
Marksmanship Training

More Than the Basics

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Most U.S. Army infantry battalions consider marksmanship training one of their most critical tasks. A unit can trace its successes (or failures) to the level of marksmanship proficiency it displays. But the actual marksmanship training that takes place within a battalion normally consists of basic zeroing and qualification requirements with sporadic visits to a live fire range. If our soldiers are to become proficient in the task that will ensure their success—and indeed survival—on the battlefield, marksmanship training must consist of more than the basics.

Over a period of 12 months, 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry, at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, developed and implemented a marksmanship training program that succeeded in getting soldiers better trained on their assigned weapons. Additionally, this program provided the battalion level leaders with vital information pertaining to the proficiency of the battalion firers and brought the unit to the next level in its warfighting capabilities.

Implementing this system required a series of planned events: The first was a meeting the battalion leaders held with all battalion NCOs and officers to establish a feasible marksmanship program that met the Standards in Training

(STRAC) requirement, while at the same time adhering to the constraints usually placed on maneuver units. The battalion commander was the primary facilitator of this meeting.

This meeting focused on how to improve marksmanship within the battalion. The discussion points included the following:

- What the unit is doing well with marksmanship.
- What changes are needed.
- How members of this group can effect needed changes.
- What do others need to do to effect needed changes.

Once the battalion had gathered input on the strengths and weaknesses in marksmanship from the company commanders, platoon leaders, and platoon sergeants, a master gunner was selected. The term *master gunner*, as used in a light infantry battalion, is considerably different from the way it is used in a mechanized infantry battalion. The light infantry battalion master gunner is first and foremost a link between the battalion and the subject matter experts, not only at home-station, but with other military organizations as well.

The battalion master gunner provides the battalion with the latest information on new weapon systems, gathers and

disseminates marksmanship training strategies developed by other units, and maintains a filing system on all marksmanship conducted within the battalion. These files are readily available to all leaders, especially new platoon leaders who may need guidance on specific requirements, such as how a range firing was previously conducted within the battalion.

The main objective for the master gunner is to reinforce the commander's guidance on marksmanship. This is accomplished in various ways. First, the battalion S-3 developed approximately 20 different posters depicting the battalion's weapons systems, which included the characteristics and capabilities of all MTOE assigned weapons. With help from the local print plant these were enlarged and acetated. Most of the printouts were selected from the technical manual (TM) or field manual (FM) pertaining to a particular weapon. These posters were then distributed throughout the respective companies. For example, some of the posters for the three line companies included the M16A2, M240, M249, M203, and AT4. The antiarmor company received posters of the M4 Carbine, TOW, Mk 19, and the M2 .50 caliber machinegun. The headquarters and headquarters

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company (HHC) received posters of the M2 .50 caliber, the 81mm mortar, the 9mm pistol, as well as the other small arms weapons within the company.

The posters were placed in areas of high visibility for the soldiers to read. This proved to be a tremendous tool for helping soldiers learn the characteristics and capabilities of their individual weapons.

Next, the battalion scheduled officer professional development (OPD) sessions on marksmanship training. Guest speakers from the post's range control were invited to attend and offer their expertise. This greatly improved the working relationship between the battalion and range control personnel. The vast experience of the range control staff provided leaders with a great deal of insight and ideas on how to get the most realistic training from the maneuver ranges as well as the known distance (KD) range. Most Army posts in the continental United States, and even overseas, have range experts who are often retired military officers and NCOs, and units should seek their help. Since these people control a very important asset that all units want—the ranges—it is also important to build good rapport.

Marksmanship Gates

The battalion developed a series of "gates" for each soldier in terms of marksmanship (Figure 1). To progress, each soldier had to go through the gates in sequence.

Before going to any range, preliminary marksmanship instruction (PMI) must be conducted. This is the most critical stage of marksmanship training. Commanders should include PMI on company training schedules to ensure that squad leaders have the time to train their soldiers before conducting live fires. Leaders should conduct training on a variety of tasks including:

- Operational characteristics of assigned weapons.
- The actual functioning of the weapons.
- Malfunctions and corrections.
- Marksmanship fundamentals.
- Basic and advanced firing positions.

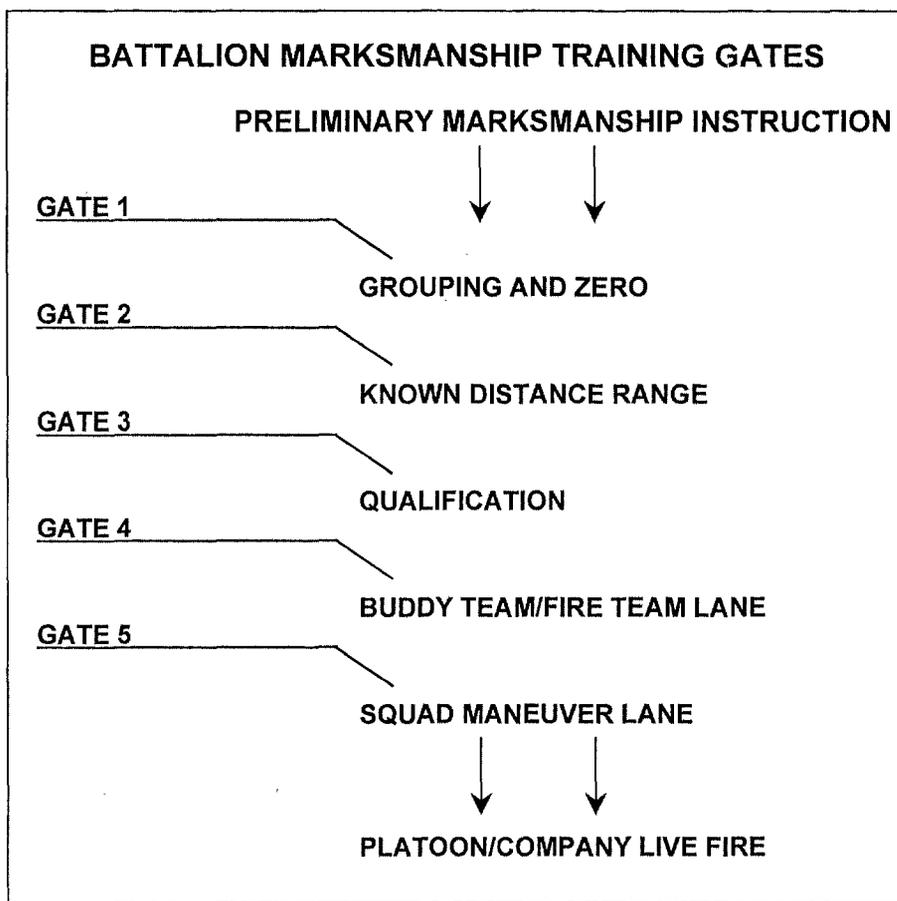


Figure 1

- Dry fire exercises.

The squad leader's role during each marksmanship phase is most important. During PMI, for instance, he must ensure that every soldier fully understands and can properly execute each of these tasks.

The first gate is shot-grouping and zeroing an assigned weapon. Each firer must have a coach throughout the firing process. (A checklist for the coach can be found in Field Manual 23-9, *M16A1 and M16A2 Rifle Marksmanship*. The purpose of shot-grouping is firing tight groups and consistently placing them in the same location on the target. If the soldier cannot consistently fire tight shot groups he is removed from the range and retrained. Once the soldier successfully fires a series of two tight shot groups, he then makes the necessary adjustments to his weapon and obtains his zero. During Gate 1, the squad leader should pay particular attention to both shooter and coach. It may be necessary for him to play the role of coach if a soldier is having more

difficulty obtaining tight shot groups.

Next, the soldier moves to the KD range to confirm his zero at actual distance. This is Gate 2. Units should try to schedule zero ranges and KD ranges on the same day. While on the KD range, the squad leader teaches wind effects and bullet trajectory to each soldier and reiterates the importance of a proper zero. Immediate target feedback is the squad leader's most valuable training aid on the KD range.

Gate 3 is qualification on a soldier's assigned weapon. By this time, the soldier's confidence level with his weapon should be high, because he knows he can engage targets effectively out to 300 meters. If the previous gates are executed to standard, there will be a definite increase in a unit's qualification scores. Although the squad leader's role at the qualification is limited, his presence is particularly important because it shows the firers that he is genuinely concerned about their shooting ability.

Gate 4, conducted on a maneuver

RANGE ASSESSMENT

DATE: _____

COMPANY: _____ RANGE: _____

OIC: _____

NCOIC: _____

OTHER LEADERS PRESENT _____

TASK: _____

CONDITION: _____

STANDARD: _____

TYPE OF PMI CONDUCTED: _____

TYPE OF CONCURRENT TRAINING: _____

TYPE OF REMEDIAL TRAINING: _____

HAVE ALL SOLDIERS FIRED ON KD RANGE PRIOR TO FIRING ON TODAY'S RANGE? _____
 (ALL ZERO RANGES DISREGARD THIS QUESTION.)

IF NOT, WHO AND WHY? _____

NUMBER AND TYPE OF ROUNDS EXPENDED: _____

NUMBER OF SOLDIERS ZEROED/QUALIFIED AND COMPANY:

	ZEROED	EXPERT	SHARPSHOOTER	MARKSMAN
HHC				
A CO				
B CO				
C CO				
D CO				

RANGE ISSUES: _____

OBSERVATIONS: _____

RECOMMENDATIONS: _____

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: _____

Figure 2

range, is the buddy team/fire team lane. At this gate the soldier begins to develop confidence in maneuvering with the soldier to his left and his right and how to properly execute individual movement techniques, as well as rapid magazine changes. While conducting the buddy team/fire team lane, the squad leader is overseeing the team leaders and ensuring that training is conducted to standard. At this gate, the squad leader's role is that of observer-

controller. Even at this level an informal after-action review should be conducted upon completion of each firing iteration.

Gate 5 is the squad maneuver lane, where the soldiers in the squad apply all of their previous marksmanship training. Target feedback is critical during squad live fire exercises because it tells the squad leader which soldiers are actually getting target hits and which ones are firing ineffectively downrange. It is

imperative that squad leaders show individual soldiers all of the targets after each engagement is complete. The training culminates in platoon and company live fires.

Providing Incentives

Another tool that can be used to emphasize the importance of marksmanship and instill a spirit of competition is to offer informal awards for marksmanship success. To meet this need, 3d Battalion established the Sergeant Alvin C. York Award. After each intensive training cycle, the battalion commander presented the award to a platoon from each rifle company, the best mortar crew, and the best scout squad. The award is nothing more than an E-type silhouette (complete with bullet holes) with the unit designation stenciled on it and a statement that it was the best during a particular training cycle. Although this may seem trivial, soldiers usually try very hard to earn it. Company commanders, executive officers, and first sergeants select the best platoon on the basis of all platoon qualifications and how well maneuver ranges were conducted.

Assessing the Program

To help give the battalion feedback on individual marksmanship qualifications, the master gunner developed a two-page range assessment sheet, the contents of which are shown in Figure 2.

These sheets provide data on the number of soldiers from each company to qualify with their assigned weapons, the level of qualification, the amount of ammunition required, as well as any problems associated with the planning and execution of the range. At the completion of all ranges, the officer in charge must turn in this information to the battalion. The master gunner, the battalion S-3, and the battalion commander review each range assessment sheet and write their comments. Then copies are distributed to each company. This not only provides the commander with feedback on his company, but also gives him an opportunity to see the statistics of the other companies in the battalion. In addition, the range as-

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assessment sheet gives the battalion S-3 a systems check of the battalion's marksmanship program.

Marksmanship training is an ongoing process within a battalion, and if it is to be successful, it must be command driven. If the commander takes an active interest in a marksmanship training program, so will everyone else. Many

methods have been developed to improve marksmanship capabilities. Creativity and gaining support from the many self-starters found in each unit can pay big dividends in a unit's marksmanship abilities. In the end, if each and every soldier can claim—and believes—that if it can be seen it can be hit, then the program is a success.

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