

Commandant's Note

BRIGADIER GENERAL BENJAMIN C. FREAKLEY

MARKSMANSHIP — THE WARRIOR'S EDGE

“The importance of well-trained infantry as the prime essential to military success can hardly be overestimated. Infantry capable of meeting the requirements of modern war can be created only by the most painstaking and intelligent instruction of the individual and all that pertains to the duties of the Soldier. The neglect of any phase of his training may cause disaster.”

— General John J. Pershing



When he commanded the American Expeditionary Force in France during World War I, General Pershing cabled the War Department, saying: “Send me men who can shoot...,” a theme he often stressed in his cables because he considered infantrymen arriving in France to be poorly trained in marksmanship. General Pershing recognized that the rifle is the infantryman’s essential weapon, and insisted that American Soldiers be able to hit targets at a range of 600 meters. That sentiment is as crucial to the profession of arms today as it was six decades ago, as our infantrymen are once again engaged, fighting the global war on terrorism. We are a nation and an Army at war, and the way the Infantry closes with and destroys the enemy will ensure our continuance as a powerful and free nation.

The last Commandant’s Note discussed Warrior Ethos and the three-pronged strategy for implementation: Warrior Skills, Warrior Culture, and Mental and Physical Toughness. This month, the focus is on the skill fundamental to an infantryman’s success in combat and his very survival: rifle marksmanship. The Warriors who are the spear point of our nation’s defense are the best-trained, best-equipped, and most lethal we have ever fielded, and that is largely because they are the most aggressive and the best shots on the battlefield. The strengths of the Infantry’s riflemen lie in the basic and fundamental skills we teach them; in the reflexive fire training they get to prepare them for the one-on-one, close-quarters firefight; in their ability to kill the enemy at long-range; and in the collective fire exercises that train units to focus massed firepower against the enemy.

As we consider all of the Soldier’s combat equipment, his individual weapon stands out as the symbol that designates him as a warrior. It is his basic tool in trade and he must be so well trained in its use that it is an extension of the Warrior. Institutional marksmanship training begins with One Station Unit Training (OSUT). The good shooting techniques taught here provide the foundation for further enhancement of an infantryman’s shooting skills when he joins his unit, and he continues to develop and reinforce them throughout his career. He enters combat confident that he can outshoot his opponent and aggressively seeks out and kills the enemy, as our adversaries in Iraq and Afghanistan have discovered. A majority of recent infantry engagements have been at 50 meters or less. The likely scenario for future combat will include quick, accurate reflexive reactions against a close, well-camouflaged, asymmetric threat, and we are training OSUT Soldiers in reflexive firing techniques. It is our responsibility as leaders to ensure that the American infantryman is the deadliest Soldier on the field of battle and that our enemies understand that.

Today’s adversaries are capable of delivering a high volume of fire against us with assault rifles, but they often do so at the cost of accuracy. This is particularly true at the longer ranges, and a seasoned combat veteran learns to return precise, aimed fire on the enemy. Combat experience in two wars against the best of the Iraqi army and in Afghanistan, in terrain ranging from the close-quarters combat of cities to the extended-range engagements of the desert and mountains, has shown that the American infantryman consistently engages and kills the enemy at ranges exceeding 300 meters, when he is properly trained. Depending upon their skills, our snipers with the M24 system can routinely engage targets out to 800 meters and beyond, and the M107-equipped sniper can engage vehicle-sized targets out to 1,800 meters, but the lion’s share of our small arms firepower lies in the hands of those infantrymen who carry the M16 rifle and the M4 carbine, and that is where we want to concentrate.

Despite our experience-driven focus on reflexive close-range

firing techniques, and regardless of the environment in which the Soldier finds himself, there will always be a need for squad designated marksmen (SDM) who can cover gaps and terrain not otherwise covered, out to the maximum effective range of his weapon. We have the rifles and the ammunition to reliably and consistently make the long shots, and we have the Soldiers who can do it as well. Many of our Soldiers have already proven that they can kill their enemy at ranges beyond those for which they were trained in service schools and at home stations. The M16- and M4-series weapons have maximum effective ranges of 550 and 500 meters respectively, and we are taking advantage of the potential for increased long-range lethality to train our infantry to kill the enemy at maximum ranges.

We know that snipers — regardless of their skills — simply cannot be everywhere at once or simultaneously engage the volume of targets an enemy can present. Our infantry must do that, and do it effectively. One step in this direction is the squad designated marksman (SDM). It is our task to build upon a rifleman's primary trained skills and teach him to perform a secondary — and vital — role as an SDM, and the 29th Infantry Regiment is accomplishing this task. The SDM learns to understand the enhanced levels of marksmanship, master his assigned weapon, and to deliver precise fire on the enemy. Over the five-day course of instruction, each student shoots over 2,500 rounds of ammunition and is taught to shoot every round as if it were his last. He learns to estimate the range of the enemy out to 550 meters. He graduates with the knowledge and teaching aids to pass on to his fellow Soldiers the skills he has learned, and can assist units in establishing their own SDM programs. We are also incorporating discussion of the SDM into our platoon and company Field Manuals. This is why marksmanship skills are steadily improving across our infantry battalions, and why insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan are becoming increasingly reluctant to openly engage U.S. infantrymen.

But the squad designated marksman training that is outlined is only one of the initiatives underway at Fort Benning to increase

the lethality of the Infantry. The United States Army Marksmanship Unit (USAMU), long the leader among international and interservice competitive shooters, is supporting and sustaining our marksmanship initiative in a number of major areas. USAMU is offering advanced rifle and pistol marksmanship training at Fort Benning, training units at their home station, deploying in-theater Mobile Training Teams, and provides the new exportable Squad Designated Marksman Instructor Course beginning in December 2004. USAMU has presented programs of instruction at seven CONUS installations, including 24 train the trainer classes to drill sergeants at Fort Benning, Fort Jackson, and Fort Leonard Wood. They have also trained U.S. Army snipers in Bosnia and presented an introduction to small arms close quarters battle marksmanship to all 11 forward operating bases of the 1st Armored Division in Iraq. USAMU has also developed modifications to the M16 that provide exceptional accuracy and combat reliability and has designed a Special Purpose Rifle used by the United States Special Operations Command. Even during the years when the primary focus of the USAMU was on marksmanship competition, the knowledge they gained toward improving the reliability and accuracy of their weapons resulted in a number of product improvements to the weapons and ammunition that have served all Soldiers so well in three recent wars and other actions around the world.

The marksmanship training of the type outlined requires us to commit resources to achieve our goal. Our Army Chief of Staff, General Peter J. Schoomaker, has observed that, "One way you know if your organization is ready for war is how much ammunition you shoot." The 2,500 rounds expended in training each of our squad designated marksmen is a good example of our commitment to training the marksmen, and we must continue our momentum in this direction. That is why we train ourselves and others to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States of America in close combat. And we do it with disciplined, tough Soldiers who can shoot.

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