

Army to extend OSUT for Infantry Soldiers

By Devon L. Suits, Army News Service 25 June 2018



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WASHINGTON -- In 2019, the Army will extend one-station unit training for Infantry Soldiers from 14 weeks to 22 weeks. Changes to the program are meant to increase Soldier readiness, making them more lethal and proficient before they depart for their first duty assignment, according to the Infantry School commandant, Col. Townley R. Hedrick.

The new OSUT program will include expanded weapons training, increased vehicle-platform familiarization, extensive combatives training and a 40-hour combat-lifesaver certification course, said Hedrick.

Further, the change will include increased time in the field during both day and night operations and include an increased emphasis on drill and ceremony maneuvers.

A NEEDED CHANGE

For the past 44 years, Infantry Soldiers were trained in a 14-week program of instruction. Ten weeks were allocated to basic military training, and an additional four were reserved for training Infantry-specific skills, Hedrick said. The Infantry career field makes up approximately 15 to 17 percent of the total force.

Discussions about changing OSUT began shortly after Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis identified the need to re-establish readiness and build a more lethal Infantry force, Hedrick said. And the Army Vision, recently published by Secretary of the Army Mark T. Esper and Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Mark A. Milley, reinforces the defense secretary's priority.

"Extending OSUT is about increasing our readiness and preparing for the future," Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey said. "This pilot program is the first step toward achieving our vision of the Army of 2028. With more time to train on critical Infantry tasks, we'll achieve greater lethality."

In response to the increased focus on readiness, specifically within the Infantry force, leadership within the U.S. Army Infantry School approached the 198th Infantry Brigade, which trains all Army Infantry forces, and asked what could be done to make better Infantry Soldiers.

"We asked them if they had a longer training pipeline, what could they do with it," Hedrick said.

In turn, the U.S. Army Maneuver Center of Excellence and the Infantry School started a combined effort with the 198th Infantry Brigade and the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command to develop an improved 21-week OSUT program. After consulting with the Army chief of staff, however, the combined OSUT team was directed to extend the new program to 22 weeks and include combat water survival training, he said.

The preliminary 22-week OSUT pilot program is slated to start this July with a graduation date scheduled for December, the commandant added.

The new 22-week OSUT should begin in 2019, sometime between July and October.

With the upcoming 22-week course, the Infantry School has already identified what new Soldiers will be part of the improved training, Hedrick said.

"U.S. Army Recruiting Command has already gone back to those identified personnel, re-generated their contract, and let them know that they would

be part of the first classes to execute a new and improved training program," Hedrick said.

THE NEW PROGRAM

Under the new OSUT program, Soldiers will get more training with their M4 rifle and increased hands-on experience with the M240 machine gun and the M249 squad automatic weapon.

"So across all the Infantry weapons, they will get more bullets," Hedrick said. "And they will also shoot more at night, rather than just doing a day familiarization fire."

In addition to increased weapons training, Soldiers will receive more field training experience, including tactical training repetitions that focus more on squad formations during day and night operations, he said. The goal is to help trainees understand where they fall within a fire team or rifle squad and make them more proficient while operating in the field.

"We looked at land navigation and individual Soldier skills," Hedrick said. "Under the new course, a Soldier will do an individual day and night land navigation course on their own. They will also do a basic combative certification. That improves the mental and physical toughness of Soldiers coming through the Infantry OSUT."

Additionally, the Infantry School has added six days of vehicle platform training to the new program. Under the 14-week program, Soldiers only received one day of training with their assigned vehicle. During the new course, Soldiers assigned to a Stryker or Bradley unit will learn how to drive and perform maintenance on their assigned vehicle.

Furthermore, a more significant emphasis on drill and ceremony has been built into the new curriculum.

"It is all about conditioning, following commands and working as a unit, so you will see an increasing level of discipline through drill and ceremony," the commandant said. "We think this gets us to the objective of a more expert and proficient Soldier."

Changes to the program create an extended and more gradual training process to help decrease injuries caused by lack of nutrition or poor conditioning, Hedrick said

"We've developed a set of metrics, with the U.S. Army Research Institute

for Behavioral and Social Science Solutions to try and evaluate how the Soldiers are doing during the 22-week pilot program versus the 14-week program," Hedrick said. "We've got an evaluation plan to try and look at ourselves and see if the product coming out has an improved proficiency -- like we think it will."

MANNING AND FUTURE OSUT CHANGES

With an increased time of training, the Infantry School must expand from five to eight battalions to ensure the same annual throughput of approximately 17,000 well-trained Soldiers. Fortunately, resources and facilities are available at Fort Benning to support the new program, Hedrick said.

Additionally, the Infantry School has been working with TRADOC to ensure they have enough drill sergeants in place to meet the 2019 launch date for the new 22-week OSUT.

Under the current 14-week program, three drill sergeants are responsible for training a platoon of 60 Soldiers. For the 22-week program, the Infantry School is looking to augment OSUT companies with six additional Infantry instructors.

Overall, the additional instructors provide a better student-to-instructor ratio during certain aspects of the course, the commandant said.

At the conclusion of the 22-week pilot, the OSUT team will review the results and determine what parts of the program need to be re-sequenced. The pilot will also be used to determine the list of tasks assigned to each instructor, Hedrick said.

In addition to the changes to the Infantry School's curriculum, the Army is looking at extending other OSUT programs. Currently, the U.S. Army Armor School and U.S. Army Engineer School are performing internal analyses of their curricula to determine what resources will be needed to extend their own programs.

"Extending Infantry OSUT will allow us to allocate more time to honing the necessary skills to provide greater capability to our commanders," Dailey said.

With our first major change to Infantry training in 40 years, he said, we are investing in future Army readiness, which will ensure we are prepared to deploy, fight and win our Nation's wars when called upon to do so.

