



(U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. True Thao taken July 22, 2019) U.S. Army Sgt. Tyler G. Foss, assigned to 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry Regiment plots grid coordinates during a land navigation event as part of the Expert Infantryman Badge testing at Novo Selo Training Area, Bulgaria, July 22, 2019.

Preparing for LSCO and the Future Fight

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"I truly believe we have to be experts as Soldiers, no matter what your MOS is."

—Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael A. Grinston
(Kimmons, 2019, para. 44)

With the U.S. Army's focus on large-scale combat operations (LSCO), every Soldier must be an expert at both their military occupational specialty (MOS) as well as basic Soldier tasks. Senior Army leaders recognize the need for basic skill proficiency and released the Expert Soldier Badge (ESB) to accompany existing badges. The possible downside to at-

taining the ESB is it may cause a hyper-focused "cramming for a test" style approach to mastering basic Soldiering skills, which are then ignored as training schedules progress. To best prepare for LSCO, units should utilize a sustained training program that emphasizes *continual individual and collective unit training* with attention from commanders and senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs).

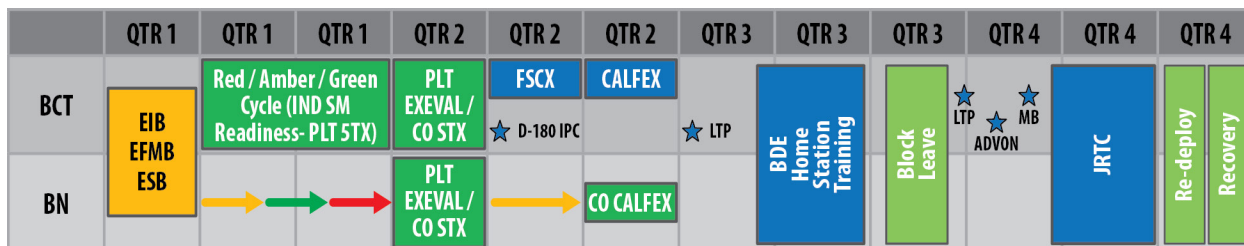


Figure 1 - Example of a battalion and brigade training progression. Note that in the span of a year, the only command emphasis placed on individual skills comes at the beginning in the form of skill badges. Without a consistent approach, skills will atrophy before the unit makes it to the CTC rotation or deployment. (Graphic by Asymmetric Warfare Group)

Combat Preparation

As brigade and battalion planners build their “road to war” for combat training center (CTC) rotations or combat deployments, a popular method is to start training for the ESB, Expert Infantryman Badge (EIB), or Expert Field Medical Badge (EFMB) (see Figure 1). The rationale is to train Soldiers on key individual tasks, and then transition to collective unit training, culminating with a Combined-Arms Live-Fire Exercise, and a home station training event.

The problem is once the individual skills proficiency portion is completed, it rarely gets revisited in the training cycle, despite the fact many Soldiers rotate in and out of the unit and skills atrophy if they aren’t trained consistently. To combat this, *units should develop a methodical and systematic approach to training individual skills consistently throughout the year, regardless of the upcoming mission.* This ensures consistency across the unit and doesn’t rely on badge testing dates as an end date for basic skills training.

Advice for Commanders

1. Insist your NCO Corps are the lead trainers in your formations, resource them appropriately, and hold them accountable.

Individual training has historically been conducted by



(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dustin D. Biven taken Jan. 23, 2020) U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Joseph H. Miya, an advanced culinary noncommissioned officer assigned to 75th Field Artillery Brigade, fires an M4 carbine during a marksmanship qualification range at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, Jan. 23, 2020.

NCOs during sergeants time training (STT) and managed through the company training meeting. Not only does STT build proficiency in Soldier skills throughout a unit, but the company training meeting and STT also provide structure to develop team leaders and squad leaders as trainers, giving them confidence in their skills while building trust and camaraderie with their subordinates. If company training meetings are not allotting time towards individual and small team tasks that support the company’s mission essential task list (METL), then units will lack proficiency in their CTC rotations, or worse, during their combat deployments.

According to *Training Circular (TC) 7-22.7: The Noncommissioned Officer’s Guide*, NCOs should be responsible for the following:

- Ensure Soldiers are proficient in individual tasks (MOS and common tasks); battle drills; assigned individual weapons, crew served, platform weapons systems; and meet physical fitness standards.
- Provide timely training feedback to the commander in order to accurately and objectively assess the unit’s training proficiency.
- Know and enforce training standards.
- Crosswalk and develop platoon and other echelon battle tasks to ensure they nest with company mission-essential tasks (METs).
- Fulfill a critical role by assisting in the professional development of the officer corps and junior NCOs.
- Maximize Soldier participation and reduce training distractors.
- Protect training time (Department of the Army, 2020, p. 4-6)

2. Place systematic emphasis on individual training events - even during periods of collective training.

Some commanders believe that when executing collective tasks no additional time is needed to train individual tasks. But leaders should acknowledge the importance of basic skills and how their foundation improves efficiency and overall performance during collective training. In *Army Doctrinal Publication*

(ADP) 7-0: *Training*, “In units where Soldiers cannot perform individual skills to standard, the unit cannot effectively execute collective tasks to standard” (Department of the Army, 2019a, p. 1-2).

The very nature of LSCO is not about technology or gadgets, but basic skills that keep Soldiers alive and mission-focused when technology is compromised (Waxler, 2019).

3. Encourage creativity.

A common feeling among unit leaders is there isn't enough time or resources to adequately prepare. Commanders and NCOs have to be creative, especially when it comes to training. For example, command maintenance can also be used to train individual tasks. An efficient leader can set up a first aid station and map reading station at the motor pool and rotate Soldiers through these skills. If encouraged and performed regularly, this can shift a unit's culture to one that is motivated by readiness and preparation (Deveraux & Castignanie, 2018).

4. Go to training and reward excellence.

Soldiers appreciate seeing their leadership sharing hardships. As the commander, being present sends a message to each Soldier that the training and mission are important. According to *ADP 6-22: Army Leadership and the Profession*:

☞*Through their presence, leaders show what they stand for and how they expect others to carry themselves. Leaders who routinely share in hardships and dangers have first-hand knowledge of what they are asking of subordinates, and show they're not above putting themselves at the same level of risk or discomfort. It assures Soldiers that what they are doing is important.* (Department of the Army, 2019b, p. 3-1).☞☞

If the training or performance is outstanding, leaders should publicly acknowledge that event or individual. Soldiers need positive reinforcement when they've done the right thing. Leaders should also develop a plan to correct mistakes during after action reviews (Department of the Army, 2019b).

Advice for NCOs

1. Be accountable.

NCOs are leaders, trainers, and role models for their units. According to *TC 7-22.7*, “NCOs are directly responsible for training individual Soldiers, crews, and small teams” (Department of the Army, 2020, p. 2-2). NCOs must be accountable for their Soldiers' readiness and performance. They must have a tracking system in place, whether it's a binder or



(U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Ashley M. Morris taken March 27, 2020) U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Adriana Fox, a senior religious affairs noncommissioned officer with the Joint Readiness Training Center, disassembles her weapon during Expert Soldier Badge testing held at Fort Polk, Louisiana, March 27, 2020.

digital leader's book, that will keep them up-to-date on their Soldiers' upcoming tasks and deficiencies. A Soldier's successes and failures are a reflection of their leadership.

2. Use opportunities.

NCOs should leverage downtime and unforeseen opportunities to improve unit readiness. NCOs should always prepare hip-pocket classes or present challenging activities to sharpen their unit's skills. According to *TC 7-22.7*:

☞*Hip-pocket training is also used to sustain proficiencies for crew based skills. For example during down-time at a weapons range, it provides an additional opportunity to train drills for crew served weapon systems, or other crew oriented tasks.* (Department of the Army, 2020, p. 4-8)☞☞

3. Create repetition.

It is only through practice and repetition that mastery is achieved. In *TC 7-22.7*, Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael A. Grinston states “Focusing on the basics with tough, realistic combat training, will ensure that in the crucible of ground combat, our Soldiers will be victorious” (Department of the Army, 2020, Foreword). As a trainer, seek ways to give Soldiers repetition in training, and through this, not only do you build proficiency, but also confidence.

4. Add complexity.

NCOs should not be afraid to challenge their Soldiers in innovative ways to prepare them for future combat. During the “2019 Best Warrior Compe-

tion,” even the Army’s best Soldiers struggled to perform basic individual tasks in realistic training environments (Fenrick et al., 2020). After demonstrating basic proficiency, NCOs can reduce visibility, or add physical and/or psychological stressors to their tasks in order to push their Soldiers’ training. These added stressors will better prepare Soldiers for the realities of LSCO.

Conclusion

ESB, EIB, and EFMB are training events that significantly improve basic task proficiency. However, the over-reliance on these events provides a false sense of confidence in long-term skills mastery. To best prepare for the demands of LSCO and the future fight, repeated training throughout the year in basic tasks will develop a solid foundation for future success. ■

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