



Staff Sgt. Matthew Stankan, rifle squad leader, Company A, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Battalion, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, trains Soldiers at the Prepare a Range Card for a M240B station during Expert Infantryman Badge training July 17, 2013 on Camp Buehring, Kuwait. (Photo by 1st Lt. Shawn Pulsipher).

# Refuse to Be a Hollow Force: Earn EIB, EIA

*By 1st Sgt. John Ugarte*

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**A**s a senior noncommissioned officer with 16 years invested to the Army I have watched this organization as well as others operate on a limited amount of funding. This challenges leaders across our Army by having to conserve resources while still providing quality and realistic training to our Soldiers. Wisely allocating funds towards training events is one way to ensure we get the most training value for the resources expended. Before becoming a first sergeant, I was the operations sergeant major for my battalion. One of my responsibilities as the operations sergeant major was to enable our organization the ability to conduct realistic and challenging training with every round fired and every mile driven. The Expert

Infantryman's Badge and the Excellence in Armor training programs have been essential to the development of our Soldiers using materials and resources readily available to most units and provide the best training to our Soldiers.

As budget constraints and sequestration slowly force units to limit collective training to the platoon or squad level, these two programs will keep our Soldiers prepared for the next chapter in our Army's future.

Our battalion conducted both the EIB and EIA during a recent deployment to Kuwait.

The EIB started 69 years ago in March 1944, when ten of the Army's first expert infantrymen earned the coveted badge after three days of intense testing. The

very first EIB was presented to Tech. Sgt. Walter Bull. He was one of ten that had to endure a 25 mile foot march in eight hours as compared to today's 12 mile in 3 hours. Today, EIB training and testing continues to be realistic, mission-focused and rigorous.

My battalion's command sergeant major, Command Sgt. Maj. Timothy Edwards, empowered the battalion's first sergeants and me to find resources to conduct the entire training and testing event. Our EIB from start to finish was a completely NCO led and driven event. The ultimate success of the EIB training goes to show how our NCO Corps truly is the backbone of the Army.

There were three officers in our battalion that had already earned the EIB, two majors and one captain. They coached younger officers, trying to earn their EIB, outside of the course. Lane NCOICs provided support where needed on the course. It was very deliberate that this was an NCO run event; we wanted to show what the NCO Corps was capable of.

Running a successful EIB is dependent upon researching the correct and current information. The following website: <http://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/eib/index.html> will provide outlines for conducting in progress reviews (IPR), a digital candidate tracker and most of the tools needed to evaluate EIB candidates.

Our success started by having a complete and thorough plan. We focused on ensuring that our unit used the most current copy of U.S. Army Infantry School Pamphlet 350-6. This resource gives detailed information on how to establish Army-wide uniformity and will ensure your validation goes smoothly when the EIB program manager comes to validate your training and testing sites.

The EIB must be validated and given a test control number. The EIB course manager travels to the EIB location and over a three day period, longer if needed, and checks every portion of the site. The EIB course manager checks cadre EIB orders, Army Physical Fitness Test site, land navigation course, the training lanes, road march course and the packing list.

He also made sure we followed the standards set forth in USAIS PAM 350-6. The course manager's main goal is to ensure realistic training standards are clearly defined and demonstrated by the EIB cadre.

From that point we focused on the tasks that aligned to our unit's Mission Essential Task List. Some additional considerations are the required training aids, training sites, and ammunition required for the event. You must ensure you have all the resources locked in as early as possible. We conducted five IPRs in preparation for our EIB along with nightly after-action reviews at the completion of each day of training. The IPRs and AARs enabled us to refine and identify issues before training began allowing Soldiers to be tested on one set standard.

Our friction points were the APFT, day-land navigation, lane testing, and 12 mile foot march. These events whittled down our EIB success rate to fewer than 20 percent.

Our battalion started with 258 EIB candidates, when the dust settled, five days later, 51 had earned the EIB. When I see a young private in the battalion area wearing his newly earned EIB, I know instantly how proud my NCOs felt when I earned mine 13 years ago.

But, it was a difficult task for those 51 that earned the badge.

A candidate must pass the APFT with at least 75 percent, in their age group, in each event. The APFT cut 89 Soldiers on the first day of testing. Most failed on the pushups or run. Day-land navigation resulted in 29 Soldiers failing because of resection miscalculations. During lane testing, intersection, range cards, nine-line medevac, and "call for fire" resulted in the most overall "no-go's" removing another 68 candidates.

The final obstacle, the 12 mile foot march proved to be too difficult for 21 of the 72 that started the three-hour task.

Another outstanding training tool is the Excellence in Armor program, formerly known as Fast Track. The EIA was initially proposed in May 1984. However, the program was not approved for implementation until October 1987. Today the EIA program rewards outstanding armor and cavalry Soldiers whose performance is routinely above the standard and demonstrates superior leadership potential. Again the key to success is research. The most recent memorandum of instruction is dated December 2011 can be found at the following website: <http://www.benning.army.mil/armor/OCOA/Excellence%20in%20Armor.htm>.

To sustain a successful EIA program, a unit must be dedicated to keeping it a priority because the program lasts at least six months.

The EIA is a long process because the unit must first identify which Soldiers qualify for the program. Qualified Soldiers must score a 260 or above on the APFT, qualify sharpshooter or better with their individual assigned weapon and complete all Warrior Training Tasks (WTT) with first time "go's" as chosen by the battalion commander. They must also receive first time go's on the gunnery skills test. The completion of these tasks will enroll qualified Soldiers into the unit level EIA.

EIA enrollment earns a Soldier a Certificate of Achievement and coin from the Chief of Armor. EIA completion will earn the Soldier the skill identifier "E4J" which will be added to their enlisted record brief and will set the Soldier apart from his peers during promotion boards.

Sergeants will take the Tank/Scout Commander Competency Test (TCCT/SCCT). If they pass with a score of at least 70 percent they will be awarded 50 promotion points.

Other training for the EIA includes: M-2 .50 caliber machine gun maintenance, functions check, etc.,

M240 proficiency, vehicle identification, ammunition identification and bore sighting the M-1 Abrams weapons systems.

Our unit conducted several IPRs and rehearsals until our leaders felt comfortable with the overall concept of our program. The most difficult portion for the Soldiers is accomplishing the required training throughout a prolonged length of time.

The dedication of 1st Sgt. Jon D. Noyes and Staff Sgt. Aaron J. Keen made our EIA successful. Noyes is the Company D first sergeant and Keen is the battalion's tank master gunner. Their dedication to the EIA for the armor and cavalry Soldiers resulted in the induction of 34 new members throughout the deployment for the battalion. Noyes himself was inducted eleven years ago and continues the proud tradition today after twenty six years since its conception.

During my time as the operations sergeant major, I oversaw multiple squad, platoon and company collective training events, none of which would have been success-

ful without the base knowledge obtained through quality skill level-one training provided by our NCOs. The ammunition and training aids required to run EIB training and maintain an EIA program is minimal in comparison to the level of basic Soldier skill proficiency the training provides Soldiers. During our nine-month deployment to Camp Buehring, Kuwait, our NCOs conducted both a successful EIB and continued to maintain an EIA program. At the end of the day the Eight Step Training Model is the number one key to conducting both an EIB and EIA with successful results. Using the Eight Step Training Model gives units a complete checklist when setting up and conducting any training event.

Our Soldiers and noncommissioned officers have adapted to both the environment and fluid mission sets in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (Spartan Shield). We refuse to be a hollow force, fully displaying the spirit of the Warrior Ethos: "I will always place the mission first, I will never accept defeat, I will never quit and I will never leave a fallen comrade." ■

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