
A NEW ERA FOR MORTARMEN:

The Transformation of the Indirect Fire Infantryman Training Strategy

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The world of the Infantryman is one of constant change, and the tools and techniques we use to dominate the battlefield must evolve to meet new threats. The recent release of the updated Training Circular (TC) 3-20.33, *Training and Qualification of Mortars*, marks a significant step forward in how the Army trains and certifies its mortar crews. This isn't just a minor revision; it's a comprehensive overhaul that will have a lasting impact on our indirect fire proficiency for years to come. So, what's new, what's different, and what does it mean for leaders and Soldiers in the field?

Soldiers assigned to 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment prepare to fire an 81mm mortar during a live-fire exercise at Yakima Training Center, WA, on 3 November 2025. (Photo by SGT Michael Majors)

A Comprehensive Overhaul

The most immediate change in the August 2025 TC is its sheer size and scope. The document has been significantly expanded, with new sections, appendices, and a wealth of detailed information that was absent from the 2017 edition. This isn't just bureaucratic bloat; it's a reflection of a more sophisticated and data-driven approach to training. The new TC provides a clearer framework for training that aligns with the demands of modern warfare, ensuring that Soldiers are well-prepared to execute their missions effectively. The increased detail and organization will enable leaders to implement training plans that are both comprehensive and practical for their units.



One of the most significant additions is how the 2025 update fundamentally changes the scoring and documentation process by introducing new standardized Department of the Army (DA) forms. DA Form 7880 (Mortar Crew Section Fire Mission Scoresheet) and DA Form 7881 (Mortar Crew Platoon Fire Mission Scoresheet) are now used to evaluate individual mortar fire missions. Furthermore, DA Forms 7882 (Mortar Crew Platoon Roll-up) and 7883 (Mortar Crew Section Roll-up) are used to consolidate all scores and serve as the official qualification record, replacing the previous memorandum format. These new forms will streamline the qualification process and simplify the required data needed during combat training center (CTC) rotations. This move toward a more quantitative assessment of gunnery skills will enable commanders to identify strengths and weaknesses with greater precision and tailor their training plans accordingly. This systematic approach will ultimately lead to more effective training and better prepared mortar crews.

Standardization and Consistency in Training

In the past, training guidance for mortar crews was often generalized, leaving much to the interpretation of unit leaders. The updated TC addresses this gap by introducing a host of new, specifically numbered individual and squad-level drills. This is a clear move away from the more generalized guidance of the past and toward a more prescriptive and standardized training methodology. The detailed drills will provide a structured approach that helps ensure every Soldier receives the same foundational skills necessary for effective mortar operations.

Furthering this commitment to objective evaluation, the new guidance mandates that both Table IV (Basic Live Fire) and Table VI (Qualification Live Fire) are now externally evaluated. The TC provides strict guidance on the criteria for these external evaluations, ensuring a consistent and unbiased assessment of a crew's capabilities across the entire force. This removes subjectivity and guarantees that all units are held to the same high standard.

This development will undoubtedly lead to greater consistency in mortar training across the force. Soldiers will receive a uniform training experience that aligns with the Army's overarching goals for readiness. However, this also presents challenges for leaders. Will this new level of detail stifle initiative and adaptability at the unit level? Or will it provide a solid foundation upon which leaders can build more advanced and creative training scenarios? The answer lies in how effectively leaders can balance the need for standardization with the flexibility to adapt to their unique operational environments. Leaders must ensure that the standardized procedures do not limit the innovative spirit that is often necessary in the field.

Embracing Modernization

The new TC also reflects the Army's ongoing modernization efforts, with the inclusion of new drills and procedures for the latest generation of mortar systems, including the RMS6-L Stryker-mounted 120mm mortar. This is a welcome

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and necessary update, ensuring that our training keeps pace with technological advancements. The incorporation of these new systems demonstrates the Army's commitment to leveraging cutting-edge technology to enhance combat effectiveness. By providing Soldiers with current training that reflects modern systems, we prepare them for the realities of today's battlefield.

However, this focus on modernization also highlights the ever-present challenge of keeping our training current with the rapid pace of technological change. As the world changes, tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) change with it. This can be seen from the war in Ukraine and how drones are being introduced into mortar TTPs. As new systems are introduced, it is imperative that training materials are regularly updated to reflect these advancements. Leaders must remain vigilant in ensuring that Soldiers are not only proficient with current systems but also adaptable enough to embrace future innovations. This adaptability is crucial as technology continues to evolve, and Soldiers must be prepared to incorporate these advancements into their operations.

Specific Requirements for Training and Qualification

One of the most notable changes in the new TC is the elimination of a round requirement for qualification. Previously, units were often bound by rigid round-count mandates that could limit training flexibility and creativity. The updated TC recognizes that effective training and qualification do not necessarily hinge on a predetermined number of rounds fired. Instead, it allows units to focus on the quality of training and the proficiency of their crews, facilitating a more tailored approach to meet the specific needs of each unit. These changes will mean units must evaluate how to effectively allocate their round allocation based on their training objectives and operational requirements.

Additionally, the new TC delineates which missions must be fired analog (using a plotting board) and which must be fired digitally. This approach will ensure that units continue to stay proficient in analog operations, which will be vital in an electronic warfare environment. This clarity is essential for ensuring that Soldiers receive comprehensive training in both traditional and modern methods of fire support. By specifying these requirements, the Army is ensuring that mortar crews are proficient in a range of operational techniques, enhancing their versatility on the battlefield. The new TC provides

a structured approach that allows for focused training on critical skills necessary for mission success.

Expanding Applicability to More Units

Another significant change in the updated TC is the expansion of its applicability to include infantry battalions and cavalry squadrons not assigned to a brigade combat team. This is a recognition of the critical role that mortars play in a wide range of operational environments and a clear signal that mortar proficiency is a priority for the entire force. For leaders in these units, the new TC will be an invaluable resource, but it will also require a renewed focus on gunnery training. Leaders must establish training schedules that incorporate the new standards while ensuring that all Soldiers are capable of executing their duties proficiently.

This change underscores the Army's understanding that effective indirect fire support is not confined to specific unit types but is essential for all combat formations. It encourages a broader integration of mortar systems into various operational contexts, ensuring that all Soldiers have the opportunity to develop and refine their indirect fire skills. These changes will allow leaders to modify their standard operating procedures (SOPs) to increase the survivability and lethality of mortar crews across the force. By fostering an environment that prioritizes mortar training, units can enhance their overall combat effectiveness.

Challenges and Opportunities Ahead

While the new TC 3-20.33 presents numerous opportunities for enhancing mortar training, it also poses challenges that leaders must navigate. The increased emphasis on data collection and analysis will require leaders to invest time and resources into understanding how to interpret and utilize this information effectively. It may also necessitate additional training for leaders to ensure they are equipped to handle their new responsibilities. As leaders adapt to these changes, they must also consider the best ways to manage the influx of data to ensure it enhances training rather than complicates it.

Moreover, the shift toward standardized training may prompt discussions about the balance between prescribed drills and the need for unit-level innovation. Leaders will need to foster an environment where Soldiers are encouraged to think critically and creatively while still adhering to the foundational skills outlined in the new TC. This balance is crucial for maintaining agility and responsiveness on the battlefield. By empowering Soldiers to take ownership of their training, leaders can cultivate a culture of excellence and continuous improvement.

The Road Ahead

The new TC 3-20.33 is more than just an update; it's a roadmap for the future of mortar gunnery in the U.S. Army. It



A Soldier in 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment adjusts the sight unit on a mortar system during Table VI gunnery on 23 November 2025. (Photo by SGT Eric Allen)

presents us with both new opportunities and new challenges. It will require us to be more data-savvy, more adaptable, and more committed than ever to the art and science of indirect fire. As we embrace these changes, it is crucial for leaders to remain engaged with their Soldiers, fostering a culture of open communication and continuous improvement. Soldiers should feel empowered to share feedback on the training process, which can help refine the implementation of the new TC and ensure that it meets the needs of the force.

Conclusion

If we embrace the changes and rise to the challenges, the result will be a more lethal and effective force, ready to dominate the battlefields of today and tomorrow. The Army's commitment to modernizing its training and qualification processes for mortarmen reflects a broader understanding of the complexities of contemporary warfare. By focusing on quality, adaptability, and comprehensive training, the updated TC 3-20.33 ensures that Soldiers are not only prepared to execute their duties effectively but are also positioned to lead the Army into the future.

As we move forward, it is essential to recognize that the success of this transformation relies on the collective efforts of leaders and Soldiers alike. Together, we can harness the opportunities presented by the new training circular to build a more capable and resilient force, ensuring that we remain prepared to face any challenge that arises on the modern battlefield. The future of mortar gunnery is bright, and with the right guidance and commitment, we will continue to excel in our mission to support and protect our nation.

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