

# FORGING THE EXPERT:

## *Introducing the Infantry Master Mortar Trainer Course*

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*Soldiers fire a 60mm mortar during the Best Mortar Competition at Fort Benning, GA, on 11 April 2023. (Photo by SFC Justin P. Morelli)*

In the crucible of modern combat, the familiar thud of a mortar leaving the tube is the sound of assurance for the Infantryman. It is the promise of immediate, responsive, and lethal indirect fire support, a critical enabler for freedom of maneuver. As the U.S. Army continues to orient on the complexities of multidomain operations (MDO), the need to guarantee the proficiency of our mortar formations has never been more acute.

### ***How can we continue to elevate mortar training to dominate contested environments?***

For commanders at every echelon, this question is paramount. While our institutional training pipeline produces skilled 11C Infantrymen, sustaining and elevating that expertise at the unit level presents a continuous challenge. Who is the commander's resident subject matter expert for planning, resourcing, and validating a rigorous, standards-based mortar training program? The answer to this critical question has arrived. The U.S. Army Infantry School and Maneuver Center of Excellence are proud to introduce the Infantry Master Mortar Trainer (IMMT) Course, an initiative designed to forge expert NCOs who will serve as training multipliers and dramatically increase the lethality of our infantry formations.

### **A New Tier in Training Excellence**

The IMMT is purpose-built to fill the "master trainer" role, creating a vital bridge between the foundational knowledge

gained at the schoolhouse and the dynamic, demanding environment of the operational force. Aligned with the Army's broader transformation and the Integrated Weapons Training Strategy (IWTS), the IMMT is a direct investment in NCO leadership and a commitment to modernizing our force for the challenges ahead.

The purpose is clear and direct: To train select NCOs to assist unit leaders by planning, coordinating, implementing, and evaluating a comprehensive unit training program (UTP) for mortars.

These certified master trainers will be the stewards of proficiency, using the principles of IWTS to ensure their formations meet and exceed the Army's highest standards.

### **The 20-Day Course**

The IMMT is a 20-day course that immerses experienced NCOs in a curriculum designed to produce masters of their craft. The course is structured around three critical phases:

#### **1. The Basic & Advanced Fire Direction Center (FDC) Academy:**

Students dive deep into the center of mortar gunnery — the Fire Direction Center. The FDC Academy is NOT designed to teach NCOs how to process and execute basic

and advanced fire missions. The goal is to create an expert who can DESIGN, TRAIN, and EVALUATE critical FDC procedures for every key leader in their formation. This will ensure that when a call for fire is made, the response of their FDC is immediate and accurate, regardless of the operational conditions.

## **2. Mortar Qualification, Training Management, and Resourcing:**

This phase centers on the IWTS. Students will not only master the execution of Gunnery Tables I-VI but, more importantly, learn the detailed planning, resourcing, and execution of live-fire qualification events. This elevates the NCO from simply being a proficient mortarman to being a master manager and executor of a complete training program — one that systematically builds proficiency from the individual Soldier level up to a fully cohesive, qualified, and lethal crew, section, or platoon.

### **3. The Unit Training Program (UTP) Capstone:**

The course culminates with a challenge that validates the student's transformation into a master trainer. In this final capstone event, students develop a complete, resource-informed UTP from the ground up. Synthesizing all the knowledge gained, they will build a long-range training calendar, identify ammunition and resource requirements, create challenging training scenarios, and present a professional, ready-to-execute UTP that a brigade or battalion commander could implement immediately. This final validation proves they are ready to serve as their commander's most trusted

advisor on all matters related to mortar training, readiness, and qualification.

**Note:** 11C ALC is now enriched with critical, advanced-level mortar tasks, including complex FDC instruction — duties traditionally currently taught in the Infantry Mortar Leader Course (IMLC) at Fort Benning. This integration ensures graduates are more capable than ever before. Building upon this robust foundation, IMMT is strategically positioned as the next essential step. The IMMT is designed to be the primary follow-on course for 11C NCOs after they have successfully graduated from ALC, guiding them toward true mastery in their field. Subsequently, our Army's junior Infantry and Armor officers will still attend the new two-week Infantry Mortar Leader Course (specializing in tactics and employment of mortars).

## **The Graduate: A Commander's Training Multiplier**

The IMMT is designed for proven leaders. The course prerequisites target U.S. Army NCOs in the grades of E-6 and E-7 (with waiver consideration for exceptional E-5s) who are graduates of the 11C ALC. By selecting these experienced leaders, the Army ensures that IMMT graduates have the maturity, credibility, and leadership acumen to enact real change in their units.

Graduates of the IMMT will be able to:

- Train and evaluate mortar crews, sections, and platoons. They return to their units capable of running mortar gunnery



*Soldiers from the 198th Infantry Brigade conduct a live-fire demonstration on 11 April 2024 at Fort Benning, GA. (Photo by SGT Jacklyn Oxendine)*

and evaluating every aspect of mortar employment in accordance with doctrinal standards (Training Circular 3-20.33, *Training Qualification and Mortars*).

- Develop and assist in the implementation of the commander's mortar UTP. They are the architects of mortar readiness. They will work hand-in-hand with command teams to build a dynamic, challenging, and standards-based training plan that ensures the platoon is always prepared for its wartime mission.

- Plan, resource, and execute mortar qualification (Tables I-VI). The master trainer understands the ammunition requirements, the range safety protocols, and the doctrinal standards, streamlining the entire process from planning to execution.

### **A Call for Discussion, Sharpening the Spear Together**

The introduction of the Infantry Master Mortar Trainer Course should spark a professional dialogue across the force. It prompts us to reflect on how we currently manage and prioritize mortar readiness. We encourage commanders and command teams to consider the following:

- 1) As a commander, who is your principal advisor for mortar training and employment? While your platoon leader and platoon sergeant are responsible for execution, who in your formation holds the deep technical and programmatic knowledge to build the training program from scratch and validate its effectiveness?

- 2) Consider your last mortar live fire. How much of the planning and resource management fell on your company executive officer or first sergeant? Imagine having several NCOs in your formation who are certified to manage that entire process, ensuring it aligns perfectly with the IWTS framework and frees up your other leaders to focus on their primary duties.

- 3) In a multidomain environment, windows of opportunity for employing indirect fires will be fleeting and contested. How are you building resilience and expertise in your FDCs to operate effectively in a degraded environment, such as the loss of digital systems? How can a master trainer, with certified expertise in both analog and digital procedures, drive this critical capability within your unit?



*A Soldier with 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, fires a 120mm M120A1 Towed Mortar System during a combined arms live-fire exercise on 26 January 2026 in Bulgaria. (Photo by SPC Brandi Frizzell)*

This course is also a powerful statement about the Army's trust in the NCO Corps. For our 11C NCOs, it offers a new path to expert status and increased responsibility. It begs the question: How can you leverage this opportunity to take true ownership of your platoon's training readiness and become an even greater asset to your commander?

### **The Future is Lethal and Accurate**

The IMMT Course is a critical and timely investment in our NCOs and the close-combat lethality of our formations. It is not merely another course but a foundational shift in how the Army will cultivate and sustain mortar expertise at the tactical edge. By empowering our best NCOs with the knowledge to build and execute world-class training, we are ensuring that our Infantry companies will always have the responsive fire support they need to close with and destroy the enemy. The future of indirect fire support in the Infantry is in the hands of these new master trainers.

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