

# WEAPONS MAINTENANCE:

## *How IBOLC Keeps Students Fit to Fight*

CPT MICHAEL MARTINO



The remains of the 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment footprint at Fort Ord, CA. (Photos courtesy of author)

The slogan “Maintenance is Training” is still stenciled proudly on the wall of an old 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry “Manchu” maintenance bay in the remnants of Fort Ord, CA. The Manchus there inactivated in 1993 and Fort Ord closed in 1995, yet the mantra of maintenance prevailed. Maintenance is inherent in our Army culture, and it is ingrained in our being as Soldiers. However, how well does maintenance culture translate from the high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV) in the unit motor pool to our most precious combat implement, the Soldier?

The 2nd Battalion, 11th Infantry Regiment, which facilitates the Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course (IBOLC) at Fort Moore, GA, has taken a deliberate approach towards Soldier care. Grounded in Field Manual (FM) 7-22, *Holistic Health and Wellness*, the unit focuses on three major components: physical fitness, mental and emotional performance, and experiential learning. Oriented on a target population within the battalion’s headquarters and headquarters company (HHC), the employment of enablers like a Tactical Athlete Performance Center (TAP-C) and Ready and Resilient (R2) Human Performance cadre work to rehabilitate, optimize performance, and prepare Soldiers for follow-on assignments.

The HHC serves a large population of 400-800 students grouped into six platoons. Course graduates from training companies are assigned there to pursue additional training like the Ranger Course and eventually conduct a permanent change of station (PCS) to their gaining unit. The company also serves students who are injured, pending administrative action, or those who recycled IBOLC for academic or medical reasons. Regardless, every student passes through a critical gate prior to assignment to HHC. Much like the battalion’s maintenance meeting run by the executive officer (XO), the battalion commander chairs reviews of student performance for all injuries, administrative matters, and medical issues. Each student in these categories is personally reviewed, and through this process, the unit diagnoses faults, identifies resources, and then determines an effective rehabilitation plan.

### **Physical Performance**

In the realm of physical fitness, the battalion leans mightily on the 199th Infantry Brigade’s TAP-C. The training center, which is adjacent to the battalion footprint, is stocked with equipment and expertise. It also sports one of the installation’s four swimming pools. The true value of the center lies in the physical therapists, athletic trainers, and specialists who support the service members. These professionals provide



**Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course students conduct physical training by injury category under the supervision of physical therapists and trainers.**

instruction and education while facilitating performance enhancement and rehabilitation on a level far beyond that of a generic Army physical training (PT) session. The staff can also document injuries and work with the on-post medical clinic regarding profiles and therapy plans.

Platoons meet with a TAP-C trainer quarterly to validate their PT plans. The training sessions are geared to accommodate each platoon's population. Those preparing to attend the Ranger Course receive specialized plans with emphasis on push-up improvement and cardiovascular endurance. The PCS platoon utilizes a plan built around maintenance and recovery for students who have experienced 11 months or more of maneuver training. The unit's recycle platoon exploits a menu of PT plans tailored to each student's needs. Five-mile-run and foot-march improvement programs are among the most popular for those in the recycle population.

Special attention is paid to students who have sustained injuries. Whether pending a medical evaluation board (MEB), on profile, or nursing an ache or pain, students cycle through the battalion's Maneuver Tactical Athlete Care (MTAC) therapist as the first role of care. With an office and small gym on the unit footprint, the specialist assesses students prior to their visit to the troop medical clinic to see a provider. The MTAC provides in-house physical therapy that often solves students' physical issues before they seek and are granted a profile.

If students are placed on profile, they are assigned to the medical platoon and begin a recovery regimen administered by the TAP-C. PT hours are adjusted to later in the day from 0800-1000. This encourages proper sleep habits and aids in recovery. Students are then grouped by injury category, counseled, and educated on an individualized plan which is then supervised by athletic trainers. The HHC commander reviews student progress and profiles with the athletic staff monthly, identifying injury trends and forecasting students' return to duty.

The unit's approach towards physical fitness is total. The battalion's task organization, PT schedule, and empowerment of subordinate leaders all facilitate the mission to "provide a practical and scientific approach to physical dominance for the modern Army Soldier."<sup>1</sup>

### **Mental and Emotional Health**

Failures to meet IBOLC course requirements by students do occur. Depending on the type of failure, the battalion commander may determine that a student can recycle and re-attempt the course requirement. If recycled, students are placed in a platoon specifically designed to rehabilitate them.

The recycle platoon utilizes the last step of the eight-step training model and retrains students on a myriad of tasks. A unique aspect is the engagement of the R2 program to build confidence and cognition. Cognitive performance experts facilitate recurring introductory sessions and follow-on mastery courses, focusing on the maintenance of human performance and the mind.

Every month, new recycles receive a briefing and instruction on how to frame and overcome failure. They are taught at the small group level about acceptance, coached to understand that shortfalls are inevitable, and encouraged to trust in their rehabilitative plans. This is all done after drafting an individual view of success and identifying the systems available to help the student succeed. This results in all students having the ability to schedule mastery sessions, which are one to three days in length. These sessions specifically address the event they failed, how they view and effectively deal with that failure, and how they will work to succeed on the next attempt.

Additionally, IBOLC is piloting a Leader Development Course designed to teach Soldiers leader identity that can be used to enhance self-awareness and specific virtues that define how they lead. Soldiers will develop a leadership philosophy that indicates how they can use these virtues with the Soldiers they lead, as well as how they can leverage their values in their leadership style.

### **Experiential**

With the intent of continuous development, HHC executes a leader development program that takes advantage of opportunities unique to Fort Moore. Personalized training plans at Army courses, training opportunities with One Station Unit Training (OSUT) units and the 75th Ranger Regiment, and relevant developmental briefs from senior leaders at the Maneuver Center of Excellence are a few examples of activities students may experience before they PCS to their gaining unit.

The 75th Ranger Regiment offers students the opportunity to participate in specialized training as opposing force (OPFOR) personnel and augmentees. Every quarter, about 30 students plan and affect urban defenses to counter a Ranger raid during house-to-house fighting. Other opportunities involve role playing as high-value targets or civilians on the battlefield. All scenarios serve as an opportunity to train with some of the best Soldiers our Army has to offer and exposes them to the capabilities of special operations forces.

Soldiers are also able to volunteer to lead a platoon during OSUT's final field training exercise. IBOLC graduates are coupled with an executing company where, as an acting platoon leader, they plan an operation, brief an operation order, and lead a platoon of Infantry trainees through an attack. The experience provides student officers with an opportunity to apply what they've learned and build rapport with future Infantry Soldiers they may one day lead.



Second lieutenants participate in a platoon leader panel.

Any leftover time is occupied with the lessons learned and experiences of leaders on the installation. Officers in a variety of roles are invited to share their experiences with the newer officers. Often, students in the Maneuver Captain's Career Course speak about their experiences as platoon leaders and staff officers to provide context on future assignments.

**Maintenance is continual.** The same processes put forth to observe student performance, provide specialized services, and encourage self-care work to extend the service life of our end item — the Soldier. The need for institutional knowledge is addressed constantly through the courses and training offered in the unit's approach to experiential learning. Physical fitness is affected through the science of athletic performance professionals applying their skills and the willingness of the organization to implement the techniques prescribed by the experts. This same willingness and use of experts coincide with an honest admission about the impact of mental and emotional readiness on human performance. Together, these three domains targeted by 2-11 IN ensure the maintainability, reliability, and availability of future Infantry officers.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Fort Moore Tactical Athlete Performance Center (TAP-C).

**CPT Mike Martino** currently serves as the commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 11th Infantry Regiment (Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course) at Fort Moore, GA. His previous assignments include serving as a mechanized rifle and mortar platoon leader in 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division; an operations officer for the Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade; a platoon tactical trainer for 4th Ranger Training Battalion; a logistics officer for Task Force 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 3rd ID; and a rifle company commander of B Company, 1-28 IN. He earned a Bachelor of Science in military history from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY, in 2014.