

Lethality has a shelf life

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A paratrooper with Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, turns his body and weapon to fire at a target through a slotted barrier during the stress shoot portion of the 1st Sgt. Funk 82nd Eight Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercise on Fort Bragg, N.C., May 1, 2017. The exercise includes a 4-mile team litter and water can carry, and an equipment layout and inspection to test the units ability to alert, assemble and conduct soldier readiness tasks. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Elvis Umanzor, 49th Public Affairs Detachment)

As Soldiers, we believe the United States Army is the most lethal fighting force on the planet. We take pride in this; however, it can be dangerous if we only look at the now and not analyze our future readiness with brutal honesty.

The 82nd Airborne Division Command Sgt. Maj., Michael Ferrusi, said, when asked, "Is the U.S. Infantry still lethal?" "Yes, we are still a lethal force, but lethality has a shelf life." This telling statement brought clarity to the idea of lethality and is the crux of this article. In order for our forces to maintain this edge, we must focus on the Army's greatest resource, the Soldier.

The U.S. Army's Asymmetric Warfare Group's "Mosul Study" and "Russian New Generation Warfare Handbook" highlight that tactical level overmatch is not guaranteed in today's or tomorrow's operating environment.¹ AWG's operational advisors observed an increase of electronic warfare and cyber effects designed to degrade U.S. Forces' GPS and communication capabilities. Electronic and cyber warfare are just two examples of how the enemy can challenge our technological edge. We must derive our combat overmatch from the Soldier and thus, a greater effort in developing the Soldier is the only way to achieve close combat overmatch against the enemy of tomorrow. As noncommissioned officers, we must champion an aggressive return to the basics as the character of war evolves.

Maintaining Lethality

Enhancing lethality or extending its shelf life, for an Infantry fighting force, does not entail forgetting about our technological advantage. On the contrary, it involves leveraging it through emphasis on what goes *in* the Soldier and not just *on* the Soldier. Marksmanship, like any skill in the profession of arms, demands requisite skills and knowledge. If we want to improve lethality, we must start by aggressively focusing on the fundamentals of weapons marksmanship. Training the fundamentals is more than teaching Soldiers how to qualify, but also teaching Soldiers ballistics, environmental effects, utilization of reticles, magazine changes, and kit placement. When, and only when, Soldiers have mastered the fundamentals, will technology, actually lengthen the battlefield and improve the lethality of our formations. Far too often, poor fundamentals translate to poor use of technology. It is the "sacred" duty of NCOs to ensure this does not happen.



Soldiers from 2nd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division conduct a base defense exercise May 16, 2018, as they prepare to assume expeditionary advisory enabling, security and force protection responsibilities at Forward Operating Base Lightning, Afghanistan. (U.S. Army photo by Lt. Matthew Chandlerj, Resolute Support Headquarters)

Train as You Fight

Challenging the Soldier in a variety of ways that mirror the battlefield is the only way to make certain that NCOs meet their obligation to make all infantrymen proficient marksmen. Shooting drills must be conducted under high stress, limited visibility, and at extended ranges.

Furthermore, outdated qualifications standards limit our Soldiers' ability to maximize their enablers and extend their range on the battlefield. The 300 meter field fire qualification has been used by the U.S. Army for more than 50 years but has not adjusted with advancements in our weapon systems. As such, we are not able to reliably measure the effectiveness of our applied technology. Additionally, we should reconsider the current training ammunition allotments dedicated to the infantry Soldier. The table below from TC 3-22.9

(https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN6246_TC%203-22x9%20C2%20-%20Basic%20w%20C2%20Incl%20FINAL%20WEB%20wFix.pdf) prescribes the number of rounds allocated to each Soldier annually for marksmanship training.

	DAY	NIGHT
ZERO	216	108
PRACTICE RECORD (Field Fire or Alt C)	240	200
RECORD (Field Fire or Alt C)	240	200
NIGHT (Field Fire)		144
TOTAL	480	544
TOTAL ALLOCATED TO FIELD FIRE	1024	
ARM	200	
SHORT RANGE PRACTICE	600	
SHORT RANGE QUAL	80	
TOTAL ALLOCATED TO ARM	880	

Table from TC3-22.9

As indicated, more than half of the round allotment per Soldier is designated for qualifying on a restrictive 300 meter field fire range.² This round allotment, however, does not maximize training value for the Soldier nor does it maximize the effectiveness of our NCOs to evaluate each Soldier on his or her ability to use the weapon. Just because a Soldier can qualify does not mean a Soldier is a proficient marksman. Necessary marksmanship fundamentals such as immediate action, weapon manipulation, and accuracy are best evaluated on flexible ranges that force Soldiers to use their weapon as they would in a combat environment. As such, the ammunition allotment should be adjusted by designating more rounds to rifle marksmanship training and less to field fire qualification.

Soldier Competency

It is the responsibility of NCOs to evaluate each Soldier to ensure they are not only meeting marksmanship qualification standards, but also are competent and safe when handling their weapon system. Evaluation of the fundamentals are best tied to Soldier competency with the weapon system and not just a quantifying score sheet. An authentic evaluation of a Soldier's ability cannot be done by micromanaging every move the Soldier makes. Ultimately, when it comes to marksmanship, technology can be a powerful enhancer; however, neither fundamentals nor enablers can make a Soldier more lethal on their own. It is the confluence of marksmanship fundamentals and technology that will increase Soldier lethality.



Soldiers of Alpha Troop, 6-8 Cav. begin the Marne Mile during the 2017 division-level Gainey Cup selection March 30, 2017 at Fort Stewart, Ga. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Robert Harris)

Physical Preparedness

Another core factor of lethality is physical fitness. If our Army is going to improve lethality, NCOs need to prioritize tough physical training. The training must start at the squad level, with physical fitness programs imitating the rigors of the hardest days in combat. Also, the mindset must change; our infantry Soldiers must be viewed as *tactical athletes*. As athletes, Soldiers

need to physically prepare for the sport they play: combat. This involves workouts in the patrolling uniform, carrying a casualty, and mirroring the near term OE (hills, walls, subterranean, etc.). Professional athletes physically train for the sport they play and so must *our* athletes. This begins with commanders placing emphasis on combat fitness training. In his speech to the Association of the U.S. Army in October 2016, the Army Chief of Staff, General Mark Milley, said "Learning to be comfortable with being seriously miserable every single minute of every day will have to become a way of life for an Army on the battlefield that I see coming."⁴ The CSA's premonition is powerful. It touches upon the necessity of a mentally and physically tough force that almost certainly will have to rely on the disciplined initiative of its subordinates to accomplish the mission. In a sport with no offseason, our tactical athletes must be physically prepared to win tomorrow's fight, today.

Mission Command Discipline

As NCOs, we must place a premium on mental and physical toughness. To pursue this, infantry elements must train under tough realistic conditions and master the discipline of mission command. As written in Army Doctrine Publication 6-0 (https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/adp6_0.pdf), disciplined initiative is action in the absence of order, when existing orders no longer fit the situation, or when unforeseen opportunities or threats arise.³ The NCO Creed states "I will exercise initiative by taking appropriate action in the absence of orders." Disciplined initiative must become the standard for all infantry units in the near term OE.

Perhaps we can all learn the principles of mission command by studying the Opposition Forces at our Combat Training Centers. It is no secret that our OPFOR units are less equipped materially than the brigade combat teams they fight each month. Yet, the OPFOR are highly lethal because they leverage the disciplined initiative of their subordinates to stand up to an enemy numerically and technologically superior.

The challenges are immense. Confronting these challenges require time, the most precious and limited resource we have. Perhaps it is time to review all Army Regulation 350-1 (https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN6701_AR350-1_Web_FINAL.pdf) requirements and their overall impact on a commander's ability to make the force more lethal. A study out of Fort Leavenworth in 2015 revealed that current mandated training would take one Soldier 514 days to be fully compliant. Compare this to the 256 training days in a calendar year and you will find there is a deficit of 258 training days.⁵ Combat distractors should be taken away from our fighting force as much as possible. NCOs must learn to prioritize training opportunities and leaders at echelon must support this in the form of protected training time, resources, focus, and tolerance for mistakes made during training.

NCO Legacy

The legacy of our NCOs both past and present, have shaped our Army into the most lethal fighting force in the world. As the NCOs of today's Army, we must honor our legacy and return to the basics. The NCO creed compels us: "uppermost in my mind - accomplishment of my mission and the welfare of my soldiers." As the backbone of our Army, it is our duty to ensure our Soldiers are ready to fight tonight. By focusing on the fundamentals, the lethality of our force will not have an expiration date.

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Notes

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2. United States, Congress, Department of the Army, Headquarters. "Rifle and Carbine." TC 3-22.9, May 2016, pp. 227-247.
3. United States, Congress, Department of the Army. "Mission Command." ADP 6-0, C2, 2012, pp. 1-5.
4. Maze, Rick. "Radical Change Is Coming: Gen. Mark A. Milley Not Talking About Just Tinkering Around the Edges." Association of the United States Army, 6 Nov. 2017, www.USA.org/articles/radical-change-coming-gen-mark-milley.
5. Burke, Crispin J. "No Time, Literally, for All Requirements." *Association of the United States Army*, 4 Apr. 2016, www.USA.org/articles/no-time-literally-all-requirements.