

New Manchus learn survival

By David Keegan
Panorama staff writer

Keep your rear end down.

Pvt. 1 Joseph White crawled on the ground, and Cpl. Dexter Ferdinand wanted him to keep his butt down.

"Get your butt down," yelled Ferdinand. "Get it behind that bush."

White was not just crawling; he was jumping, running, shooting and moving. White is a brand-new private in a unit full of new soldiers—1st Battalion, 9th Infantry.

Soldiers in 1-9 Inf. spent last week working team and squad battle drills and patrolling techniques.

To teach those skills, 1-9 Inf.'s

leaders thought up a combat story. The story was this: two soldiers are alone in the woods, advancing on enemy riflemen by shooting and rushing.

Pairs of soldiers acted out the story at a live-fire range on the south end of post. "They start moving out as if they were patrolling," explained 1st Lt. Al Sanders of Charlie Company. "They may see a target pop up 500 meters away. In that case, they freeze and start moving with hand and arm signals. Or a target may pop up in front of them, which means they must engage immediately."

The importance of the exercise, according to Sanders, is that soldiers have to think and react. They don't know

whether they're going to have to fire right away, or move quietly in the bushes.

"It's not a canned exercise," he said. "We're making them think about what they're doing, because you've got to think to stay alive."

The pair of soldiers are put into the combat story, moving up the range firing live rounds at pop-up targets. How the story ends is up to how well the infantrymen help each other out.

One soldier must shoot while the other runs. When a soldier is down, when he's out of ammunition, when he's ready to move, he's got to make sure his buddy can help.

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Photo by David Keegan

PVT. 1 CHRISTOPHER GLICK of Co. C, 1-9 Inf., low-crawls through the brush.

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1-9 practices skills

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Photo by David Keegan

PVT. 2 JESSIE GORMLEY rushes over a log on his way to pop-up target "enemies."

"They need to communicate to stay alive," Sanders said. "We're teaching them to communicate as a buddy team. They'll graduate with this knowledge and move into platoon and company operations."

Bigger operations will come next month, when 1-9 travels to Fort Hunter Liggett to place their small-team knowledge into the context of larger teams.

For now, according to Sanders, 1-9 Inf. soldiers are actors in small combat tales.

"Get it down," yelled Ferdinand, who followed White up the range. When White advanced at his pop-up-target enemy, Ferdinand let him know how to stay out of enemy gunshots.

"You're up, you're seen, you're down," he said. "You should only be up for three to five seconds; cover as much ground as you can in that time."

White crawled forward, yelled to his buddy, and ran again for cover. When he ran out of ammo, he had to scream to his buddy above the sound of the gunfire around him: "I'm out of ammo, man. Cover for me."

When he finished the course, White said he learned a lesson. "As long as you can communicate, you can stay alive. You yell at him while you're shooting, and you know what's going on. You don't even have to see [your buddy]; you can do it at night," he said.