consumption of ammunition, and that priceless commodity — time. Live fires require rehearsals, blank, and live-fire iterations during both day and night. This force generation effort habitually consumes an entire training cycle and culminates with a rotation to a CTC and then deployment. It produces a CALFEX-certified and CTC-validated brigade combat team, but does completion of a CALFEX and a CTC rotation produce a force best prepared to defeat a near peer? To secure infrastructure in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait, Korea, or Djibouti? To train, advise, assist, and accompany security forces in non-permissive environments?

This question is further complicated by the introduction of the Sustainable Readiness Model (SRM) and Objective-T (OBJ-T) generators and assessors of readiness that quickly reveal themselves to be at odds with one another. SRM seeks to provide combatant commanders with a perpetually ready and deployable force. It achieves this by reducing “the readiness ‘peaks and valleys’ we have witnessed for the past decade and enhance the Army’s ability to preserve the readiness of the force and balance the Army’s steady state missions and contingency response requirements.”⁶

The Army’s Objective Assessment of Training Proficiency, informally referred to as the OBJ-T initiative, assesses readiness by measuring individual, crew, and platform proficiency; mission essential task (MET) proficiency; and collective live-fire task proficiency.⁷

SRM requires that Soldiers are moved between units and installations frequently to increase personnel readiness across the force rather than filling units preparing to deploy. This means Soldiers will arrive to and depart from units during collective training and deployments. OBJ-T, though, requires continuity of personnel and units, as the introduction of new Soldiers during a collective live-fire progression would prevent their addition to crews, platforms, and fire teams that have progressed through Stage 1, listed in Training Circular (TC) 7-9, *Infantry Live Fire Training*, and referenced above.

OBJ-T ensures units arrive to CTCs with a highly trained team that is prepared for certification and validation. SRM ensures that upon completion of the CTC rotation, the newly validated and certified team is deprived of key leaders whom are moved to new assignments prior to and during the operational deployment that follows. SRM and OBJ-T pull the force in different directions — towards two definitions of readiness. They leave little room for mastery of the fundamentals.

In a February 2018 announcement of the formation of the Close Combat Lethality Task Force (CCLTF), then Secretary of Defense James Mattis acknowledged that combat formations like the ones described in this article “have historically accounted for almost 90 percent of our casualties and yet our personnel policies, advances in training methods, and equipment have not kept pace with changes in available technology, human factors science, and talent management best practices.”⁸ The Army’s own Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG) recommended that “the service needs to increase training ammunition allocation for units to allow them to conduct more CQB [close quarters battle] training with small arms, especially carbine and pistol.”⁹

Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 7-0, *Training*, confirms these assertions:

*“The goal in training is achieving task mastery, not just proficiency. Task mastery means Soldiers and units can perform a task to standard repeatedly under increasingly challenging, stressful, and varying conditions. Soldiers and units rarely achieve task standards on the first attempt or even after a few initial attempts. Leaders continually vary task conditions and conduct multiple iterations of task execution to make achieving standards more challenging. This technique builds Soldiers’ confidence that they can perform tasks under the most demanding conditions.”*¹⁰

The intent of the CCLTF, the concerns of AWG, and the mandate of Army doctrine are not satisfied under the competing requirements of OBJ-T, SRM, and the CALFEX as the capstone achievement of a collective training evolution.



A Soldier from Able Company, 1st Battalion, 41st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, participates in a marksmanship competition at Contingency Location Dwyer in Helmand, Afghanistan, in June 2018. (Photo by 1LT Dewey Ellison)

The current model forces rapid progression through a series of increasingly complex training events, but it prevents and discourages mastery of marksmanship. It requires the training of qualifiers, not shooters — CALFEX participators, not warfighters. Simply put, Soldiers are not required to replicate, in sufficient quantity, the type of direct-fire engagements they must perform in combat.

On a recent deployment to Afghanistan, the 1st Battalion, 41st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, overcame the challenges associated with a traditional live-fire progression by deliberately scaling the culminating collective training event of the deployment and making mastery of the fundamentals a prerequisite for its execution. The conditions for such an experiment were ideal — operational tempo that supported the effort, platoon leadership empowered to lead high-quality marksmanship training, abundant resources, and time. The progression deliberately ended with a fire team live fire to prevent impacts on operations and ensure sufficient training of the fundamentals. Companies designed a seven-week progression to get there. A traditional marksmanship certification program was first. Soldiers completed Tables I through VI on the M4 Carbine or equivalent for their primary weapon system.¹¹

The battalion's rifle companies designed and executed a marksmanship density program before progressing to maneuver LFXs. Bushmaster Company led a battalion leader professional development range day to ensure the requisite expertise existed at the company and platoon leadership levels. Commanders, first sergeants, platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and staff performed magazine changes, close quarters engagements, and completed a close quarters drill (El Presidente) in which a shooter engages each of three targets from left to right with a controlled pair at 10 meters, reloads, and engages the same targets from right to left — for time.

Drills such as these are common in competitive shooting circles and the Special Operations community because they create a more effective shooter — a master of the fundamentals. They are uncommon in the conventional force because time and resources are a scarce commodity, and CTC and CALFEX preparation must be prioritized over developing experts.

Able Company, 1-41 IN's marksmanship density resulted in the authoring of a standardized marksmanship program codified in the company's tactical standard operating procedures (TACSOP). The program "exists to standardize marksmanship training, progression, qualification, and certification across the company. It is also a tool that allows

leaders to select from a menu of drills to tailor training to the needs of their Soldiers.”¹² Drills are categorized as common, close quarters, or complex engagements.¹³ There are 37 in total. Soldiers are required to earn the endorsement of their immediate supervisor and complete three drills in each category before advancing to the next series of engagements. Only after this requirement is met does a Soldier advance to a stress shoot and ultimately participate in a maneuver live fire.

The shooters’ performance in the fire team live fire exceeded expectations. Their magazine changes were quick, their kit was assembled for function, their engagements were more accurate, and their confidence — earned through repetition of the fundamentals — resulted in faster and more aggressive fire teams. The scenario required a fire team to engage targets from 50-300 meters while maneuvering under live-fire conditions. The company achieved an average hit rate of 31.05 percent during daylight and 30.54 percent during limited visibility, revealing virtually zero degradation in marksmanship ability at night. The training methods used to achieve these results are not new or revolutionary, but they are rarely used to train Soldiers to master their craft. Units are unable to resource the time and ammunition required for such events while scrambling to achieve the requirements of a CALFEX progression constrained by OBJ-T.

Theoretical and practical solutions do exist and are achievable within the guidance of training doctrine. ADP 7-0 reminds us that “[e]ven when the unit trains to achieve mission-essential task (MET) proficiency, the underlying task proficiencies at the individual level are monitored and constantly trained and retrained as necessary by unit NCOs. In units where Soldiers are incapable of performing individual tasks to standard, the unit cannot effectively execute collective tasks to standard.”¹⁴ The goal of training is achieving task mastery. “Task mastery means Soldiers and units can perform a task to standard repeatedly under increasingly challenging, stressful, and varying conditions.”¹⁵

Doctrine encourages commanders to employ the operations process to design a plan that will prepare the unit for operations in a specific operational environment against a specific enemy at a specific time. This process is designed to “allow commanders to focus time and resources in ways that mitigate constraints to maintain required levels of proficiency.”¹⁶ Yet time and again, units from across the force train in exactly the same way despite radically different missions and operational environments.

To achieve and sustain individual task mastery, units could periodically forgo CALFEX progressions in favor of a unit training plan focused on developing experts in their craft and the operational environment. Such a design would culminate with squad or team live fires rather than company or battalion events. The excess training days would be used to master the fundamentals. The risk to mission incurred by failing to exercise and train mission command functions at the company and battalion level could be mitigated by executing command post exercises, the warfighter exercise, or similar mission command simulations. An organization executing this model would deploy to a CTC but omit maneuver live fires in favor of additional situational training exercises tailored to the operational environment and enemy identified in the unit training plan. A unit deploying to provide uplift to a security force assistance brigade or secure a forward operating base in Afghanistan would execute an aggressive battery of ranges designed to mimic likely engagements in the operational environment rather than a CALFEX designed to simulate a near peer.

The force is constrained by time and resources. If combat readiness is our ultimate priority, as it must be, our profession must acknowledge that readiness begins with the fundamentals of fighting. Soldiers master these fundamentals through repetition. Unit training plans designed for the mission, coupled with a deliberate focus on cultivating expertise, will provide that repetition.

Notes

¹ ADP 1, *The Army*, September 2012, 1-7.

² *Ibid*, 1-7.

³ Training Circular (TC) 3-20.40, *Training and Qualification, Individual Weapons* (Pre-Approval), 2018, 3-1 thru 3-17.

⁴ TC 7-9, *Infantry Live Fire Training*, September 1993, 1-5.

⁵ *Ibid*, 1-5 thru 1-6.

⁶ LTG James L. Huggins Jr., “2014 Green Book: Rebuilding and Sustaining Army Readiness,” accessed from https://www.army.mil/article/134893/2014_green_book_rebuilding_and_sustaining_army_readiness.

⁷ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Leader’s Guide to Objective Assessment of Training Proficiency* (Washington,

DC: U.S. Army, 2017).

⁸ Matthew Cox, "Mattis Wants Ground Combat Units to Be More Lethal in the Close Fight," Military.com, 23 February 2018. Accessed from <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/02/23/mattis-wants-ground-combat-units-be-more-lethal-close-fight.html>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ ADP 7-0, *Training*, August 2012, 3-2.

¹¹ TC 3-20.40, 3-1 thru 3-17.

¹² A Company, 1st Battalion, 41st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Able Marksmanship Program (Helmand, Afghanistan: 2018), 4.

¹³ Ibid, 5.

¹⁴ ADP 7-0, 1-1.

¹⁵ Ibid, 3-2.

¹⁶ Ibid, 4-3.

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A Soldier from Able Company, 1st Battalion, 41st Infantry Regiment, participates in a marksmanship competition at Contingency Location Dwyer in Helmand, Afghanistan, in June 2018. (Photo by 1LT Dewey Ellison)