



The Expert Infantryman Badge: *The Credential of a Professional Infantry Soldier*

CSM ROBERT K. FORTENBERRY

The Expert Infantryman Badge (EIB) is the gold standard for evaluating expertise and mastery of those core Skill Level I tasks required for the base tactical/technical knowledge of the Infantryman. It is the cornerstone from which all infantry tactics are derived and is the hallmark of a tactically disciplined unit. The history of the EIB is entwined with the Combat Infantryman Badge (CIB). Both badges were formally established by the War Department under the Army Chief of Staff, George C. Marshall, on 27 October 1943, at the height of World War II in order to honor the U.S. Army Infantryman. The badge is a simple 3-inch rectangular bar with a background of Infantry Blue and a silver border. An embossed M1795 Springfield Musket is centered in the badge, un-cocked, for it has not yet been fired in combat. GEN Marshall's intent for the badge was to provide prestige in a career field that requires living a tough life, enduring hardships under the most difficult conditions, and succeeding in accomplishing many undesirable yet essential tasks.

The intensity and integrity of the EIB program have developed and prepared our Infantrymen since 1943 and continue to test the Infantry Soldier for the future fight in large-scale combat operations (LSCO). The EIB and its associated events are the core of Infantry Skill Level 1 tasks, often referred to as Warrior Tasks, which are important to all Career Management Fields (CMFs) in the U.S. Army. A unified level of proficiency should be a standard that all other CMFs aspire to achieve to ultimately increase overall lethality of any formation, regardless of the CMF. However, the pursuit of task mastery and expertise are a must for all Infantry Soldiers to most effectively perform their duties. The EIB's rigorous standards and the physical and mental hardships endured during the testing period replicate the decision cycle and the required clarity of thoughts and focused actions under hardship, under stress, and in tough conditions to achieve success. The EIB test is designed to be a crucible event where the margin of error

is measured in seconds and requires consistent attention to detail. The EIB is the true mark of a professional Infantry Soldier and signifies mastery under test conditions for expertise of individual infantry tasks. It is the building block for collective level training required to face the enemy in the last 100 yards of ground combat and should be planned and executed annually in support of training progressions across units with Infantry Soldiers.

The EIB is part of the individual to collective training progression, designed to build confidence at the individual level before progressing to collective and mission-essential task training. Throughout my career, including earning my EIB in 1998, I witnessed the EIB building tremendous confidence to succeed and challenging me and other Infantry Soldiers to continue to strive for excellence over the last 30 years. The EIB event assists leaders in establishing more than well-trained Soldiers. Great units always established two consistent attributes — not measured in metrics, flow charts, or qualification scores — but in the positive climate and culture they established. The data and statistics are a by-product of a positive command climate and a culture that use the EIB and other team-building events to encourage personal growth and professional development. The EIB establishes

An NCO with the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division demonstrates how to properly execute a functions check on an M4 Carbine during Expert Infantryman Badge training on 23 April 2019.

Photo by SSG James Avery



the confidence and training repetition for all Infantry Soldiers to want to succeed and set themselves apart as experts, wanting to aspire to be more within the organization. Leaders who sustain the EIB training event solidify, through their deeds, that the opportunity for individual success of the Infantry Soldiers they lead is important to the command. It establishes a climate and culture that provide individual opportunity and can often be a catalyst for other mission-enhancing courses such as the Ranger, Master Gunner, and Jumpmaster Courses that increase the lethality of the collective organization. It is a simple human need to succeed. Nobody joins the Infantry to be average. Infantry Soldiers need a challenge. They need opportunities to contribute to something bigger than themselves. It is the core of who we are as Infantry Soldiers.

The integrity of the EIB is protected by the strict adherence to U.S. Army Infantry School (USAIS) Pamphlet 350-6, which is governed by the Infantry School Commandant and a team of USAIS EIB lane evaluators. The combination of EIB written standards, senior officer oversight, and NCO hands-on inspections maintain the integrity of the EIB program. The legacy of the EIB is maintained in this manner by preventing iterative deviation of the EIB over time, which would dilute and undermine the intent of original framework drafted by GEN Marshall and his team. On two occasions, while facilitating 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division's EIB and operating as an EIB Lane NCOIC for 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, I personally witnessed the USAIS EIB Committee act as not only the standard bearers for the EIB, but as a critical professional resource for the execution of the EIB to standard. The team on both occasions spent much of its time assisting in lane development and EIB packet validation by using best practices from across the entire enterprise. The unit's EIB senior leaders found the assistance invaluable and instrumental in training and testing to a consistent standard in both of those formations. In the current generation of our Army where outsourcing validation through virtual technology appears to be an efficient option, I caution that it will likely create iterative deviation, and we must be hesitant and vigilant before we attempt to change a process that has never failed to deliver excellence. The EIB measures consistent expertise across the entire Infantry Branch regardless of location because it is validated with one unified standard with no deviations.

Finally, the EIB is a five-day testing event that requires minimal resources, if followed in accordance with USAIS Pamphlet 350-6. It is best executed at the brigade level for maximum training throughput that measures expertise of Skill Level 1 infantry tasks by applying both physical and mental hardship in a controlled environment. I also find it to be a perfect example of This Is My Squad (TIMS) and the most genuine level of measurable leadership in our Army. It encapsulates



Photo by SSG Alan Brutus

MG James Jarrard, commanding general of the 25th Infantry Division, presents 1LT Andrew King, a mortar platoon leader in the 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, with the Expert Infantryman Badge at Schofield Barracks, HI, on 25 September 2020.

the essence of an Infantry squad by sharing in the hardship of the event; teaching, coaching, and mentoring; and producing results in a measurable example of effective leadership. Leaders who attempt to earn their EIB are true examples of humble leaders who inspire others to never stop learning, developing, and becoming better versions of themselves. When old Soldiers stop and ask, "What will this generation of Soldiers and leaders need to carry on the legacy that made us successful?" I think we all have an example of our days trying to stay true-blue on an EIB site with leaders who inspired us to succeed. It is my opinion, as we look for ways to decrease Combat Training Center (CTC) rotation safety violations, it is leader involvement and Infantry Soldier expertise that will inspire our next generation of Infantry leaders. We do not have to look for more classroom instruction or social media communications; it is right in front of us, the EIB... the mark of the Infantry Soldier.

CSM Robert K. Fortenberry served as the U.S. Army Infantry School command sergeant major at Fort Benning, GA, from 25 March 2019 until 25 February 2021. During his career, CSM Fortenberry served as a brigade command sergeant major, battalion command sergeant major, battalion operations sergeant major, operations sergeant, first sergeant, platoon sergeant, drill sergeant, U.S. Army Sniper School instructor, rifle squad leader, team leader, 4.2 inch mortar team member, M249 SAW gunner, grenadier, and rifleman. He has served with the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Battalion, 10th Mountain Division, Fort Drum, NY; 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment (SBCT), Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA; 173rd Special Troops Battalion (Airborne) in Bamberg, Germany; E Company, 2nd Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment, Fort Benning; A Company, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, TX; A Company, 3rd Battalion, 67th Armor Battalion, 4th Infantry Division, Fort Hood; B Company, 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry Regiment, Fort Benning; U.S. Army Sniper School, Fort Benning; and B Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Battalion, Schofield Barracks, HI. CSM Fortenberry has deployed four times to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Inherent Resolve and most recently to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.
