

WICWAM 16

COMBATIVES STYLE



A R M Y C O M B A

**AT
FORT
BENNING**

Story by
Linda Crippen



Although the dreaded tap-out may be an option during a U.S. Army Combatives tournament, it's not an option in combat. There is no timeout in combat; there is no second chance. And despite what some critics may think, the Modern Army Combatives Program is not a reinvention of the Ultimate Fighting Championship. The program is saving lives.

Almost every instructor with the U.S. Army Combatives School at Fort Benning, Ga., will tell a willing ear about feedback from downrange. “We’ve had former students call us and tell us that what they learned here saved their lives in Afghanistan or Iraq,” said Sgt. 1st Class Tohonn Nicholson, NCO in charge, U.S. Army Combatives School, Fort Benning, Ga.

Nicholson posits the magnitude of the situation to his students as, “Which is more important: for you to return home to your family or the enemy to return home to his?” The MACP is changing the way the U.S. Army fights, and in order to maintain the advantage, the program must

Photo by Linda Crippen

U.S. Army Combatives School, Fort Benning, Ga., teaches the Basic Army Combatives Instructor Course and Tactical Army Combatives Instructor Course. The school can also accommodate group training and is open 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 5 to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Sgt. 1st Class Tohonn Nicholson, USACS NCOIC, encourages Soldiers and units to come in. “We’ll teach you whatever you want to learn.”

continue to adapt. Recently, the program underwent some refinement to better prepare Soldiers for combat by teaching important techniques sooner rather than later. Due to deployment demands and time constraints, units did not always have a chance to train new Soldiers before going downrange. Senior leaders say the program will continue to progress as they consider pertinent feedback from Soldiers in theater. The needs of the operational force will dictate future refinements in combatives curriculum and the program in general.

POST, FRAME, HOOK

Beginning in 1995 as a grassroots program, combatives continues to evolve as the environment and missions of the force change and grow. Keeping in touch with deployed Soldiers is integral to maintaining relevancy and value; therefore, USACS actively pursues feedback from Soldiers in the field. The latest changes to the curriculum combined with scenario-based training are direct results from the feedback and lessons learned.

A January combatives symposium held at Fort Benning led to several shifts in training, and some of the curriculum has been pushed down to lower levels, specifically Basic Combat Training and Advanced Individual Training. The objective of these shifts is to prepare Soldiers in case they are deployed shortly after AIT, as their new permanent duty stations may not have the time or resources to train them further.

Retired NCO Matt Larsen, creator and director of the Army Combatives Program, said the two biggest lessons that pushed these changes: “Every fight is grappling,” and, “There’s no such thing as unarmed combat on the battlefield.”

These lessons were already incorporated into level 3 and level 4 courses, which have been renamed the Basic Army Combatives Instructor Course and the Tactical Army Combatives Instructor Course, respectively. “We’ve now pushed some of that stuff down to basic training. So even at that level, they’re learning how to fight with weapons and implement different tactics,” said Larsen, who is often referred to as the father of MACP since he wrote the FM 3-25.150, *Combatives*.

A former hand-to-hand combat instructor in the Marine Corps, Sgt. 1st Class James Baxley, NCOIC of the USACS demonstration team, explained that the moves taught in basic training used to be without equipment and completely on the ground. Soldiers learned how to achieve basic moves like the clinch, “an optimum way to hold an opponent,” according to the FM.



USACS instructors Staff Sgts. Christopher Gordon (left) and Stephen Schmeichel (right) demonstrate the post technique, which is similar to a stiff-arm move in football.



Gordon and Schmeichel demonstrate the frame technique, which is executed by extending the arm at least 90 degrees and placing the hand on either side of the opponent's neck.



Gordon and Staff Sgt. Troy Cochran, (right) demonstrate the hook technique, which is executed by reaching under the armpit of the opponent and then hooking your arm up on top of the shoulder.

Under the new curriculum, “Within the first 72 hours of arriving at basic training, Soldiers learn weapons manipulation: what to do if they lose control of their weapons. Then there’s the post, frame, hook, which has two variations,” utilizing a weapon or bare hands, he said. “These techniques give Soldiers the ability to think on their feet and adapt to whatever the situation may call for.”

Among other lessons that have shifted down, the post, frame, hook movements are executed just as the names imply.

The post is similar to a stiff-arm move in football, in that your arm is stretched out in front of you to subdue or push away the combatant. The frame movement is executed by extending the arm at least 90 degrees and placing your hand on either side of the opponent’s head at the base of the neck, which will allow you to manipulate his movement. The hook, unlike the boxing move, is executed by reaching under the armpit of the opponent and then reaching around or hooking your arm up on top of the shoulder, while simultaneously driving your forehead into the opponent’s head. The hook movement should lift the opponent’s arm back and upward, making him lose balance.

Demonstrations of these movements may be viewed at <https://www.benning.army.mil/combatives/content/Combatives%207-21-10/DemoVideos.html>. Additionally, USACS has a basic combatives instructional video that demonstrates several combinations of grappling movements, as well as recommended drills, which can be incorporated into physical training programs: <https://www.benning.army.mil/videos/video16/>.

WARRIOR ETHOS

Wars are not won through hand-to-hand combat. In fact, the last bayonet charge was during the Korean War in 1951. Decisively, the Army has phased out the bayonet during basic infantry training, as combat environments have dictated the necessity for more updated tactics. But more than teaching fighting techniques, the Army Combatives Program offers leadership development and epitomizes the meaning of the Warrior Ethos, officials explained.

Larsen puts hand-to-hand combat in perspective as, “The winner of the hand-to-hand fight in combat will be the one whose buddy first shows up with a gun.” The techniques to be a good fighter will not win the war; however, the skills and tenets that make up a good fighter extend beyond this single

attribute. The value behind the training makes for better Soldiers and leaders, he said.

Maj. Gen. Michael Ferriter, commanding general of the Maneuver Center of Excellence, Fort Benning, said combatives offers a couple of opportunities to develop leadership qualities. “I see it as a very successful vehicle for leader development. Some Soldiers, enlisted and officers, coming into the Army may have never dealt with any kind of diversity, and combatives offers a way to give them a situation where they develop tools, capabilities and skills to handle diversity — in this case, fighting.” But, it goes beyond just fighting.

“The program helps Soldiers work through issues and problems, which enhances critical thinking skills,” said Ferriter, who has been involved with the program since its beginning. “For example, losing a practice match leads to introspection about why the Soldier lost and what to do next time in order to beat the opponent.”

Relative to leadership and the Warrior Ethos, Larsen asks, “What does it mean to be squared-away? Does location matter? Does being downrange change the definition or standard of being squared-away?”

Larsen cautioned that if the answers to those questions differ, then the Army community needs to re-evaluate the definitions. “Squared-away should mean being the person others want next to them during deployment. Our real mission is to change the culture of the Army so that we value those warrior skills and attributes. Hand-to-hand combat is about values and what it means to be a Soldier,” he said.

“Soldiers may have none of the Army values when they enlist, and through the course of institutional training, we’ve got to instill those values. They don’t learn values by memorizing platitudes;

they learn values through the demands we put on them,” Larsen explained. “Hence, we affect the culture in real ways. Only then do the platitudes give form to the meaning of those values.”

WOMEN IN COMBATIVES

Just as the Warrior Ethos is gender-neutral, so too is the combatives program. Instructors say every class cycle has several female students, but they would really like to bring female instructors on board. Currently, most instructors are 11B infantrymen.

Sgt. Stephen Wyatt, instructor at USACS, said he thinks it’s important to have female instructors. “The female students need to have role models they can look up to when they come through the course.”

“We’re working hard for gender integration,” Larsen explained, and boasts that the school has never had an issue of sexual harassment in the history of the program. “Most people aren’t thinking about that kind of thing when they’re pummeling on each other.”

“Our first female level 3 instructor was 1st Lt. Christine Van Fleet, who choked out the starting quarterback from West Point 30 seconds into the match. She was skillful, and he wasn’t. She weighed approximately 145 pounds, and he weighed 225 pounds. That’s the evidence that the program works,” Larsen said.

The only mention of gender is in regards to weight classes for sparring. Females have a slightly heavier weight allowance, which accommodates the difference in muscle mass between the sexes. “The 9 percent allowable difference, which is according to the PT FM,” Larsen said, “equates to similar muscle masses between a female and male sparring partner.” 📄

To contact Linda Crippen, e-mail linda.crippen@us.army.mil.



U.S. Army Combatives Tournaments

Tournaments are a valuable part of the combatives program, because they give Soldiers the chance to train and improve. USACS cadre agreed that holding tournaments serves as a motivational tool to get Soldiers to want to train.

“No one wants to come in last place,” said Sgt. 1st Class Tohonn Nicholson, USACS NCOIC. “Soldiers train and prepare for tournaments because they don’t want to lose. If tournaments get Soldiers to want to train, then it’s an effective tool.”

U.S. Army Combatives tournaments take place year-round at installations throughout the Army. Fort Benning, Ga., will hold the **U.S. Army 2010 Championship Combatives Tournament Oct. 1-3**, with weigh-ins Sept. 30. Those interested in participating have until Sept. 15 to register. For questions about the tournament or USACS, contact the school directly at (706) 545-2811, or send e-mails to benn.229inregt.cbtsch@conus.army.mil.