

# Building Overmatch

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In 2017 GEN Mark A. Milley laid out modernization priorities in order for Soldiers to become “more lethal.” Lethality quickly became the buzzword in the halls of the institution and from the podiums of instructors. Have NCOs stopped to think about that word and defined it? Lethality is nothing more than being capable of causing death or being deadly in the application of force. Running with scissors is therefore an exercise in lethality. The focus should be on overmatch. Overmatch is applying a learned skill, employing equipment, leveraging technology, and applying proper force to create an unfair fight in favor of the Soldier. It requires a Soldier to be smart, fast, lethal, and precise. Lethality is one functional element of overmatch, but we need to train on all four. As leaders in the profession of combat arms, how do we build overmatch? How do we make it more than just a word to our Soldiers? In order to be lethal in current and future operations, Soldiers need to be able to overmatch the enemy. The Marksmanship Master Trainer Course (MMTC) and U.S. Army Sniper Course (USASC) transform Soldiers from novices into proficient employers and trainers of the equipment required to achieve overmatch.

Overmatch fundamentally begins with Soldiers — each one coming from different parts of the country and possibly the world. Each brand new Soldier experiences initial training differently and may be struggling with past experiences. In order for Soldiers to perform, they need to be grounded and healthy. Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness (CSF2) is often scoffed at, but it is a critical part to ensuring Soldiers show up ready to perform. The five pillars are physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and family. Anyone struggling or failing to communicate about issues in these pillars is already at a disadvantage and may be performing poorly in the organization. NCOs cannot expect to achieve overmatch and deliver lethality if they cannot understand what is going on in their squad and guide Soldiers in improving these facets.

In order for the U.S. Army to achieve overmatch, it needs Soldiers to perform tasks. These tasks cover multiple domains but all require performance. The ability to perform tasks builds overmatch and drives lethality. In addition to individual task proficiency, individual weapons proficiencies form the backbone of the unit’s ability to execute more complex and dynamic collective training under live-fire conditions and ultimately the unit’s ability to successfully execute operational missions. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 7-0, *Training*, also states that



A Soldier assigned to the 2nd Cavalry Regiment fires his M4 carbine during the Marksmanship Master Trainer Course at Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, on 3 February 2021. (Photo by SPC Zack Stahlberg)



**Sniper Course students practice engaging targets from a hasty urban position.  
(Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army Sniper Course)**

an integral component of collective training includes the successful and lethal employment of a unit's weapon systems.<sup>1</sup> This training is tied not just to a Soldier's proficiency with individually assigned weapons, but also to the proficiencies gained as part of collective teams. Proficiency in both crew-served and platform weapon systems requires the same level of constant attention and training as those at the individual level. NCOs and Soldiers need dedicated training to learn these skills, employ the equipment, leverage technology, and apply the proper force.

A Soldier learns the employment of weapons and equipment during Initial Entry Training (IET) and Advanced Individual Training (AIT) or One Station Unit Training (OSUT). Soldiers are exposed to multiple weapon systems, attachments, and equipment. They are required to display base-level knowledge on the equipment and then are sent to a duty station. NCOs are then required to pick up the training and build Soldiers' experience. Without dedicated courses that build mastery of training, NCOs are just regurgitating what they can remember from experience or their initial training.

The MMTC and USASC provide doctrinally based training and performance-oriented evaluations. Soldiers who attend the USASC learn technical and tactical skills that provide a commander with the ability to deliver long-range precision fires on select targets, targets of opportunity, and the critical ability of collecting and reporting battlefield information. The course is open to 11B, 19D, or 18-series Soldiers in the rank of private first class to staff sergeant. Graduates earn the additional skill identifier of B4. Snipers and their ability to achieve overmatch for the formation through precision fires, indirect fires, and information reporting is eroding slowly across the U.S. Army. Soldiers need to utilize the tools available to them and the lessons they learned in the course to communicate effectiveness. The doctrine, tasks, and historical data is there. Communication needs to be achieved not just verbally but through demonstrated proficiency and performance in training. Commanders and command sergeants major should not forget to man and assess these assets within their formation. NCOs who run these platoons and squads need to doctrinally assess and prepare these Soldiers. Send them to the course with knowledge and potential. The unit will only be better for it.

Through 18 years of continuous operations, the U.S. Army knows how Soldiers are tested on the battlefield. NCOs and commanders recognize that rifle and pistol qualifications demonstrate a baseline proficiency on these weapons alone. Every target is stationary, a threat, and presents itself at known distances for specified times. It sets a baseline standard to ensure Soldiers can safely manipulate their weapon, engage the target, and not hurt themselves or anyone left and right of them. Soldiers are required to execute these qualifications once a year. Lessons learned in combat and from watching our adversaries prepare and engage in conflict demonstrate that a higher degree of performance is necessary to achieve overmatch.

NCOs must train Soldiers past the ability to load, fire, reduce stoppage, and maintain a rifle or pistol. These tasks are skill level one and simple. Even scores on qualification do not demonstrate overmatch or lethality because nicking



**A Sniper Course student participates in the ghillie wash on 5 February 2021.  
(Photo by Patrick A. Albright)**

the target achieves the same result as a center of visible mass strike. The MMTC trains sergeants through sergeants first class on how to train to and after qualification on the rifle/carbine, pistol, and M249 Squad Automatic Rifle, and build unit training plans for them as well as the squad designated marksman rifle and sniper weapon systems. Graduates of this five-week course are proficient at each table of the weapon training strategy and how to plan it for the unit. They receive extensive training on how to train past qualification on weapons and equipment both day and night. These NCOs receive the additional skill identifier of E1 and know how to plan, prepare, execute, and assess this training for your unit. The course is open to all Military Occupational Specialties.

MMTC does not just teach these NCOs how to shoot. Inherently it will improve Soldiers' performance, but it builds NCOs who can doctrinally train the formation and avoid skill regression or deterioration. Without marksmanship master trainers (MMTs), the Army cannot truly achieve overmatch. Soldiers need to be trained and immersed in the training circulars that MMTC trains your NCOs on. MMTs are the bridge between the environment and the Soldier. They can build or design training that trains Soldiers on how and when to apply the proper amount of force to attain an unfair advantage over the threat. This includes employment of equipment to its maximum effective range, moving targets, environmental conditions, limited exposure targets, multiple targets, threat and non-threat decision making, and overall understanding of the direct fire engagement and shot processes.

The most important part in force modernization has to be Soldiers and the NCOs who train them. The U.S. Army will continue to fund, test, and approve materiel solutions for Soldiers. These are amazing solutions that in the end still need professionals operating them. The need for NCOs and Soldiers to truly understand performance is critical.

*In operations, Soldiers and units are led by trained and qualified leaders — officers and NCOs. These leaders have a direct and decisive role in unit training. NCOs are directly responsible for training individual Soldiers, crews, and small teams. Additionally, NCOs coach other NCOs, advise senior leaders, and help develop junior officers. Leaders implement a strong chain of command, high esprit de corps, and good discipline. As the unit trains, leaders mentor, guide, listen to, and offer solutions by thinking with subordinates to challenge their depth of knowledge and understanding.<sup>2</sup>*

Soldiers need to know individual performance, team or collective performance, and how they fit into higher echelon performance. NCOs need to continually seek new information, experiment and improve the ability to explain and demonstrate performance, as well as assess their Soldiers' performance. Soldiers cannot stop learning or striving to achieve certifications or qualifications. It cannot be good enough to say you know information. Performance cannot be talked about; it has to be trained, measured, and improved. The goal of training should be to obtain the most progress you can make in the time allotted. This means doing as much work as your body and mind can handle... productively.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Army Doctrine Publication 7-0, *Training*, July 2019, 1-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 3-5.

At the time this article was written, **1SG Kevin L. Sipes** was serving as the first sergeant of the Combat Marksmanship Company (C Company, 1st Battalion, 29th Infantry Regiment), overseeing the U.S. Army Sniper Course and U.S. Army Marksmanship Master Trainer Course at Fort Benning, GA. 1SG Sipes currently serves as a first sergeant in the 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade.



**A Soldier assigned to the 2nd Cavalry Regiment fires his M4 carbine during the Marksmanship Master Trainer Course at Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, on 3 February 2021. (Photo by SPC Zack Stahlberg)**