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THE NEED FOR FREQUENT PRACTICE IN SMALL ARMS FIRING

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PREFACE

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This monograph has been written to show that through the combat commanders failure to realize the critical need for small arms fire, our present training methods do not adequately prepare individuals and units for combat.

As an Assistant Regimental S-3, the author was able to observe many and varied methods of conducting small unit training. Inaddition the author has had considerable experience with small unit tactics both in maneuvers and in combat. An historical example of a rifle platoon in action is presented in this discussion. Annex A will assist the reader in following more closely the course of action of this platoon.

Appreciation is expressed to the members of the Infantry School Library and to the members of the Operations and Training Committee, The Infantry School, for assistance given in the preparation of this monograph. Excent as cited the views or opinions expressed in this monograph are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Department of the Army or The Infantry School.

Mark E. Jones
Signature

INTRODUCTION

The problem of adequate training for the Infantry unit and the Infantry soldier is not a new one. The deficiencies that existed in our training between wars seem to reocurr again and again. It is the purpose of this discussion to analyze a problem inherent to small unit training and to point out specific examples that show the need for improvement in that particular phase of training. The problem is the use of live ammunition in our small unit field problems.

While combat commanders recognize the importance for training in small unit tactics, they are not fully aware of the critical need for effective small arms fire. The author will attempt to show through combat examples and through the discussion that follows the decisive role small arms fire plays in the seizure of an objective. A fallacy that has existed for sometime in the minds of many commanders is that the battle can be won by the side who employs the most artillery and mortar fire. The trend of thought among many commanders is that these supporting fires alone hold the decisive punch in seizure of an objective, that it is only necessary for the infantry to maneuver close in behind these fires and to follow their devastating effect while overruning the enemy positions.

The acceptance of this theory led to an overemphasis in the use of supporting weapons while at the time stressing the maneuver and control problems of

the infantry units. Rifle and automatic weapons fire was subsequently de-emphasized and generally limited to the Known Distance Range and an occasional field firing problem. With the outbreak of the Korean War, the inadequacies in the small arms training became readily apparent on the battle field. Despite tremendous artillery and mortar preparations, units many times failed to take their objective. Their failure was attributed to a lack of skill in the soldiers use of small arms fire during the assault of an objective.

The purpose of this monograph then is to explain the importance of small arms fire in combat and thereby show the need to constantly employ live ammunition in training, so as to properly prepare individuals and units for combat.

DISCUSSION

The American Army has progressed considerably in their training methods since World War II, but there is still room for improvement. In the early training periods of World War II rigid directives went down from higher headquarters prescribing hour by hour subjects such as grenade throwing, gas mask drill, individual cooking, first aid, etc. Most directives pertained to individual soldiers and little time was devoted to small unit tactics. Today Army directives emphasize small unit tactics but the resultant training is still far from effective. The use of live ammunition is restricted in most cases to the known distance firing range and possibly a final assult on an objective during the annual Army Training Test. Only partial heed was payed to the warnings of our battle experienced commanders as they related the shortcomings of our small unit combat training. While most deficiencies were corrected the glaring shortcomings in the employment of our small arms fire were lost and forgotton in the light of heavy mortar and artillery fire and in the new mass destruction weapons.

Following World War II, Combat Commanders were fully aware of our shortcomings in small unit tactics. These commanders stated that despite diligent efforts in devising methods of attack and in planning deceptive maneuvers, many of our attacks failed to attain their

objectives. These commanders believed the cause to be a deficiency in infantry minor tactics, and they warned that a failure to correct these mistakes in our training program would again result in unnecessary casualties in a future war. Nearly all combat commanders were familiar with these deficiencies and one infantry division in 1944 devoted an entire memorandum stressing the need for the effective massing and shifting of small arms FIRE by minor infantry formations. This division felt that the volume of small arms fire was ridiculously inadequate. However, as the years following the war passed, combat commanders soon forgot the importance of small arms fire and many officers who had not experienced combat began training troops neglecting to stress the employment of small arms fire. (5:51)

Five years later the Korean War broke out and after several months of heavy fighting the old bugaboo of inadequate training began to creep back into combat reports. Junior Infantry Leaders were criticized for depending on artillery and mortar fire alone to reduce the objective. Training was considered inadequate in the use of live ammunition and the front line soldier apparently lacked confidence and proficiency in the use of his individual weapon. (4:3) Commanders on the Korean Front complained that men could not fire their weapons properly and that many would not fire their weapons at all. Something was definitely wrong in our training of the individual soldier. A need for improvement in the effectiveness of small arms fire was advocated by all divisions in Korea. The Korean battlefront was

reminiscent of old time frontier fighting. Close and accurate fire was as necessary to stop the enemy as was volume of fire. Many engagements in World War II however, were decided by sheer weight of munitions alone. The hastily trained replacement of that war was faced with obscure targets. Consequently he seldom fired at all and left much to be desired as a marksman. Extensive artillery barrages, air delivered explosives and use of tanks permitted the attacker to ignore small arms fire to a great extent. Between World War II and the Korean War the tendency existed to almost completely substitute the use of heavy supporting weapons for small arms fire. In training with small arms fire volume was substituted for aimed fire and fire power for marksmanship. Since the Korean War there has been a renewed emphasis upon individual marksmanship in the Army. (6:3)

The lack of skill in the technique of accurately aimed rifle fire by the American soldier necessitated a re-evaluation of the Army Training Program. Lately the emphasis on rifle fire has been manifested in a new concept of marksmanship called "Trainfire". The aim of this new program is to produce a more effective combat rifleman through a course of rifle instruction that includes accurate and effective small arms fire under realistic combat conditions. During the "Trainfire" exercises the rifleman becomes proficient through repetition. An individual rifleman is required to participate many times over in varied firing exercises

and thereby demonstrate his true proficiency in the art of delivering accurate and effective rifle fire. The advocates of the "Trainfire" course firmly believe that in order for the soldier to learn this new method of rifle marksmanship efficiently, it is essential that he constantly practices it. (6:17)

Most commanders during World War II had no doubt that the majority of their men were willingly and aggressively firing their weapons. However, few commanders ever had the chance to substantiate their beliefs. During battle it was physically impossible for them to check on the actions of all of their men without neglecting more decisive responsibilities. During the latter stages of the Korean War it was possible for the commanders to get down to lower units and it was here that the need for more effective small arms training became painfully evident to them. Although the importance of small arms fire was abruptly brought to the attention of Korean War Commanders there was a knowledge of its decisive importance following World War II. General S.L.A. Marshall emphasized its importance in his account of the Normandy Landings: "In the whole of the initial assault landings on the Omaha Beachead there were only about seven infantry companies which were tactically effective during the greater part of June 6, 1944. In these particular companies an average of about one-fifth of the men fired their weapons during the day-long advance from the waters edge to the first tier of villages inland-a total of perhaps not more than 450 men firing

consistently with the infantry weapons in the decisive companies. These facts were determined by a systematic check of the survivors. It was not a story of great volume even for the men who fired. Only one company was able to unite a base of fire for any period. The company which made the deepest penetration, losing a high percentage of its men in so doing, saw only six live Germans during its advance and these turned out to be Russians. The day was conspicious for its lack of live targets.

"Yet had not this relatively small amount of fire been delivered by these men, the decisive companies would have made no advance in their separate sectors, the beachhead would not have begun to take form and in all probability, Normandy would have been lost. At their backs was the power of the mightiest sea and air forces ever to support an invading army in the history of the world. But in the final hour of crisis for these infantry companies, the metal, guns and bombs of these distant supporters were not worth three squads from that small band of men which had gone to work with their grenades and rifles." (3:17)

Of course General Marshall did not mean that these few riflemen alone won the victory on the Normandy beaches, but he does infer that without them there would have been no beachhead and no victory on that day. Again there could not be a better example of the miraculous possibilities of a very small volume of fire than the incident at the Bourcy roadblock to the north of Bastogne

on the morning of December 19, 1944. "Twelve American Armored Infantrymen, -twelve very nervous infantrymen- fired erratically in the darkness at a group of approaching enemy soldiers. The enemy fired and fell back. The Americans thought they had probably turned back a German reconnaissance element and that their fire may have hit four or five men. But the group was the point of an infantry regiment which was leading the column of the 2nd Panzer Division. It had recoiled on meeting the surprise fire. The enemy commander reported quite incorrectly, that he was being opposed by superior forces. The word was passed through two higher headquarters and Corps ordered the 2nd Panzer Division to change its route of march and swing northward, thereby wasting precious time and traversing unnecessary space. Had the enemy made one good lunge against the Bourcy roadblock he could have turned southward and entered Bastogne before the American forces had assembled." (3:18)

In Korea many of our attacks failed at the assault stage. A review of the fundamentals of assault tactics will show however, that the methods of assault advocated by Army field manuals is basically sound. The most critical phase of an attack is that moment when the fires of the supporting weapons lift and the responsibility for keeping the enemy down in his hole is transferred to the rapid, accurate and violent fire from the riflemens weapon. Since the artillery and mortar fire has lifted, the closest coordination is then required with the direct support weapons. The gunners must observe

the advance of the maneuvering elements and estimate their point of furtherest advance. When the foremost line of infantrymen approach this limit the gunners should use their initiative and shift their fires. The advancing riflemen should deploy into as skirmishers and commence to fire immediately upon targets and likely enemy positions. In order to keep the enemy under constant pressure, there must be an overlap of rifle fire with that of the supporting weapons. Squad Leaders should position themselves where they can best control their men and to encourage and urge them forward. Men must be prevented from bunching up and squad leaders must be careful not to herd and crowd their men into a group at the top of the objective. During the assault the squads move at a rapid walk, the riflemen pausing every two or three steps to squeeze off a well aimed shots at likely targets. Men must be taught that they will seldom see a live target except for possibly a fleeting moment and therefore they must fire at every bush,log,tree or rise in the ground that could possibly hide an enemy soldier. The assault should carry through the enemy positions employing a violent, accurate volume of fire. This vital phase of the attack requires maximum coordination and control. Proficiency can only be attain-ed through constant practice and training. But without a frequent use of live ammunition the individual and unit is not able to appreciate or realistically perceive the maze of confusion and hollycaust that can result

during this phase of the attack. We can not wait until the soldier enters combat in order to learn these things. Rather he must be throughly indoctrinated in training with the frequent employment of live ammunition to give him confidence in himself and in his weapon and to have a full understanding of battle conditions prior to his first real fire fight. We cannot train our soldiers to that degree with our present methods of either avoiding completely the use of live ammunition or the teaching of unrealistic assault techniques on our safety conscious Close Combat Courses.

The use of conventional, easily recognizable targets in this type of training presents a completely false picture of true close combat conditions. Combat leaders must not have their men hold fire until they see an enemy soldier. The soldier must fire at positions where the enemy is likely to be located. More time must be spent on field firing without sacrificing accuracy of fire. Small unit formations must be taught to fire on such targets as a line of woods, a stream bed, a stone wall or the crest of a hill. We cannot obtain flexibility of fire by sending men through field problems with numerous bobbing targets conveniently popping up in plain view. A rifleman who moves from this unrealistic type of training to the battlefield will naturally hesitate to fire on a harmless looking terrain feature.

Let us therefore take a look at a small unit action engaged in by the 2nd Platoon of King Company,

7th Infantry Regiment, near Chunchon, Korea on 8 April 1951. The 7th Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division had been attacking in the mountain sector north of Chunchon, Korea. The Third Battalion had a narrow sector but was up against an entrenched enemy along a mountain range of sharp ridges, often impassable due to jutting rock formations. Company "K" had run the ridges for two days when they encountered hill 878. (see Annex "A") There were two south approaches to the hill both up rocky ridges. Picture three peaks in a line joined by ridges 200 meters lower than the peak. The company was perimetered on the first one. The center hill, 860, was a pinnacle. The third, hill 878, was connected to hill 860 by a 300 yard base ridge. The western approaches would be over exposed, heavily defended terrain.

If the rock pinnacle 860 could be taken then 878 would be relatively easy. But 860 was a tough position with five or six automatic weapons positions among the rocks and unapproachable by more than a few men at a time. Unknown to the Regiment at this time hills 860 and 878 were defended by an enemy battalion of approximately 500 strong. Meanwhile, the first battalion on the right flank continued to advance rapidly and by 7 April its left flank was dangerously exposed to the enemy on hill 878. A scheme of maneuver was developed. After an early morning preparatory fires, Company "L" would assault hill 860 and continue the attack to hill 868. At the same time a fast light rifle platoon would take a roundabout route and end up directly North of hill

878 behind the enemy. As Company "L" put the main effort across the 300 yard ridge at the face of the hill, the platoon would drive in from the rear, overrunning the rear slope positions.

At 0700 hours on the 8th of April the 2nd Platoon moved out. At 0935 the platoon ran into a two platoon patrol from "B" Company as it was heading for a nearby objective. After a few minutes delay for coordination with battalion the platoons moved out again. The 2nd Platoon Leader decided to follow behind the "B" Company patrol along part of his route to the objective. Mortar rounds began to fall close by so both units hurried in file along a path leading slightly north to the "B" Company objective. When the units crossed a draw slightly north of the hill 878 the 2nd platoon turned sharp left and under cover of foilage and terrain moved a thousand yards southwest to the foot of hill 878. The mortar fire continued to follow Company "B" and apparently the Chinese had lost the 2nd Platoon in the draw.

The platoon leader moved forward to hill 878 undetected and started to move up a path along one of the ridges with the 1st squad in the lead, followed by the 2nd squad, next the light machine gun and a bazooka and finally the third squad bringing up the end of the column. 200 meters from the top of the objective the platoon was radioed to hold up by the Company Commander and to put out their air panel. A few minutes later the top of the hill was attacked

by four F-80's employing napalm, rockets and calibre 50 fire. This was followed by artillery and mortar fire that came dangerously close to the platoon but no one got hurt. It was now 1230 and the platoon began to move out again.

About 75 yards up the slope the point man froze. The platoon leader looked past him and not twenty yards ahead were two Chinese sitting and chatting on the edge of a small dugout. The platoon leader raised his rifle and shot the nearest enemy. The other enemy soldier started to run but the point man dropped him before he could move a dozen steps. The firing had tipped their hand and the 1st squad immediately deployed in as skirmish line and began firing heavily at every sign of cover or concealment. The platoon leader ran the 2nd squad up on the right and they immediately raised the volume of their fire to that of the 1st squad. The machine gunner ran forward instinctively and soon his chattering weapon was flushing Chinese out of their holes. The platoon leader recalls that "Thirty more yards and we reached a "T" ridge where the squads assumed a full skirmish deployment and brought maximum fire to the front. The din was terrific and only the snap of the closest enemy bullets could be heard. Every man was firing, watching the smash of the bullets on the limestone rock. It assisted the adjustment of the fire. The enemy ran helter-skelter in front of us throwing grenades and firing spasmodically but we cut them down with the volume of our fire. Many were hit even after they had pulled the pins of their patatoe mashers.

They could not pin us down. An enemy weapon on the ridge began chewing up the ground between the men. Our machine gun took it under fire while two men ran at it from the right and two from the left. The machine gunner put a steady stream of slugs into the enemy position until the men were a scant five yards away. The Chinese gunner never had a chance. That was close support." (2:17)

The platoon had run three hundred yards up the steep slope in a short time and had reached a solid netwook of trenches. The assault started to lag to a walk near the top so the platoon leader committed the last squad through the middle adding their fire power to the already voluminous marching fire. The shock action was too much for the remaining defenders on top of the hill and the platoon swarmed into the chinese trenches and formed a rough perimeter. They began to shoot down the fleeing chinese as the confused and panic stricken enemy poured out of their dugouts around the platoon position. The platoon suffered only one serious casualty. A BAR man was killed running to an ammo bearer for more ammunition. The platoon held off two counterattacks but ammunition was running low. Finally the Company Commander radioed to the platoon leader to fall back immediately. Company "L" had been stopped back at hill 860 and was unable to continue the attack. Under cover of their machine gun and artillery fire the platoon withdrew back down the hill.

The next day the enemy withdrew from hill 878 and friendly Intelligence was able to compute the results of the 2nd Platoon mission. POW's stated that the platoon had attacked a position with an estimated 500 man battalion in the network of defenses. In one prisoner's unit (a 50 man mortar platoon) he knew of twenty casualities. In addition thirty-five enemy dead were counted on the hill. Why did the 2nd Platoon succeed in taking their objective? The platoon leader attributed it to two simple but decisive principles. One was surprise. The other was the employment of marching fire by every member of the platoon. "The marching fire kept him off balance all the way. The luck involved was the fortune that favors thoroughness. That we could not hold the hill indefinitely was not the fault of the thirty men who took it. Had we fired less in the attack, the enemy would certainly have been able to inflict more casualities than he did. As it was the twenty-three riflemen fired an unprecedented 4000 rounds of ball ammunition in twenty minutes and the BAR's and machine gun put in another 3000 rounds. This weighed heavily in the success. Every man fired his weapon."(2:13)

This situation typifies the type of small action that we can expect against Russian and Chinese forces or their satellites. Despite the use of tremendous artillery, air and mortar fires, the decisive action will come only when the man with the rifle can close in for the kill. In this combat example, the chinese climed out of their holes and dugouts, alive, unhurt

and physically capable of offering strong resistance and holding their ground. World War II and Korea has proven that the enemy who digs in is usually safe from the shells and bombs we pour on top of him. Close, violent, and accurate use of small arms fire must be taught our soldiers to such an extent that he can develope a full appreciation of its effect and to which he can deliver without hesitation or confusion. We can not attain that state of training under our present system of close combat courses. American combat commanders have realized that the most critical time in battle is when the supporting fires lift and the foremost line of riflemen closes in to clash with the enemy. They know that success of the attack depends on the soldier exercising the utmost in individual initiative and determination and that needless exposure means needless casualities. However, many of these commanders are reluctant to instigate a realistic close combat course employing live ammunition with fire and movement. The fear of repercussion from higher headquarters concerning training casualities have guided the commanders to the use of extreme safety precautions on the close combat courses. Too often we see a group of infantry soldiers formed into a single line and then cautiously move forward to fire at obvious bobbing targets. No man must get ahead of the next man and all must walk upright, straight ahead. As they near the end of the course a safety NCO shouts "cease fire, lock pieces, fix bayonets, charge" and the line of riflemen run the last fifty yards

over the hill and form a perimeter defense. Many of the responsible commanders who employed this unrealistic type of training (and it is still very evident in our training and combat divisions today) would ease their conscience with the remark that "These men will react in a more flexible and realistic manner when under fire in combat." Unfortunately the soldiers did not as the Korean battle reports so emphatically showed. The men assaulted their objective in that same cautious, upright position they had been taught in training. This method of assault only resulted in needless casualities and frequently in a failure to take the objective. General James C. Fry, an experienced commander in both World War II and Korea explained the results of this present type of combat course as follows:" Current training in marksmanship and tactics in not wholly realistic. Most young officers and soldiers of infantry who have been in battle have been taught to fire with accuracy on a rifle range and to hit targets only a fraction of the size of a mans body at a distance of several hundred yards. Almost simultaneously they have been taught to close with the enemy in an upright position without adequate explanation of how the enemy meantime will be restrained from killing them. Emphasis is given to supporting fires as the element that will drive the enemy to cover until overrun by our advancing troops, but in contradition to this instruction the effects of enemy rifle and artillery fire are mimimized. Out of the entire pattern of instruction the need for

coordinated FIRE and MANEUVER stands crystal clear. Two principals that combat infantrymen need to remember when closing with the enemy through heavy small arms fire are that only a mimimum number of men should expose themselves simultaneously and that "MAXIMUM AIMED FIRE* POWER MUST COVER THE ADVANCING INFANTRYMEN." (1:4) These principles have culminated into a method of training on close combat courses called Assault Battle Drill. The training stresses the use of aimed fire in sufficient volume to force an enemy to seek cover.

The United States Army will continue to be a great army only if we continue to produce well trained small units. Superior squads and platoons result in superior battalions and divisions. The point of an attack will be a small unit. Our combat commanders do realize the importance of small unit actions and our training schedules allocate considerable time to small unit training. However, many commanders lose sight of the fundamentals in small unit tactics. They must recognize that the assault is the most important phase of training upon which ultimate success of the front line infantryman depends.

Field problems in small unit tactics, although greatly improved and increased is not enough. Incorporated into this training must be the frequent employment of realistic field firing problems. Only under these conditions will the junior leaders learn to regulate their firers, to place their men in correct firing positions and to impress upon their men the need for fire superiority. The men themselves can only learn

the proper application of fire when commanders frequently employ live ammunition into their tactical problems. It is here alone that the men can become fully aware of the noise, the smell of powder, the problems of control and the confusion that will be found on the field of battle. It is here alone that the man can gain the confidence and respect for his small arms weapon and to have instilled in him a knowledge of why he must fire his weapon in combat.

The repetition of firing must not be confined to "Trainfire" or marksmanship alone. In order for the rifleman to learn his job efficiently it is essential that he practices the act. A Battalion Commander should insure that his rifle squads employ live fire in their small unit tactics at least once a month. Scheduling these live fire problems at least once a month would distribute the practice to an extent that the riflemen would have a strong familiarity with his weapon and yet not so often as to make him careless and disrespectful of safety precautions. Consistent with our policy to perfect training methods, trainfire has been incorporated into rifle marksmanship and Assault Battle Drill has been incorporated into the close combat course. But whether it be the implementation of a new method or the renovation of an old method, the need for repetition in the training will still exist. In most courses of instruction the army adheres to the principle that practice makes perfect. Yet the use of live ammunition in our field problems is either so completely restricted or seriously limited that the soldier cannot possibly attain a standard of proficiency in the use of his weapon. The deficiencies

that occurred in World War II and Korea should not happen again. These deficiencies will be repeated again if we hold to the belief that a yearly marksmanship course or any easy familiarity with a weapon on an occasional field problem can instinctively prompt a soldier to use the weapon when he comes under fire in combat.

CONCLUSION

(1) Small unit training methods are generally good, but there still exists room for improvement. Considerable time is allocated on training schedules to small unit tactics, however, little time is devoted to realistic firing exercises.

(2) In the past commanders have tend to over-emphasize the accomplishments of heavy supporting weapons and in turn de-emphasize small arms fire. Small unit firing problems became unrealistic and wholly inadequate.

(3) Historical examples from both World War II and Korea showed that the use of small arms fire plays a vital role in the seizure of an objective.

(4) Since the Korean War small arms fire has received additional interest and emphasis, resulting in much improved training methods and realistic firing exercises.

(5) Despite the improved methods of instruction in realistic firing problems, it is imperative that there be frequent application of these firing exercises. Only through constant repetition can the individual and the unit become fully proficient and thereby adequately trained for combat.

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ANNEX A (Area of Action)