

“So you see, I can unequivocally endorse the importance and value of the senior NCO mentor in our command. He has become a member of the team,” he said. “He is known as a trusted and dedicated advisor to the commander of the operations group, his CSM, and the commanding general of this command. He is an invaluable key ingredient to the JMRC mission; his effective coaching, teaching and mentoring of our CSMs/SGMs are critical in the role they play on today’s battlefield.”

Command Sergeant Major Frank Graham, the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division CSM, said, “The value the senior NCO mentor provided us at brigade and battalion levels during our CTC rotation was immeasurable. He provided exceptional guidance to all my battalion and operations CSMs/SGMs that they needed. A couple main factors were his ability to mentor several CSMs on their relationships with their commanders. It was information that only an experienced CSM can provide. His input during our NCO professional development training to all my NCOs and young leaders was very constructive and vital to our wartime mission; I know the Soldiers are using the experience they gained now in combat.”

Editor’s Note: *Since this article was written, Command Sergeant Major (Retired) Gerald Utterback has replaced Command Sergeant Major (Retired) Gerald Parks as the CTC mentor at the JMRC. Parks is currently serving in Afghanistan where he is helping mentor Afghan soldiers.*

Sergeant Major (Retired) Patrick Castin enlisted in the U.S. Army in September 1976 as an Armored Reconnaissance Specialist (11D). During his career, he held many positions of responsibility to include cavalry scout, squad leader, scout section sergeant, platoon sergeant, senior instructor ROTC, platoon sergeant, assistant operations sergeant, first sergeant, operations sergeant major, and CTC senior observer trainer.

He currently is a CTC mentor for MPRI and assigned to the Battle Command Training Program at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

A Commander’s View

SUSTAINING MARKSMANSHIP WHILE DEPLOYED

LIEUTENANT COLONEL DAVID LIWANAG

So now you’re deployed from home station and are in the “Sand Box” or the “Rock Pile.” The rest-in-place/transfer of authority is complete, and your unit is developing its battle rhythm.

You assess your area of operations and key terrain from your map reconnaissance, patrol experience, and leaders’ recons and study the most likely and most dangerous enemy courses of action. You want dominating overwatch and supporting fires, precision fires in urban terrain, and squad and platoon counter-marksman capabilities. You want your Soldiers to be able to quickly engage and kill insurgents armed with AKs and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) who expose themselves for only a short time to let loose rockets at targets of opportunity.

Your unit may not have organic snipers or designated marksmen. You note your Soldiers’ marksmanship could use a tune-up, but you find

the need for longer shots to 300 meters and you don’t want to use the 25-meter zero and function-fire range. You wish you could have sent more troops to the known distance range, to the All-Army Championships or the Designated Marksman’s Course, but in the routine of pre-deployment, re-cock, and re-set there just wasn’t enough time.

You find the experienced NCOs who have shot in combat competitions, who

A Soldier takes part in a reflexive fire exercise.

Jorge Gomez



have been to designated marksman training, or who are former snipers. You give them the guidance that you want the troops to “own” everything from muzzle to 300 meters; you want some decent marksmen who can hit what they’re aiming at to 300; and you want your troops confident in their ability to hit “runners” within 100 meters.

They take stock of their assets. All your troops are armed with decent M16A4 rifles and M4 carbines. You’ve got enough M855 “Green Tip” Ball to support a decent sustainment program. Some of the Soldiers have ACOG telescopes issued by RFI.

They note on their maps that there are a few secure areas on or near your forward operating base with secure routes where you can put in a north-facing range (to keep the sun out of your troops’ eyes in both the mornings and afternoons) with suitable backstopping or downrange area that allows 300-meter shots.

They’ve asked you to speak with the engineers to get some “T-Wall” sections, and they’ve gone off to scrounge target materials. A few call or e-mail around to scrape up other low-tech training materials.

Soon your junior leaders invite you to inspect training. You find they’ve built two ranges — an improvised known distance or “KD” range and a field firing range. What’s more, they’re not only conducting advanced day and night shooting training but they’re also conducting rifle qualification in the field, and not on the 25-meter paper sheet alternate course of fire.

The KD range was built using “T-Walls” or stacked Hesco barriers. There are firing lines or berms 100, 200, and 300 meters from the T-Walls. They show you the score sheets of the first squads to shoot the alternate known distance qualification course, earning a few Soldiers promotion points for scoring as experts.

The NCOs have stapled cardboard E and F-type silhouettes to 1x4 boards and, from behind the solid reinforced concrete cover of the T-Walls, raise these over the top edge of the T-Wall for 3 to 5 seconds before pulling them down, mirroring the “snap”

exposures of the standard “pop-up” range. When a bullet goes through the silhouette, they place a paper or cardboard spotting disk, skewered with a golf tee or wooden spindle, into the last bullet hole in the target. When they raise the target over the berm, the shooter clearly sees where his last round hit without the need for binoculars or a telescope.

They repeat the exercise, only now when Soldiers raise targets over the top edge of the T-Wall they begin walking for 10 feet, paralleling the wall before stopping and pulling down the target. The shooter sees a left-to-right or right-to-left “mover” in the hardest engagement a rifleman has — a body moving perpendicular to his line of sight.

The NCOs repeat the exercises after dark, with the shooters illuminating and aiming their rifles and carbines with AN/PEQ-2 and AN/PAQ-4 aiming lasers and night vision devices at 75, 100, and 200 meters. Some of the squad leaders use tracers, and their fire teams “lock on” to where their leaders are pointing.

On the field fire range the NCOs have found enough empty 55-gallon drums to fill with sand and place at 200, 225, 250, 275, and 300 meters, the more difficult distances to hit when “turtled-up” in helmet, IBA, DAPS, and plates. They’re waiting on E-type silhouettes cut from steel plates to replace the drums. 5.56mm shots against the drums and plates give a solid “Whack!” once they’re hit, giving the Soldiers instant feedback. The E-type plates will be even better, as they won’t have to be replaced as often.

You notice the NCOs put up U-shaped pickets with pieces of engineer tape or bandolier webbing on them at 200 and 300 yards. The tape shifts lightly in the breeze giving those Soldiers without ACOGs or binoculars an idea of how the wind may be affecting their bullets. Some of the Soldiers will put engineer tape out on the concertina or from pickets, phone, and light poles at certain ranges around their FOB firing positions, giving them both range and wind direction once they’re pulling security.

You smile and shake hands all around with your leaders. They’ve done a good job. You know your Soldiers will be well set for the rest of their rotation and they’ll be able to keep their firing skills up. Your replacements will also have a range to keep their skills in good order as well.

Now, what was the next thing you had to try to solve...?



Specialist Sharhonda R. McCoy

Soldiers from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division fire their weapons at a range on Camp Liberty, Iraq.

Lieutenant Colonel David Liwanag is currently an advisor to the Counter-Terrorism Command, Iraqi National CT Force in Baghdad, Iraq. He previously served with the J3, Special Operations Command - Joint Forces Command at Norfolk, Virginia, and commanded the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit at Fort Benning, Georgia, from June 2003 until June 2006. Other previous assignments include commanding the U.S. Army Parachute Team and serving with the 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group.
