

Training - The Cornerstone of Readiness

By adhering to the concepts that produce combat-ready forces, the Army's leaders prepare for victory in the next battle. At the start of the American Civil War in 1861, Thomas Jonathan Jackson, an obscure professor from the Virginia Military Institute, understood that message. He rigorously trained his brigade of Virginia volunteers by drilling them from sunrise to sunset according to the linear tactics of the day until each component—company, regiment, brigade—moved as a machine. His men practiced until the nine-count firing movement became an automatic function.

That summer at Manassas, Jackson and his superbly prepared brigade were put to a critical test in the opening battle of the Civil War. Against the attack of numerically superior Union forces that were on the verge of victory, Jackson and his men defended their position on the hill like a stone wall until the Confederates were able to bring in their reserves. Amidst all the noise, smoke, and confusion of the battlefield, Jackson's men stood their ground in their first taste of combat—thanks to their leader's skill in thoroughly preparing them. Afterwards, Jackson paid tribute to the men of his brigade; in his view, it was their discipline and training that saved the day for the Confederate Army. Over the next few years, the brigade, first trained by Jackson, continued to display the same fighting spirit as on that memorable day in 1861, and became the standard against which other units of the Confederate Army were judged.

Training, then and now, must be the Army's top peacetime priority—it is the cornerstone of readiness.