



*Colonel William O. Vowell*



# RIFLE FIGHTING

# HIGH PAYOFF TRAINING



When someone makes broad generalizations about the state of the Army in small arms marksmanship, howls of indignation invariably echo across the hills and descend to the plains. Having said that, we at the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit offer a broad generalization, grab our helmets, LCE and weapons, and prepare for incoming: Folks, our soldiers can't hit a bull in the ear with the proverbial bass fiddle. We have work to do.

The first outcry will most assuredly be, "Not in my unit!" Perhaps not—but perhaps, just perhaps, it does apply to your unit. Look harder and deeper. Just because a unit satisfies the annual regulatory qualification requirements does not, by any means, insure its success in defeating a determined battlefield enemy bent on the destruction of U.S. soldiers.

A confident, determined soldier who believes in himself, his unit, and especially his rifle and knows how to use it is a dreaded instrument that all our potential enemies must learn again to fear. What it takes in training priorities and plain leader dedication to create such a soldier goes light years beyond mere minimum standard qualification on some manicured trainfire range.

As Thomas Paine wrote in 1776, "These are the times that try men's souls." In 1989, the horizon reveals cutbacks in manpower and money, as well as all sorts of constraints that are probably far more real than simply apparent.

Where, then, does individual rifle marksmanship training fit into a commander's overall priority list? Surely it must rank right up there with physical training. We cannot find a single documented case in which we ran enemy soldiers to death or killed them with sit-ups. And that scourge of our enemies—the dreaded push-up. We can hear the enemy commander now, "Spread out men. One American push-up dropped in here could get us all."

I do not indulge in cheap sardonics here. I am merely saying that if physical training is important enough to do three or more times a week, individual marksmanship training ought to be a lot higher on any priority list than it is now. If the Army's physical training program is a combat multiplier, accurate, devastatingly effective rifle fighting also ought to be entered into these high mathematics, somewhere. After all, first rate rifle ability is pretty basic to being a soldier—regardless of a soldier's MOS.

I do not suggest, because of range, ammunition, and time/space constraints, that we have our soldiers shoot live rounds three times a week, but three times a quarter may not be all that unrealistic. The first primal scream to be heard on this radical proposal, that we actually require soldiers to shoot their rifles more frequently, will probably be about range and ammunition constraints. All right, then, how about live fire rifle training three times a year? What an improvement even that would make.

There are numerous high payoff tactics that would result in a quantum leap toward better rifle fighting efficiency. They are very simple, very basic, readily available, and not at all uneconomical. Let's look at what we can do better with what we already have.

The basics are the absolute first points upon which we must concentrate our soldiers' attention. I am talking about a train-

ing program run by knowledgeable, confident trainer/leaders who can teach. Start by looking at our soldiers' real grasp of the four fundamentals—steady position, aiming, breath control, and trigger squeeze. These are the building blocks upon which later advanced rifle fighting techniques *must* be based. There will be a point—amid the fear, noise, and confusion of a pitched battle—when a soldier will have to shoot fast over the front sitepost at a fleeting glimpse of an enemy soldier; and then he will have to shoot quickly and efficiently. Our soldiers must master this sort of technique for their own survival. But before they get to such a celestial level of personal rifle abilities, an individual soldier must master the four fundamentals—not just be able to recite them. We are nowhere near the mastery of fundamentals in the United States Army. If you listen carefully you will hear trainers all down the line still telling soldiers to remember their "eight steady hold factors," which went out about the same time as the "eleven general orders."

## TRAINING EFFORT

The next point is to establish a determined training effort in every unit, an effort deliberately designed to ensure our soldiers' total familiarization with their rifles. Again, I am not suggesting that every soldier must become a ballistics expert. Every soldier, though, ought to know his rifle inside first, outside second; he absolutely must know what it can and cannot do. Total familiarization with the rifle instills confidence.

Do many of our soldiers have the foggiest notion of what actually happens once they launch the projectile from the end of the barrel? I don't think they do. But they should, because it will help them hit the target at which they are aiming. It will also cause the individual soldier to use his rifle without hesitating when the opportunity is there.

Do our trainers have even the most basic notions about the flight path trajectories of standard 5.56mm rounds? Across the board, they do not. Should we, the trainers, understand such lofty matters and be able to tell our soldiers why, for example, the standard for zeroing is based on a four-centimeter shot group at 25 meters? (For a good explanation, see FC 23-11, page 10-3, Unit Rifle Marksmanship Training Guide, August 1984.) Am I saying that across the board our trainers do not understand marksmanship fundamentals enough to teach them? Yes, I am. We are living in a dream world, fellow leaders, if we think we have a handle on rifle fighting throughout the Army.

Let's admit it, then, and do something constructive about it. Now. In peacetime.

If you're short on ammunition, get your soldiers out behind the barracks with their M16A1s or A2s. It takes practice to use a rifle that has five to eight pounds of trigger pull. Lay a dime on top of a barrel, snug in front of the front sight assembly, and have your soldiers dry fire until the dime doesn't fall when the hammer does. Do this in the prone unsupported position. Now try it standing—offhand. Vary the exercise any way you want. Move the dime progressively farther out toward the muzzle as your soldiers get better at it. If your unit is armed



with the M16A2, which has a somewhat heavier barrel, use a quarter. This makes it more sporting. It is amazing what this single, cost-effective technique will do for a soldier's trigger control skills—and you can still spend the dime or quarter.

The time-tested target box exercise has been lost somewhere in the shuffle. The first time I used the target box exercise to sharpen sight alignment and sight picture skills, there was an M-1 Garand lying in the target box notches. In other words, the technique has been around for awhile. (The target box exercise is still used in the initial entry training environment, but try and find one in an MTOE unit.) Local training support or self-help centers can build target boxes inexpensively from wood scraps. Check it out.

Our zeroing procedure is the most maligned, misunderstood function of rifle marksmanship—bar none. Its original purpose and procedure are buried in myth and folklore. As Will Rogers once said, "It ain't the things you don't know that gets you in trouble; it's the things you know that just ain't so."

Dig out the manuals and do a massive trainer re-education exercise on zeroing. Conduct your own unit train-the-trainer program on zeroing. At the risk of becoming ridiculously elementary, understand that the zeroing procedure for the M16A2 is decidedly different from that for the M16A1.

Read the manuals, practice it, rehearse it, understand it. Then when you are satisfied that your trainers understand exactly what they are doing, have them teach you—after you are sure you have done your own homework thoroughly. There are racks and racks of un-zeroed weapons out there, right now, assigned to soldiers; these are their own weapons with which

they must deploy into a combat zone, and they don't have the foggiest notion of where they're going to hit.

Let's get really basic here and ask an even more foreboding question, the answer to which usually brings on professional palpitations: "How many of our soldiers do not even have an assigned weapon?" This gets really close to the epicenter of small arms neglect in the U.S. Army, doesn't it?

Diligently, seriously, work on target detection techniques. The last time most U.S. Army soldiers did any serious target detection training was during initial entry training. Even if a soldier is a superbly trained rifle fighter, it does no good if he can't detect and effectively engage targets.

Preliminary rifle instruction (PRI) is also a lost art. But we can easily improve it with a change in mindset. It's called translating the peacetime training routine into a warfighting way of doing business. Let's stop talking about training as we are going to fight and actually start doing it.

Thus, qualification day should be just like organizing for combat. This is the commander's or the leader's time for evaluating and assessing his unit's small arms efficiency. Soldiers should go to qualification day zipped up, taped down, checked out—thoroughly prepared and ready to max the course. They should not have to ride or march to the range and then wait while someone in charge figures out what the next event is going to be. All the preliminary rifle instruction should have been done before qualification day—especially zeroing. How many times have we all seen this sort of training debacle executed by unprepared trainers, disorganized planners, and detached commanders?

If we just clean up PRI and use qualification firing for our evaluation, the results will be much more realistic and a much better evaluation tool for developing future training programs.

It is not enough for leaders and trainers to read the source documents. They must make certain they are reading the right publications. The U.S. Army Infantry School is the proponent for small arms marksmanship. If our trainers have any doubt what they should be following, they should check with the proponent.

Although we are small in numbers, the United States Army Marksmanship Unit has a specified mission to help the Army train its trainers. We have three outlying marksmanship training units, one for each of the FORSCOM corps, and we're working to coordinate the same additional assistance overseas. We, too, are dedicated to the training of our soldiers. The Army's train-the-trainers program is a very large part of the reason for our existence. Just remember—the Army Marksmanship Unit works for you. Don't forget us.

While we are on the subject of sources, bibliography, and training aids, you might want to check your zero targets. The Canadian bullseye zeroing target was replaced in 1983. If you have any, please get rid of them. You should use only the zeroing targets for the M16A1 and the M16A2, keeping in mind these are two different targets.

Soldiers want and need feedback on how well they are shooting. If you can't build a new range where you train, try balloons. Even with inflation (no humor intended), they cost about three cents each. When an M16 projectile hits a balloon, there is instant feedback. Try it. You and your soldiers will like it, and it's cost effective.

A spinoff of this technique is to take old uniforms and stuff them with any soft material, such as straw; make a balloon head and implant a balloon in the kill area of the chest (inside the shirt). The beauty of this simple technique is that you can set up such a series of targets anywhere in your training area where live rounds are allowed, with no requirement for rakes

or lawn mowers. Sound realistic? It is, and the balloon technique works especially well when conducting collective live fire small arms training. Instead of just launching a wall of wasted lead down range, the soldiers receive feedback on the effectiveness of their fire.

Try these simple high payoff tactics in training your unit. The result, instead of being simply an increase in the number of misses per minute, will be an increase in the number of one-shot kills our soldiers get during each engagement.

I have outlined only a few of the techniques that will help any unit achieve better results. Many more are being used in units all over the Army. Use your imagination, within real world safety considerations.

It is important to understand, or at least to recognize, that small arms marksmanship, at present, is getting worse—not better. It is also important to recognize that true commander or leader involvement can achieve stunning results in reversing this trend.

We must instill fear in our potential enemies. When an enemy soldier knows that within rifle range there is a confident U.S. soldier with a deadly accurate rifle, it becomes a deeply personal thing. Concerns will mount in that enemy soldier's mind about both his immediate future and his long range future. And that is the enemy soldier we want to confront on the battlefield.

Our goal must be to build confident U.S. soldiers who know they are masters of themselves, their rifles, and any enemy who dares lift his eyes above ground level.

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