

OVERHAULING THE PLATOON

NIGHT LIVE-FIRE DEFENSE IN IET

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The Army has made great strides in preparing Soldiers for combat over the past two years. Using a foundation of 39 core warrior tasks and nine core warrior battle drills, it recently instituted a new program of instruction (POI) for Basic Combat Training that adds urban and convoy operations, crew-served weapons familiarization, advanced rifle marksmanship, reaction to improvised explosive devices/unexploded ordnance (IED/UO), interaction with news media, and increased the length of time spent in the field. Gone are the days of sterile end-of-phase testing, which have been replaced with realistic and relevant situational training exercises with embedding critical individual tasks. Unfortunately, one critical event that was in desperate need to be revamped due to the very same lack of relevancy and realism, was overlooked — the platoon night live-fire defense from prepared fighting positions. The purpose of this article is to lobby for a low cost change to the recently released POI that enables the same range to be adapted to safely train Soldiers on core warrior battle drills and tasks under the most realistic and relevant conditions — before they deploy to combat.

Though each Army Training Center (ATC) has a slightly different range, the concept is the same and has been since the height of the Cold War and the advent of pop-up targets: occupy a prepared fighting position, engage “advancing” and then “retreating” targets from 300 meters to 25 meters and back to 300 meters again. At night, the only difference is that parachute flares are launched so the Soldiers can see their targets. Recently, some ATCs have added noncombatants to the mix of targetry; however, because Soldiers have no night vision equipment or laser aiming devices, not only can they not get target feedback, they can’t identify friend from foe. The Army is working quickly to address the lack of equipment, but this won’t solve the problem of relevancy: Soldiers in combat today are rarely engaging the enemy from prepared fighting positions.

According to the POI

that was approved by the Commanding General, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command on 15 November 2004, the terminal learning objective (TLO) for the platoon defensive live fire during daylight is Employ Mutually Supporting Fires, and there are four supporting enabling learning objectives (ELOs):

- Provide security as part of a perimeter or assembly area;
- Move tactically from a perimeter to a prepared fighting position;
- Engage targets in a nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) environment; and
- Employ mutually supporting fires.

The TLO for the night portion is Conduct Night Live-Fire Defensive Exercise, and it has one ELO: Participate in night live-fire defensive exercise. The poorly worded TLOs and ELOs notwithstanding, there is little nesting with the 39 core warrior tasks and nine core warrior drills. As the Training Support Package (TSP) currently reads, only three core warrior tasks are taught or reinforced, but not one core warrior drill:

- Correct malfunctions with assigned weapon;
- Use visual signaling techniques; and
- React to a chemical or biological hazard.

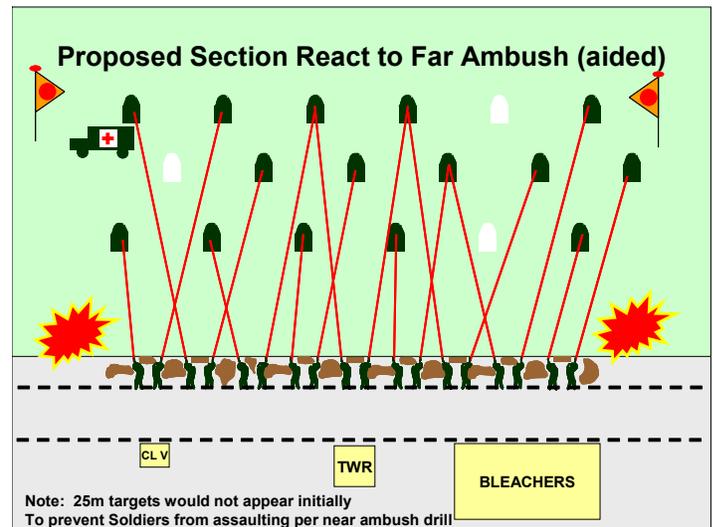
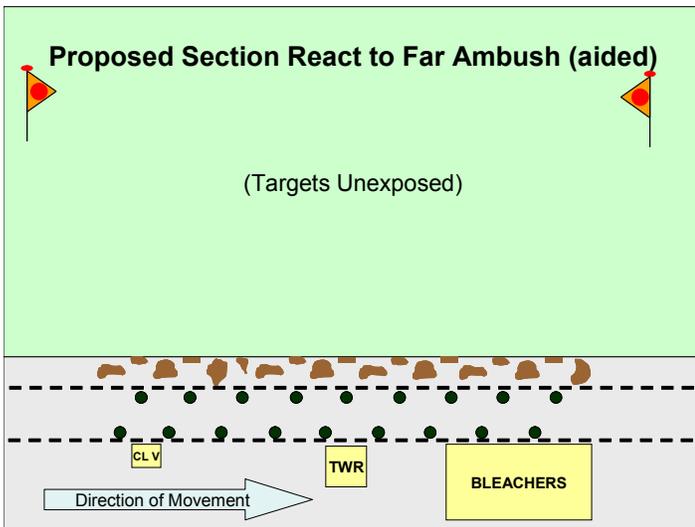
To vastly improve relevancy and realism, and train or reinforce more of the core warrior tasks and drills, Fort Knox is piloting a



Courtesy photo

Soldiers in combat today are rarely engaging the enemy from prepared fighting positions like those used during Basic Combat Training.

new concept using the existing range (See Figures 1 and 2), changing the TLO from Employ Mutually Supportive Fires to React to Far Ambush (day and night). Under this concept, Soldiers are conducting a presence patrol along a road beginning on an adjacent range with two squads (section) in a staggered column — a typical foot march formation — paralleling the “firing line” with their weapons at the low ready. To mitigate risk, drill sergeants perform as squad leaders, all Soldiers wear Improved Body Armor, live magazines in their ammunition pouches, but no magazines are in the weapon.



(We will continue to work with Post Safety to gain approval for Soldiers to move in an “amber status” [live ammunition in magazines, but no round chambered]). Once the lead members of the section approach the end of the “road” that has replaced the old prepared fighting positions, grenade simulators in demolition pits are simultaneously command detonated near the lead and trail Soldiers, thus simulating a blocked ambush. All Soldiers immediately drop and move to the nearest covered and concealed position, insert the live magazine, and destroy the threat.

To prevent assaulting through the kill zone, as would be the drill for reacting to a near ambush, the closest targets to appear initially are between 50 and 100 meters. Noncombatant targets are presented in the scenario. Once the threat is destroyed, the section performs consolidation and reorganization, and continues their patrol off of the range. At night, the scenario is the same, but Soldiers wear PVS-7 or PVS-14 Night Vision Devices and their rifles are equipped with PAQ-4 or PEQ-2 Laser Aiming Devices. Also to mitigate risk and increase Soldier proficiency, following a demonstration at the beginning of the training, each section performs a day and night dry rehearsal (no ammunition), a day blank rehearsal prior to conducting its live-fire iterations. Prerequisite training includes advanced rifle marksmanship (engage targets, night-aided) and night tactical movement with night vision devices. A 220-Soldier company, maximum for the BCT POI, can conduct the day and night dry, blank, and live-fire iterations in about eight hours, which adds no more time to the schedule than what is currently allocated.

Below are the proposed TLOs and ELOs to support this concept:

TLO: React to Far Ambush during Daylight

- ELO A: Provide security as part of a perimeter.
- ELO B: Move as a member of a presence patrol.
- ELO C: Engage targets from a temporary fighting position, employing mutually supportive fires.

TLO: React to Far Ambush at Night (Aided)

- ELO A: Provide security as part of a perimeter.
- ELO B: Move as a member of a presence patrol.
- ELO C: Engage targets (aided) from a temporary fighting position, employing mutually supportive fires.

Note: The previous ELO, Engage Targets in an NBC

Environment, can easily be performed during advanced rifle marksmanship training, as it requires only 30 minutes of instruction and application.

Using this new concept, Soldiers would train or reinforce six core warrior tasks and two core warrior drills:

- Correct malfunctions with assigned weapon;
- Use visual signaling techniques;
- Engage targets using aiming light AN/PEQ-2;
- Engage targets using aiming light AN/PAQ-4;
- React to direct fire (dismounted);
- Move under direct fire (dismounted);
- Select temporary fighting position;
- React to contact; and
- React to ambush (blocked).

Fort Knox has successfully conducted three pilots of this new concept to date, two with cadre and one with BCT Soldiers. It has proven to be a significantly more realistic and relevant experience that can be done safely without increased time. If this concept is approved by the U.S. Army Infantry Center, the proponent for the BCT POI, the existing bunkers would be bulldozed, producing an unimproved road, and without the need to maintain the prepared fighting positions, range maintenance costs would actually be lower than they currently are. More importantly, we would be sending Soldiers to combat who are immediately ready to go on a dismounted patrol in combat at night, trained on the equipment they will use, under the conditions they will fight, and on a task that is relevant to the contemporary operating environment.

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