

Training for the Army's New M4 Qualification

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The new Army marksmanship M4A1 carbine qualification course of fire is a more complex and realistic evaluation of lethality. The integration of barriers, unprompted reloading, and firing position transitions provide leadership with a challenging task for training Soldiers.

Company-Level Rifle Marksmanship Programs

Any company's rifle marksmanship program needs to start with the identification, training, and certification of marksmanship trainers. The Marksmanship Master Trainer Course (MMTC) at Fort Benning, GA, provides units with marksmanship trainers who understand how to train marksmanship and can assist commanders in planning and implementing a marksmanship training strategy.¹ In the 198th Infantry Brigade, which conducts Infantry One Station Unit Training (OSUT) at Fort Benning, companies have one MMTC-qualified drill sergeant per platoon. As a result, companies routinely maintain marksmanship averages from 34-36 each training cycle with 235 Infantry recruits.

In establishing an effective company-level marksmanship program, send as many NCOs as possible to the MMTC—one per platoon at the very least. Acknowledging that some units do not have the luxury of having the MMTC



A trainee in the 2nd Battalion, 54th Infantry Regiment, 198th Infantry Brigade, fires his rifle during marksmanship training at Fort Benning, GA. (Photos courtesy of authors)

right down the road, battalions should find every available opportunity to send their NCOs to school; a perfect opportunity would be reserving an MMTC slot pending an NCO's graduation from either Advanced Leader Course or Senior Leader Course. Sending NCOs to MMTC still might not be an option to some units either due to training calendars or funding. Under these circumstances, divisions should look to establish their own satellite "Master Marksmanship Course." The 25th Infantry Division's Lightning Marksmanship Instructor Course and the 10th Mountain Division's Rifle Marksmanship Instructor Course are just two examples of units providing their Soldiers with a local training course nesting with the principles taught at the MMTC.

Rifle Marksmanship Progression – A Way

At Infantry OSUT, rifle marksmanship includes 19 different training periods spanning roughly three weeks. Within the first 72 hours of the trainees' arrival, we issue their weapons and conduct weapons immersion training. This block of instruction includes the four tenets of weapons safety and a foundational knowledge base of the characteristics and capabilities of the M4A1 carbine. Over the next two weeks — and prior to even getting on a live-fire range — trainees will conduct concurrent training on rifle marksmanship. All of this concurrent training is meant to ensure a trainee's success on the range, prior to them even firing live rounds. They will then progress to training in the Engagement Skills Trainer (EST) for basic grouping techniques and practice.

Live marksmanship training begins with executing a group/zero with back-up iron sights and progresses through the EST (single/multiple targets) to a location of misses and hits (LOMAH) range. At the LOMAH range, trainees confirm their zeroes at 175 and 300 meters respectively. Any units that have the opportunity to train at LOMAH ranges should absolutely do so. These ranges allow the drill sergeants (or any marksmanship trainer) to simultaneously view 16 different shooters' target groups using a handheld tablet. Similar tablets are set up at each firing position in order to give immediate feedback to shooters of where their rounds are hitting the target. From a trainer perspective, this presents a shooter with two possible coaches: a battle buddy who is monitoring the shooter with the individual results and the cadre with the 16-view tablet. The cadre member can identify lanes with shooters who are struggling and redirect a leader to provide some additional and personal coaching. Moreover, LOMAH ranges provide the opportunity for trainees' to utilize their holds at proper distances; this allows them to understand the difference between the point of aim versus the point of impact.

After executing LOMAH training and additional periods in the EST, trainees execute single/multiple target training (on a 300-meter range) and then conduct a qualification. After the qualification with back-up iron sight, the entire marksmanship process resets and restarts implementing the M68 Close Combat Optic (CCO). After executing single/multiple target training, there is room in the training glide path to train with barriers, on moving targets, and execute a number of practice qualifications. Around the fourth week of being on the range, trainees will execute their record qualification with the CCO, culminating the rifle marksmanship training period. Throughout the Infantry OSUT rifle marksmanship period, trainees will expend approximately 1,000 rounds of ammunition.

Concurrent Training

Just like any operation, concurrent training must be planned deliberately to achieve a specific desired end state. When planning for rifle marksmanship training, this end state is all trainees (or Soldiers in a given company) qualifying expert on their assigned weapon.

All concurrent training must start with and build upon the functional elements of the shot process (stability, aim, control, and movement).² The most basic dry-fire drills are listed and explained in Appendix D of Training Circular (TC) 3-22.9: *Rifle and Carbine*. Despite the necessity to focus on magazine changes and transitions, it is imperative that units continue to begin their progression (and enforce) with the basics of stability: body position, natural point of aim, correctly holding the rifle, and posture. After mastering the shot process, companies must deliberately plan concurrent training to incorporate transitioning positions, fighting up on the barrier, and executing magazine changes.³

Shadow boxes and transition barrels have continuously proven to be the most effective training aids. Shadow boxes are extremely portable and can be set up virtually anywhere — even and especially in the bays. Transition barrels are just standard metal drums with four ALT-C targets fixed around the outside. These, too, are relatively portable. Using the transition barrels allows Soldiers to practice their shot process, holds, and eventually become proficient with the new course of fire. The biggest challenge that most units at OSUT face is reinforcing the necessity of



A drill sergeant with the 2nd Battalion, 54th Infantry Regiment looks over a trainee's shoulder to assess target acquisition and points of impact.

utilizing proper holds at a given distance. LOMAH ranges do help build repetition; however, holds can be easily emphasized using transition barrels.

Magazine changes cannot be ignored, especially with the new course of fire. Executing training of magazine changes is easy to facilitate and can be done anywhere at any time. It is important, however, to incorporate malfunctions into any and all concurrent training. Despite having a deliberate concurrent training plan augmenting a training glide path, it is important to note that some issues will arise throughout training that require involved leadership. Plan for a number of trainers to focus on “hardcore” shooters that simply do not understand the basics and allot them the proper resources and time to work with these Soldiers.

To be successful (and lethal) as a unit, it is absolutely necessary that leaders implement concurrent training and dry-fire drills daily. This makes the functional elements of the shot process a habit that can be easily replicated on the range.

Thinking through the Training Cycle

TC 3-20.0, *Integrated Weapons Training Strategy*, outlines six tables pertaining to an individual weapon training strategy.⁴ These tables are divided into “Prerequisites to Live Fire” (Tables I, II, and III) and “Live-Fire Events” (Tables IV, V, and VI):

- Table I: Preliminary Marksmanship Instruction and Evaluation
- Table II: Preliminary Live Fire Simulations
- Table III: Drills
- Table IV: Basic
- Table V: Practice
- Table VI: Qualification

The TC also states that the above tables can be executed in 4.5 training days.⁵ This includes conducting Table III (drills) throughout the other live-fire training events as concurrent training. Units can and should plan for much more time dedicated to weapons strategy. Ideally, units have at least two weeks to execute individual weapons training. This will allow ample time to deliberately instruct, practice, train, and execute so as to ensure all Soldiers can become as lethal as possible.

Preliminary Marksmanship Instruction and Evaluation (PMIE) cannot be ignored, even in tactical units. At Infantry OSUT, as previously described, units often take a week to conduct proper PMIE. Even though these are

civilians, it is important to not just assume that every Soldier has a proper understanding of weapons safety, weapon manipulation, and the functional elements of the shot process (this last one is especially uncommon knowledge across any unit — just ask). In taking the time to teach a number of classes for PMIE, leaders also create opportunities for concurrent training based off the classes given. This way, units can build more range time for themselves by getting ahead of Table III: Drills.

The Army is constantly moving more towards the execution of virtual training due to availability, cost, and effectiveness. Preliminary live-fire simulations are an extremely effective tool because they allow trainers to identify issues early and in a low-threat environment; better to fix these issues in the EST rather than out at the range, wasting precious time and ammunition. Taking the time to conduct effective virtual training will facilitate a more efficient training event on the range, not to mention the fact that these virtual training events can (and should) be broken up and reinforced with concurrent training drills. At Infantry OSUT, units typically spend four to five days in the EST. On the line, units might execute a day of EST, then move out to the range. The recommendation is to not just “check the block” on virtual training, but plan for it to occur throughout the weapons training glide path: use the EST up front, go to the range, use the EST to fix issues, reinforce good habits, and then go back out to the range. Implementing virtual training throughout — not just up front — will actually save time, resources, and effort for every unit.

When it comes to Tables IV-V, repetition is key, especially with the new course of fire. At this point, units ideally have no issues with Soldiers understanding and executing the functional elements of the shot process. This will allow trainers to focus on transitions and magazine changes for concurrent training, creating familiarity with the scenario. The more exposure Soldiers get with the course of fire, the more proficient and lethal they will become.



A trainee in the 2nd Battalion, 54th Infantry Regiment prepares to fire from a barrier during marksmanship training.

Notes

¹ <https://www.benning.army.mil/Infantry/199th/MMTC/>

² Training Circular (TC) 3-22.9, *Rifle and Carbine*, May 2016, 5-11.

³ Note: In the new course of fire, magazine retention is not required.

⁴ TC 3-20.0, *Integrated Weapons Training Strategy*, June 2019, Table 3-1.

⁵ TC 3-20.40, *Training and Qualification – Individual Weapons*, July 2019, 1-38.

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