
Own the Night? Or Shoot, Move, and Communicate Effectively in It?

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Darkness is a friend to the skilled infantryman, according to Captain Sir Basil Liddell Hart (*Thoughts on War*, 1944). This statement is as true today as it was in 1944, if not more so, but I would have to edit it to read: Darkness is a friend to the skilled *and properly equipped* infantryman.

“Own the night” is the U.S. Army’s claim to the edge that we have over every potential adversary on the modern battlefield. For the most part, that is true—but only in the sense that we can see in limited visibility conditions because of our advanced night vision capabilities and their abundance in most of our infantry units. But do we truly own the night? Can we engage targets more effectively with these systems? Are we integrating them effectively into our qualification ranges and night live fire exercises?

Although our Army has the finest night vision devices in the world, for the most part we use them only for observation. We do not use them to fight

with, or use them along with our weapons to get the full effectiveness. We do not combine them and the weapons into one system as effectively as we should.

While I was a platoon leader in the 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry, 10th Mountain Division, I was tasked with developing a company training plan for a night qualification range. After re-

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searching our current Field Manual (FM) 23-9, *M16A1 and M16A2 Rifle Marksmanship*, and conferring with my noncommissioned officers, I recommended that we conduct a modified M16 night familiarization using the AN/PVS-7D and AN/PAQ-4. The decision to use these systems was based

on the fact that almost all of our riflemen had PVS-7Ds. In short, the FM seemed to be outdated—surpassed by our current technology and the number of night vision devices per platoon.

What we came up with was a three-phase plan: Pre-marksmanship instruction (PMI), a practical exercise, and the familiarization fire itself.

Three NCOs were tasked to prepare the PMI classes. They were given enough advance notice to be able to prepare good solid classes, rehearse, and request the necessary training aids. Each NCO was given a task, condition, and standard for his class. The three classes were: Night Firing Techniques, Firing With an AN/PVS-7D, and Zero and Engage Targets With an AN/PVS-7D and an AN/PAQ-4. As their references, the NCOs used FM 23-9, Soldier Technical Publication (STP) 7-11BCHM, the appropriate Technical Manual, and their own experience and expertise.

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TRAINING NOTES

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After the initial day qualification, the company was given an additional safety brief and an orientation on the range and range concept, which covered the way the range was to be conducted.

The company was then divided into three sections, and the round-robin series of PMI began. The soldiers assigned PAQ-4s were put in one firing order and sent first to the class on zeroing and engaging targets. During this class, each soldier, with the help of the NCOIC, zeroed the PAQ-4 to his assigned weapon. This was a key area: Each weapon had to be zeroed to the individual soldier, then the PAQ-4 had to be zeroed to the weapon by that same soldier. Once the two were mated and zeroed, any soldier could pick up the weapon and fire it as if it were his own individual weapon, so long as he was wearing the PVS-7.

The other two classes—Night Firing Techniques and Firing With the PVS-7D—were straight out of FM 23-9 and the TM, with the NCOs adding their own experience. Each rotation of round-robin classes took 30 minutes. For many of the soldiers, this was the first time they had been exposed to and trained in techniques developed specifically for night firing.

After the round-robin training, the three firing orders formed up for the night fire. The soldiers with PAQ-4s were the first to fire. Every soldier was to have the PVS-7D. The second firing order moved up to the firing points, with the soldiers of the first order to act as safeties. The standard night firing table for qualification was used. After firing, the first order left the firing line—leaving their weapons with the PAQ-4s mounted on them—and moved off the range, to be replaced by the next firing order. After the second firing order fired, they became safeties for the last order, and the safeties became the firers.

Since this was a familiarization and not a qualification, in the orientation brief I gave the platoon sergeants and squad leaders the option of having their soldiers fire their weapons with just the PVS-7Ds or having the first soldiers fire their weapons with the PAQ-4s mounted. Although most of them chose to fire with the PAQ-4, some opted to fire with just the PVS-7D. We did not yet have PAQ-4s assigned to every rifleman and wanted a test group for comparison.

The PMI NCOICs, the platoon sergeant, and I were on the firing line during each order with night observation devices to observe, correct any deficiencies, and answer any questions. When we conducted the training, we shared the range with a sister company, whose soldiers did not attend the PMI or use any night vision devices in their qualification. When the scores were announced, it was evident that many of that company's soldiers did not meet the standard of seven hits out of 30 silhouettes. Every man in our company qualified according to FM 23-9 standards, and most qualified Expert. Even soldiers who had difficulty qualifying during the day had no problem at night. One soldier who had failed to qualify during the day—even though he had been retrained and sent back to rezero—attended all of the round-robin training and, that night, shot 39 out of 40.

Our success was the direct result of several factors: First, the NCOs presented outstanding PMI instruction. This was the first time many of the soldiers had received PMI for a night fire. A second factor was the use of the AN/PVS-7Ds. The third, and probably the largest contributing factor, was the use of the AN/PAQ-4s.

As with every training event, much of it went well, but a few improvements and recommendations were noted during the after-action review:

- Take more time for the PAQ-4 class—an hour, instead of 30 minutes.

- Introduce artificial illumination, using parachute flares, during each firing order.

- Run all soldiers through a firing order with just the PVS-7s first, then add the PAQ-4s.

- Introduce firing positions other than the prone.

- Initiate ambidextrous firing.

- Teach soldiers in the PAQ-4 class not to splash their sector before a target appears.

- Fix bayonets to counteract the natural tendency to fire high.

In addition, assault firing techniques could be taught and trained while wearing night observation devices; odd and difficult terrain could be built into the even, mown, landscape of the range; and urban terrain techniques could be trained, using a little imagination and relatively few additional training aids.

Over all, this excellent training event gave the soldiers confidence in their equipment and the leaders a base from which to expand their training programs.

As the tip of the spear, we should truly be able to shoot, move, and communicate in the night—not just *see* in it. The FM is there to provide guidelines and standards. But nothing says we as leaders cannot adopt a higher standard with our equipment on the basis of our experience and the desire to own the night in all its facets. Once we can move, shoot, and observe to the fullest extent of our capabilities, we can truly dominate the night and seize the initiative from any adversary.

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