

The Importance of Individual Training

CSM (RETIRED) CHIP E. MEZZALINE

NCOs are responsible for individual training. Officers have entrusted NCOs to accomplish this mission. During the period of the Continental Army, Inspector General Friedrich von Steuben standardized NCO duties and responsibilities in his "Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States." His work, commonly called the "Blue Book," set down the duties and responsibilities for corporals, sergeants, first sergeants, quartermaster sergeants, and sergeants major, which were the NCO ranks of that period. Although NCO duties and responsibilities have evolved since the Revolutionary War, the "Blue Book" paved the way, recognizing that individual training is sergeant's business. This is a point that is clearly specified in today's modern doctrine such as Field Manual 7-0, *Training*, which states that NCOS "set the foundation for Army training. They train Soldiers, crews, and small teams to be battle-ready. They provide crucial input and advice to the commander on what is trained and how it is trained. This ensures the organization trains on its most important tasks down to the individual Soldier."

NCOs must remain up to date with new equipment and technology. Our Soldiers must be well prepared to operate within their commander's intent and accomplish their assigned mission. Preparing our Soldiers begins with individual training. NCOs accomplish this through tough and realistic individual and collective task training. This enables us to meet the challenges of tomorrow's ever-changing environment. The Army will continue to field new equipment, and NCOs must remain on the cutting edge of understanding and mastery of that equipment. We must embrace technology and use it to our advantage; however, we must also maintain proficiency in skills and tasks that are not reliant on technology or technical systems. Ensure you stay proficient with those tasks that might be considered "old." The fundamentals acquired from that basic proficiency will enable you to become a more adaptive leader. A couple of examples quickly come to mind; first, the use of satellite-based navigational devices has become the standard for getting from one point to another. We must also remain proficient with a map, protractor, and a compass. Your weapon, if properly zeroed, should still be accurate without your assigned optics. You can always use your iron sights. Embrace technology and incorporate it into your individual training but also ensure continued proficiency on basic (analog) Soldier skills that enable survival in any environment.

Individual training is accomplished by training our Soldiers on the individual and warrior task list. Ensure that you are training your Soldiers on the correct tasks. Check with your NCO support channel and chain of command to understand your unit's critical collective task list (CCTL) and mission-essential task list (METL). Work with other NCOs to ensure that you stay proficient on your own individual and warrior tasks. Here are a few keys to success



A paratrooper assigned to 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, engages pop-up targets during marksmanship training in Pordenone, Italy, on 15 March 2022. (Photo by Davide Dalla Massara)

when it comes to training. Prior to the training, always set your Soldiers up for success. Let your Soldiers know what is expected, ensuring that they know what training will be conducted by providing them with the task, conditions, and standards. Keep them informed of the uniform and equipment standards. Have a designated area to post timelines and training schedules for training. Foster a training environment that is conducive to learning and building trust. You can do this by letting your Soldiers know that it is alright to make mistakes. If you embarrass your Soldiers, they will become hesitant. In most cases, it only takes patience and repetition to achieve success. Ensure that they meet the training objectives before training is complete. When planning individual training, always ensure you have included time for retraining as necessary. Conduct an after action review after every training event. This will allow your training to become more effective.

Individual training is meant to focus on individual and warrior tasks. Individual and warrior tasks are those responsibilities that must be performed by the individual Soldier in order to perform a larger collective task. Soldiers must be accurate when firing their individual weapon. The task associated with this individual responsibility is 071-COM-0030, Engage Targets with an M16-series Rifle/M4-series Carbine. Soldiers must accomplish this task semi-annually in order to remain proficient. Once individual tasks are accomplished to standard, the team, squad, and section are better prepared to conduct training on a collective task. The task to engage targets with an M16-series Rifle/M4-series Carbine directly supports the collective tasks of react to an ambush. Warrior tasks are a collection of individual Soldier skills deemed critical to Soldier survival by the Army. Weapons training, tactical communications, urban operations, and first aid are all examples of categories of warrior tasks. When we reach the desired level of proficiency with individual tasks, we can then focus on battle drills. Battle drills are collective actions rapidly executed by the team, squad, or section without applying a deliberate decision-making process. Some examples of battle drills are react to ambush, react to chemical attack, and evacuate injured personnel from a vehicle.

The primary manuals for individual and warrior task training are Soldier training publications (STPs) and the Soldier's Manual of Common Tasks (SMCT). STP 21-1 SMCT directly supports individual and warrior task training. You must use these manuals to plan, conduct, and evaluate individual and warrior task training. The manuals include the Army warrior training plan for Warrior Skills Level 1 and task summaries for all skill level (SL) 1 critical common tasks that support your unit's wartime mission. The SMCT manual is the only authorized source for individual and warrior task training. It is our responsibility to ensure that our Soldiers have access to the SL 1 STP SMCT within our team, squad, section, platoon, and company areas.

There are few significant individual responsibilities for those involved with individual and warrior task training. Every Soldier must be able to perform the individual tasks that their organization has identified based on the unit's CCTL and METL. The individual Soldier is responsible for being prepared to conduct individual and warrior task training at any time the opportunity presents itself. Some NCO responsibilities are to help identify, plan, prepare, execute, and assess the individual training that supports the unit's CCTL and METL.

Some of the more specific responsibilities of the NCO include making individual and warrior task training your primary focus and do not become distracted. Your Soldiers will know what is important to you by where you spend your time. When conducting individual training, follow the steps in the SMCT. Set objectives for the training that you will conduct. Ensure that you plan and resource the training and take into consideration the number of personnel being trained, the time it will take to train them, and the training aids that are required. For more senior NCOs, focus on the following: certify your trainers (ensuring that they can accomplish the task to standard), assist with ensuring that the training being conducted is both effective and efficient, and most importantly, participate in the training. All leaders should conduct risk management and take into consideration the environmental and safety concerns which could affect your training.

Many times NCOs find themselves looking for time to train their Soldiers. Today's Army is busy. Units should always set aside time on the training calendar to conduct "sergeant's time" training. When sergeant's time training is conducted correctly, it allows NCOs to focus on the necessary individual training while empowering them to take ownership of their team, squad, etc. Get the attention of your commander and senior NCOs and work with them to get this time blocked on the training calendar to enable you to train your Soldiers on their individual tasks. Even though it is called sergeant's time training, include your officers in this training. This is a great opportunity for them to see how valuable this training is and will help in their understanding of why it is so important when they become a commander; plus it will ensure that they too are proficient as a Soldier.

A leader should always know what resources are available for use when conducting individual training. You must use current doctrine when conducting individual training. Most field manuals have been updated to reflect current doctrine. A great source to find the most recent and emerging Army doctrine publications, Army doctrine reference publications, field manuals, and training circulars is the Army Doctrine and Training Publications website (<http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/index.html>). This website provides drop-down boxes that allow you to access administrative regulations, doctrinal references, technical manuals, Soldier training publications, the Soldier's Manual of Common Tasks, and Army doctrine reference publications. Another useful website is the Army Training Network (<https://atn.army.mil/>). This site also includes the Combined Arms Training Strategies (CATS) and allows you to search for a task by proponent or by the type of unit. This is a great resource for planning and conducting home station training.

Editor's Note: *This article was first published in From One Leader to Another, edited by CSM Joe B. Parson (Combat Studies Institute Press). Read other articles in the volume at <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/combat-studies-institute/csi-books/FromOneLeadertoAnother.pdf>.*

At the time this article was written, **CSM Chip E. Mezzaline** was serving with the Joint Readiness Training Center Operations Group at Fort Polk, LA. He has since retired from active duty and is currently working as an Department of the Army Civilian at Fort Benning, GA.