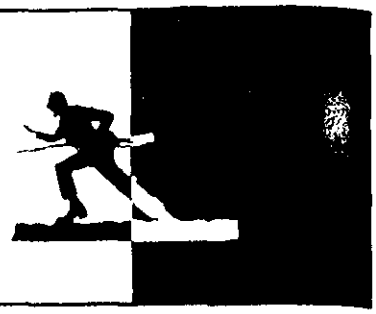
TRAINING NOTES



THE BAYONET

JOHN P. GARZONE

After a ten-year absence from the Army's training calendar, bayonet training has reappeared — much to the delight of some and the despair of others. Although many soldiers feel that the bayonet is little more than an expedient can opener, and should remain so, the bayonet has found staunch support with others who feel it embodies an infantry soldier's will to fight. The question today, though, isn't whether soldiers should have a bayonet, but rather how they should use it. The answer depends upon your view of modern combat.

THE GREAT DEBATE

Any proponent of bayonet training will quickly tell you its most important result as he sees it: The training promotes aggressiveness and confidence in each soldier. He believes that hand-to-hand combat is the most feared and desperate of situations, and that only a trained bayonet fighter can survive it and win. This view is usually countered by the observation that there is little need for bayonet fighting in an age of automatic weapons and mutually supported firepower. Those who argue against the bayonet feel that bayonet fighting is an undesirable if not unacceptable tactic. Both sides can call upon a mountain of historical data and experience to argue their cases.

The bayonet saw its greatest use during World War I when an infantry assault with fixed bayonets was the only way ground could be gained and then held against resistance. The soldiers who did not use their bayonets aggressively paid the price. The arrival of the machinegun shortened the day of the bayonet and its use decreased as automatic weapons multiplied.

During World War II, the bayonet was confined to small and desperate engagements or individual acts of heroism, and its mere use in combat became remarkable and awe-inspiring. For most, it became a forgotten weapon and the bayonet fighter a ghost of the past.

Today, the trained bayonet fighter is coming back, and whether you love it or hate it bayonet training is here again. So, what's a trained bayonet fighter?

According to the War Department's 1918 bayonet training manual, a trained bayonet fighter was a soldier who could disable or kill an opponent with a fixed bayonet using any of four basic attack movements. Those same four movements are taught today at Fort Benning to all new infantrymen in a program of instruction called Instinctive Rifle Bayonet Fighting (IRBF) techniques.

IRBF stresses the four attack movements and is aimed at training a soldier to use them quickly and instinctively if the need ever arises. The instruction program covers nine hours, which are divided into six hours on learning the movements and three hours on a bayonet assault course.

The new infantrymen first learn the attack movements on a drill pad with each soldier alternately playing offensive and defensive roles. During the six one-hour periods, each soldier learns the thrust, butt stroke, slash, and smash attacks and how to combine them with parry and blocking movements. The emphasis is on the offense, and the soldiers are continually urged to take the initiative and press the attack. Aggressiveness is a main goal of the training — and

certainly teaches that.

After they have learned the four basic attack movements, the new soldiers are put through a specially constructed bayonet assault course, which is 460 meters long and quite tough to negotiate. The path of the course leads around and up a hill in much the same way an assault route would in an actual combat situation. Obstacles and bayonet targets are spotted along the course.

The soldiers first run the course in groups of ten, negotiating the obstacles and pausing at each target to deliver, on command, a specific bayonet attack. Each soldier is evaluated on how well he executes the movements, and on his aggressiveness, control of his weapon, balance, speed, and use of the proper movement techniques to get over the obstacles. Individual instruction is given on the spot to any soldier who encounters problems.

On their second run through the course, the soldiers are required to run the course as fast as possible while negotiating all the obstacles and attacking all the targets.

ADDING IT UP

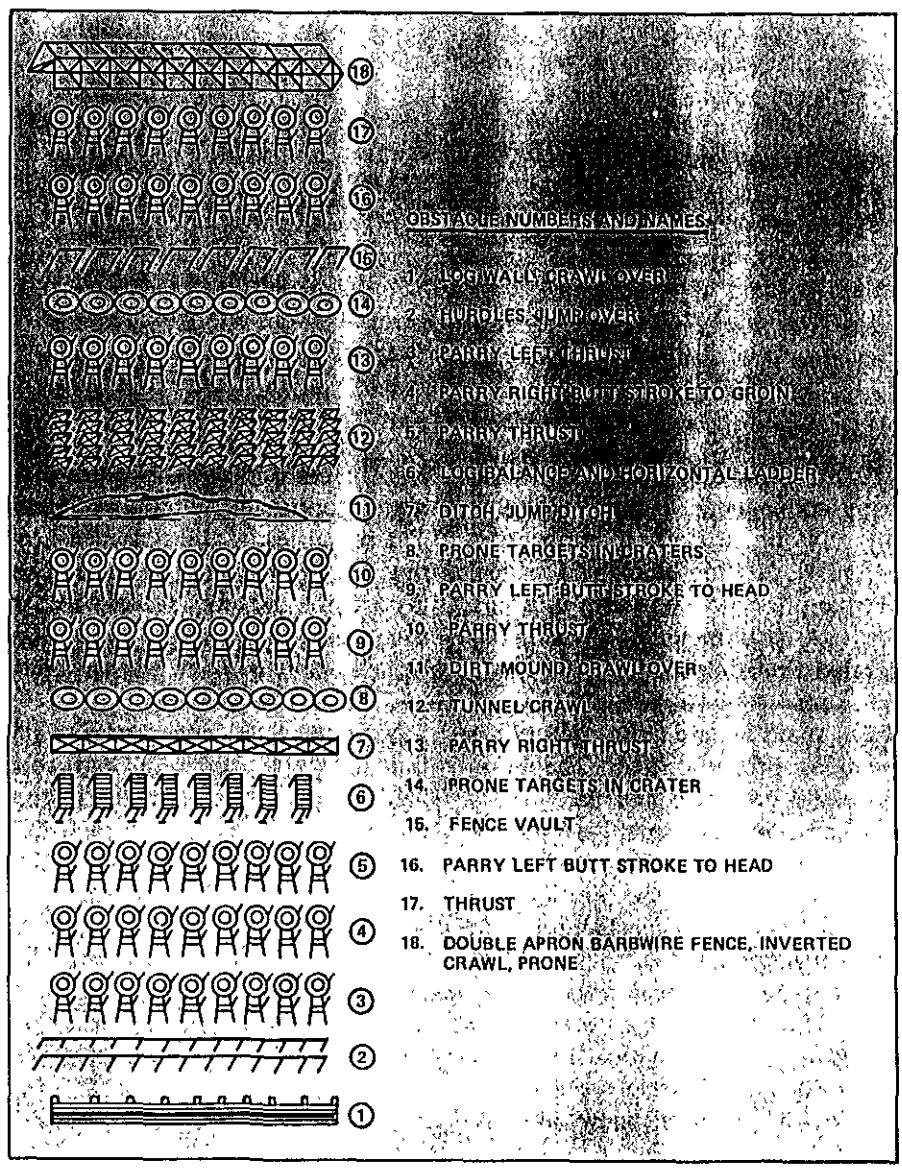
The bayonet training program at Fort Benning gets high marks for promoting aggressiveness and confidence, and it does have the advantage of reinforcing physical conditioning, methods of movement, and bayonet attack techniques all at the same time. But there are some problems.

The doctrine on the use of the bayonet has not changed significantly over the years, in spite of the dramatic changes that have been made in the Army's weapons and tactics. The basic moves and countermoves of bayonet fighting are well known and practiced by all of the world's major armies. In effect this creates a static condition with no one having a particular tactical advantage — unless the advantage is the weapon itself.

If it is the weapon, the U.S. Army may have a problem. The bayonet it now issues to its soldiers has been reduced in length to six and one-half inches, it used to be as long as 14 inches. The soldier's rifle — the M16A1 — has also been reduced to a size and a construction never intended for bayonet fighting. Since other military forces still feature stronger weapons and longer bayonets, this puts the U.S. infantryman at a distinct disadvantage. Further, it is uncertain whether the present bayonet can be mounted or used effectively on the M203. This equipment problem is especially noteworthy, because the new infantrymen at Fort Benning must use a simulated rifle made of rubber when they run the bayonet assault course to avoid damaging their M16 rifles.

Although the current bayonet training program aspires to teach a quick and aggressive bayonet attack with instinctive reactions, it does not actually provide for such an attack since there is no live opponent. On the drill pad, the students are taught to execute the attack movements on command. But on the course itself, the targets cannot react to an attack. In the past, the Army used the pugil stick, which, though it occasionally caused injuries, did give a degree of realism to the training. Today, there is no form of pugil stick training.

Finally, there is no provision at the present time to make sure the training is reinforced at a soldier's permanent duty station. So while the new program makes an interesting and motivating break in the routine of physical training at a training center,



it is not yet on the training calendar of the Army's TOE infantry battalions.

Bayonet training is a constant subject of conflict for commanders and trainers alike, because it reminds everyone of the ultimate job of the infantryman to disable or kill an enemy soldier. Technology and terminology have not made this job any easier to learn or any less deadly to practice. Today's bayonet training shows that the Army can produce an aggressive and confident bayonet fighter. What it needs to do now is to match that spirit with the best equipment and techniques it can provide.

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Individual Training

CAPTAIN WARREN D. WILSON

In my initial field exercise as a company commander, I directed one of my platoon leaders to prepare a defensive position blocking a critical avenue of approach. I also told him to use a hasty minefield. When I inspected the completed platoon position sometime later, I found the men well placed and the platoon's weapons properly sited. The hasty minefield area also had been neatly blocked with engineer tape. The platoon leader was convinced that his platoon could hold the position and cited many tactical considerations to support his conviction.

But there was a major flaw in his plan. The squad he had assigned to put in the hasty minefield in reality could not have done so, because not one of its soldiers knew how to emplace, arm, disarm, or recover the antipersonnel and antitank mines. The squad leader did not even know how to record a hasty minefield. And neither the platoon leader nor the squad leader knew what type of mines or how many of them were available in the unit's basic load.

My immediate concern was to find out how this situation had come about. I discovered that the platoon had been tested on hasty minefields a year earlier during an ARTEP evaluation, and that it had passed. Since then, however, because of the rapid pace of field training exercises, it had not practiced installing hasty minefields. Instead, minefields had always been simulated, because the "men know how to install them anyway." Unfortunately, many of the men who had known what to do had left the unit.

I also discovered in all of the platoons other deficiencies in individual skills in basic combat readiness, which pointed to inadequate individual and squad level training. Many reasons for this were cited, but the one repeated most often was the lack of time. Competing requirements, many said, took scheduled individual training time away from the squad leaders. (This, of course, also gave a weak squad leader a ready excuse for the poorly trained soldiers in his squad.)

As I checked further, I became convinced that lack of time was chiefly a convenient excuse. True, it was difficult to schedule formal training time, but there was unscheduled tim