In the Absence of Training, How-To Books

Marines headed for combat are now issued small “how to” booklets, which are designed to fit into the pockets of their combat uniforms. These how-to manuals are supposed to make up for the inadequate training given marine infantry. Marine basic training is nothing more than an exercise in physical fitness and enduring the screams of egotistical drill sergeants. The infantry combat training is stereotypical and obsolescent. No one bothers to keep it up to date and relative, as Marine DIs scream, “If you can’t crawl through the muck you will die in Iraq, Marine !” Marine training is totally inadequate, and has been for decades. Now the Marines are going to hope that a library of how-to manuals will take up the slack. Fat Chance !

The U.S. Marine Corps, noting the development of new tactics and techniques developed by marines fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, have sped up the creation of “how to” publications. Instead of training Marines adequately, they hope the marines will read their books. So, when Marine units are pinned down and about to be destroyed, it is hoped that they will whip out their military cook book and read about what to do next. It won’t work.

The Marines, and the Army, have been putting the latest techniques on their web sites. The troops themselves, who are avid Internet users, exchange this information among themselves; often hours after the new tricks were discovered in combat. The Marines are taking this one step further with their series of booklets (Marine Corps Warfighting Publication Interims), because when you are in combat, you can’t refer to web sites or old emails to check details. The new booklets are illustrated, and written so that Marines in a combat zone will easily understand them under stressful conditions. Some of the booklets will be classified (for electronic warfare and the like), but most will give practical,

and up-to-the-minute advice on street fighting, patrolling and convoy operations. The Marines and Army should be trained well enough so that they don't have to read a how-to-do-it manual.

As far back as World War II, the U.S. Army improvised booklets that were prepared (from very current information about the enemy) and given out to the troops. However, those manuals consisted of intelligence updates on the enemy. They were not supposed to fill the gaps in basic training about patrolling, urban combat, and other methods that soldiers and marines must learn in training. There were also paperback books (field manuals) with more abundant, but more out of date, information on the enemy. This idea has come, and gone, several times since.

The U.S. Army (CALL, or the Center for Army Lessons Learned) has been maintaining a special web site for this sort of thing for years, and before that would pass around reports on lessons learned. Any professional soldier who reads those "lessons learned" will soon note that there is nothing new there. For example, one "lesson learned" admonished troops to not bunch up or mortar fire might more easily kill more of them." Another lesson was "how to carry out a recon patrol." These are not lessons; they are basic combat training that is not being taught to new soldiers and marines. Why? There are no trainers of combat troops that: (1) have the requisite combat experience (2) know what is important (3) know how to train for combat. Both services consider training to consist of screaming sergeants who force soldiers to stand at attention correctly and march in step. Such "arts" were obsolete in the War of 1812.

Don't even ask about the reading level of these booklets ! How can any reading level, no matter how simplistic, capture the attention of young men (that includes enlisted men, NCOs, and officers) under high stress, who are expected to get out of a book what they should have already been taught and trained.

During the 1991 Persian Gulf War, CALL issued booklets to the troops. CALL proudly proclaimed: "Unless you get timely material into the hands of the people doing the fighting, the usefulness of all that collected knowledge is very limited." If troops need training, they should be trained in theater by capable veterans, not handed a book.

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