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RIFLE PLATOON NIGHT ATTACKS W3F0015XQ STUDENT HANDOUT

Rifle Platoon Night Attacks

Introduction

An attack emphasizes maximum application of combat power, coupled with bold maneuver, shock effect in the assault, and prompt exploitation of our success. Our four principle tasks in an attack (Prevent effective enemy maneuver, Maneuver to gain an advantage, deliver an overwhelming assault, and exploit advantages gained) make it necessary that we are capable of operating in a limited visibility environment.

Importance

As you are conducting your METT-TC analysis in planning for a limited visibility attack it should be more deliberate in nature, except when it is part of a follow-up mission to a day attack mission or as a part of an exploitation or pursuit operation. As the commander you need to consider the affect that operating in a limited visibility environment will have on your unit.

In This Lesson

During this lesson we will cover the many considerations on conducting a limited visibility attack. We will consider how the limited visibility environment affects the control of units and fires, identifying and engaging targets, navigating and moving without detection, locating, treating and evacuating casualties and enemy prisoners of war, and identifying and bypassing the enemies' obstacle plan.

This lesson covers the following topics:

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Learning Objectives

Learning Objectives

Terminal learning objective

TBS-OFF-2103 Given an offensive order from higher and a rifle unit, conduct offensive operations to accomplish the mission.

Enabling learning objective(s)

TBS-OFF-2103f Given an evaluation, identify night attack considerations without omission.

TBS-OFF-2103g Given a unit and an order from higher, plan a night attack to accomplish the mission and meet the commander's intent.

"Success in a night attack depends largely upon direction, control, and surprise."
-FMFRP 12-2, *Infantry in Battle*

Purpose of Night Attacks

As a unit leader you would conduct attacks during limited visibility to take advantage of our night vision devices against the majority of our potential enemies. Other reasons that you would conduct a limited visibility operation are to continue an attack started in the daylight (i.e. pursuit of an objective or exploitation of an objective), achieve surprise and psychological advantage, and compensate for inferior combat power. The table below highlights some of the advantages and disadvantages of conducting limited visibility operations.

ADAVANTAGES OF LIMITED VISIBILITY OPERATIONS	DISADVANTAGES OF LIMITED VISIBILITY OPERATIONS
• Darkness can conceal the movement of large forces • Physical and psychological factors favor the attacker (shock, disorientation, and isolation are easier to achieve) • Increase the element of surprise • Defender cannot deploy his least engaged unit (or reserve) as quickly as he can during the day • Compensate for inferior combat power • Avoid heavy losses	• Command and control are more difficult • Terrain is more difficult to traverse • The attacker loses momentum because he attacks at a reduced speed in order to maintain the coherence of the unit • Land navigation is more difficult at night • The enemy can reposition or emplace obstacles at night without being detected • Attacking units are easier to ambush • Adjusting indirect fires is difficult at night • Units will require significantly larger quantities of signal ammunition to develop a signal plan • Locating and evacuating casualties • The risk of fratricide • Communication upon consolidation • Segregating and marking EPW's

Phases of the Night Attack

- Preparation
- Conduct
  - Movement to the PLD/Objective
  - Actions on the Objective
- Consolidation

Preparation of a Night Attack

As with the preparation of a day attack, preparations for a night attack still require the commander to conduct a thorough estimate of the situation to identify points of friction as well as the advantages to exploit. As considerations for conducting attacks during times of limited visibility as discussed, use the Platoon in the Attack student handout as a reference for the basic concepts of an attack. Understand that an attack during limited visibility doesn't require anything special; however, consider things that are different from a day attack.

Once the platoon commander receives the order to conduct an attack the commander will immediately begin to conduct an estimate of the situation (METT-TC). Understanding the commander's intent and the mission aides in the decision as to whether this will be a hasty or deliberate attack. A frontal or flanking attack approach is determined based off of the enemy situation.

As stated above, a hasty attack can be used to exploit success from day time operations or to pursue an enemy. A hasty attack is exchanges preparation and planning time for execution time. The commander may choose to conduct a deliberate attack to help mitigate some of the disadvantages of operating during times of limited visibility. Although this may be the preferred type of attack the commander must understand that the deliberate attack allows the enemy to continue defensive improvements or conduct a spoiling attack.

Preparation of a Night Attack (Continued)

A form of maneuver must be determined. Consider is a frontal attack or a flanking attack. Table 2-1 outlines some of advantages and disadvantages of conducting a flanking or frontal attack.

ADAVANTAGES OF A FRONTAL ATTACK
- Facilitates control of units during the attack
- Exploit a weak enemy
- Greater dispersion of forces along the enemies frontage

DISADVANTAGES OF A FRONTAL ATTACK
- Attacking the strength of the enemies defense

ADAVANTAGES OF FLANKING ATTACK
- Ability to gain the element of surprise
- Attacks a perceived gap in the enemy

DISADVANTAGES OF A FLANKING ATTACK
- May not employ all of the commanders forces

Consider the advantages and disadvantages of conducting an illuminated attack verses a non-illuminated attack. The commander uses limited visibility attacks to take advantage of night vision device technology as well as the other advantages that operating at this time can affords. Although non-illuminated may be the preferred course of action what advantages does an illuminated attack afford the commander? See table 3-1 below which outlines advantages and disadvantages of an illuminated verses a non-illuminated attack.

ILLUMINATED ATTACK
- Utilizes illumination from organic weapons (M203) or supporting arms (mortars, artillery, air)
- Resembles a daylight attack
- Is supported by continuous illumination
- Could be used when:
  - Friendly units lack NVG capability
  - Enemy has NVG capability and we have no tactical advantage
  - Poor ambient illumination creates poor visibility with NVGs
  - Multiple friendly units on the battlefield and commander wants to reduce confusion
- The visibility resulting from illumination determines the degree to which daylight techniques are employed; under ideal illumination, a night attack could use all the tactics of a daylight attack
- Used when speed is essential
- Should be placed beyond the objective to silhouette the objective
- Used to confuse the enemy about the location of attack

NON-ILLUMINATED ATTACK
- Conducted by stealth to maintain secrecy and achieve surprise.
- A complete fire support plan is developed, including illumination, but not used until the enemy discovers the attack. This helps to ensure that tactical surprise is maintained until contact is made.
- Normally requires accurate and detailed knowledge of the location of
  - Enemy positions
  - Obstacles
  - Security measures

  Which is gained during the Leader's Recon.
- Use of NVDs improves our ability to:
  - Move
  - Navigate
  - Reconnoiter
  - Identify enemy positions
  - Adjust fires
- Some units may not have enough optics to issue one to every Marine. Therefore, priority of issue should go to:
  - Key Leaders
  - Automatic Weapons
  - Lead trace/reconnaissance units
- Know the enemy: If he has good night vision capabilities, consider an illuminated attack to degrade this. It's a two-way street!

Preparation Phase: Prep for Combat

After conducting a thorough estimate of the situation and developing a tentative SOM, the platoon commander should publish a Warning Order. The platoon can then begin drawing necessary communications, ammunition, and pyrotechnics specific to operating at night. It is also at this phase of the preparation that a platoon commander should conduct fire support planning and have his subordinates check the functionality of their night vision/thermal devices.

Illumination Planning Considerations				
WEAPON	Projectile	Burn Time	Effective Illum Diameter (spread) (M)	Rate of Descent (M/Sec)
155mm	M485A2	120	1000	5
81mm	M301A3	60	500	6
60mm	M721	40	500	6
40mm	M583A1	40	200	7

Preparation Phase: Make Reconnaissance

The leader's reconnaissance for a night attack is conducted during the daytime, using a patrol that is task-organized to:

- Accomplish reconnaissance of the enemy positions
- Determine routes, key terrain and tactical control measures for the attacking unit; to include the Probable Line of Deployment (PLD)
- Provide terminal guidance and security for the attacking unit
- Mark the PLD

What is a PLD?

- Similar to an assault position, a PLD is a tactical control measure (TCM) that we use under limited visibility conditions to identify where our unit will deploy prior to beginning its assault.
- It provides a platoon with *direction*, by facilitating the transition to an on-line formation in front of the enemy.
- Usually perpendicular to the direction of attack, it is a line on the ground (either natural or man-made) that can be the last covered/concealed position prior to the objective and forward of the LOD.
- Where the unit leader plans to complete final deployment of his forces.
- Close enough to the enemy positions so the distance moved in the assault is relatively short and the amount of obstacles are limited.
- Ideally, is set on terrain that shields it from discovery by the enemy.
- It is the unit leader's responsibility to confirm the direction of attack and the unit orientation at the PLD.

Preparation Phase: Make Reconnaissance (Continued)

Who goes on the PLD/recon patrol?

The patrol may take more Marines in order to provide better control and facilitation in preparation for the night attack. An example of a PLD could include SBF and maneuver element leader, navigation Marine, a security team, and (4-6) guides left at the PLD for link up prior to conducting the attack.

A sample organization of a PLD patrol and its tasks can be found in the Appendix of this student handout.

How do we emplace a PLD?

- If no natural features exist to use as a PLD, we can emplace a man-made one with a patrol.
- PLD patrol can be separate from leader's recon patrol, though at a minimum, the PLD should be identified during the recon.
- Once near the objective, the patrol leader moves forward to locate the objective. After establishing security, he supervises the guides as they locate and mark the necessary control measures.
- A small element (guides) should remain behind to maintain security on the PLD while the patrol returns to link up with the platoon.
- PLD should be marked at dusk, loaded in the dark.
- Directional or IR chemlights can be used to lead unit to PLD in the dark

Ultimately, the decision is up to the unit leader, but there are several things that must be considered before the decision is made to establish a support by fire position. If the platoon commander does decide to use an SBF for a night attack, it is one of the greater command-and-control challenges that can be faced at the platoon level.

SUPPORT BY FIRE CONSIDERATIONS

- Does the terrain support establishing a support by fire position?
- What is the level of training for my unit?
- Does the situation require us to gain fire superiority from the flank to be successful?
- Do we need to minimize the number of Marines in the maneuver element?
- What is the risk of fratricide?
- What communications assets does my platoon possess?
- What pyro do I have remaining to use for a detailed signal plan?
- What is the No comm. plan and has the unit been informed?
- What unit leader will I place at the SBF position?

Preparation Phase: Complete the Plan & Issue the Order

The commander planning for and conducting limited visibility operations must plan for the operation just as a day time operation but with specific emphasis on ensuring that the plan is simple. Take extra time for reconnaissance, formations, communications, contingency plans, tactical control measures, and marking of key leaders.

Formations

Choose the formation to facilitate speed and control. This generally means a column formation in the early stages of the attack. The unit should transition to a more linear formation at the PLD or just prior to contact with the enemy.

Other formation considerations:

- Rate of march should be slow to facilitate control and stealth, which gives us *surprise*.
- Leaders should be positioned near the front of their units. Squad leaders and platoon commanders may move at the front of their squads and platoons. This enhances the leaders' situational awareness and *control,* and facilitates the decision-making process.
- All personnel should know the locations and markings of small unit leaders.

Communications

Because the night attack relies on *surprise*, maintain radio silence prior to contact with the enemy, when at all possible. At a minimum, use brevity codes.

- Messengers are also an option for communications.
- Key personnel, in addition to unit leaders, can be subtly marked to help identify them at night.

Contingency Plan

Night attacks may not always be executed as planned. Leaders must prepare alternate plans and plan for unexpected developments. Plans must be flexible and allow for initiative by subordinate leaders.

Preparation Phase: Complete the Plan & Issue the Order (Continued)

Tactical Control Measures

Control measures are generally more restrictive than during daylight and therefore must be easily recognizable. In addition to the PLD that was discussed earlier, the table below lists specific considerations for employing tactical control measures during a night attack.

Assembly Area

- Usually required to conduct the extensive preparations for a night attack.

Assault Azimuth

- A magnetic azimuth that gives the direction from the PLD to the objective.
- Determined during leader's reconnaissance and briefed to Marines prior to crossing the line of departure.

Time of Attack

- If the night attack is launched to seize favorable terrain for a succeeding daylight attack, it is usually launched during the final hours of darkness.
- Conversely, attacks launched during the early hours of darkness permit the attacker to take advantage of a long period of darkness to consolidate his position or to exploit the enemy's confusion and loss of control.
- In either case, attacking units must avoid setting patterns.

Objective Rally Point

- The objective rally point (ORP) is located nearest the objective where the patrol makes final preparations prior to approaching the objective. The objective rally point is a point out of sight, sound, and small-arms range of the objective area. The ORP is tentative until the objective is pinpointed. Actions at or from the ORP include: reconnoitering the objective, issuing a FRAGO, disseminating information from the reconnaissance, making final preparations before continuing operations

Squad Release Point

- A TCM that may be used, depending on the method utilized to load the PLD. Established on the friendly side of the PLD, it is the point at which squads separate from the platoon to facilitate loading the PLD.

Rally Points

- Designated for link-up if the enemy repulses the attack.

Preparation Phase: Complete the Plan & Issue the Order (Continued)

Limit of Advance
- Is a terrain feature easily recognized in the dark (stream, road, edge of woods, etc.) beyond which attacking elements will not advance.

Aids in consolidation after the assault.

Marking

To facilitate *control* at night, we mark key leaders for identification in the dark. The following are ways we can do this:
- Cat Eyes
- Illumination tape
- Engineer Tape
- IR Strobes (Dependent on the capabilities of the enemy)
- Chemical Lights
  - Colored lights
  - Infrared
    (ex. 1 = FTL, 2 = SL, 3 = PC, etc.)

By marking terrain, a platoon commander can enhance his unit's *direction* while closing with the enemy.
- Engineer tape – to mark control measures like the PLD
  - Keep personnel ON LINE
- Chemical lights – prepped in advance
  - Colored
    - Not visible to enemy (directional technique / use tape)
    - Used during training
  - Infrared
    - If enemy does NOT have IR detection capability
    - Must train to this standard with NVGs

Preparation Phase: Supervise

The preparations for combat following the issuance of the order are very similar to when conducting a day attack. However, special emphasis must be placed on inspecting things like NVDs, issuance of pyrotechnics, marking tactical control measures, marking of key leaders, PLD marking kits, rehearsals, and LZ marking kits.

PLD Marking Kits
- Chemlights (IR and Color)
- Engineer Tape
- Chalk
- IR Strobes

LZ Marking Kits
- Chemlights (IR and Color)
- Engineer Tape
- Chalk
- IR Strobes
- IR Buzzsaw

Rehearsals

Rehearsals are vital for success in a night attack because they:
- Reinforce techniques
- Decentralize control
- Evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the plan
- Enhance coordination

Preparation Phase: Supervise (Continued)

The unit leader should rehearse his plan of attack over ground as similar as possible to the terrain over which the attack will be conducted. If possible, the unit leader should conduct daylight, dusk, and dark rehearsals.

Conduct Phase: Movement to the PLD

Stealth and controlled movement at night give us surprise over the enemy. The key to gaining surprise is the individual discipline of the Marines; discipline must be ruthlessly enforced throughout the operation. It is vital that the platoon move to the PLD without being detected. Therefore, we always load the PLD in the dark to ensure that our movement remains undetected.

Conduct Phase: Loading PLD

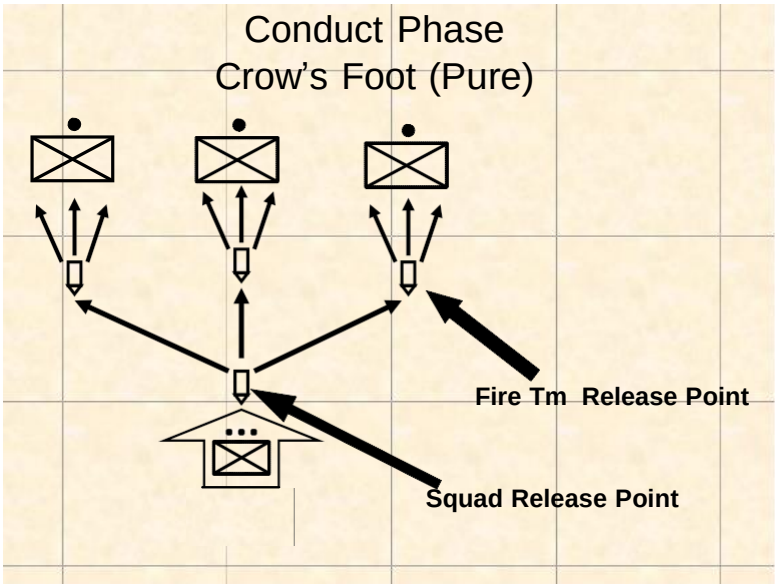
There are three basic techniques for loading the PLD. They are the same as the defensive occupation techniques. Once a platoon/squad reaches the guides left from the PLD patrol, the unit should follow a deliberate process to occupy the PLD. Below are the preferred methods of occupation:

- Bent-L
- Crows Foot
- Combination (Crows Foot & Bent L)

OCCUPY PLD WITH CROW'S FOOT

The "Crow's Foot" technique allows for lateral dispersion of the platoon prior to moving into the PLD. The platoon approaches the squad release point and the squad's release. The platoon then approaches the PLD in three squad columns, rather than a single platoon column. This facilitates control and enhances security.

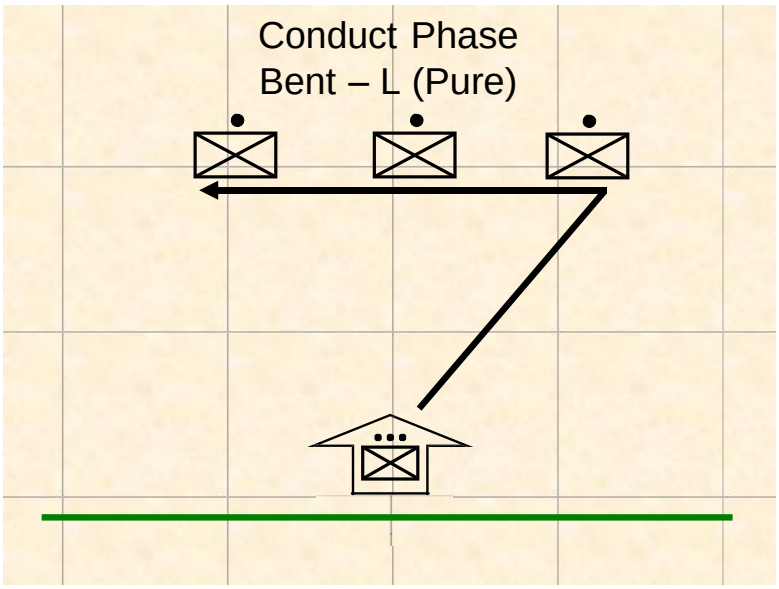
Though it may sound easy, the Crow's Foot is not a simple method. The Crow's Foot is difficult to set up and to execute (see diagram below).



Conduct Phase: Loading PLD (Continued)

OCCUPY PLD WITH BENT - L

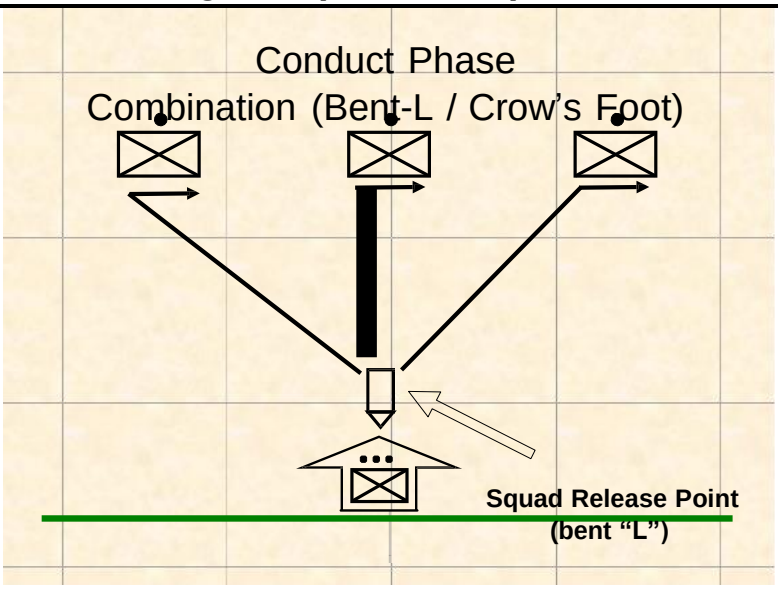
The "Bent L" is a simple and easily executed technique (see diagram below). The significant disadvantage is that if the attacking force is discovered as they move in column to the PLD or while "loading" the PLD, it will have difficulty deploying its forces.



OCCUPY WITH COMBINATION METHOD

In the combination method, the platoon approaches the squad release point, as in the crow's foot method. Upon reaching the squad release point, each squad moves in column to the PLD, then pivots and moves into an online formation.

Conduct Phase: Loading PLD (Continued)



Conduct Phase: Actions on the Objective

Once in the PLD, the platoon quietly moves forward to the objective until contact is made or the attack is discovered. At that point, the squads and fire teams transition to fire and movement. To ensure that surprise is maintained, the fire support plan, which may include illumination, is not initiated until contact. Ideally, the assault is not discovered and the attackers capture the enemy in their sleeping bags as they move onto the objective.

It is imperative for the attacking force to maintain absolute silence throughout the attack until contact is made. Do not show any lights to the enemy. Flashlights, chemlights, and even the luminous dial on a compass, if visible to the enemy, can negate the advantage of surprise and wreck a good plan.

As discussed earlier, we should always attempt to achieve a completely non-illuminated attack. However, if the enemy decides to use illumination on the battlefield, the platoon commander must immediately transition his Marines into an illuminated attack using whatever assets he planned for. Additionally, at any time, a platoon commander may decide to transition to an illuminated attack at his discretion.

Consolidation/Re-Organization Phase

There are a few extra considerations for consolidating at night that we do not necessarily have during the day. The platoon's limit of advance must be easily recognizable in the dark. Immediately thereafter, just like with a day attack, the unit must quickly transition to security on the objective, utilizing the priorities of SAFE. Once security is established, the unit begins putting their automatic weapons on the likely enemy avenues of approach as well as establishing fields of fire. As the commander you need to ensure that the subordinate element leaders are giving their units fields of fire that are easily identifiable at night. The Enemy Prisoners of War (EPW) and Casualty Collection Points (CCP) should be marked using chemlights or other devices that are visible to Marines in the dark.

Summary

The night attack is a difficult operation that requires a detailed yet simple plan, realistic and recognizable control measures, and discipline of individual Marines. The ability to operate successfully at night is not guaranteed by simply being able to operate during daylight hours. For units to be successful at night, they must undertake a thorough and intensive training plan that prepares Marines to operate in the darkness. At the platoon level, platoon commanders must ensure that their units are properly trained, properly supervised, and that the proper planning is done prior to ever crossing the line of departure.

References

Reference Number	Reference Title
MCDP 1-3	Tactics (Chapter 3)
MCWP 3-1	Ground Combat Operations
MCWP 3-11.1	Marine Rifle Company / Platoon
FMFRP 12-2	Infantry in Battle
MCWP 3-11.3	Scouting and Patrolling

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Terms and Acronyms	Definitions or Identifications
PLD	Probable Line of Deployment

Notes

Appendix

Example of PLD patrol and possible tasks

Organization	Tasks (in priority order)
• Patrol leader: Platoon commander • Assistant patrol leader: Generally an experienced squad leader • Radio operators: – Patrol will normally require at least one radio – However, the patrol leader determines how many radio operators he needs • Guides: – Each squad provides a Marine to act as that squad's guide – The first squad guide also acts as the platoon guide – Guides should be trained and experienced at operating independently – Normally, squad and fire team leaders will not be used as guides. Leaders should choose other well-qualified Marines for this purpose • Navigation Marine: Who will bring you back to the PLD during limited visibility • PLD security: Each squad may provide one additional man to act as security along the probable line of deployment	• Detailed enemy information and terrain analysis: The patrol must locate – Obstacles – Gaps in obstacles – Enemy Ops – Enemy automatic weapons – The best route to the objective • Mark routes and control measures: The patrol must locate and mark very specific and restrictive control measures to – Move a rifle platoon at night to an enemy position (or other objective) – Transition from a movement formation to an assault formation – Assault the objective • Provide guides: – After locating the enemy and fixing the control measures, some patrol members return to the rifle platoon to lead it to the squad release point – Additional guides lead squads and other subordinate units (machine guns...) to the probable line of deployment and into their assault formations • Maintain surveillance of objective: – Inform the platoon commander of any changes in the enemy situation. Reinforcements of the position, additional enemy patrols or OPs, or repositioning of forces could seriously affect the platoon's plan of attack. – The patrol needs radios or other communication gear to inform the platoon commander of changes in the situation prior to the platoon arriving at the PLD