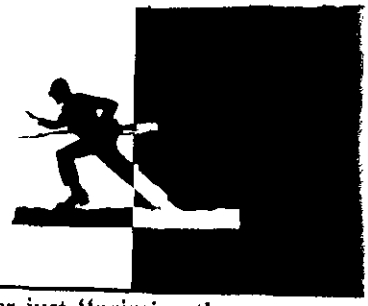
INFANTRY LETTERS



SAFETY vs REALISM

I applaud Captain Kratman's article "Concerning 'Safety'" (May-June 1985, page 10). Having served as a company commander and a battalion S-3 with the 193d Infantry Brigade in Panama, I can unequivocally state that training realism and live fire exercises from individual to company level were everyday tasks there.

In units outside that brigade, however, I have found leaders habitually concentrating their efforts on observing the safety of their men and not on the developing tactical scenario. They were reluctant to employ fire and maneuver. The soldiers, too, consistently showed hesitation and a reluctance to employ fire and movement techniques.

In contract, the soldiers of the 193d Brigade had absolute trust and confidence in the ability and judgment of their comrades and devoted their attention to the mission at hand.

Boundaries, phase lines, routes of advance, probable lines of deployment, and objectives are the safety measures leaders employ. Anything beyond good military command and control measures detracts from training realism.

Our units must constantly train in realistic conditions employing all organic and attached weapon systems in a free-flowing tactical environment, and unit leaders must become more involved in their tactical roles.

Let's start practicing the way we're going to play!

W. SCOTT KNOEBEL
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ANOTHER VIEW

In Captain Kratman's article in your May-June 1985 issue, he laments the so-called overstringent safety requirements in live fire exercises. I would agree that "unreasonable preoccupation with reducing or eliminating injuries and deaths, to the exclusion of all other considerations" would significantly detract from realistic training. But I do not feel that the restrictions mentioned in the article are unreasonable.

Many of these problems can be eliminated, with little loss of realism, by a more extensive use of MILES equipment. Live munitions do not leave much room for mistakes when used in training; MILES does. People do make mistakes, even well-trained soldiers. And mistakes are supposed to happen in training so they can be corrected before they cause casualties and mission failure during wartime. There is, however, no excuse for a preventable accident that causes the injury or death of a soldier, especially during peacetime. The use of live munitions requires that safety be more heavily weighed against realism in training, and that restrictions be put on the type of training in which they are used.

Conversely, timidity in attacking the problems of realistic training is not satisfactory. For instance, the lack of any sort of target other than "somewhere in the live grenade range impact area," doesn't present realistic training for our soldiers. Targets need to be set up, and a system of scoring needs to be devised for live-grenade ranges.

Challenging demolition training can be used in conjunction with range and post improvement projects in many cases. This type of training gives soldiers more opportunities to think (in deciding the type of charge needed and its placement), and it also gives them more of a sense of purpose in their training. The training is no longer just "priming the same meaningless lump of C-4," dumping it into a demolition pit and watching it go "boom." In the long run, it might save the Army some money as well.

Safety is most desirable in all training situations. Accidents are not just "the cost of doing business." The active and aggressive involvement of a unit's leadership can and must ensure that realistic training is conducted without detracting from safety. Realistic training that causes real casualties is not good training!

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TRAINING LIEUTENANTS

Reference "Training New Lieutenants," by Captain Samuel K. Rock, Jr., in your November-December 1984 issue (page 35), I was amazed that NCOs were not mentioned more as trainers of lieutenants.

AR 600-20 describes the platoon sergeant as playing a key role in the chain of command as an assistant and advisor to the platoon leader and as one who assumes temporary command in his absence.

With 13 years of experience in the infantry, I think this is logical on the basis of the training the platoon sergeant has received. In most circumstances, the platoon sergeant already has a thorough knowledge of how a platoon should be run and has worked with other platoon leaders before the new one arrives. Who, then, seems most qualified to train the new lieutenant?

The company commander should train the new lieutenant, of course, on his role in the officer corps and on where he fits into the company scheme

of maneuver. But the platoon sergeant should advise the platoon leader on the operation of the platoon.

Even though the article says that many new lieutenants in Europe say they are not even sure what their job is or how they fit into their units, I have observed over the years that most new lieutenants do want to accept complete responsibility for their platoons.

It is my conviction that a platoon leader and platoon sergeant should form a combined "fighting team" to cover all aspects of training the platoon. Once both know their duties and perform them together, their platoon will become combat ready.

ROY A. FABIAN, JR.
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UNEXPLOITED ASSET

Many people subscribe to the philosophy that all soldiers are basically infantrymen but with different specialties. In my opinion mortars are an extension of field artillery, and artillery techniques are directly applicable to the mortar's mode of operation.

From my observations, though, most infantry units lack the necessary organic expertise to effectively train or employ their mortars within broad artillery concepts. In many cases the mortar platoon leaders lack the up-to-date training, guidance, and experience to complete their missions. A platoon leader is usually in the early phases of his career and is busy developing his confidence and technical expertise.

An infantry battalion has no one skilled in up-to-date artillery techniques who provides guidance for the mortar platoon leaders. The battalion fire support officer (FSO) can be the solution to this problem.

The battalion FSO can be used to provide training and guidance in the reconnaissance, selection, and occupation of positions; fire direction center operations (in both consolidated and split modes); hip shoots; and displacement by echelon. He can also provide guidance to the battalion commander, the company commanders, and the platoon leaders on how to conduct their training to bring their units to the highest level of readiness.

The FSO can be a tremendous asset to an infantry battalion in this regard but, like any other asset, only if he is fully used.

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WHY NOT?

When I was a rifle platoon leader, one of the problems I often encountered was in signaling my squad leaders, support elements, or security personnel. The star clusters and parachute flares used with the M16A1 are large and cumbersome, and the squad radios (PRC-68s) are unreliable at times.

It seems to me that if a rifle platoon leader trained with and carried an M203 grenade launcher, he could carry a variety of star clusters and other signaling devices in less space with less weight. The platoon leader would not necessarily have to carry the full basic load of 36 rounds, just a few rounds for signaling. The M203 does weigh more than the M16 but not much, and its additional versatility would make up for that extra weight.

The platoon leader could mark targets indirectly with a smoke or HE round instead of with a stream of tracers. He could initiate a raid or an ambush with an HE round and keep his organic M203s with the support element.

He could also provide his own illumination instead of violating noise and light discipline by calling to his M203 gunner, who is primarily responsible for the deadspace in front of the M60 machinegun, while in the defense.

The M203 gives the platoon leader a variety of options that are not available with the M16A1 and the standard signaling devices issued to him.

When I suggested this idea to my commander, though, he laughed and said it was not a good idea. But he failed to convince me that it was not practical. Maybe some INFANTRY readers can explain to me why this is not a good idea — or maybe why it *is*. I would appreciate any comments on the subject.

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CHALLENGING CTT

All too often the Common Task Test (CTT) is administered only out of necessity and is boring to the soldiers. But the CTT can be made more challenging than this.

After last year's CTT, my company — Headquarters Company, 2d Battalion, 124th Infantry (Florida National Guard) — decided that something better had to be done. That test was conducted in the company area in round robin fashion. The lines were long, and the soldiers selected as evaluators were not well prepared for what they were to do. That's when it was decided that the 1985 CTT would be conducted the way it should be — in the field, in a tactical situation, and in a more challenging way.

First, the unit NCOs were asked to suggest ways to improve the CTT — to make it more interesting to the soldiers taking it. We decided that a two-mile course through the forest along an unimproved road or trail would be best, with test stations placed at various locations along the route. Soldiers would start the course in two-man teams at ten-minute intervals. The length of the course would make waiting time at the stations minimal.

We welcome letters from our readers and print as many of them as we can. Sometimes it takes a while before we find room for them. But keep writing on topics of interest to our readers, and we'll do our best to get your letters in, sooner or later.

The NCOs selected to be evaluators were notified well in advance and encouraged to become experts on the tasks assigned to them. As a result, they demonstrated creative ability and resourcefulness. (Each evaluator was assigned two tasks, which reduced the number of evaluators needed to conduct the test.)

Some innovative ideas were used. The soldiers were instructed, for example, to camouflage before starting the course. This put them into a tactical frame of mind and reduced the amount of time needed at the first station, at which they were to camouflage themselves and their equipment.

At another station, the soldiers were to collect and report information using the SALUTE format. The station was on a small hilltop overlooking another station where other soldiers were performing operator maintenance on their weapons. These soldiers used binoculars to gather intelligence for their SALUTE report.

At the challenge and password station, soldiers entered friendly lines after negotiating a barbed wire and concertina obstacle. At each station soldiers were read tactical scenarios before receiving the task, condition, and standard of the task being tested.

Additional tasks were included to make the test more of an adventure. For example, because headquarters troops seldom have an opportunity to see or use the weapons and equipment regular infantry units use, stations were provided to expose them to a few: An M47 Dragon LET was set up and the soldiers engaged targets with it. At another station, a fire and maneuver course was set up and, using blank ammunition and hand grenades, the troops engaged simulated enemy positions and silhouettes.

Evaluators were told from the start to use their imaginations and make the stations as realistic as possible. But safety was a priority from the start. Caution statements were issued when necessary, and ear plugs were provided for use around weapons. And because heat was a factor, water points were placed throughout the course.

The overall results of this year's test were positive. Because the unit NCOs were made a part of the planning process and given a free hand in preparing the stations, they showed considerable initiative in planning and executing the tasks assigned to them. And they learned to appreciate the value of planning ahead. The commander also now has a better understanding of where we stand on common tasks. More important, our soldiers were motivated to train hard and excel at the tasks assigned to them. Many of them, in fact, can't wait to do it again next year.

MICHAEL L. COLLIS
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VIETNAM VETERANS

As some INFANTRY readers may know, my first book, *Battle for Hue: Tet 1968* (Presidio Press, 1983), was based on interviews with 35 Vietnam veterans. A second book, to be published soon, is based on interviews with 90 Vietnam veterans who served in the 1971 invasion of Laos.

Now, I'm starting a third proposed book. In it I hope to chronicle the activities of the 1st Marine Division and the Americal Division in the area of Arizona Valley, the Que Son Mountains, and Hiep Duc Valley from 7 June to 7 September 1969. During this period the Marines were involved in several rough battles in the Arizona Valley, then shifted south into the Que Sons to assist the Army, which was fighting a bloody bunker-to-bunker action in the Hiep Duc Valley.

The Army units involved were the 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry; 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry; 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry; 1st Battalion, 46th Infantry; 196th Light Infantry Brigade, Americal Division. Added to these were the 1st and 2d Battalions, 5th Marines, and the 1st and 2d Battalions, 7th Marines; the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion; the 1st Tank Battalion; the 1st Marine Air Wing; and various smaller units.

I would greatly appreciate hearing from any veteran of these operations as soon as possible so that we can arrange an interview, no matter how small his personal role may have been. Call or write me any time at 20 Kingsville Court, Webster Groves, Missouri 63119; (314) 961-7577.

KEITH WILLIAM NOLAN

PRE-D-DAY UNITS IN WALES

One week before D-Day, 6 June 1944, American servicemen were billeted in private homes in Ferndale in South Wales. I don't know which unit or units they were from or which division they belonged to. But they were made more than welcome here. In fact, my parents-in-law had one trooper billeted with them at No. 9 Elm Street, but we never heard about him or any of the others.

We knew about the terrible losses on Omaha Beach and have always felt that these Americans were there. Any information I could get on them would be greatly appreciated.

My brother was in the Bayeux, Le Havre, Turnhout liberation but, sadly, was killed in action near Nispen in southwest Holland. So you can understand my interest.

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