Commandant's NOTE

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RIFLE MARKSMANSHIP

During the past several years, we at the Infantry School have devoted a considerable amount of time to the subject of rifle marksmanship. We have done so for two reasons: First, we are convinced that in any future war—and particularly in low- and mid-intensity conflicts—our infantry squads and platoons will often live or die on the basis of their ability to place accurate small arms fire on the opposing force.

The second reason stems from the simple fact that, in general, our unit marksmanship programs have not been turning out the kind of proficient shooters we want our infantrymen to be.

Several years ago we began a marksmanship study to determine the extent of the problem and to explore possible solutions. We looked at various parts of the Army's past and present marksmanship training programs, including known distance shooting, a more challenging record firing course, and longer range shooting. And we tested several of our findings using soldiers from the Infantry Training Center and from other TRADOC training centers.

We did develop a program that improved the marksmanship skills of our soldiers. But it was eventually decided that the cost of the new program was not justified by the amount of improvement that was shown.

The data from the study, however, did show that many improvements could be made in our existing marksmanship programs that would require little or no additional resources. Our modified program, accordingly, includes the following improvements.

By doing away with some of the shooting previously being done at 25 meters and moving the time and ammunition saved there to other periods of instruction, we can increase the time spent on dry fire and other marksmanship fundamentals such as sight manipulation and immediate action drills before live firing.

This extra time also permits the more extensive use of the Weaponeer for diagnosing individual shooting skills. Unit leaders can now tell whether their soldiers have learned the fundamentals of shooting and, if they have not, what additional training they need. At the same time, the individual soldier benefits from this earlier and more intensive training in the fundamental skills.

Along the same line, downrange feedback has been shown to be one of the most significant contributors to better shooting skills, particularly for the new or inexperienced shooter. Accordingly, some of the rounds from the 25-meter firing exercises can now be used in other places to get more downrange feedback at all ranges out to 300 meters.

The M16A2 rifle, now being fielded, has been the subject of a number of interesting discussions as to its effect on the rifle marksmanship programs,

largely because of its increased accuracy at the longer ranges. We have studied the issue of firing at ranges beyond 300 meters and have conducted such firing tests with basic infantry trainees. From these tests, it has become quite clear to us that to train all of our soldiers to fire at long ranges—say out to 800 meters—would require a significant increase in training resources, the most important of which would be time. Our review of past conflicts has also shown that the great majority of small arms engagements have occurred within 200 meters. Thus, using precious resources to train our soldiers to shoot at ranges beyond 300 meters simply would not be cost effective.

Like long range shooting, proficiency in shooting at moving targets is another area of concern to many infantrymen. We know that such training requires a lot of extra time and effort and yields only questionable rewards. Our studies have shown conclusively that soldiers who are proficient at hitting stationary targets will also do well at hitting moving targets.

While our program does not require that all soldiers become proficient in shooting at moving targets, we recognize that this is a valuable skill for infantry soldiers to be exposed to. Therefore, they will receive this kind of training when they pass through the training base. In addition, they will shoot at moving targets during their collective (squad and platoon) training periods.

Training for the individual sustainment of moving targets skills in units will not be taught on a firing range. We feel that the valuable time now being devoted to this training should be spent on learning and sustaining good marksmanship basics to standard. One possible solution to the individual sustainment of moving target skills is the development of a training device to give our soldiers practice on moving targets without using limited range training time.

For this purpose, and for both initial training and unit sustainment, we are currently analyzing several training devices. An upcoming test will look at the merits of a multi-purpose arcade combat simulator (MACS), a device that uses a personal computer to teach shooting skills; of LOMAH, or location of miss and hit, which is a device that provides immediate feedback on the range; and of the currently fielded Weaponeer.

All of these changes will go a long way toward sustaining and improving a soldier's proficiency with his basic weapon. According to test data, however, the most important improvement that can be made is to ensure that unit and institutional trainers are knowledgable in all aspects of marksmanship and instructional techniques. Instructor and cadre training programs are paramount to the successful execution of marksmanship programs.

The School has begun several initiatives to address this subject. For more than a year the Infantry Officers Advanced Course and the Pre-Command Course have included instruction on marksmanship training. Similar instruction has been integrated into the Infantry Officers Basic Course and the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course to improve the marksmanship training of these key leaders. Marksmanship instruction is planned in the future for the Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course.

The School has also developed a training certification program for those marksmanship instructors in the training base, and has improved the weapons training program that is presented in all TRADOC Drill Sergeant Schools. Since drill sergeants and BRM instructors are the ones who first teach shooting skills to our young soldiers, they are an important factor in improving marksmanship throughout the Army.

To keep our leaders current on the more recent marksmanship training techniques, we are revising Field Manual 23-9, M16 Rifle and Rifle Marksmanship. The rewritten manual, which will appear as Field Circular 23-9 this year, will also address the M16A2 as well as new alternate courses of record fire. At the same time, it will incorporate the most significant portions of FC 23-11, The Unit Guide to Rifle Marksmanship.

Although we have taken several important steps to improve our marksmanship training programs, the most significant one is the more thorough training we are giving to our leaders and trainers. The best weapons and most modern training techniques and devices will have little effect if our leaders cannot train their soldiers, evaluate the results, and then sustain their soldiers' shooting skills.

Like so many of our soldiers' skills, marksmanship must be reinforced or it will decay. Only highly trained and knowledgable trainers can keep our soldiers' shooting skills sharp and ready for use on the battlefield.