

# JRTC

## Live Fire Operations

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Realistic live-fire training often eludes the most stalwart of Army leaders. As a rifle company commander in a light division, I attempted to develop realistic live-fire exercises that focused on freedom of maneuver, allowing bold flanking movements. I found myself restricted by range fans, left and right limits, and my interpretation of the safety regulations; I assumed that I had to compromise realism for safety, and the exercises fell short of what they should have been.

With those less-than-perfect exercises under my belt, however, I gained further insight during Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama. I saw first-hand the correlation between training for combat and combat itself. All soldiers fight using the warfighting techniques they have learned in training. Only tried and true warfighting techniques succeeded on the streets of Panama City, and unfortunately most soldiers had to use on-the-job training to develop and reinforce those techniques. Initially, I saw apprehension and a lack of confidence among the soldiers. As the hours passed and experience grew, however, their apprehension quickly turned to confidence.

Senior leaders quickly recognized that better training on more realistic live-fire ranges at home station and at the combat training centers would help overcome the problems identified in Panama. The Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) then took on the responsibility for developing a realistic, challenging live-fire program.

The JRTC conducts live-fire exercises for light infantry and Special Forces (SF) units. Unlike the battalion level live-fire exercises conducted at the National Training Center, those at the JRTC focus on infantry rifle squads and platoons and Special Forces A detachments. The unit missions include *movement-to-contact*, *ambush*, *deliberate attack*, and *raid*.

This relatively new training event is a departure from the way most units conduct live-fire training. I have observed platoons from seven light divisions, detachments from five SF groups, and more than 90 live-fire exercises since August 1990 and found a great disparity in the units' levels of training. Most units appear unprepared to conduct the live-fire training at the JRTC.

### STANDARD

The JRTC sets the standard for live-fire training, and a simple understanding of this standard will improve each rotational unit's performance and raise the level of combat readiness throughout the Army. JRTC live-fire operations differ from most routine live-fire exercises in three areas: *The basic concept for operations*, *the approach to safety*, and *the actual execution of each live-fire event*.

The concept is simply to provide the most realistic live-fire experience short of actual combat. The JRTC and its live-fire division do this in several ways: by producing a tactical scenario

that clarifies all administrative requirements for the unit; by portraying a tough, life-like enemy who fights back; and by observing the unit's performance and providing immediate and precise feedback.

The live-fire division becomes a platoon's higher headquarters and participates as its sister units and support elements. This headquarters issues the orders and controls the tactical scenario. The platoon executes its live-fire exercise as a tactical mission in accordance with the operations order (OPORD) and to the standards found in the mission training plans.

The opposing force (OPFOR) is realistic and tough. The live-fire division has specifically designed targets to resemble uniformed, life-like enemy soldiers who fiercely stand their ground. They seek cover and concealment, stay out of the open, and engage the friendly attacker with their own weapon systems. The OPFOR weapons shoot back, using lasers from the multiple integrated laser engagement system (MILES), coupled with gunfire simulators. The attacker must seek cover and concealment as he maneuvers, or he risks becoming a MILES casualty.

The observer-controllers (OCs) perform indispensable functions in live-fire exercises. As observers, they examine the execution of the exercise from a doctrinal standpoint and provide immediate, accurate feedback to the unit with an after-action review (AAR). The live-fire AAR goes one step farther to correlate the number of rounds expend-

ed with the effects on the target. As controllers, they act as referees for the exercise rules of engagement and MILES casualties. As a live-fire controller, an experienced OC watches the live-fire battle unfold, foresees potential safety violations, and moves to intervene only when he thinks it is necessary. This most important aspect of the OC makes his role critical for realistic live-fire exercises.

### Safety

An administrative range mentality permeates most live-fire training throughout the Army. This mentality stems from overcautious and unimaginative training conducted by leaders who are products of this same kind of training. Administrative safety stifles realistic execution and teaches bad habits to soldiers who may one day find themselves in hostile territory. The JRTC overcomes this mentality and the live-fire division conducts realistic training in accordance with the Army's safety regulations.

The live-fire division coordinates all administrative safety restrictions and requirements found in the safety regulations and makes them clear to the maneuver elements. The live-fire division writes the OPORDs and designs the maneuver graphics with range fans, firing limits, and reservation boundaries in mind. The player unit, which never sees the administrative considerations, fires and maneuvers in accordance with its tactical order. This perceived freedom to maneuver is vital to realism.

The live-fire division further improves freedom to maneuver by replacing the enemy targets in areas where the rounds fall within established surface danger zones (SDZs). The live fire division constructs these zones so that they provide almost 180-degree fields of fire. This allows units the flexibility to execute bold flanking movements and to emplace their weapon systems in locations of their own choosing. For added realism, the division constructs these SDZs in rugged, wooded, and restrictive terrain.

From the outset, the unit chain of command is held responsible for safety.

The leaders stress the safety principles inherent in the tactically sound execution of the missions outlined in the mission training plan. The JRTC gives soldiers and their leaders the benefit of the doubt—assuming the unit will employ its weapons responsibly. The JRTC further assumes the unit will use tactically sound procedures and techniques to engage the enemy and that it will avoid situations of potential fratricide to safeguard its soldiers.

Since August 1990, no soldier has been injured by direct fire on a live-fire



exercise at JRTC. Safety in training is paramount. When the training is handled correctly, units can fire safely without compromising tough and realistic training.

### Execution

**Mission Preparation.** The platoons occupy tactical assembly areas within two to four kilometers of the forward line of own troops (FLOT). This allows the units to conduct detailed planning and rehearsals before crossing the line of departure. The JRTC attaches platoons to a notional company in which a role-playing company commander issues a detailed operations order or a fragmentary order for a company operation. The platoons then plan, backbrief, and move in accordance with this order.

Each platoon receives a basic load of live ammunition. Munitions for each weapon system include: ball ammunition for M9 pistols; ball and tracer for M16A2 rifles, M249 SAW, and M60 machinegun; target practice and buckshot for M203 grenade launchers; 00

buckshot for M1200 shotguns; M67 (90mm) and M3-550 (84mm) recoilless rifles; M67 fragmentation grenades; high explosive and subcaliber M136 AT4 and M72A2 LAW antitank rockets; M47 antitank missiles; M18A1 claymore and M15 antitank mines; non-electric firing systems for demolition satchel charges and M1A1 bangalore torpedoes; smoke grenades; and signaling pyrotechnics. The platoon cross-loads and issues ammunition on the basis of its understanding of the mission.

Units rehearse on terrain similar to that of the objective area, but they do not maneuver on the actual terrain until the execution of the mission. Some missions, however, require a leader's reconnaissance of the objective. The platoon conducts a reconnaissance patrol to a vantage point overlooking the objective area. During the reconnaissance, the platoon uses stealth and security, because live opposing forces in the objective area may compromise the patrol.

**Movement to Contact.** The platoons in training move as the lead element of a company conducting a movement to contact to locate enemy targets within the battalion sector. The company maneuvers with its platoons abreast or in trail along the axis of advance through march objectives. The platoons execute squad and platoon combat drills on contact. A platoon continues until it becomes combat ineffective with 30 percent casualties or until the commander decides to maneuver another platoon around to continue as the main effort.

The OPFOR, lightly armed and dismounted, ranges in size from two-man security elements to ten-man squads in hasty defensive positions on cache sites. Generally, the platoons make contact with the enemy six to eight times during three kilometers of movement.

The platoons must exercise great care in distinguishing friend from foe and non-combatant from combatant. They may encounter friendly units forward along unit boundaries or misoriented scouts along the axis of advance. As part of the targetry, these elements are

dressed in U.S. uniforms. Battlefield clutter may include civilian non-combatants. Care is taken to ensure realism.

**Ambush.** The platoons conduct a night point ambush on a vehicle convoy as part of a company area ambush to destroy OPFOR supply convoys within the battalion sector. Company or battalion mortars support the objective area with on-call illumination and high-explosive blocking fires. This adds a real training event to the indirect-fire systems.

The OPFOR convoys consist of groups of three to six vehicles moving along an existing road. The vehicles include the BRDM-2, a light armored reconnaissance vehicle, and the GAZ-69, a thin-skinned cargo vehicle. Each vehicle looks, sounds, and reacts like a real vehicle moving in convoy.

The platoons develop their own ground tactical plan and emplace their own weapon systems. The platoon leaders execute whatever tactically sound plan they devise. The platoons use subcaliber antitank munitions to supplement their machineguns, grenade launchers, and mines to disable and destroy the convoy.

**Deliberate Attack.** The platoons conduct a deliberate attack on a fortified position to seize and occupy an enemy platoon strongpoint as the company's main effort. The platoons, with an attached engineer section, establish a breach in a wire and mine obstacle, gain a foothold in the trenchwork, and begin to clear the trenches and bunkers. They use both night infiltration and deliberate daylight techniques.

The enemy platoon occupies a strongpoint consisting of a fortified trenchwork, crew-served fighting positions with overhead cover, and command bunkers. The enemy uses both mines and boobytraps throughout the position and may reinforce the position with armored vehicles.

As the platoons move along the axis of attack, the forward observer calls for planned artillery and mortar fires to prepare the objective. Artillery is fired over the axis of advance so the soldiers can experience overhead, low-angle fire. The forward observer shifts the

high-explosive and smoke fires to blocking targets as the platoons maneuver dangerously close to the objective.

The platoons establish a breach in a location designated by the company commander. Generally, engineers establish a breach using an M1A1 Bangalore torpedo. The platoons suppress the breach point with fire from their machineguns, SAWs, recoilless rifles, and AT4s or LAWs.

Upon establishing the breach, the platoons fight to secure the foothold by first firing and maneuvering forward and clearing the entry point with M67 fragmentation grenades. The soldiers systematically clear the trenchwork with M16A2s, SAWs, M203s, and shotguns. They also clear crew-served fighting positions and bunkers with fragmentation grenades.

During consolidation and reorganization, a reinforcing armor element threatens the platoons on the objective. Company mortars and available artillery suppress the armor column, and the platoons engage the approaching vehicles with their machineguns, AT4s, and Dragons. Meanwhile, the platoons must continue treating casualties and evacuating them to the company casualty collection point.

**Raid.** The SF detachment conducts direct action missions to destroy enemy command and control centers or cache sites. The detachment first goes into isolation at the intermediate staging base for detailed planning and rehearsals. It then conducts airborne or air assault insertion into the objective area and places the objective under observation. The detachment infiltrates with a basic load of blank or inert munitions and conducts active reconnaissance against a live enemy on the objective. This makes stealth and security the keys to success, because compromise is always possible.

Before attack time, the detachment exchanges blank munitions for live, and the OPFOR soldiers withdraw, leaving their mechanical counterparts in position. The detachment conducts the raid, withdraws to a pickup zone, and exfiltrates by helicopter. The JRTC uses this same process of replacing blank

with live ammunition and live for inert OPFOR targets for the detachment executing the ambush mission.

Live-fire exercises at the JRTC are truly unique in their scope and realism. The concept, philosophy, safety, and execution of JRTC live-fire exercises use a commonsense approach to training. This approach exposes the strengths and weaknesses of squads and platoons by forcing units to rely on their chains of command to get the job done. Platoons are given the responsibility for reacting as they have been trained. Platoons are held accountable. As the observer-controllers have seen, most units respond professionally to the challenge and appreciate their newfound responsibility.

To gain the most from their rotation at the JRTC, the units must understand and prepare for the live-fire challenges they will face. Before deployment, all soldiers must understand their basic warfighting doctrine and be confident in themselves and their weapons. The leaders must demonstrate competence and then develop the same competence among their soldiers. Live-fire exercises offer both exciting training opportunities and the potential for accidental shootings. With a no-nonsense approach to firearms safety, commanders can derive the maximum training value with the confidence that their soldiers understand the responsibilities that are inherent in training with loaded weapons. On the ground, with these tasks mastered, the unit can anticipate, react to, and overcome every challenge.

JRTC live-fire exercises correctly train future soldiers and their leaders for combat. We can best prepare our soldiers and their units for the rigors of combat by implementing this commonsense approach in all live-fire exercises.

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