

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

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News from the Front: Training to Improve Basic Combat Skills

The Army's number one priority is to maintain readiness for ground combat operations. In order to win our nation's wars all Soldiers must be trained and prepared to close with and destroy the enemy.

After nearly sixteen years of sustained combat operations in irregular warfare, many of these basic Soldier and leader tasks have atrophied. The junior leaders have become our mid-level leaders and trainers who have had little training on the basic warfighting tasks.

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The contents of this document were acquired during a collection at Fort Knox, KY, during the ROTC Advanced Camp from 4-7 August 2017.

Personnel interviewed at Fort Knox included MG Christopher Hughes, the 10th Regiment Advanced Camp cadre, and ROTC Cadet Command staff.

Secondary interviews were conducted with LTC Michael Eliassen, Professor of Military Science, Eastern Washington University; and LTC Peter Gray, Professor of Military Science, Kansas State University.

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The purpose of this article is to illustrate how ROTC Cadet Command approached improving basic combat skills and fieldcraft through command emphasis, mission command, and the eight-step training model. While Cadet Command's efforts are what inspired this document, the lessons and best practices are applicable for training programs for most junior Army leaders. This Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) document was produced with the cooperation and input of ROTC Cadet Command and ROTC Advanced Camp cadre and staff.

The Army must be prepared for decisive action against an adaptive enemy across the range of military operations. It is probable that the Army's near future combat operations will potentially be in the form of irregular warfare. Irregular opponents, counterinsurgency (COIN), and non-state actors will force leaders to adapt their decisive action training to fight in unconventional ways. Decisive action training is the base. Leaders can improvise from that base knowledge. Recent combat training center (CTC) rotations, from 2012 to present, have shown that trying to improvise from a COIN mindset (and training), against a near-peer enemy force, will place an unprepared U.S. force at a significant disadvantage.



Figure 1. Cadet M240B team provides security at a short halt.

Preparing to fight a lethal and adaptive enemy requires command emphasis at the unit level, coupled with training at all professional military education courses. The goal should be to train the basic skill sets first (i.e., individual, team, and squad tasks and live fire). After successful collective METL training has been achieved, a unit can move toward unconventional warfare, with situations involving non-state actors, terrorist extremism, and key leader engagements.

The Army recognized that a return to the decisive action training environment was necessary to prepare for the next fight. However, simply changing the training scenarios at the CTCs was not enough. The gap that had to be filled was training Soldiers and leaders at all levels on skill sets that had atrophied after 16 years of unconventional warfare.

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1. Train and Certify Leaders

In May of 2016, MG Christopher Hughes took command of U.S. Army Cadet Command. Within months, more than 5,000 ROTC cadets descended on Fort Knox for the ROTC Basic and Advanced camps. The cadets had been exposed to years of ROTC curriculum that prepared them for irregular warfare and mature areas of operation. The camps were heavily influenced by this line of thinking. The 31-day Advanced Camp is a culminating exercise where cadets are evaluated for fitness as an Army lieutenant. Cadets are expected to arrive at the Advanced Camp ready to demonstrate proficiency in basic combat skills and leadership character traits. An unprepared cadet will struggle at camp and will likely be recycled into camp the following summer.

In mid-stride of the camp execution, MG Hughes directed a change in philosophy. His cadre and staff immediately changed the environment and training events to focus on combat operations in austere environments. Cadet Command had some resident knowledge and experience to accomplish this, but much of the cadre required training on instructing cadets in combat skills. Cadet Command had to fight with the Army they had and completed the 2016 summer camps using course corrections along the way.

A plan to plan. Cadet Command invited the Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG) to help the planners and leaders identify the problem and way ahead. As an outside agency, the AWG was instrumental to the success of certifying instructors. The AWG and ROTC cadre identified both the root causes and gaps with cadre training capability.

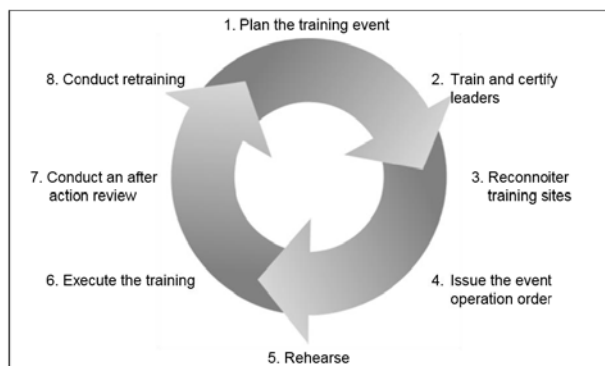


Figure 2. The Eight-Step Training Model. (FM 7-0)

Cadet Command's first priority was to train the cadre on combat skill sets and fieldcraft. They selected noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and officers with strong patrolling skills. These ROTC master trainers participated in an eight-day course, with a three-day field problem, focusing on those combat skills that leaders need to be successful (patrolling, marksmanship, combat-focused physical training [PT], land navigation, camouflage, facilitating an after action review [AAR], problem solving). With 178 master trainers certified, ROTC now had enough leadership to place one master trainer per ROTC Advanced Camp platoon. The platoon master trainers were inserted, with the three other cadre, to ensure that all instructors were training to standard.



Figure 3. Cadets rappel at Fort Knox, KY.

The cadre that CALL interviewed all agreed that this renewed focus on combat skills was exactly what was needed and the master trainer program set the conditions for the camps. ROTC already had a cadre certification before the master trainer program was created, but this did not focus on fieldcraft. Professors of Military Science (PMSs) and senior military instructors went through the ROTC pre-command course. Cadre and DA civilians attended courses at Fort Knox, KY, (recruiting officers, human resource assistants, and logistic technicians received training tailored to their duties). New cadre members were also trained on how to instruct in a university setting. In total, nearly 1,100 Cadet Command personnel attend leader certification every year.

What ROTC did to improve BRM training resulted in a 98% qualification rate at the Advanced Camp.

Basic Rifle Marksmanship (BRM). BRM is a constant struggle within ROTC. While the cadre may understand how to apply marksmanship fundamentals to qualify, many have very little experience instructing marksmanship. With limited access to weapons, a very limited window of training time each week, and an audience that is not captive, ROTC programs can be challenged with even the simplest concepts of basic weapon

fundamentals. Compared to Soldiers in basic training, cadets have significantly less exposure to nearly every aspect of combat skills training. What ROTC did to improve BRM training resulted in a 98% qualification rate at the Advanced Camp. This is not an argument that the ROTC cadet is a better marksman than a basic training private; however, it is a noteworthy accomplishment, considering that ROTC BRM was executed in two days compared to the typical basic training model of 15 days.



Figure 4. A cadet conducts the alternate qualification course.

A potential pitfall is making the assumption that cadets are comfortable around weapons, the noise and recoil, and the stress of failing to qualify and pass Advanced Camp.

Marksmanship goes beyond the technical aspects of interacting with the weapon and applying the fundamentals to shoot well. A potential pitfall is making the assumption that cadets are comfortable around weapons, the noise and recoil, and the stress of failing to qualify and pass Advanced Camp.

To solve the problem, Cadet Command sent its six primary BRM instructors to work with the Army Marksmanship Unit (AMU) at Fort Benning, GA. These instructors received basic rifle training techniques and instruction in how to train novice shooters. Before the ROTC Advanced Camp began, the AMU sent a team to Fort Knox to validate the 78 members of the camp BRM committee. The 78 instructors, with assistance from the six BRM primary instructors and AMU, team-trained and rehearsed their program of instruction to include ballistic theory and zeroing a rifle. Some cadets did require multiple attempts to qualify, but this is clearly a success story when the operating environment and instructor training are considered.

Cadet Command's philosophy on selecting and certifying trainers and leaders is paying off. Quality, well-run training events are producing cadets that are confident and ready to join the force.

2. Implementation at the ROTC Advanced Camp

Cadet Command used a crawl, walk methodology. This is similar to Ranger School which employs an instructor-led, instructor-assisted, instructor-supervised, Soldier-led leader training model. At Advanced Camp, cadets were exposed to blocks of instruction on patrolling and combat operations. This was then followed by combat patrols led by the cadre to demonstrate proper execution. As cadet proficiency grew, cadre would supervise the cadet-led patrols, progressing from squad to platoon level. In total, the cadets spent 15 days conducting combat-focused training that started with squad lanes and ended with more complex platoon operations. Both the cadre and the cadets felt continuous training in a field environment enhanced learning and confidence.



Figure 5. A cadre member mentors the cadet platoon leader and RTO.

To dissuade even the thought of a “forward operating base (FOB)-like” mentality, Cadet Command made the environment of the new camp partan, expeditionary, and challenging. From the day the cadets arrived at Fort Knox they were exposed to testing and evaluation during no-fail events such as the Army Physical Fitness Test, height/weight standards, 12-mile foot march, marksmanship qualification, a map reading exam, and a land navigation test. This was rounded out with classes on patrolling and fieldcraft, call for fire, first aid, and troop leading procedures.



Figure 6. Cadets are evaluated on land navigation.

The majority of the camp was conducted in a field environment. Cadets underwent rigorous training in the field, under enemy threat, with constant combat patrolling and patrol base activities (day and night). It was crucial to set the stage and provide the proper atmosphere for leadership development and evaluation under combat conditions.

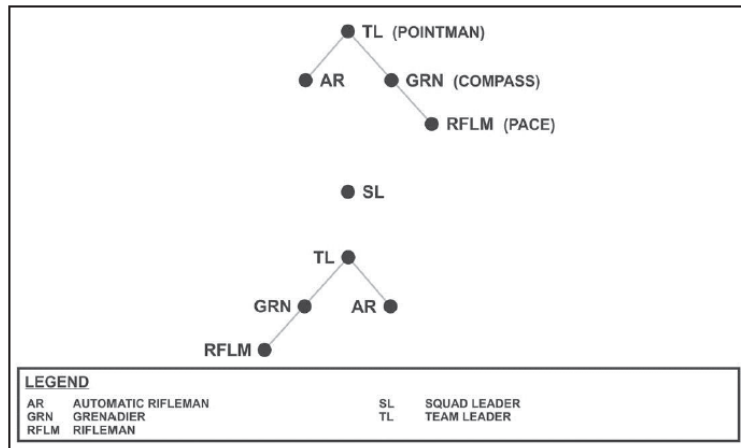


Figure 7. Squad column, fire teams in wedge. (ATP 3-21.8)

Fieldcraft. A challenge the cadre had to deal with was the difference in understanding between “tactics” and “patrolling.” Many cadets and junior leaders believe that the proper execution of a squad in column with fire teams in a wedge is “patrolling.” This may be the correct execution of the maneuver formation, but does not take into account the nuances of fieldcraft and stalking the enemy. The cadre showed the cadets the importance of camouflage, noise and light discipline, moving quietly through foliage, and turning around every few steps to check on surroundings and formation. The cadre promoted a mindset that U.S. Army Soldiers will be in combat situations where the

enemy is doing everything it can to win, and that Army formations must capitalize on their entire body of knowledge, skills, and abilities to succeed over an adaptive enemy.

A cadet asked a cadre member, “Will I need to know this stuff? I plan on being a signal officer.” The cadre member replied, “Yes, between your current location and where you want to set up your RETRANS site, there may be someone intent on killing you.”

The ROTC Advanced Camp is not a basic skills training environment. It is a basic skills and leadership evaluation environment. Cadets that arrived at the Advanced Camp expecting to be trained struggled to meet minimum standards or even pass. ROTC received very positive feedback from the cadets regarding the rigor and challenge of the 2017 Advanced Camp. Typical Army officer candidates seek challenge, and the ROTC Advanced Camp’s new environment provided that experience.

3. Revised School of Cadet Command Course Plan



Figure 8. Cadre and cadets executed a progressive road march assessment starting with 3 miles and culminating with the 12-mile final evaluation.

Following the successes at the ROTC Advanced Camp, Cadet Command’s next priority was to maintain the momentum gained from training its leaders by reviewing university training plans. The 2016 academic plan used every opportunity to develop ROTC cadets into lieutenants by training on leadership and skill sets that are familiar throughout the Army. The programs of instruction were all suitable. The instructional method that was used was more of a classroom approach. The cadets were exposed to large doses of administrative training, leadership philosophies through academic classes, and some tactical-level training. This resulted in cadets attending Advanced

Camp with varying degrees of understanding of what the Army does, how it executes its mission, and inconsistent capabilities to execute small unit tasks and maneuver.

A cadet interviewed in August of 2017 by CALL stated that he had a lot of training on key leader engagements, but felt he needed more training on patrolling and physical conditioning.

The ROTC Cadet Command G-3 was directed to develop a new training philosophy for the 2017 cadet academic year, in line with MG Hughes' vision of challenging field environments and focused on combat operations. The G-3 quickly realized that ROTC universities could execute all of the instruction required to build a young leader, while utilizing tactical training as the method for much of it. In doing so, ROTC will accomplish both a theoretical and practical understanding of Army operations and leadership.

MG Hughes' guidance to the ROTC brigade commanders and PMSs was to prepare the cadets to be competent and confident lieutenants. The ROTC programs are training cadets to a high standard. The programs are to prepare cadets to be lieutenants and lead Soldiers in combat. This new approach is currently in the initial days of execution and preliminary impressions from ROTC PMSs shows this is the right direction.

4. Insights for Building Successful Cadets

"To be successful, today's ROTC cadets need grit."

--LTC Mike Eliassen

- Leaders must have character, fitness, grit, and a desire to serve the Nation.
- ROTC programs should not train for the test, but for the desired end state.
- Opportunity training is key; following the program of instruction is good, but providing more training outside of the prescribed calendar pays huge dividends.
- Know proper wear of the uniform.
- Know Army customs and courtesies.
- Conduct land navigation training and build confidence in the field environment.
- Learn troop leading procedures (TLP) and understand that the 1/3-2/3 rule is about planning and preparing.
- Quick mission planning and disseminating an order quickly (20 minutes or so), allows subordinates time to plan and rehearse.
- Cadets and junior leaders must know TLP well before moving to the military decisionmaking process (MDMP); young leaders should have an understanding of MDMP, but for most it is too early in their development to internalize MDMP.
- ROTC programs at the universities would benefit from replicating the training methodology used at the Advanced Camp.
- Cadets will struggle at Advanced Camp without a familiarity with ASIPS radios prior to arrival.

- Weapon/rifle familiarization should be conducted throughout the academic year (M240B and M249 are not a common training tool at universities, but the cadets will have to use them at Advanced Camp).
- ROTC programs that progressively build on a PT/ruck-march plan will condition the cadets' feet to long movements and their bodies to extra weight.

Interviews conducted by CALL suggest that command emphasis is crucial for junior leader development. ROTC programs in even the most dense urban areas can build strong cadets by leveraging local resources such as parks and National Guard units to find ways to train on military skills.

There are several key insights that are applicable to the operating force, leaders, and trainers. Basic combat and Soldier skills are the crucial building block for training leaders, units, and executing collective tasks. Commanders can manage their training to accomplish this with an understanding of their end state, a focused command emphasis, mission command, and the eight-step training model. By training and certifying its leaders using subject matter experts, Cadet Command found that the quality of instruction improved drastically. This resulted in competent and confident cadets ready to commission and succeed at their basic courses.