Anatomy of a live fire

Infantry unit shoots and maneuvers during annual training

The heart of the infantry

Army Sgt. Brett Hackett leads his squad through the live fire range at Fort Carson, Colo. The Soldiers of Attack Company conducted a live fire exercise as part of their annual training May 30 - June 14.

Photo by Army 1st Sgt. Steve Segin

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Department of the Army Training Circular 7-9: Infantry Live Fire Training says to be successful on the battlefield, a commander must know the capabilities of his weapons and Soldiers. One way to know this is to conduct a live fire exercise. That's what the Colorado Army National Guard's Company A, 1st Battalion, 157th Infantry did June 5-7 during its first annual training at Fort Carson, Colo.

The 1-157th Infantry is a new battalion with old roots. The unit can trace its lineage from the Civil War to the liberation of Dachau during World War II. In the early 1950s, the 157th was converted to Field Artillery, serving proudly in that role until 2007 when 1st Battalion reverted to its infantry roots.

Known as "Attack," Company A is the first rifle company to serve in the Colorado Army National Guard in more than 50 years and the first company to conduct an LFX. With this proud lineage behind them – and potential deployment ahead of them – the Soldiers of Attack embraced their motto, "Lead the Fight," and hit Range 155 hard.

"The heart of an infantry company is the squad," said Capt. Tom Sullivan, Attack Company commander. "The LFX demonstrates the effects of our weapons systems and teaches leaders how to properly employ their weapons systems; it builds confidence in the Soldiers and leaders. This is what we do in the infantry: Close with and destroy the enemy."

An Infantry squad is made up of nine Soldiers: a squad leader and two fire teams of three Soldiers and a team leader. Each fire team can move independently in support of one another, allowing for one team to become a base of fire while the second team maneuvers on an objective.

"The basic principle for this LFX is for the squad to react to contact," said Sgt. 1st Class Josh Stuteville, 3rd Platoon sergeant. Known as *Battle Drill 1 in Field Manual 3-21.8: The Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad,* react to contact means just that. When an element of the squad is engaged it reacts to the threat quickly and violently, using all its weapons systems. While the target is "fixed" by one team laying down a base of fire, the second team can then quickly maneuver to close and eliminate the threat. An additional tool the squads had was a weapons team providing suppressive fire on the target area.

"In an infantry platoon, there's a weapons squad that uses the

M-240B machine gun and the FGM-148 Javelin anti-tank missile that can be assigned to one of the rifle squads based on the mission," said Stuteville. "For this scenario, we added a weapons team with the 240B so the gun crews could train with the rifle squads."

Before the squads could "lock and load," they had to hone their skills; proving their readiness before "going live."

"The LFX lane uses dry, blank and live iterations," said Sullivan. "LFXes take months to prepare for. There are safety considerations, prior training and walk-throughs with range control before Soldiers ever go down range," said Sullivan.

Attack Soldiers performed numerous iterations with no ammunition while observer/controllers watched and critiqued their performance.

Once the squads were judged to be meeting the performance standards, they began using blank ammunition. More iterations followed and the critiques became harsher and more focused. The squads sharpened their skills to perfection and finally received the green light for live fire.

"These dry and blank runs are important because the Soldiers get an understanding of where their muzzles are pointing, who is moving around them and where their rounds are going to hit," said Stuteville.

The first to "go live" was 1st Squad, 3rd Platoon, led by Army Sgt. Brett Hackett. The squads were evaluated on their ability to react to contact along a linear route that contained an observation post, a bunker and further reinforcements.

"The positions contain pop up targets, a machine gun simulator and items of intelligence value," said Capt. Jason Griffith, Range 155 officer in charge. "The squads need to destroy an OP, then they'll be engaged by a bunker. Once those are neutralized they'll be engaged by a large force looking to counterattack."

Of course, that's not enough for Attack Company.

"Oh, and to make it more challenging, the squad leader will have to adjust indirect fire, conduct sensitive site exploitation for intelligence and treat and evacuate a casualty to a landing zone," added Griffith.

After two dry runs, the sun – nicknamed 'Bob' by the Soldiers – was directly overhead. With temperatures creeping steadily into the 90s, the Soldiers of 1st Squad noted, "Bob is angry and he's taking

Debunking

Team Leader Army Sgt. Ralph Knudson sweeps through a bunker during the blank ammunition phase of live fire training.

Photo by Army 1st Sgt. Steve Segin

Combat speed
Infantry squads train to move as fast and tactically as possible while wearing more than 30 pounds of combat gear.
Photo by Army 1st Sgt. Steve Segin

it out on us," as they moved to their initial blank iteration.

The firing of blank ammo adds a necessary layer of realism to combat training. Soldiers begin to develop a battle rhythm and leaders control rates of fire under the added stress and noise.

After successfully performing a second blank fire iteration – to include the added challenges of calling for indirect fire on counter-attacking forces, dragging a "wounded" comrade 200 meters in a portable stretcher and calling for a medevac, all while wearing helmets, knee and elbow pads, load-bearing vests and 33 pounds of body armor each – the worn out Soldiers were ready for the live fire.

"The guys did well," Hackett said. "We worked out the kinks and we're ready to do a live run."

As the Soldiers exchanged blanks for ball ammunition, the team leaders hovered around doing pre-combat checks and inspections on magazines, weapons and body armor. The squad fell in to formation, confident and prepared.

"I am ready to do this. Lock and load!" yelled Hackett

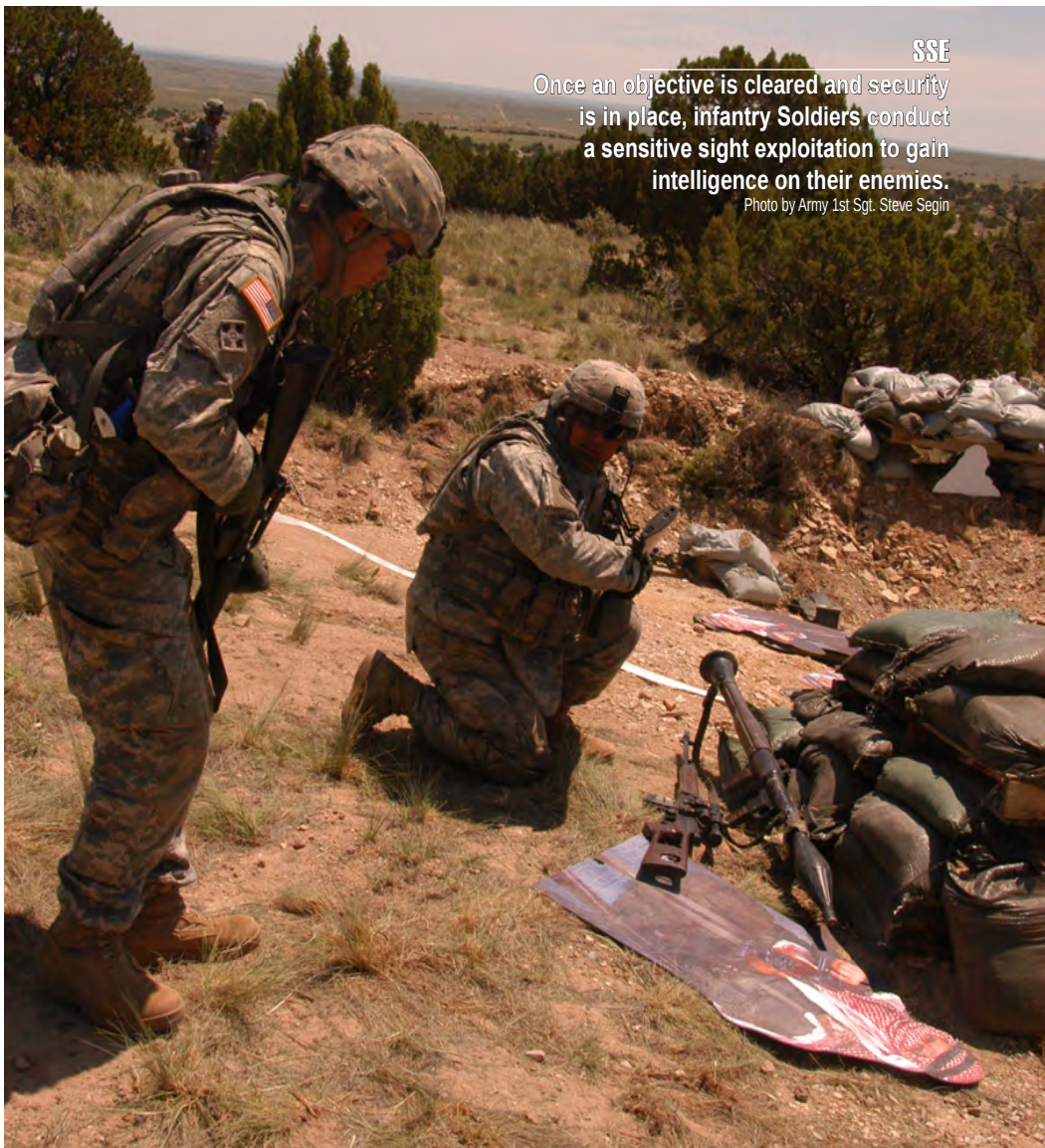
When the sound of magazines being slapped and bolts ramming home faded, the squad moved out. Thirty seconds later rifle fire broke out. "Contact! Twelve o'clock!"

Within only a few minutes, the OP was destroyed. The squad reconsolidated and moved on to the bunker engagement. Fire from a belt-fed machine gun broke out and yells of "Contact!" echoed across the line.

As the Soldiers returned fire, Weapons Team got its M-240B machine gun into position. The heavy, thudding sound of the weapon let the other teams know that they had suppressive fire on the bunker and the other team began to maneuver on the objective.

Using cover and concealment, the Soldiers moved to positions on the bunker's flank.

"Shift fire. … Shift fire. …" crackled calmly through the radios as the team moved into position.



SSE
Once an objective is cleared and security is in place, infantry Soldiers conduct a sensitive sight exploitation to gain intelligence on their enemies.
Photo by Army 1st Sgt. Steve Segin

Man down
Aid and litter teams make use of Combat Life Saver-certified Soldiers to provide immediate care for casualties.
Photo by Army 1st Sgt. Steve Segin

Moving swiftly to the bunker, the team called, "Lift fire," destroyed the bunker with a grenade and swept across the objective.

The Alpha Team leader called for a status report as the Soldiers fell immediately into security positions. Hackett used Bravo Team to sweep across the objective and complete the security perimeter.

"LACE report!" echoed across the lane.

Yells of "Green! Amber! Green! Green!" came back in seconds, indicating the status of liquid, ammunition, causalities and equipment.

The Soldiers paused briefly to catch their breaths and half a dozen targets popped up 50 meters away.

"Contact, twelve o'clock!" was followed by a burst from an M-249 Squad Automatic Weapon. The targets fell one by one under a hail of deafening and accurate fire. The sound of gunfire was quickly drowned out by the shrill whistle of an artillery simulator.

"Incoming! Incoming!"

BOOM! BOOM!

More targets fell as Hackett adjusted indirect fire to neutralize the threats. With the enemy destroyed, Hackett called for another LACE report.

One team replied, "Red!" A casualty.

The Soldiers sprang into action, applying buddy aid and controlling the bleeding. The aid and litter team moved in and loaded the Soldier on a portable sled. Hackett called in the casualty and requested a medevac. Two Soldiers dragged their injured comrade to the LZ at combat speed as the others pulled security for the helicopter. The simulated Black Hawk landed in a cloud of violet smoke.

With the casualty "in the air" the scenario ended. "Endex. … Endex. …" echoed across the LZ. The tired but pumped Soldiers traded big grins and high-fives.

With one squad down, there were still seven to go and the Attack Company Soldiers got right back to it.

"After three days, every rifle squad in the Company validated," said Sullivan.

"This is the first time I have ever done something like this, and I am a Charlie [mortarman]," said Pvt. Ronald Gray, an indirect fire infantryman assigned to 3rd Platoon for the live fire.

With their first live fire behind them, the Soldiers of Attack Company looked forward. "Next year will be a lot different, but I can't wait," said Gray. "Hopefully we get to use some mortars, too."

Medevac
Soldiers use a portable litter to transport their injured comrade to a secure landing zone for medical evacuation.
Photo by Army 1st Sgt. Steve Segin

Spitting lead

The culmination of days of training in more than 30 pounds of gear in temperatures above 90 degrees: Live rounds fired from an M-240B knock down enemy targets as a squad successfully concludes its live fire exercise.

Photo by Army 1st Sgt. Steve Segin