

Training for Today's Infantrymen

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Training for Today's Infantrymen

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"The infantryman in combat has the most demanding job...His job requires an almost superhuman combination of skills, endurance, and acceptance of personal risk. Yet, his is a job that must be done by ordinary men. The task of infantry leaders is to make infantrymen out of ordinary men. Once this is done, these men are no longer ordinary; they are extraordinary-they are infantrymen."¹

As this quote suggests, the development of an infantryman requires an investment in training, education, and physical and mental conditioning. The cost of not making this investment will inevitably result in unnecessary losses associated with sending unprepared men into combat. The more prepared the infantrymen are before going into combat, the greater the potential for victory and the lower the cost in personnel and materiel. The principles of war are timeless. However, the tactics, techniques, procedures (TTPs), and equipment used to wage war are continuously evolving. Unfortunately, the training of Marine infantrymen is not evolving as quickly as technology and the geopolitical environment that influence warfare. By many accounts from current operations (OIF/OEF) the Marine Infantryman is performing superbly. However, it would be a fallacy to apply the axiom "if it isn't broke don't fix it!" To do so would be as irrational as a mechanic saying, "The engine is running fine, why change the oil?". Because of the emergence of new technology and changes in the

¹ Collins, Extract from Course 9005, Training, 1975, USA Command and General Staff College, 159.

geopolitical environment the Marine Corps needs to make a larger investment in entry-level training of its infantrymen, both officer and enlisted, and the professional development of its infantry leaders in order to prevent the situation in which unprepared men could potentially be sent into combat.

I. The ever-changing modern battlefield

Perhaps the greatest contributing factors to changes in infantry TTP

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endurance, and acceptance of personal risk. Yet, his is a job that must be done by ordinary men. The task of infantry leaders is to make infantrymen out of ordinary men. Once this is done, these men are no longer ordinary; they are extwill increase.² As such, changes in the geopolitical environment have a profound influence on the form of combat the infantrymen will be expected to conduct. Martin Van Creveld emphasizes that, "future war will not be relatively simple, hightech conventional war, but rather extremely complex low-intensity conflict."³ The result of these changes will result in what has been termed "the fourth generation of war" and will require the infantryman to employ different skills than conventional war has typically required.⁴ According to LtCol Hammes, "...fourth generation tactics are rarely employed exclusively. Rather they exist side by side with the tactics of earlier generations."⁵ As such, the infantryman will not only be required to maintain proficiency in conventional warfighting skills, but will also need to be up to date on new combat tactics and techniques.

² Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-35.3, 1-1.

³ Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 218.

⁴ William S. Lind, "Understanding Fourth Generation War," *Military Review*, Sep/Oct 2004, 12.

⁵ Thomas X. Hammes, "The Evolution of War: The Fourth Generation," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Sep 1994, 35.

II. The reason to change Marine infantryman training

The modern infantryman is required to maintain similar skill-sets required of infantrymen fifty years ago. However, the increase in the sophistication of equipment and the shift toward an unconventional enemy in an unconventional fight require an increase in time and resources needed to properly prepare today's infantrymen for the modern battlefield. As such, the Marine Corps' training programs for infantrymen need to become more robust in order to train infantrymen in additional skill-sets and with increased technical expertise of modern equipment.

III. Problems with entry level training of infantrymen

There are a number of new technologies under development or in various stages of fielding. Until these systems are fielded, it is understandable that there maybe gaps between training Marines on these systems. However, it is not understandable for a currently fielded system to have a training gap. For example, every Marine Rifleman in an infantry battalion is currently equipped with a night vision device (NVD) and a night aiming device (NAD). However, the Marine infantryman only receives minimal familiarization with these devices at the School of

Infantry (SOI), in the form of 6.25 out of 429.25 academic hours.⁶ Non-lethal weapons have also been fielded, but the SOI students do not receive any training in the employment of these weapons.

Unfortunately, this training gap exists not only within the enlisted training pipeline. Graduates of the Infantry Officer Course (IOC) receive minimal to no training on the Mounted Data Automated Communications Terminal (MDACT) and the Precision Lightweight GPS Receiver (PLGR).⁷ In order for our infantrymen to fully exploit our nation's technological advantage over our enemies they must be trained and able to master the use and employment of such technology.

An argument can be made that SOI and IOC only need to conduct familiarization-training because individual mastery-training can be conducted as on the job training (OJT) at the infantry battalion. However, one could make a better argument, that if the infantry battalion received a completely qualified infantryman capable of shooting, moving and communicating in any clime, place, day or night, the infantry battalion could then focus more on unit training vice individual training. Of course the infantry

⁶ Course Descriptive Data SOI, ITB.

⁷ Course Descriptive Data IOC, TBS.

battalions will always be responsible for maintaining individual proficiency among their Marines, but because it requires less time to sustain a skill-set than to develop one, the battalions will have more time to train and develop cohesive and proficient units.

SOI and IOC are not at fault for this training gap. The faculties at these schools are doing what all good Marines do; accomplishing the mission with the resources available. The problem lies with the resources made available to these schools. The Marine Corps needs to make a larger investment in time and resources to train entry-level infantrymen.

IV. Problem with advanced training of infantrymen

The 2004 Gunner Symposium identified the need of the infantry community to develop a more warfighting-centric infantry professional military education (PME) program for the enlisted ranks. Additionally, the Gunner Symposium recommended the development of advanced infantry schools that meet the PME requirements for promotions, yet have curriculums that are more centered on infantry skills than the non-warfighting skills found in current PME schools.⁸ Many of these courses already exist. However, with the

⁸ Jeffery L. Eby, "2004 Gunner Outbrief," Marine Corps Gazette, January 2005, 44.

exception of the Infantry Unit Leaders Course (IULC), graduates of these courses are still required to attend another PME school in order to become eligible for promotion. In the case of IULC, the graduates still have to complete the non-resident Marine Corps Institute (MCI) for the Staff Non-Commission Officer Academy to be considered PME complete for promotion.⁹ The action taken with regards to the IULC is a step in the right direction. The Marine Corps needs to take similar action in the case of the other advance infantry schools in order to promote infantry skills among enlisted infantrymen.

V. Proposed infantrymen development for the enlisted ranks

In keeping with the training pipeline that was used in the early 1990s, all graduates of Recruit Training should attend a basic rifleman course similar to the Marine Combat Training course (MCT). The Basic Rifleman Course at MCT will train all Marines on common-skills of a rifleman. Upon graduating from MCT, the newly trained riflemen will attend their MOS producing schools. Those Marines designated to be infantrymen will attend various courses at SOI to include, an Advanced Rifleman Course for 0311s, and other courses for those designated 0331/41/51/52. These

⁹ MARADMIN 166/04

current course lengths should be altered in accordance with the complexity of the skill-sets being taught, vice the convenience of similar graduation dates. For example, the skill-set for an assaultmen (0351) requires him to be proficient in almost all of the 0311 skills as well as the employment of the shoulder-launched multipurpose assault weapon (SMAW), the Javelin, and demolitions. Therefore, the course taken by the 0351 Marines should be longer than that of an 0311, because the 0351 MOS requires more training time and resources.

Once the infantryman has attained the rank of Corporal, he should receive formalized training within his specific MOS and commensurate to his rank and increasing level of responsibility. Completion of this formalized advanced infantry training will also make the Marine PME complete for promotion to Sergeant. As a Sergeant, infantrymen should again be required to attend an infantry PME School that focuses on developing the infantryman into a 0369 (Infantry Small Unit Leader) capable of serving as a SNCO in any 0369 billet within the infantry battalion. As a Gunnery Sergeant, the 0369 should attend an Operations Chief Course (OCC). The OCC should be similar in content to that provided to Marine Corps officers at Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS).

Even though most of these courses currently exist in some form, they are not mandatory for promotion and therefore not all infantrymen attend them. In order to ensure attendance at the schools, the Marine Corps needs to require completion of MOS specific infantry PME prior to promotion. This will ensure depth within the enlisted ranks and proactively develop enlisted leaders. As a result, the infantry community will develop a more professional and educated infantrymen capable of operating more effectively on the modern battlefield.

VI. Proposed infantrymen development for the officer ranks

IOC does a phenomenal job of preparing rifle platoon commanders. However, IOC simply does not have the time or resources to prepare an infantry officer for every billet he may hold within an infantry battalion during his time as a company grade officer. Without advanced infantry training for company grade officers, the Marine Corps is relying on the twelve-weeks of IOC and a lot of on the job training (OJT) to provide company grade infantry officers with the skill-sets needed for all of the jobs they will encounter during their company grade career. While some

argue that the Occupational Field Expansion Course (OFEC) at EWS accomplishes this task, even if this was true, not all Marine infantry officers are able to attend EWS due to limited number of school seats, and those that are able to attend EWS do so toward the end of their time as a company-grade officer. Additionally, EWS is neither organized nor equipped to provide infantry-specific training. For example, EWS does not have an armory available for advanced training exercises. While EWS does dedicate a portion of its curriculum to a MOS-specific OFEC, the OFEC is, at best, a short-term solution. However, the fact that EWS makes an effort to include MOS-specific advanced training in its curriculum is testament that the need for such training is relevant, important and necessary.

The long-term solution is to provide the Marine infantry officer community with an Advanced Infantry Officer Course (AIOC). Ideally, AIOC should be attended by all 0302 First Lieutenants and completion of the course should be required for promotion to Captain. The AIOC curriculum should pick-up where IOC left-off with crew-served weapons employment, orders development, tactical decision making, unit training management, advanced TTP, and new technology training (Mortar Ballistic Computer, MDACT, etc).

The more time and resources that the Marine Corps allocates to the training of its entry-level infantrymen and to the education and development of its infantry leaders the better prepared they will be to fight on the modern battlefield. However, some may argue that the Marine Corps cannot afford longer training pipelines because of limitations in manpower, money, and training ammunition. To rebut this line of reason one should ask the question, "what would cost the infantry battalion more; to lose a Marine for a month so that he can become a better infantryman or infantry leader, or to lose a Marine permanently due to injury or death in combat?" The formula is simple. The more prepared the infantrymen are before going into combat, the greater the potential for victory and the lower the cost in personnel and materiel.

VII. The need and the solution for training of infantryman

It is the responsibility of infantry leaders to provide infantrymen with the training and education necessary to be successful on the modern battlefield. Because the modern battlefield is affected by the complexity of new technology and changes in geopolitics, the infantryman must receive more training than previously

required.¹⁰ While the training of infantryman should be progressive as they advance within their careers, reliance on OJT to develop the infantryman places a significant burden on the infantry battalions. Instead the infantry battalions' focus should be on unit training not individual training. There is a gap between fielded equipment and required skills of the infantryman and the training they receive. If the Marine Corps does not evolve alongside technology and pay attention to the ever-changing geopolitical environment, the current gap that exists between the infantrymen and training will continue to grow. As such, the Marine Corps should address this gap by investing more time and resources in the training and education of its infantrymen so as not to incur additional costs on the battlefields of tomorrow.

¹⁰ Thomas X. Hammes, "The Evolution of War: The Fourth Generation," Marine Corps Gazette, Sep 1994, 35.

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