



Commandant's NOTE

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INFANTRY TRAINING—FROM THE BEGINNING

At the heart of the infantry team are the soldiers who must ultimately close with and destroy the enemy, and I want to use my pages in this issue to bring you up to date on the most recent improvements to the training of the infantryman.

Infantry units throughout our Army today must be able to deploy rapidly, with little notice, to anywhere in the world. At the same time, technological advances, diminishing resources, and the need for tough, skilled, combat-ready soldiers all demand a revised training strategy for infantry one-station unit training (OSUT). This training prepares soldiers to fight and survive on the battlefield as members of a mechanized infantry squad, a mortar crew, rifle squad, or a TOW crew upon their graduation.

During Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM, we took an in-depth look at which individual skills our trainees retained at the end of the OSUT cycle and whether they could apply those skills in a field training exercise (FTX), in a totally tactical environment, or as members of a squad on a series of situational training exercises (STXs). We were surprised to find that many soldiers had great difficulty executing skills to standard when we changed the conditions. This revelation caused us to re-examine the way we did business and to develop ways of improving the soldiers' skill retention.

An earlier strategy focused on training a soldier to achieve "GO" ratings on a series of test stations in what Field Manual (FM) 25-101 refers to as the *initial* stage of training. This strategy has value where the purpose is to simply teach soldiers a standardized method of completing a task, but it falls short when training infantrymen who must apply all of these skills in a tactical environment where their very survival and unit mission accomplishment depend upon it. It became obvious to all of us during DESERT STORM that infantry OSUT graduates were joining units on the way to the theater of operations and that they might even join units already in combat, without any further opportunity for additional training. This condition still exists today—any U.S.

Army unit could be committed to combat on short notice and at its present level of training.

We believe the revised strategy develops individual infantry training to an art and that the new approach to command, leadership, and development holds many lessons for trainers and commanders. Our current OSUT program links mission training plans, collective skills, leader skills, and battle drills. In other words, we now train in OSUT the way we train everywhere else in the Army—using FM 25-101.

The major points of this assessment-based strategy revolve around the soldiers' roles as members of a squad, crew, or fire team; on drill sergeants and trainers as infantry leaders; on first sergeants as master trainers; and on commanders as training managers.

Under the old training strategy, once a soldier received a "GO" on one task, he rarely referred to that task again in OSUT. By contrast, the new strategy integrates every old task with new tasks that train the soldier to higher levels of difficulty—and proficiency—in more realistic environments.

The new strategy also recognizes the high aptitude of the average soldier as he enters training. He is intelligent, relatively accomplished at what he has done so far, and well motivated to succeed. He therefore has a vested interest in behaving and performing well. He wants to be a winner!

We base our training on our vision of the final product, of this soldier upon graduation. We build the soldier by focusing on three major characteristics: skill, discipline, and motivation.

Skill. Skill includes all the components of physical training, combat critical skills, and program of instruction (POI) tasks performed to the specified standards. A soldier must execute all of the tasks in the POI for his military occupational specialty (MOS) to the *initial* stage of training. FM 25-101 defines initial stage training as the ability to complete a task in sequence. A task is trained to the *refresher* stage when a soldier can complete it to the Army standard, usually expressed in either time or accuracy. The skill is at the *sustainment* stage when the soldier can execute the task under

conditions of increased realism and intensity.

Our focus here is still to ensure that an infantry soldier can perform all the skills required of him at least to the initial stage, and that he can achieve the refresher or sustainment stage on the combat critical tasks for MOS 11B. A committee of command sergeants major, first sergeants, and drill sergeants recommended these tasks as the minimum requirements for a soldier if he is to fight and survive on today's battlefield without any additional training.

The OSUT soldier does physical fitness training six days a week, with his daily training alternating between cardiovascular conditioning and upper body strength. The goal is to have him reach far beyond the standard for passing the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT). The objective of this training is to turn out a soldier who is physically fit and who can sustain himself for extended periods under rigorous combat conditions. His fitness is assessed through progressive road marches of up to 18 miles (while carrying up to one-third of his body weight), runs of up to five miles in 45 minutes, obstacle and confidence courses, rope climbs, chin-ups, and aerobic exercises. If a soldier is out of shape or unable to pass the APFT when he arrives in his first unit, it is probably because he met only minimum requirements while in training and did no physical training while on leave or on the way to his unit.

Discipline. The focus of discipline is on teaching a soldier to do the right things all the time by the time he graduates, with little or no supervision. We provide him with more incentives in the current program than in the past. Our objective is to shift the responsibility for individual performance from the drill sergeant at the beginning of the cycle to the soldier himself by the end of the cycle.

Motivation. The goal is to produce a winner who is a self-starter, who takes pride in himself and his unit, and who builds on his strengths to achieve the standards. (Soldiers who demonstrate a lack of self-discipline or motivation while at Fort Benning will be given an entry level separation.)

The key player in the process of developing a new soldier and easing his transition from civilian to infantryman is the drill sergeant. He is responsible for teaching the soldier about 80 percent of what he retains from training. The drill sergeant consistently tracks the soldier's progress in achieving the training standards, and he provides one-on-one remedial training for those who need it. He also gives the soldier constant feedback in terms of performance counseling. He is the one who motivates the soldier to be all he can be.

A soldier who excels in training and who clearly demonstrates leadership abilities is identified by his drill sergeant and unit commander as a "fast track" soldier. He receives additional coaching, mentoring, and counseling from his drill sergeant. In the process, he learns how to lead soldiers and to perform a limited number of additional tasks at Skill Levels 1 and 2.

The results of all infantry OSUT soldier qualifications and training are identified in the soldier's 201 file as part of his individual training record. Gaining units should make sure this information is not disregarded during in-processing, because it provides valuable insights into the soldier's background and experience in the Army up to that point.

If you are an officer or noncommissioned officer passing through Fort Benning to attend a school or a conference, we invite you to visit the Sand Hill area and go out on an FTX with our soldiers. You will be impressed with their level of proficiency and their ability to execute training to standard in a totally tactical environment using MILES equipment.

If you cannot come to Fort Benning to observe OSUT training, we encourage you to send us your comments on the quality of the graduates you are getting in your unit. Our goal is to meet unit requirements for quality in all new infantry soldiers. But we cannot do everything in the time allotted and must identify some trade-offs. We will therefore consider your thoughts in everything we do. Please help us make our new infantrymen the best they can be.

The goal of OSUT is still to produce a physically fit, technically competent, and highly motivated infantryman who can join a unit anywhere in the world and carry out the missions expected of him. Some of those units will be mechanized infantry, and this is an exciting time for the mechanized force. The quality of our training was validated in DESERT STORM, when mechanized units of the United States Army smashed the best units of the Iraqi Army. But we cannot afford to rest on our laurels.

We are therefore reviewing doctrine, tactics, gunnery, weapon systems, and crew training to make sure our fighting skills keep up with technological advances of our country, our allies, and—most important—our potential adversaries. Our ability to critically analyze our own training and equipment has been the key to victory throughout our nation's history, and this continuing analysis will ensure that the United States Army of the next century is the best fighting force on the battlefield.

