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New cadets learn marksmanship on lasers first

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A new cadet sights down his laser-equipped M16A2 during basic rifle marksmanship training at Tronsrue Marksmanship Center.

Six weeks is the amount of time between Reception Day and March Back that is available to train new cadets to the U.S. Military Academy basic military skills. That is three weeks less than the nine weeks it takes to train Soldiers out in the regular Army.

Several things are done to expedite the process of training and bring the new cadets up to speed and one of those is through the Laser Marksmanship Training System.

For the third year the 3rd Battalion, 304th Regiment of the 98th Division, a reserve unit out of Lewiston, Maine, has come to West Point to teach new cadets marksmanship through LMTS.

“We have been doing this pretty consistently for about the last 10 years, but laser marksmanship has only been done for four years,” said Maj. Fred Roig, officer-in-charge of the LMTS site. “Our unit has done it in ‘03, ‘04 and ‘05. The first time it was done we were in Fort Lewis.”

The new cadets completed their rifle marksmanship training in three days beginning with LMTS the first day, grouping and zeroing along with a field fire exercise the second day and marksmanship qualification and a night fire the third day.

Using the lasers the reserve unit takes the new cadets through four exercises on 40 lanes set up in the Tronsrue Marksmanship Center and Gillis Field House here to prepare them to fire live rounds.

In the first exercise new cadets must demonstrate the four fundamentals of rifle marksmanship, while firing a laser attached to the end of their rifle at a reflective zero target.

It is a chance for them to practice breathing control, sight picture, steady position and trigger squeeze, explained Sgt. 1st Class Charles McCue, of the 3-304th.

“After they do that, we move them over to a little target called the TR-700,” McCue said, explaining the second exercise. “It has an open face target in there, and they fire at that in an unsupported position. They’ve got to hit it 8 out of 10 that we record.”

The TR-700 target has a counter for each time it is hit by the laser and, according to McCue, helps build muscle memory and allows for repetition.

For the third exercise the new cadets fire the laser at another target called the TR-900, electronically transmitting the shots to a computer to group and zero the weapon. New cadets must hit three consecutive shots within a four centimeter circle twice. Adjustments will then be made to the sights just like on the zero range.

To zero the weapon each new cadet must then hit five out of six striking the zeroing circle, which can only be seen on the computer, showing just how it would on the rifle range.

The weapon will not be 100 percent zeroed with the laser, explained McCue, but as long as the shooters remember everything they learned the sight adjustment should be minimal.



Cadet 2nd Class Jameson Boscow (left) shows a new cadet the laser targets at Gillis Field House.

“Distinctively (the next day) their shot group will be on the paper,” Roig said, explaining how LMTS helps the new cadets. “If these people came out (without having used LMTS) they wouldn’t even be hitting the paper sometimes. They’d be blowing holes in the target frames, probably. They’d be all over the place. This really gets them right on paper, so we can literally group and zero.”

The final exercise with the LMTS is a pre-qualification exercise with the Remote Electronic Target System known as Mini RETS.

New cadets are given the opportunity to engage pop up targets just like they would on the qualification range on 10 scaled down lanes controlled by a computer.



The 98th Division's Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Jones (sitting center) helps new cadets zero their M16A2's at Gillis Field House as part of Cadet Basic Training.

“They will engage multiple and single frame exposures anywhere from three seconds to eight seconds -- the farther the target the longer the exposure,” said the 3-304th’s Sgt. 1st Class Mark R. Sargent, who runs the Mini RETS.

“Compared to the record fire range we added three seconds in between each target exposure to give them time to be able to charge the weapon,” Sargent explained. “Every time they shoot this weapon it is a dry-fire exercise so they have to recharge the weapon and fire again, and then the targets will go down.”

Even though the LMTS exercises assist in teaching shooters how to fire their weapons it is no substitute for firing live rounds, Roig explained. LMTS simply prepares them to know exactly what they need to do in the next couple of days out on the zero and qualifying range.

One of the biggest differences between firing the lasers and live ammunition is the recoil.

“When you are using the laser you are inside and there is no sun beaming down and reflecting off the sight post,” said one new cadet who came here from Fort Bragg, N.C. “It is a better experience when you are outside and you are actually getting to fire the rounds and feel the kick of the recoil and the whole overall feeling is just better when you are outside.”

The new cadet recognized that working with the lasers helped him with the fundamentals of basic marksmanship, but fully enjoys firing live rounds.

Another new cadet liked both saying, “I went from not firing much at all as far as ammunition or anything, and they brought me to the laser and I think it helped me a lot. I came out today and I qualified expert.”

Reserve units, according to Roig, started using the equipment as early as 1998 to assist in training and cut down on the use of ammunition.

“This system has been distributed through various units in the reserves and we have this system,” Roig said. “We have all our gear from our entire division here, consolidated for this training.”