

Focus Training on the Basics

by Command Sergeant Major Jim Dale, Armor School Sergeant Major

I would like to thank the leaders of the 24th Infantry Division (M) and Fort Riley for the wonderful visit my team and I had from 22 through 24 September 2002. MG Metz and CSM Hearron, your post and soldiers look GREAT!! They are motivated and ready for any mission that might come their way.

I would also like to thank PFC Simms, SPC Dees, CSM Fyffe (Garrison CSM), CSM Hopkins (3d Bde), CSM Riling (1st Bde), CSM Skidmore (2-70th AR Bn), CSM Pring (1-13 Tank), CSM Nobel (1-34 AR Bn), and CSM Moore (2-34 AR Bn), for going out of their way to ensure we had a pleasant trip. I also extend thanks to the soldiers of B Company, 3d Platoon, 2-70th Armor for allowing me to do PT with them.

We also had a great visit with the Manhattan Armory, and met some very professional leaders who are also ready for any mission that might come their way.

For this issue of the "Driver's Seat," I have asked the Armor School Command Sergeant Major, Jim Dale, to write an article about training focus. I would hope that we can use his experiences as a platoon sergeant and master gunner of an armored unit to help better train our soldiers to not make the same mistakes.

*- CSM William J. Gainey
Command Sergeant Major
U.S. Army Armor Center*

I once served as the battalion master gunner in a unit fielding the new M1 Abrams tank. At that time, only a few tankers in the battalion had prior experience on the combat system, so everyone was focused on learning the fundamentals and characteristics of the tank as we proceeded through fielding and training. Shortly after transition, we participated in our first Tank Table VIII gunnery. The results of the gunnery were outstanding, 55 out of 58 tank crews qualified first time down range. You can imagine the pride among the

soldiers of a tank battalion that has done so well.

While serving as a platoon sergeant several years later, my unit and crew did not do as well, so you can imagine the disappointment among the soldiers. The difference in the two situations was our training focus and preparation for gunnery as tank commanders.

We put so much energy into meeting the gates in unit conduct of fire trainer (UCOFT), we forgot to train in the UCOFT. We focused on what the maintenance team had not done, rather than performing preventive maintenance checks and services by the book, using special gunnery and armament accuracy checks to verify that our systems were ready as a crew. We did not take advantage of the snake boards and other tools to learn how to manipulate the switches, knobs, and buttons on the M1A1. After the disappointing gunnery, we brushed ourselves off and developed a plan to become the best in the battalion — we succeeded.

Our plan was simple from a noncommissioned officer standpoint. To succeed, we had to enforce training standards and take advantage of every opportunity to train gunnery. I am reminded of the speech one of my former squadron commanders gave as we prepared for our National Training Center rotation, "for the squadron to be successful, the noncommissioned officers (NCOs) had to ensure our soldiers were trained to standards in individual and crew tasks." He went on to say, "training is just like playing football, the basics of winning the game are to block and tackle well."

As NCOs, we shoulder the brunt of the responsibility to train Armor crewmen to master individual skills to successfully accomplish their mission. There are a myriad of successful training programs in units throughout the Army, but the best must always focus on training crewmen on the most basic task — how to operate the crew station of his assigned vehicle. Tactically, we

must train crews on how to perform individual crew tasks, which contributes to a successful collective task. For example, frequent MILES boresighting is one of the keys to success at a combat training center and contributes immeasurably to the crew's ability to engage and destroy the opposing force (OPFOR). When the fast-moving OPFOR comes across the horizon, every tank needs to be engaged in the battle for the platoon to be successful, and likewise for each platoon if the company is to be successful. Our smaller organizations cannot afford an untrained crew.

My battle buddy and the Deputy Commanding General of the Armor Center tells me quite often, "every soldier has a sergeant who is responsible for his training and welfare, including him." As sergeants responsible for soldiers, focus your energy on training the basics, using our abundance of initiative. You will have successful gunneries, excel during Cav Cup, and defeat the OPFOR at the CTC. Be innovative in your approach to train your crew, but focus on the basics and collective success will follow.

I also believe that the success to training our crews to be combat ready is never forgetting the basics. During my 27 years as a soldier, I have learned that no matter how complex we get, the soldier who knows the basic task will get us through our mission.

I look forward to hearing more from the soldiers in the field. Always take the hard right over the easy wrong and remember, PRIDE IS CONTAGIOUS!!

I am very interested in receiving concerns, comments, and suggestions from soldiers out in the field. Please send all questions and comments to the following email address:

CSM@knox.army.mil