



A SOLDIER

# SUSTAINMENT TRAINING

The United States Army's approach to training has passed through several distinct phases during the past fifteen years or so. It was about that long ago that the Army's trainers came to the realization that performance oriented, or hands-on, training should be student- and not instructor-centered and that students learned better, in most cases, by actually doing the training tasks. At the same time, the instructors realized that a student's proficiency in a particular skill had to be verified, again preferably by having the student actually do it.

But many trainers did not appreciate all the ramifications of the tasks, conditions, and standards as they were spelled out in the Soldier's Manuals and the ARTEPs, which were then new on the training scene.

This attitude has begun to change. There is now a growing realization that if a soldier is expected to maintain his proficiency in a specific skill, he will need to be trained in that skill more often than once a year. What the Army needs today, many trainers believe, are training programs that are designed to sustain a soldier's proficiency rather than the kinds of annual training programs the Army uses.

Unfortunately, this idea is still not universally accepted throughout the Army. Nor is the idea of evaluating a soldier's proficiency several times a year, although this latter point is one that has been made repeatedly in several recent studies of the Army's training methods and programs.

Admittedly, the idea of sustainment training is an abstract one. No one can say for certain just how often it should be conducted. And it may nor may not sufficiently recognize just how important individual intelligence, motivation, or job knowledge are to a training program.

Take, for example, a class on training a soldier to set the correct headspace and timing on a .50 caliber machinegun. Fifteen years ago, such a class would have been largely instructor-oriented and a training inspector would have looked for an attendance report — to make sure all the soldiers who were supposed to be present were actually present — and for suitable training aids. The inspector probably would have been more concerned with the instructor's method of presentation than with what the students were getting from the class.

Five years ago, an inspector looking at the same kind of class would have made sure the proper tasks, conditions, and standards were being taught, and that the class had been scheduled on a prescribed frequency, perhaps once a month, or as often as that particular unit commander had determined it was needed. In addition, most inspectors would have felt that if the training was to be effective, everyone in the unit had to be present at the same time. Thus, the training inspector would have concentrated on verifying the training schedule and on determining personnel accountability.

Now consider three typical soldiers in today's Army who need the same instruction on setting the correct headspace and timing on the .50 caliber machinegun. You, their unit commander, have said that you want this particular bit of training to be conducted every month.

One of the three soldiers, let's call him Smith, is a highly motivated young man, probably Category III or Category IV, not well coordinated physically but certain that one day he will be the Sergeant Major of the Army. He listens carefully, and will practice something over and over again if he does not completely understand it. If you say you want him to do something, he will do it. Smith probably needs to practice headspace and timing once every six to eight weeks, rather than every month.

Next is Rogers, by every statistical measurement a "super soldier." He is a high school graduate and ranks either in Category I or Category II. Unfortunately, he is not mature and appears to have little desire to learn or to perform any better than he has to. It seems that half of what goes in one ear comes out the other without ever being interrupted by his brain. He is not necessarily a bad soldier, only an immature one. If you really want Rogers to know headspace and timing, you will probably have to refresh his skills at least once every two weeks.

Hernandez is the third soldier. He knows little English and prefers to read and speak in his native Spanish. Since you don't know Spanish, you really don't understand him. For certain, he doesn't understand you.

Each of these soldiers represents a particular training challenge, and they point up the fact that your carefully thought out sustainment training program for a particular skill simply will not give you trained, motivated soldiers. With that program, you are not training one of them often enough, you are probably training another more often than necessary, and you really cannot evaluate the training the third one needs until you find a satisfactory way of communicating with him. What can be done?

Too many of today's trainers, it is sad to say, are still process-oriented. That is, they make sure that the training schedule is correct, that all the soldiers scheduled to receive the training are accounted for, and that the instruction is presented in an organized, effective manner. The training itself, therefore, is procedural rather than substantive. In too many instances, training programs are designed to pass training inspections rather than to ensure that the soldiers, and the units, actually become proficient in the individual and collective skills they will need to survive on the battlefield.

We sometimes forget, too, that it is just as important for officers to practice their skills more frequently and to develop for themselves a sustainment training package as it is for Smith, Rogers, and Hernandez to practice setting headspace and timing. The Army simply has not paid enough attention to the training and sustainment of leader skills across all three areas of combat, combat support, and combat service support.

## **MAINTAIN STANDARDS**

Sustainment training to a level of consistent proficiency, then, is a useful concept when it is contrasted with our current annual program in which proficiency only



reaches an occasional peak. It seems far better to reach a "high school" standard every few months and to maintain that standard all year — assuming it is the desired level of proficiency that permits a unit to accomplish its combat mission — than to train once a year up to a highly proficient but transitory "graduate school" level.

Admittedly, sustainment training is far more complex than this proposition suggests. It must be recognized, though, as being product-oriented, not process-oriented with different critical paths for monitoring, and its design must be sensitive to the various methods that are associated with training for different kinds of skills. Thus, the sustainment of crew proficiency on the ITV at night under a high stress situation while the crew is tired requires one kind of sustainment training. A second, different type of sustainment effort is needed for fairly complex MOSs such as that of track and turret mechanic (CMF 63).

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with training to the "graduate school" level. In fact, there is merit in giving a battalion an opportunity to do a full-blown combined arms live fire exercise or a division a chance to deploy on a Reforger exercise. In either case, whether or not the battalion or division can maintain a high level of proficiency over a period of time, it is important for the offi-

cers and noncommissioned officers in those units, during what is probably a formative period in their military careers, to take part in exercises that duplicate as closely as possible actual wartime requirements.

But the danger is that infrequent repetitions of an exercise will be translated into a belief that because the unit has reached a "graduate level" of proficiency that level reflects the unit's actual continuing level of training proficiency. This is certainly not the case. With the degree of turnover and personnel turbulence we have now, a unit can do well only those things it can do every few months, that is, to meet the "high school" standards.

While we need a real sustainment training program to maintain our standards, we must realize that the real purpose of sustainment training is to maintain a consistent level of proficiency. Furthermore, the frequency of our sustainment training programs must depend upon the nature of the skills in which our soldiers must be trained.

It is equally important for sustainment training to establish a measurable degree of proficiency that is to be attained at a specified frequency, a frequency set often enough that a unit commander simply cannot afford to neglect it.

In developing his particular training requirements, today's trainer can choose from a broad array of training

support items such as MILES (Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System). But a major factor in determining what and how much to use must be the motivation of the unit commander, specifically the battalion commander. What he believes to be important is, by definition, important to the unit. Therefore, our commanders must be educated and trained in the use of the various training support items if we are to improve and further refine the sustainment of skill proficiency.

There is, of course, a great deal of training instinct involved when a trainer starts to choose his support material. Thus, if he wants to use some form of tactical

engagement simulation to sustain his soldiers' firing skills, he can choose from a number of target arrays, each of which can give him a distinctly different training challenge for his small units or crews.

The challenge to the trainer, then, is to ensure the quality control of the training environment so that the result will be well-executed battle drills as well as detailed after-action reviews that can be used to reinforce the training process.

Multiple repetitions of training events are exceedingly useful. For the average small unit live fire exercise, for instance, it is better for all concerned if the unit is first per-



mitted to conduct a dry run of its SOPs and procedures — in brief, a review of its battle drills. Then it should be given a chance to run, over the same course, an abbreviated live fire exercise in which it uses a reduced amount of ammunition. This kind of exercise should be used to point out to the unit's leaders and to the soldiers themselves the difficulty of properly controlling and distributing their fires, and it can be used to correct or to strengthen the unit's SOPs, if either is needed.

Finally, the unit should be put through a second live fire exercise, this time using its full allotment of ammunition. By now, the unit should be more than ready to demonstrate its competence, and its members should be brimming with confidence in their ability to run the exercise as it should be run. The unit should also conduct the same exercise, using live fire and the same training situation, at least twice during darkness.

The ammunition requirement for all of this is really not as high as it may seem. Four repetitions of an exercise do not necessarily require four times as much ammunition. In fact, the total will be closer to twice the usual allocation, because a unit will normally do a much better job of controlling and distributing its fires as it repeats the exercise. A unit doesn't have to fire a lot of ammunition to determine whether it has a serious control problem.

Evaluation is also a vital aspect of training, and each commander's evaluation program must be suited to his unit's mission and to his style of command.

One of the most difficult decisions a commander must make is to determine how often he is going to conduct external evaluations of training. Assume, for example, that in a certain division setting the headspace and timing of the .50 caliber machinegun is considered an absolutely vital task that must be sustained by all soldiers at a high level of proficiency. Assume, too, that that particular division commander believes the task is important enough that the proficiency of 10 percent of the soldiers must be evaluated on a random, no-notice basis once every three months.

With the division using a 10 percent figure, the brigades will undoubtedly establish a 15 percent figure, while a battalion's policy could range from 10 to 20 percent. As a result, somewhere between 35 and 40 percent of the time an echelon higher than the company will be verifying the proficiency of a company's soldiers in a very specific task.

This can be an intolerable situation for a company commander, because his training time is actually being governed by external evaluations. Having higher headquarters tell our young leaders not only what to do but also how to do it in great detail is not the best way to develop their confidence. And this kind of situation can only amount to a stressful command environment in which there can be little, if any, positive feedback.

What standards do we expect a unit to maintain? The Army now believes that 60 to 80 percent skill mastery is enough for qualification or verification of individual task proficiency in the SQT. But frequently, on evaluations such as the no-notice annual general inspection evalua-

tion, the Army's trainers are dismayed if a soldier does not reach a similar high level of proficiency.

Because proficiency can be maintained in just so many skills at one time, it would seem that a sliding scale of expectations is needed. Thus, the Army itself, or a unit's chain of command, should determine some sort of order of preference and the amount of warning that will be given before testing a certain skill proficiency. Thus, the standard set for the no-notice evaluation of a particular skill should differ from the standard established for a 48-hour notice, which, in turn, would differ from the standard set for a two-week notice. And any raising of a standard must be accompanied by additional resources (time and chain of command understanding included), or there will be a definite challenge to the leader's integrity.

Many commanders have a lurking desire to use training evaluations to inculcate a competitive spirit in their units. All commanders want to develop the highly competitive team camaraderie that is characteristic of good units. This is desirable. But when it is incorporated in the evaluation of an intensive training program, overt competition can be destructive. For this reason, the criterion-referenced nature of training should be stressed. That is, a unit should be able to do a task to the condition and standard required. It should not enter the picture whether one unit is better than another in terms of exceeding particular tasks, conditions, and standards. What is important is that units are suitably proficient in all of the tasks, conditions, and standards required by the training program.

There are most definitely times and places for tough, overt competition. But training and evaluation exercises are neither the time nor the place. Those exercises should be devoted to the development of competent and highly confident units that will be prepared on short notice to execute their general defense plan missions.

## OVERVIEW

The current training system has great potential for highly effective proficiency training at the squad and crew level. The competence of the squad leader or tank commander is absolutely critical to successful training. This competence, combined with a supporting environment that can produce a disciplined, motivated soldier, is without question the essential variable in the sustainment of the requisite level of training proficiency.

To take full advantage of the new training support equipment now becoming available, proficiency in a range of skills, including crew proficiency, must be developed. These skills involve the use of ammunition as well as tactical engagement simulations both during the day and at night. The skills should include exercising the mobility and survivability that have been built into the combat system, as well as demonstrating proficiency in the integration of direct and indirect fire to achieve a desired battlefield effect. None of our current tank or antitank gunnery exercises really stress proficiency in this broad range of skills.



A detailed analysis of each echelon's collective task training requirements is badly needed. It may not be an efficient, effective use of resources, for example, to conduct a battalion task force road march without having previously exercised the component parts. The point is the subordinate echelons have many collective tasks that they need to accomplish well to ensure quality training. Furthermore, by sub-dividing the training into collective enabling tasks, the entire leadership chain can focus on training and evaluating the units on those enabling tasks and thereby increase the efficiency of their evaluations.

Similar logic applies to the exercise of integrated skills for officers. It may provide a warm, comfortable feeling to have a brigade or division headquarters in the field and effectively moving. But this is only an enabling skill in the execution of the much more important system integrating tasks — such things as the integration under stress of the division's maneuver, terrain reinforcement, and fire support systems. Too frequently, attention is paid to the movement of the headquarters, with its supporting elements, and not to the actual training situation. This is particularly true given the disturbing variation in the level

of training attained by our combat, combat support, and combat service support units.

As a general proposition, the Army as a whole has far more knowledge of the training requirements of its maneuver units than of its supporting units. Yet with the attrition that can be expected if war comes, the supporting units may have the decisive effect on its eventual outcome. These units must be able to regenerate combat power. The Army has much to do to develop this proficiency through combat service support exercises.

The modernization of the force is a significant event in any unit. As new equipment is made available, it becomes a major task to apply its capabilities to the general defense plan. For example, the receipt of a counter-mortar radar can cause a reevaluation and subsequent readjustment of an entire fire plan. The improved TOW vehicle can require a significant increase in professional training for our officers. All of this must be taken into consideration in the analysis and design of a training program to make sure a unit is not overlooked.

## REQUIREMENTS

Special training requirements for conducting sustainment training itself also develop from the characteristics of the training system. For one thing, the proficiency of those who are going to conduct the training must be maintained regularly. Another recognized requirement is the sustainment of the battalion training management system (BTMS) in the context of the training objectives, resources, and programs of the particular chain of command.

A deliberate training policy decision is also needed in listing those requirements for maintaining unit training proficiency that can be institutionalized provided they are done often enough. One example of this would be understanding the difficulty involved in preparing a strong point. It is extremely difficult and time consuming, for instance, to put in a company strong point. It is probably not necessary that a company dig in every three or four months to maintain its proficiency, but there must be a system to ensure that there is either a CPX or an extensive professional discussion of the problem, or that it is actually done on the ground once a year. The particular chain of command must determine what is appropriate and, at intervals, jog the institutional memory.

The chain of command of a unit undergoing range training should be given the opportunity to provide any enabling task training to the soldiers. Thus, training support material can be issued to a squad or section leader so that he can train his soldiers or refresh their memories in the firing skills before the actual firing.

Another difficult training policy issue is how to centralize the evaluation of leader proficiency. At what echelon should specific requirements be established?

Who should conduct the training and for what purpose? This is a delicate issue of command policy that needs to be weighed against the centralization of sustainment training, planning, and execution, and against the scope of the command evaluation program itself. Needless to say, each must complement the other in reflecting the policy of the senior commander.

Learning Resource Centers at the battalion level have proved quite useful, when they were established properly. Each should have a trained monitor and should have the multiple capabilities of the training system (individual or group MOS study), the education system, and some aspect of entertainment (library, written, or audio-visual material). Sustainment training in some critical areas can be accomplished at the LRCs. With a new item of equipment or a new maintenance responsibility, for example, contract sustainment training can be provided by a skilled technician. At the same time, soldiers who have difficulty in reading should receive some help in improving their reading skills. This could be offered by the LRCs, provided they received the proper command attention.

## EVOLUTION

The Army's training system has improved considerably over the years. The present system of multi-echelon integrated training is designed for the sustainment training of a force that has to be ready for combat on short notice. A supply of competent officers and NCOs is almost a precondition for executing this intensive training program.

The intensity of any training program is such that it must have total support. In other words, there must be a reinforcing system of annual general inspections, including the training proficiency tests, both scheduled and no-notice. There must also be solid equipment maintenance programs; continuing command attention to and discussion of the training management process; scheduled and detailed command training reviews; and time for assessing the programs, the available resources, and their results. In addition, there must be reinforcement by the chain of command and detailed professional discussions of the unit's training program.

Total system also implies the support of the community that surrounds the training process of the unit. This means there is a high order of discipline in all the things a unit is engaged in. It means there is an aggressive sports program to reinforce unit cohesion through company or battery competitions. And it means that barracks, motor pools, dining facilities, and family quarters are upgraded to a standard of excellence consistent with what is expected from the soldiers.

What is perhaps most important is that all the parts of the program must mesh if it is to produce the competent, confident young American who believes in his heart that he belongs to a skilled, tough, proud, disciplined, ready force that truly cares.