

Commandant's Note

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COMBATIVES AND CONDITIONING Winning the Close Fight

The infantry fight is close, violent, and intensely personal. In today's contemporary operational environment we locate and destroy the enemy one room, one house, one street at a time. The global war on terrorism demands the best of the entire maneuver force and the arms that support it, because the enemy can attack without warning, day or night, and we must be ready to destroy him whenever the opportunity presents itself. Mounted forces often fight as infantry when they dismount to secure their vehicles in built-up areas, when they provide security for refueling and rearming, or when they conduct sweeps to clear their immediate environment. Likewise, combat service support Soldiers and their leaders often find themselves fighting as infantry to secure and sustain the vital functions they perform all day, every day. The insurgent has chosen to take the fight to the urban battleground where engagement ranges are short, reaction times are limited, and split-second decisions literally mean life or death. This environment imposes constraints and limitations on our forces. This limits the tactics, techniques, and procedures we can employ. In the close quarters battle (CQB) all options for the use of force must be considered when Soldiers need to achieve control over a noncombatant. In this Commandant's Note I want to talk about combatives instruction, its purpose, and some of the initiatives we are pursuing in training for this key dimension of the close fight.

Although the Army has trained on close fighting since the Revolutionary War, the techniques of pure knife fighting first received serious attention during World War I, where trench raids and other night operations were common. What we called hand-to-hand combat was commonplace in World War II, in the Korean War, and in Vietnam, and it has been a part of Soldiers' training ever since. The basis for much of the training was Field Manual 21-150, *Unarmed Defense for the American Soldier*, which stressed defensive fighting to guard against an enemy's body and choke holds, his weapons, and his hand-to-hand combat techniques. Today the Modern Army Combatives Program is a proactive program to develop aggressiveness and self-confidence. Soldiers train to employ their combatives skills to seize the initiative to dominate, disable, or kill an opponent in the CQB. Personal protection techniques are a secondary purpose for our training, but these skills have their non-lethal applications as well. In crowd control situations, during removal of noncombatants from the area of operations, or when maintaining control over prisoners or detainees such skills enable Soldiers to efficiently seize and maintain control of a situation to accomplish the mission. A Soldier competent in combatives techniques is better equipped to approach a situation with confidence and appropriate aggressiveness, and to thus surprise an adversary

unprepared for the shock of sudden, violent confrontation.

In the past, training for unarmed combat took place with minimal equipment, aside from a weapon and basic items of clothing. This is not how we fight. While our enemy may travel light and be unencumbered by load-bearing and protective gear, we can find ourselves at a marked disadvantage unless we train to fight effectively under all conditions and without taking time to shed unneeded equipment. While units routinely adjust their Soldiers' combat load to the mission, they must be ready to go into action as soon as the opportunity presents itself, and we can only assure this happens by training as we will fight. No Soldier will be alone for long in the close fight; his teammates will be there, shoulder to shoulder, and the aggressiveness and momentum of a fire team or squad engaged in CQB are powerful combat multipliers. This is called team momentum and is a key part of our training.

Combatives training begins with physical conditioning, and performance-oriented strength training is an effective way to achieve it. Both the United States Marine Corps and the Army are working this concept, with considerable success. The 75th Ranger Regiment has gained over 21 months' experience with the planning and fielding of its Ranger-Athlete-Warrior (RAW) program which employs a phased approach to physical training. The RAW concept includes strength, endurance, and movement skills training, as well as movement preparation and recovery. It is a multidimensional approach to conditioning which offers scheduling guidance for both garrison and deployed units, a physical training menu, and guidance on adding battle focus to training.

Today's Infantry School students receive combatives instruction across virtually the entire spectrum of our courses, in the 198th Infantry Brigade's one station unit training and the 192nd Infantry Brigade's training of infantry and non-infantry MOSs, in our noncommissioned officer programs, in Officer Candidate School pre-commissioning instruction, and in the basic officer leadership course, infantry basic officer leader course and maneuver captains' career courses. The Ranger Training Brigade has stressed combatives from its earliest days in the 1950's. Combatives training can be an effective part of every leader's unit training plan, and will better prepare our Soldiers for their roles in the global war on terrorism. We don't know how tough the next enemy will be, but we can train to move fast, strike hard, and win in the close fight. Follow me!

