

# TRAINING NOTES



## Point Man Training

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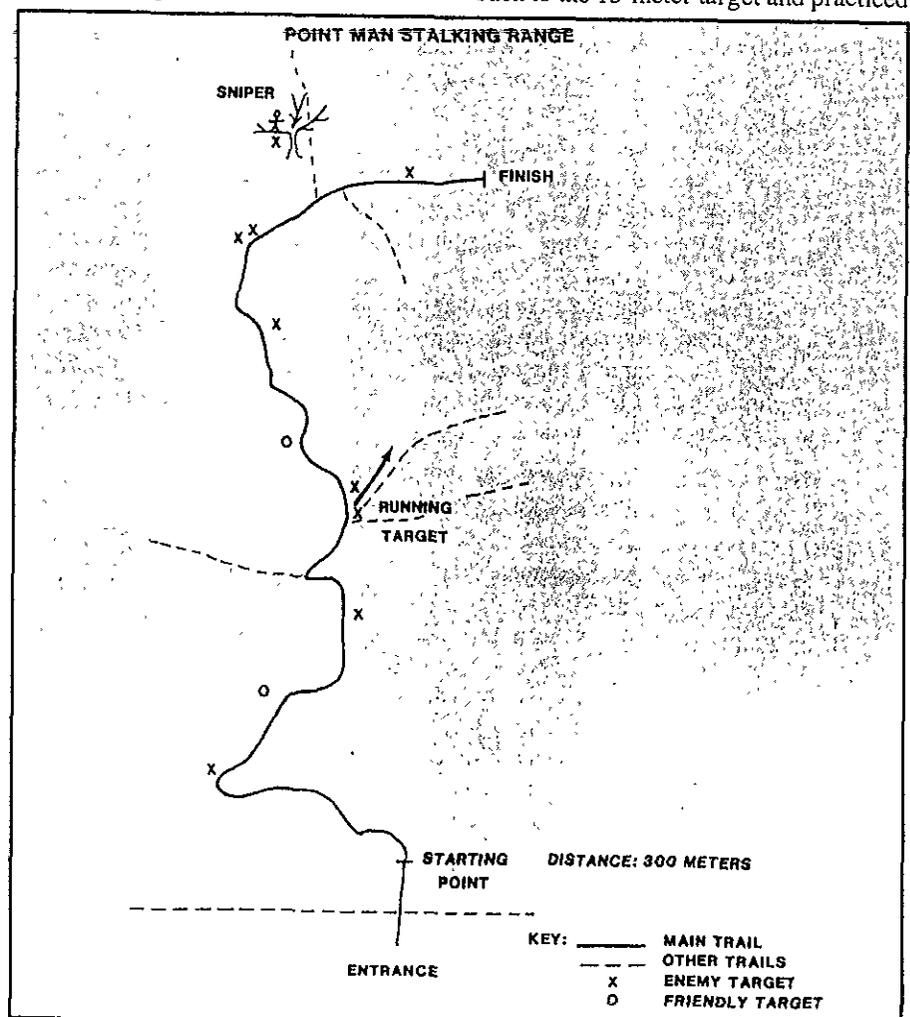
A good point man can provide the early warning necessary for a squad to complete its mission while keeping friendly casualties to a minimum. A poor point man can endanger the lives of his entire squad. Unfortunately, many units in the Army do not have a standard training program that emphasizes the valuable live fire skills and stalking techniques a soldier must use to be an effective point man.

The 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry (Light), during the time I was assigned to it, researched the subject and developed an effective point man training program similar to the Australian Army's "Sneaker" range. In brief, it was a live fire training program conducted in three phases—a quick fire familiarization drill, a quick fire qualification exercise, and a live fire stalking exercise.

The quick fire familiarization drill was conducted with M16A1 rifles on a combat pistol qualification range. During the drill, each firer taped his front sights to avoid aiming. Each practiced the quick fire techniques outlined in FM 23-9 on a 15-meter target and continued to fire one shot at a time, regardless of the ammunition required, until he had mastered the skill on that target. A coach stood behind each firer to guide the strike of each round on the target, much as an assistant gunner does for his machinegunner. Once he was deemed to be proficient

on the 15-meter target, a firer and his coach repeated the process on the 31-meter target

When a firer had mastered both targets with the single-shot technique, he went back to the 15-meter target and practiced



the "double shot" technique, in which he fired two quick shots while stepping toward the target. This double shot procedure was repeated on the 31-meter target until the firer mastered it.

The quick fire qualification exercise was conducted on the same range using the combat pistol qualification firing tables (DA Form 88). Each firer received three 20-round magazines, stood at the ready position on his lane, and engaged each target with the double shot quick fire technique. The target operator controlled Tables I and III and then gave the firer eight seconds to change magazines. He then controlled Tables II and IV and allowed eight more seconds for changing magazines before finally controlling Table V. The coach scored the firer. Amazingly enough, the average point man qualified as a sharpshooter; many also qualified as expert shooters.

The third phase was conducted on the battalion's point man live fire stalking range (see sketch). This range placed the firer in a realistic field environment walking point and called for him to use the quick fire and stalking techniques his squad leader had previously taught him. (Any unit can construct a similar range. It should cover several hundred meters of wooded terrain and should integrate friendly and enemy pop-up targets, including snipers and moving targets, and anything else a unit can think of within safety limits.)

A squad leader and target controller followed a point man along the course and acted as members of a squad. When the point man saw a target, he fired, using the double shot technique, and took cover. If he missed the target, he shot again from the prone unsupported position. He continued in this manner until he reached the finish line.

Throughout the course, squad leaders continually stressed those quick fire and stalking techniques that had proved effective in Vietnam and that can be used to save lives in future conflicts. Among the quick fire teaching points were the following:

- Aim low to counter the natural tendency to aim high.
- Because the first shot will probably be high, the double shot technique should be used to ensure a quick kill.



Soldiers of the 196th Infantry Brigade move out on patrol—15 miles west of coastal Tam Ky, 1969.

• Always be conscious of how many rounds you have in the magazine in your rifle and change when there are only three or four rounds left. One technique is to load a tracer round fourth from last in your magazines as a signal to change.

• Place full magazines in the ammunition pouch with the open rounds at the bottom, facing out, for quicker magazine changes.

• Keep your weapon on "semi-automatic" at all times. All other members of the squad should have their weapons on "safe."

• Step toward your target with your lead foot to establish your quick fire aim.

The following stalking techniques were taught:

• Don't try to kill everything that moves. Stay aware of the friendly situation and the local populace and focus on the hands of possible enemies, looking for weapons.

• After firing your double shot at the enemy point man, immediately hit the dirt and continue to return fire; the enemy point man's first instinct is also to return fire.

• When approaching a curve in a road or trail, stop on the inside of the curve and signal the "slack man," who is behind you, to approach the outside of

the curve. The slack man should continue to move around the curve to make sure no enemy is present and then signal you to continue.

• Halt at trail or road intersections until the slack man conducts a security check of the adjoining trail. The next man back should then cover the slack man and so on throughout the patrol.

• Always be conscious of the ground in front of you. Broken brush, footprints, dead foliage, scuff marks, or manmade materials are all signs of what is out front. Pay particular attention to trip wires; booby traps may be everywhere.

• Always pay strict attention to your front and flanks, and remember possible sniper locations above eye level. Also be alert for any unusual sounds or odors, because these can help you detect the enemy before he detects you.

These lists are not all inclusive, but a training program such as this one, combined with a unit's standing operating procedures, will instill in soldiers the confidence and knowledge they need to be good point men.

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