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Shoot, move and dominate: Alaska Army Guardsmen hone movement techniques

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — When Liverpool, England, native Spc. Innocent Bennett talks, he doesn't sound like fellow Liverpoolian Ringo Starr, or any of the Beatles for that matter. His British Commonwealth accent is linguistically seasoned by years abroad in Europe, Africa and finally the United States where he serves with 1st Battalion (Airborne), 143rd Infantry Regiment, Alaska Army National Guard.

Hunkered behind a small berm, Bennett's accent was a nonentity as he bellowed his status to his battle buddy.

"Right side set!" he screamed, straining to cover the sonic distance to his cohort and override the din of weapons fire.

"Left side moving!" came the response.

Bennett peered through the optics of his reflex site, superimposing the red LED dot over the bunker that concealed the opposing force who aimed to shoot him. He squeezed the trigger in timed succession, keeping the enemy's head down while conserving ammunition.

The infantryman was embroiled in an individual-movement techniques (IMT) training lane flavored with a twist of realism – the usual blank ammunition and laser transmitters were replaced by paint-marker training munitions. Lasers don't hurt. Paint markers – traveling at 375 feet per second – do.

A strong foundation

Staff Sgt. Garrett Kirby suffers no foolishness. The 1st Squadron, 297th Cavalry Regiment, Soldier pulled no punches when he instructed fellow Guardsmen through the IMT lane. The stakes of combat are too high to wear kid gloves in an infantryman's game.

When a paint marker hit, it felt like a Charley-horse punch, except the stinging sensation was focused into a small circle .223 inches in diameter. Soldiers jumped the first time they were hit, and they got real small behind cover.

"A lot of times, we do this with blanks and there's no feedback from the enemy," Kirby said. "What guys tend to do since they get smoked from bounding for so long is their rushes get longer and longer ... This (training) includes pain in the equation, so they know the enemy is targeting them."

Just as stinging as the paint rounds were Kirby's rebukes. When a Soldier stopped short of the refuge of a berm, he screamed at him to high crawl with a purpose. The Soldier's battle buddy was counting on him to get set and suppress the opposing force.

Kirby was looking for pure aggression and decisive action, and he chastised buddy teams when they showed anything less. Conversely, Kirby praised teams who boldly got after it. Closing with and destroying the enemy is the mission of the U.S. Army Infantry, and IMT provides the cornerstone for that mission.

“Any good unit is good at the fundamentals,” Kirby said of the IMT lanes. “If they've mastered the fundamentals before they get into the more advanced stuff, they have a good solid foundation.”

Leading the assault

Bennett is a combat veteran who served with 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, an active-duty unit stationed at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

He brought his experience to bear during his efforts to turn the tables on the opposing force and the advantages Bennett's adversaries had by way of an ambush.

The technique of the three-to-five-second rush is simple enough and is exemplified in an equally simple axiom: “I'm up. He sees me. I'm down.”

I'm up: Bennett popped up, trading the sanctuary of his cover for the opportunity to rapidly cover ground.

He sees me: It took a short second for the opposing force to identify the bounding infantryman. It would take another instant for the enemy to draw a bead on him and send effective fire.

I'm down: Bennett was down before the opposing force could capitalize on his temporary vulnerability. The erstwhile Englishman found the cover he needed low-crawling through a deep tire track.

This dance went on for two nerve-racking minutes – a waltz between battle buddies and those who doggedly opposed their assault.

The closer the infantrymen got to their objective, the more the flying paint rounds made the enemy munitions' presence known. A zip could be heard as they passed over head. A symphony of rustling arose from trees as the paint passed indiscriminately through the leaves. A staccato of thunks drummed on the compacted soil of the berms, the rounds seemingly desperate to get at the Soldier hiding behind the earthen refuges.

Eventually, Bennett managed to maneuver to the bunker's flank. He had to strain to get a good sight picture through the goggles of his paintball face mask, but he managed to string together a barrage of effective fire.

Instructors ended the exercise; Bennett's team had prevailed. The opposing force crawled out of their bunker and everyone was on the same team again. The temporary adversaries told Bennett his marksmanship was spot on and made their jobs quite difficult.

Bennett said IMT is always a rush, and the paint rounds added to the exhilaration of the training. “What you experience is all your senses are heightened,” he said. “Your heart rate is up. You have to pay attention to what your buddy is doing. You're not just going through the motions. You're bringing back all those years of training – from basic training to going to your unit enforcing what you learned.” The infantryman said it is vital to train with and understand his battle buddy if they are to thrive in combat.

“I know exactly how he's going to react, and he knows exactly how I am going to react,” Bennett

explained. “That really makes a difference knowing the guy next to you, what he's doing. This is what they have been training us for – knowing each person's movements, and that's what makes the American Army great.”

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PHOTOS

1. **Flickr link** includes an event album with the complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images. (Flickr is not generally accessible from .mil computers.)

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/sets/72157665993580523>

2. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.)

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/198409/shoot-move-and-dominate-alaska-army-guardsmen-hone-movement-techniques#.Vzz9bU0UVD9>

