

# TRAINING NOTES



## Train as We Fight

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When our country calls us to battle these days, we rarely have a lot of time to get ready. Instead—as they did in Grenada, the Persian Gulf, Somalia, Haiti, Liberia, and Rwanda—our senior leaders simply say “go.” And we go. Our Army prides itself on our ability to execute operations based on as little as a mission and a commander’s intent.

How are we able to do this?

The answer is simple to say and hard to do: We fight as we train. Driven by Field Manuals (FMs) 25-100, *Training the Force*, and 25-101, *Battle-Focused Training*, and much supporting training doctrine, our combat forces have learned how to get the job done in all climates and against all foes. There is an interesting parallel between our training doctrine and our fighting doctrine. You won’t find it stated in exactly the same way in today’s 25-series manuals, but the idea is implicit throughout our doctrinal literature. In war, we determine the desired end state, issue orders to the leaders, focus the main effort, and capitalize on our strengths. Quality training relies on exactly the same underlying principles. Success in training promises success under fire.

**Define the End State.** There’s an old maxim that says, “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will take you there.” Well, soldiers do know where they’re going, and that means we pay attention when we choose the route

to that destination. The end shapes our choice of means, in training and in conflict.

Confronting our adversaries, we speak of end state as the key component in our commander’s intent. It tells our subordinates, all the folks on our team, what success looks like. We express end state in terms of our side, the enemy, and the terrain. That formula can be found in every order issued, from the rifle squad up to corps and joint task force. If everything else goes bad, our soldiers return to that simple definition of victory and make it happen.

So it also goes in training. Here, our branch schools have done the preliminary spade-work for us. Mission training plans (MTPs) offer time-tested tasks, conditions, and standards. And if you read carefully, you can’t help noticing that the MTP standards regularly speak in terms of friendly force, effects on the opposing forces (OPFOR), and terrain. In short, our training end state is already embedded in our detailed MTPs.

That’s the science part, the part where you can rely on the system. The art part, which draws on experience and imagination, is just as important. You have to figure out where you want to go, then pick the scheme that gets you there. In combat, you design an operation to reach your end state. Trainers must pick the MTP tasks (one or two)

that bring their units to the desired end state. If you want rifle platoons that can fight and win, you might choose to focus on the ability to execute a night maneuver live-fire exercise involving the attack of a fortified position. In that one end state you can identify a multitude of critical subtasks that could easily generate an entire cyclical training plan.

Once you select that kind of core competency task, everything else falls out pretty clearly. You know where you’re going, so the road becomes obvious. Our fine MTPs show you the supporting individual, collective, and leader tasks. With this brand of roadmap in hand, you have the plan. But as General George S. Patton, Jr., warned, planning is only five percent of the challenge. Execution is where we really earn our pay, whether we’re fighting or training.

**Train Leaders First.** With the intent described, a commander must then get the word out and ensure that his task force understands the operation. Our tactical processes rely heavily on a proven series of orders, backbriefs, rehearsals, “synch-exes,” and reconnaissance to make sure everybody knows his job. When we do so, and then make contact, we greatly increase the chances that we’ll fight on our own terms. Not surprisingly, our training methods should follow this same path.

It's sometimes frustrating to see units head out to a range or a field site and spend an inordinate amount of time getting organized. Often, our leaders act as if they first put their minds to their business when they cross into the training grounds. As a result, the units can spend a lot of time training their own leaders, instead of the other way around. To resort to a tactical analogy, it's as if we tried to figure out our scheme of maneuver on the fly, between the line of departure and the objective. This is no way to fight. It's no way to train, either.

To get it right under fire, you must tell the leaders the mission, talk it out, let them brief their troops, and then rehearse, rehearse, and rehearse. Training runs the same way. We must discipline ourselves to allow time to teach our leaders first, to get them in the picture early. Then, our officers and NCOs become true experts. When they, in turn, teach their units, there is little wasted time. As a side benefit, trust and confidence grow in the chain of command.

When you let these troop-leading procedures play out, including full-up rehearsals, you quickly find that 90 percent of the learning occurs long before you execute the terminal training task. In this effort, it's important to allow time for a good after-action review (AAR). Equally important, we have to carve out resources (including time) for retraining and numerous iterations. We do AARs and retraining in combat, too. Once again, this reinforces training the way we fight.

**Do Less Better.** Under fire, you cannot hope to do everything everywhere all the time. You have to pick your fights and pile on when and where it matters. When commanders do this, we applaud them for concentrating combat power, and refer to the principle of mass. When commanders mess this up, they chide themselves for dissipating combat power, for trying to be strong everywhere and ending up spread too thin. That's a recipe for failure.

Spreading yourself too thin can happen very easily in training. Those same wonderful MTPs mentioned earlier feature dozens of tasks that beg for at-

tention. A recent infantry battalion MTP, for example, lists some 60 battalion-level tasks. Many of these cry out for weeks and months of extensive training. And yet our calendars constrict us, and our ammunition and ranges limit our appetite. You can't eat everything on the menu any more than you can take every objective or destroy every enemy unit at once.

The trick in war or training involves deciding on that one key effort and then making it overwhelmingly strong. You have to do less than everything, but perform better on the part you choose to emphasize. The same kind of combat multipliers must be applied to triumph in battle or on the range. We have to bring in the entire combined arms team—including our medical evacuation, supply, and maintenance elements. Resources must include MILES or live-fire targetry, training ammunition, and the right kind of land and ranges. In force-on-force training, we gain a lot by introducing an uncooperative OPFOR, civilian and press role players, and varied terrain, including built-up areas. Don't neglect the special challenges brought on by darkness. The emphasis is on quality and intensity, not just throughput and numbers.

Now some of us won't be comfortable with this kind of approach. Soldiers are "type-A" personalities by nature, who want to do more and more, not less. We like long mission-essential task lists and lots of subunit tasks, as if quantity alone proves how good we are. It does not, especially if you don't have time to train on all these potential tasks. In war, or in training, you win by doing a few key things right.

**Focus on Foundations.** When you fight well, you mass your strength against hostile weaknesses. Historical evidence consistently tells us that armies are only as good as their small units. In modern warfare, we fight spread out, combined arms, joint services, and often with allies. We must have very high-quality small units to operate in that environment. Our foundations, our strengths, lie at company or battery or troop level and below.

The exact fighting focus varies by branch and type unit. In light infantry,

the rifle platoon is the first element that has a decent radio, leadership, and arms enough to carry out contemporary operations. In attack aviation, we fly into action by companies. Military intelligence often goes in teams of two to five men, as with ground surveillance radars. Once you know your foundation, you know where to put most of your training effort.

That said, what about units above the company echelon? Simulations offer one good way to work on troop-leading procedures, tactics, staff work, and command post routines. This is a valid form of leader training and should be exploited as a form of rehearsal.

It would be a mistake, however, to place too much stock in pushing electrons. Basing tactical expertise on computer simulations alone is like thinking you can play professional basketball after a few rounds of Nintendo 64. As soldiers, we know that nothing short of going out to the field can teach you how to accommodate fatigue, uncertainty, fear, and Murphy's Law. So while we put our priority on training highly skilled small units, we must also create key events and exercises to replicate larger unit operations. When done correctly, these exercises allow for (indeed, insist upon) high-quality small-unit training as crucial measures of overall performance.

**Train as We Fight and Fight as We Train.** We can be pretty certain that the next rewrites of our 25-series training doctrine will better reflect the intentional similarities between the way we plan and execute training and the way we plan and execute combat operations. Training management has never been some arcane subject conducted in a vacuum. It's nothing more (or less) than drilling our battle tactics over and over until we know them cold.

Define the end state.

Train leaders first.

Do less better.

Focus on foundations.

None of these are unique concepts, but taken together, they offer a pretty good way of ensuring that we really do train our soldiers using techniques similar to those they will use in war. The more training resembles combat,

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the more we do to get our forces ready for that ultimate test. Our goal remains that of the old Roman legionnaires, of whom the historian and soldier Josephus wrote: "Their drills were like bloodless battles; their battles were like bloody drills." The better the training, the less the blood.

That's all there is to it.

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