

# Re-energizing Modern Army Combatives

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As we emerge into the post-COVID pandemic era, there are numerous warrior tasks that must be re-energized into unit training plans (UTPs). The Modern Army Combatives Program (MACP) is one of these tasks.

After having to cease the program for almost a year and a half as a COVID mitigation measure due to the close nature of training, commanders and NCOs must now revive their unit- and installation-level combatives programs. Train as you fight is a principle which encourages training that replicates tough, realistic, and near-peer threats in complex combat scenarios.<sup>1</sup> The hand-to-hand capabilities of American Soldiers are an important weapon during close-quarter combat and non-lethal engagements.

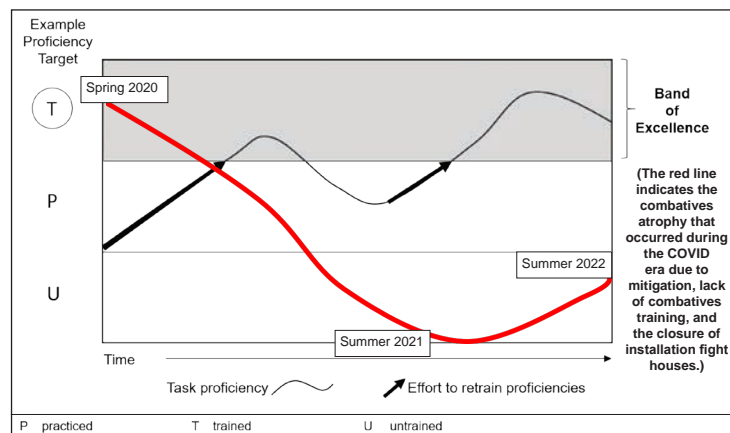
The global war on terrorism (GWOT) provided numerous lessons learned on the importance of Soldiers being able to protect and defend themselves in close quarters battle.<sup>2</sup> MACP provides the baseline fight strategy to ensure success on the battlefield. The program is applicable to all Soldiers regardless of military occupational specialty (MOS) or branch as all Soldiers are all trained to destroy the enemy first. MACP empowers and enables the fighting spirit of the American Soldier — the most decisive weapon on the battlefield.

## History of MACP

Martial arts have been a key part of military training since the earliest records of human history. It stands to reason that the importance of this training and its practical applications have been widely accepted throughout time. Throughout the years, we have also changed and adjusted martial arts techniques to meet modern challenges and ensure Soldiers have effective means by which to destroy the enemy. The Modern Army Combatives Program was created in 1995 with the purpose of refining hand-to-hand combat skills of Soldiers. At the time, a manual for combatives training (Field Manual 21-150, *Combatives*) existed, although it was very ambiguous in terms of how combatives would be introduced at the lowest unit level. The biggest questions that weren't answered in this manual included who was qualified to teach Soldiers and what made them qualified instructors? At the time, the qualifications of instructors varied — and so did the effectiveness of the training. In 1995, the 75th Ranger Regiment began reviewing the Army's combatives training and formulating improvements; these efforts led to the development of the current MACP, which has paid dividends on the varying battlefields during the 20-year GWOT campaign.

Matt Larsen and Greg Thompson are branded as the fathers of Modern Army Combatives because of their efforts to completely revise the archaic and partially lacking system of the 90's Army. In an effort to improve hand-to-hand fighting, it was paramount to develop a system of key movements (drills) and a fighting strategy.<sup>3</sup> MACP incorporated functions from multiple martial arts disciplines — such as judo, Jiu-Jitsu, wrestling, boxing, and Muay

Figure 1 — Proficiency Levels for Mission Tasks from FM 7-0





**Trainees compete in a battalion combatives tournament in April 2022 at Fort Jackson, SC. (Photos by 1LT Sydney Thorpe)**

Thai — to form the program’s foundation. The hybrid disciplines enabled modern Soldiers to protect, defend, and defeat the enemy on the battlefield. The renowned Royce Gracie plan of taking an opponent to the ground and then finishing the fight is a sound concept but requires repetitions and sets of practice in various environments. Today, in the post COVID-era, there are tactical gaps that exist with combatives competencies and capabilities of all Soldiers — especially our frontline fighters! Now is an opportune time to reintroduce the MACP and implement training plans to further prepare our force for future operations.

### **CATS aligned to Modern Army Combatives**

The Combined Arms Training Strategies (CATS) tool on the Army Training Network (ATN) can assist commanders with prioritizing unit task lists in order to build and maintain capabilities.<sup>4</sup> Some of the combatives tasks are sub-tasks to larger platoon, company, and battalion mission-essential tasks:

1. 071-COM-0512 - Perform Hand-to-Hand Combat
2. 19-PLT-3107 - Process Detainees at Point of Capture
3. 07-CO-1092 - Conduct an Attack - Rifle Company
4. 07-BN-1099 - Conduct a Raid
5. 07-BN-1181 - Conduct an Attack in an Urban Area

A Soldier who is equipped with all the physical, mental, and emotional attributes will succeed in the modern and ever-changing operating environment. We must ensure the competencies are aligned with these attributes for guaranteed success on the battlefield.

In order to inculcate these qualities and characteristics, we must plan, resource, and execute all training with the aim of replicating the conditions of combat. In combat, our Soldiers can expect to be exposed to situations whereby their physical limitations will be challenged greatly. The pressure, time sensitivity, and implications of war will induce stress and fatigue beyond that of what average civilians are likely to experience at any point of their lives. Such being the reality, Modern Army Combatives serves as one of our most effective tools to challenge physical limitations and induce extreme stress, while at the same time imparting skills and techniques upon Soldiers that may save their lives or the lives of others in combat.

### **Unit Training Plans in Basic Combat Training (BCT)**

BCT units transform civilians into Soldiers during a 10-week period. The Army expects that Soldiers are properly trained on the required mission-essential tasks (METs) before graduating and continuing on to their Advanced Individual Training (AIT). Performing hand-to-hand combat was one MET that was taken off the core map during



**Trainees in 1st Battalion, 61st Infantry Regiment grapple during a battalion combatives tournament in April 2022 at Fort Jackson.**

COVID. During this period, Soldiers arrived to their first duty assignments without any combatives experience and resulted in units having to teach these basics to newly arrived Soldiers, which delayed other essential training. This was a detriment to the force; re-introducing MACP into the BCT plan is essential.

During BCT, there are four main phases (Yellow, Red, White, and Blue) that progressively teach trainees how to effectively be a member of a team. In order to effectively train combatives in the BCT environment, introducing combatives after Red Phase allows trainees to piece together the core skills taught in earlier phases before beginning hand-to-hand combat training. In MET 071-COM-0512 (Perform Hand-to-Hand Combat), trainees are expected to learn Drills 1, 2, and 3 from Training Circular (TC) 3.25-150, *Combatives*.

**Drill 1:**

- A. Arm Trap and Roll
- B. Pass the Guard
- C. Achieve Mount from Side Control

**Drill 2:**

- A. Arm Push and Roll to the Rear Mount
- B. Rear Naked Choke
- C. Escape the Rear Mount

**Drill 3:**

- A. Escape the Mount, Shrimp to the Guard
- B. Scissors Sweep
- C. Cross Collar Choke from the Mount
- D. Straight Arm Bar from the Guard
- E. Sweep from the attempted Straight Arm Bar

In order to effectively instruct trainees in a battalion, each company should have at least one Level II Combatives instructor/master trainer with at least four Level I Combatives instructors. This allows seamless instruction and effective results as trainees are able to learn from multiple certified instructors. Training combatives in BCT will ingrain in these future Soldiers the importance of winning on the battlefield no matter the circumstance.

As mentioned previously, introducing combatives after Red Phase has proven to be more effective based on the established skills learned in previous phases. Utilizing non-program of instruction (POI) days to introduce combatives is imperative to ensure all drills are properly taught and trained. BCT companies able to effectively train combatives during weeks 5, 6, and 9 of each training cycle complete a cumulative of 20 hours of instruction. These weeks consist of rifle marksmanship and recovery operations respectively. This allowed for drill sergeants and cadre to effectively home in on critical METs without overwhelming required POI days. During week 9, the master

trainer was able to effectively train selected trainees (based off of the order of merit list) to be certified in Level I combatives. Every trainee received at least 20 hours of training and will be of instant value to their next unit and to the U.S. Army. In addition to trainees, the master trainer also trains cadre members to Level I or Level II standards quarterly to ensure that instructors remain certified to train our next generation of Soldiers.

### **Reinvigorating the Importance of Combatives Training**

In order to capitalize on the importance of combatives, top Soldiers in heavy/light categories from each company competed against one another in front of the entire battalion in Week 10. The action that occurred in these exhibition bouts generated fruitful conversations that provoked thought among the trainees. More importantly, however, is what takes place within individuals when they willfully enter mutual combat, in front of a large crowd, knowing that they will either win or lose. This creates an immense amount of stress and pressure that will pay dividends in future combat. Situations such as these introduce variables that cannot readily be measured in their entirety, and, henceforth, the propensity for negative outcomes increases. When the winner is announced, he/she is overcome by happiness, joy, pride, and confidence. The loser must deal with the loss in front of teammates and leverage necessary resiliency skills to bounce back and move forward.

On 5 April 2022, Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) fighter Colby “Chaos” Covington visited Fort Jackson, SC, and spent the day with 1st Battalion, 61st Infantry Regiment for an external review of combatives training. Covington is currently the number 1-ranked UFC welterweight (170 lbs) fighter in the world and holds numerous credentials across the various martial art disciplines, including UFC Champion. He is a huge supporter of the military, and before his accolades in the UFC, he was an accomplished collegiate athlete from Oregon earning an NCAA D1 wrestling championship.

The visit from a top-ranked UFC fighter undoubtedly boosted morale and esprit de corps within our battalion. Covington stated, “The 1-61 combatives program is exactly what I’d hope [for] and expect of our Army Soldiers; grounded in the Warrior Ethos and professionally executed the MACP. These finite details to combatives training are evident through the disciplined Soldiers about to graduate and will prove [to be] a powerful weapon on the battlefield. I am proud to stand among real American Warriors!”

Combatives training directly aligns and supports the Army’s Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) program when planned, resourced, and executed properly. We as Army leaders (officers and NCOs) must re-energize the MACP program in a similar fashion to how drastic changes were made in the late 1995 era.



**Professional relationships and partnerships matter. UFC fighter Colby Covington offered pro-tips during a visit to Fort Jackson in April 2022.**

### Modern Army Combatives Recommendations Moving Forward

1. Establish combatives UTP aligned with CATS/METs.
2. Certify trainers for Levels I and II and Master Combatives Trainers.
3. Baseline train skill level one Soldiers.
4. Incorporate combatives training into physical readiness training.
5. Leverage all training aides at Training and Support Center (TASC) — pugils, Blauer suits, training knives/pistols.
6. Incorporate combatives training into mutually supporting METs:
  1. Airfield seizures;
  2. Raid (Enter and Clear a Room);
  3. Offensive Operations; and
  4. Detainee Operations.
7. Host quarterly or semi-annually combatives tournaments.
8. Re-establish installation-level fight houses.
9. Establish partnerships with local universities, fight clubs/houses, and dojos.
10. Lastly, as we re-energize combatives, implement a color rigger's belt system to identify combatives skill classification (for example, ocp = student/entry level, tan = Level 1, green = Level 2, black = Master Combatives).

NCOs, train as you fight! Commanders, fight to train!<sup>5</sup> We challenge all leaders at every echelon to ensure combatives training is implemented into unit training programs. The tenacity of the American Soldier is the most important intangible on the modern battlefield.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Field Manual (FM) 7-0, *Training*, June 2021.

<sup>2</sup> One of the authors, CSM Sword, knows firsthand and recalls using combatives during countless engagements with unarmed hostile combatants while fighting house to house in downtown Baghdad as an infantry team and squad leader with the 82nd Airborne Division.

<sup>3</sup> Special Operations Combatives Program and Modern Army Combatives Program, accessed from <https://ussocp.com/history/macp/>.

<sup>4</sup> Army Training Network, accessed from <https://atn.army.mil/ATNPortalUI/CATS/>.

<sup>5</sup> FM 7-0.

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**1SG Stephen M. Hodgson** currently serves as first sergeant/senior operations NCO for the U.S. Army Parachute Team at Fort Bragg, NC. His previous assignments include serving as a long range surveillance team leader, rifle platoon sergeant, and scout platoon sergeant at Fort Bragg; Ranger instructor with the 6th Ranger Training Battalion at Eglin Air Force Base, FL; and first sergeant with companies in the 2nd and 3rd Brigades of the 82nd Airborne Division.

**1LT Kelli M. Vetter** currently serves as the battalion operations officer for 1-61 IN. Her previous assignments include serving as the executive officer of E Company, 1-61 IN, and a platoon leader in the 46th Composite Truck Company. 1LT Vetter earned a bachelor's degree in international security at the University of Washington. She's currently a graduate student with the University of Tennessee.