UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
THE BASIC SCHOOL
MARINE CORPS TRAINING COMMAND
CAMP BARRETT, VIRGINIA 22134-5019

RIFLE PLATOON IN THE OFFENSE B3J3718 STUDENT HANDOUT

Rifle Platoon in the Attack

Introduction

Up to this point at The Basic School, all of your tactical operations have been at the squad level. While the principles of warfare are the same at all levels, a platoon's larger size gives it a different set of capabilities and limitations than a squad. Some of the tactics, techniques, and procedures at the platoon level will be different to reflect this unique set of capabilities and limitations.

Importance

The offense is one of the principles of war and one of the most important concepts in maneuver warfare. Offense allows initiative, which lets us dictate the terms of battle and bend the enemy to our will. The better our offensives are planned and executed, the longer they can be sustained and the more likely they are to result in decisive success.

In this Lesson

This lesson will give the student officer an understanding of the tactics, techniques, and procedures necessary to conduct a successful attack at the provisional rifle platoon level.

This lesson covers the following topics:

Rifle Platoon in the Attack (Continued)

Learning Objectives

Terminal Learning Objectives

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

Given a mission, implement Marine Corps Warfighting concepts, to accomplish the mission. (TBS-OFF-2102)

Given a unit, an objective and an order, lead a unit in offensive operations, to accomplish the mission and meet the commander's intent. (TBS-OFF-1001)

Enabling Learning Objectives

Without the aid of reference, describe rifle platoon task organization without omission. (TBS-OFF-1001a)

Without the aid of reference, utilize an offensive leader's reconnaissance, to accomplish the mission and meet the commander's intent. (TBS-OFF-1001b)

Without the aid of reference, employ rifle platoon actions in the attack position to accomplish the mission and meet the commander's intent. (TBS-OFF-1001c)

Given a unit, a mission, and a mental estimate of the situation, integrate a support by fire position into the ground scheme of maneuver to accomplish the mission. (TBS-OFF-1001e)

Given a unit, a mission, a mental estimate of the situation, supporting indirect fire assets, and a support by fire position, integrate fire and maneuver into the ground scheme of maneuver to accomplish the mission. (TBS-OFF-1001f)

Given a mission and a commander's intent, employ operational terms and graphics to completely represent the situation and execution in accordance with MCRP 5-12A. (TBS-OFF-2102c)

Given a mission and a commander's intent, employ tactical tasks to accomplish the mission. (TBS-OFF-2102d)

Given a mission and commander's intent, develop a mental estimate of the situation using METT-TC to accomplish the mission. (TBS-OFF-2102k)

Learning Objectives (Continued)

Given an evaluation, describe types of offensive operations without omission. (TBS-OFF-2103a)

Given a unit and an order from higher, task organize to best support mission accomplishment. (TBS-OFF-2103c)

Given a unit and an order from higher, integrate supporting arms to best support the scheme of maneuver. (TBS-OFF-2103e)

Types of Attack

Hasty

MCDP 1-0 defines a hasty attack as "an attack when the commander decides to trade preparation time for speed to exploit an opportunity."

A hasty attack is used when a fleeting opportunity must be rapidly exploited. There is minimal time for planning and coordination, so many of the detailed planning considerations used for deliberate attacks will be abbreviated or eliminated altogether. Hasty attacks rely on intuitive vice analytical decision-making, and orders are usually brief and sometimes even given over the radio. To be successful, hasty attack plans must be simple and flexible, and execution will rely heavily on unit SOPs and battle drills to replace the lack of detail in the order. Realistic training and experience will greatly increase a unit's proficiency at hasty attacks.

Deliberate

MCDP 1-0 defines a deliberate attack as "a type of offensive action characterized by pre-planned and coordinated employment of firepower and maneuver to close with and destroy the enemy."

Deliberate attacks are used when there is no need to rapidly exploit an enemy weakness, or when a hasty attack will not defeat the enemy. Deliberate attacks rely on analytical decision-making for detailed planning that coordinates all available resources to allow the unit to close with and destroy the enemy. Even in detailed planning there will be no 100% solution—there is still a need to maintain the tempo of the offense and execute the plan before changes on the battlefield render it obsolete. Commanders must continue to train and gain experience that will make their planning more timely, efficient, and effective. This lesson will deal with the planning and execution of a platoon deliberate attack.

Preparation Phase

BEGIN PLANNING

Planning begins when the commander receives the warning order or operations order from higher. The commander analyzes his mission and higher's intent to determine what he is doing and, more importantly, why. The commander looks for both specified tasks (deliberately stated in the order) and implied tasks (not stated in the order, but necessary to accomplish the mission and/or intent). For example: "At 1200, 1st Platoon destroys the enemy squad guarding the bridge at 873 341 IOT allow the battalion to continue its attack to the north." In this case

Preparation Phase (continued)

DESTROY (physically rendering an enemy force combat-ineffective unless it is reconstituted) is a specified task, assigned by the company commander to the platoon commander. An implied task would be that 1st Platoon's attack must leave the bridge intact—though not specifically stated by the company commander, the destruction of the bridge would likely significantly disrupt the battalion's ability to continue its attack north. Based off the commander's understanding of the mission and intent, he will develop the tentative form of maneuver for his plan. Although there are six different offensive forms of maneuver, most of them can only be effectively used at a company or higher level. At the platoon level, attacks will be frontal or flanking.

Frontal Attack

A frontal attack is used to rapidly destroy a weak enemy force, or to fix an enemy in place to support a flanking attack. The frontal attack is simple and easy to control, but attacks the enemy's strongest point. Frontal attacks utilize fire and movement, as demonstrated on R5. In fire and movement, one buddy suppresses the enemy in order to allow the other buddy to move closer to the enemy. Marines use the 300 mil rule to avoid fratricide.

Flanking Attack (see Diagram 1)

A flanking attack uses fire and maneuver in order to gain a position of advantage against an enemy vulnerability. A flanking attack usually uses a support by fire position that diverts attention away from the main effort and uses fires to fix the enemy in place, preventing them from reorienting on the main effort. This can also be accomplished by fire support assets, which is a case where a platoon could conduct a flanking attack without a support by fire position. A support by fire position makes a flanking attack more complex than a frontal attack, and requires more planning and coordination to avoid fratricide.

Fire and maneuver is different from fire and movement. In fire and maneuver, one unit (such as a squad support by fire) and/or fire support agencies (such as mortars or artillery) uses FIRES to fix the enemy, preventing him from moving or reorienting his forces. This allows another unit to MANEUVER to a position of advantage—i.e. the enemy flank. Once in a position of advantage, the maneuver unit finishes the assault using fire and movement. The commander uses fire support coordination measures, tactical control measures, and the signal plan to avoid fratricide.

ACHIEVING A DECISION

After his initial estimate of the situation, a platoon commander must develop a tentative plan, based off of the EMLCOA that is derived from the Tactical Planning Process (METT-TC). This decision will drive the leader's reconnaissance and rehearsals that are conducted prior to crossing the line of departure, and its suitability for the mission is essential to a unit's success.

Sound, tactical decision-making is one of the most important responsibilities of a Marine Rifle Platoon Commander, and the reason that we emphasize this so heavily at The Basic School. The foundation of a Platoon Commander's tactical thought must be based upon:

Preparation Phase (continued)

- The Maneuver Warfare Concepts discussed in MCDP-1, *Warfighting*
- The tactical tenets presented in MCDP 1-3, *Tactics*
- The principals of war that you were taught in B2F2737 Tactical Fundamentals
    - Mass
    - Objective
    - Offensive
    - Security
    - Economy of Force
    - Maneuver
    - Unity of Command
    - Surprise
    - Simplicity

This initial decision-making will allow a commander to choose a form of maneuver and task organization, which is enough information to issue a warning order. The warning order allows subordinate leaders to begin their own planning while the commander writes the full order. They can build a terrain model, prepare mission-essential gear, or conduct rehearsals that apply to the situation, mission, task organization, and chosen form of maneuver listed in the warning order. Utilizing this time will allow subordinates to focus better on the specific details when the commander briefs the full order.

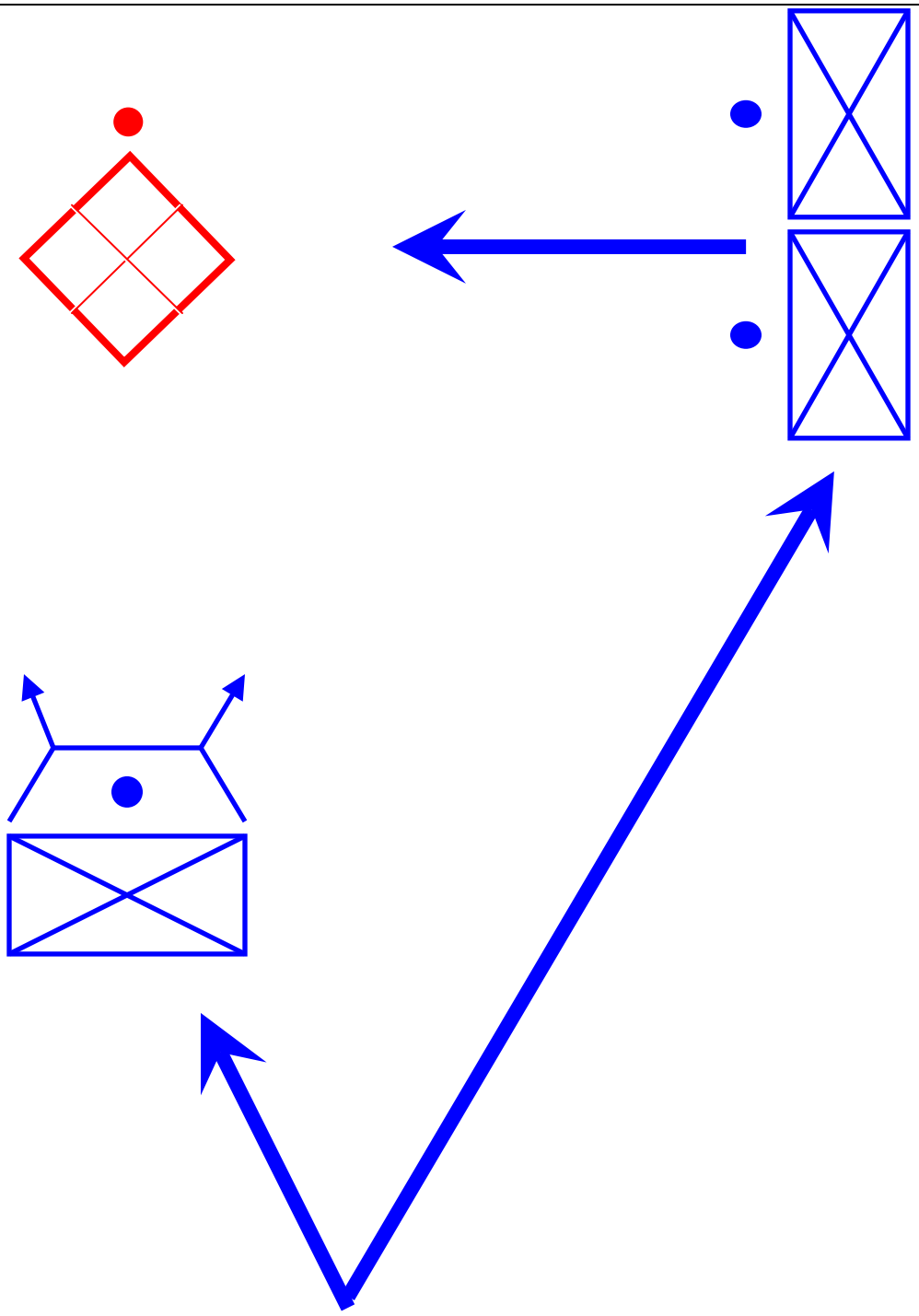


Diagram 1 shows a platoon flanking attack utilizing a support by fire position

Arrange/Make Reconnaissance

COC Coordination

COC coordination can provide updates to all aspects of a commander's METT-TC analysis, but is especially useful for completing the picture on Troops and Fire Support Available. COC coordination will likely be conducted at least twice: before the commander writes his order, so he can update his METT-TC and plan more realistically, and after the commander writes his order, when his detailed planning has identified more clearly the support his unit needs to accomplish the mission. The following are a few items to consider when planning COC Coordination:

- S-2. Ground, signal, and human intelligence sources may be able to provide information on the terrain and enemy. Check debriefs from units that may have patrolled the area before for information on terrain. UAVs can recon the route and the objective and provide real-time information on terrain and enemy. The intelligence officer can better support you if he or she knows what information you need to plan your mission.
- S-3. If available and requested, aviation assets can recon the route and objective to provide real-time information on terrain and enemy. The battalion may also use aviation assets as part of preparatory fires. Submit list of targets to support leader's recon. Submit list of targets to support the attack. Confirm the locations and missions of adjacent and supporting units, to include CASEVAC assets, reinforcements, and fire support.
- S-4. Request logistics necessary to accomplish the mission, to include ammunition, chow, water, specialized equipment such as breach kits, transportation, fuel, etc. Try to anticipate what missions might follow the attack and what logistics they might require. Carry extra logistics into the attack or coordinate a resupply to be delivered immediately on consolidation if follow-on missions are known.
- S-6. Get updated CEOI and challenges/passwords. Check fills and timing on encrypted radios. A platoon will need a minimum of two radios (one for support by fire, one for maneuver) to ensure the best command and control in a flanking attack.

Arrange/Make Reconnaissance (continued)

Leader's Recon

A leader's recon is a small, leadership-heavy reconnaissance patrol that will operate in close proximity to the enemy. As such, it must be planned in detail. Some considerations are:

- Task Organization. Who goes? Smaller is better on a leader's recon, since a small patrol has less chance of being compromised. Take only necessary platoon leadership—in a flanking attack, for example, the support by fire leader and the main effort leader. The remaining squad leader and the platoon sergeant remain in the assembly area supervising pre-combat actions. Because the patrol is small and leadership-heavy, Marines will likely have to perform roles to which they are not accustomed—for example, a squad leader may have to navigate or be flank security. Each Marine on the patrol needs to understand their responsibilities for the patrol.
- SOM. Routes should maximize cover and concealment, and avoid likely enemy LP/OP locations and patrol routes. Decide the **priority of recon**, in order to collect the information most vital to mission accomplishment first, and build the route around this. If the enemy compromises the leader's recon, it may reveal key details about the attack plan and force the commander to change the attack scheme of maneuver.
- FSP/IA Drills. Fire support plan and IA drills should be designed to allow the patrol to avoid and break contact.

Priorities of recon should work from the enemy back to friendly—picking an assault position first is a waste of time if the patrol discovers later that the enemy is in a different location or has a different orientation. The following is a sample priority of recon:

- Confirm location and orientation of enemy defense, crew-served weapons, obstacles, and security.
- Identify the enemy critical vulnerability.
- Identify an assault position that will best allow the ME to exploit the enemy critical vulnerability.
- Identify a support by fire position that will best support the ME
- Identify routes and tactical control measures that will best support the scheme of maneuver.

When choosing a support by fire position, the commander should consider the following:

- The support by fire position should ideally be located on the enemy frontage (see Diagram 1 above). This allows the support by fire element to effectively fix and suppress the entire enemy defense, whereas if it is located on a flank it may only be able to effectively fix and suppress that flank. Additionally, if the support by fire element is located on the frontage of the enemy defense, it allows the maneuver element to attack from a flank.

Leader's Recon (Continued)

- The support by fire position's direction of fire should be located 60-90 degrees offset from the maneuver element's direction of assault (see Diagram 1 above). This allows the maneuver element to advance as close to the enemy as possible under friendly suppression without the risk of fratricide.
- Should have cover and concealment. This protects the support by fire element and promotes an occupation by stealth vice force:
    - **Stealth**. An occupation by stealth is when the enemy does not observe the occupation. The enemy is not aware of the support by fire position until they open fire. This method promotes surprise and protects the support by fire element.
    - **Force**. The enemy observes the occupation, or currently occupies the planned support by fire position. In this case, the maneuver element or fire support assets would isolate the position (by suppressing any enemy that could reinforce or fire on the position) in order to allow the support by fire element to seize the position and commence fire on the objective. An occupation by force requires better timing than an occupation by stealth because, unlike an occupation by stealth, the support by fire position must establish fire superiority on the objective immediately upon occupation. Since the enemy is aware of the support by fire occupation, the commander should not occupy the support by fire position until he is ready for their fires. This promotes surprise, protects the SBF element, and conserves ammunition.

Some **Tactical Control Measures** that will be useful in controlling a platoon attack are listed below. See the sample scheme of maneuver in the COMPLETE THE PLAN section of this lesson for examples of their use.

- Boundary: A line which delineates surface areas for the purpose of facilitating coordination and deconfliction of operations between adjacent units, formations, or areas. (Army) - **1.** A control measure used to define the right, left, rear, and forward limits of an area of operation. **2.** A control measure normally drawn along identifiable terrain features and used to delineate areas of tactical responsibility between adjacent units and between higher headquarters to the rear of subordinate units. Within their boundaries, units may maneuver within the overall plan without close coordination with neighboring units unless otherwise restricted. Direct fire may be placed across boundaries on clearly identified enemy targets without prior coordination, provided friendly forces are not endangered. Indirect fire also may be used after prior coordination.
- Assembly Area: An area in which a command is assembled preparatory to further action.
- Attack Position: The last position occupied by the assault echelon before crossing the line of departure.
- Line of Departure: In land warfare, a line designated to coordinate the departure of attack elements.
- Checkpoint: Predetermined point on the ground used to control movement and tactical maneuver.
- Phase Line: A line used for control and coordination of military

Leader's Recon (Continued)

operations, usually a terrain feature extending across the zone of action. Units normally report crossing PLs, but do not halt unless specifically directed.

- Release Point: A well-defined point on a route at which the elements composing a column return under the authority of their respective commanders, each one of these elements continuing its movement toward its own appropriate destination.
- Target Reference Point: An easily recognizable point on the ground (either natural or man-made) used to initiate, distribute, and control fires. TRPs are designated by maneuver leaders from platoon through battalion to define battalion, company, platoon, section, squad, or individual sectors of fire and observation usually within an engagement area. TRPs can also designate the center of an area where the commander plans to distribute or converge the fires of all his weapons rapidly. TRPs are designated using the standard target symbol and numbers issued by maneuver commanders. Once approved by the battalion fire support officer, TRPs can be designated as indirect fire targets using the standard target symbol with letters and numbers issued by the fire support officer.
- Assault Position: That position between the line of departure and the objective in an attack from which forces assault the objective. Ideally, it is the last covered and concealed position before reaching the objective.
- Objective: The physical object of the action taken (for example, a definite terrain feature, the seizure or holding of which is essential to the commander's plan, or, the destruction of an enemy force without regard to terrain features).
- Limit of Advance: An easily recognized terrain feature beyond which attacking elements will not advance.
- Linkup Point: An easily identifiable point on the ground where two forces conducting a linkup meet. When one force is stationary, linkup points normally are established where the moving force's routes of advance intersect the stationary force's security elements. Linkup points for two moving forces are established on boundaries where the two forces are expected to converge.

The commander will usually issue his operations order before departing on the leader's recon. This allows subordinates to conduct detailed planning and rehearsals during the leader's recon. When the commander returns, he can brief any changes to the plan resulting from information gained on the leader's recon.

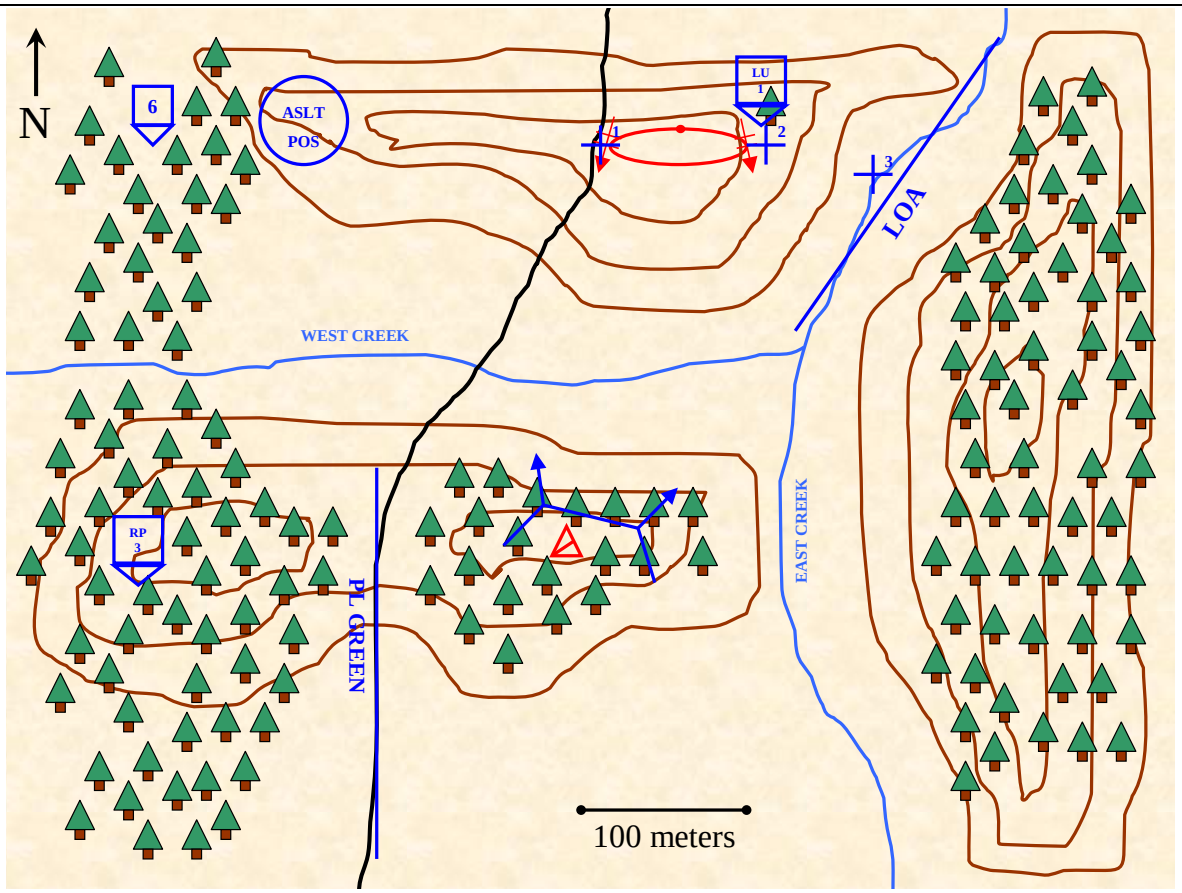


Diagram 2 depicts the tactical control measures for the example scheme of maneuver.

Complete the Plan

Scheme of Maneuver

The commander updates his estimate of the situation (METT-TC analysis) in several ways: higher's order, COC coordination, and the leader's recon. While each of these inputs can provide some information on all the elements of METT-TC, the commander will primarily understand his mission and time available from higher's order and intent, the enemy and terrain from the leader's recon, and the troops and fire support available from the COC coordination. The information from these three sources, combined with the commander's judgment, will produce the commander's assessment of the enemy's most likely course of action (EMLCOA). The commander then focuses on the enemy center of gravity and critical vulnerability specific to that EMLCOA. His plan to exploit that critical vulnerability, combined with the METT-TC analysis, becomes the detailed scheme of maneuver.

- Example: "2nd Platoon will conduct a flanking attack on Co Obj A with two rifle squads online as a maneuver element (ME, SE1) and one rifle squad supporting by fire (SE 2). Direction of attack is north. We will depart the assembly area in platoon column (SE 1, ME, SE 2) and move to the attack position, where we will establish priority target AB1001 and request permission to cross the LD. From the LD to RP 3, we will travel in platoon wedge (SE 1, ME, SE 2). At RP 3, SE 2 will release and travel via an independent route to PL Green and hold there. The maneuver element will continue to CP 6 in echelon right (SE 1, ME). When the maneuver element has crossed West Creek, SE 2 will call for three minutes of suppression on AB1001, seize the SBF position, and begin suppressing Co Obj A at the rapid rate between TRP 1 and TRP 2, switching to the sustained rate after one minute. At CP 6, the maneuver element will transition into a line (SE 1, ME) and continue to the assault position. When SE 2 is effectively suppressing the enemy on Co Obj A, the maneuver element will begin the assault. On signal, SE 2 will shift their fires and suppress withdrawing or reinforcing enemy between TRP 2 and TRP 3 at the sustained rate. The maneuver element will assault through the objective and, on signal, SE 2 will cease fires. The maneuver element will consolidate facing east, SE 1 with 9 to 12 and ME with 12 to 3. On signal, SE 2 will displace by unit via most direct route and link up with the guide at LU 1. When SE 2 joins consolidation, SE 1 will have 8 to 12, ME will have 12 to 4, and SE 2 will have 4 to 8. When consolidation, reorganization, and resupply are complete, the platoon will be prepared to continue the attack to the north." See Diagram 2 above.

Fire Support Plan

A detailed fire support plan will support the scheme of maneuver. Fires in the attack are broken into three categories:

- Preparatory fires. Conducted before the platoon steps into the attack, usually at the battalion level or higher. These fires isolate the objective by targeting enemy command and control, logistics, fire support, reinforcements, etc.

Fire Support Plan (Continued)

- Fires in support of conduct. These fires are used by the platoon commander to support the platoon's movement to and actions on the objective. The platoon commander should target the enemy security plan (LP/OPs, patrol routes), the enemy main defense (objective), and likely reinforcement routes. When suppressing the main defense to allow the platoon to close with the objective, the platoon commander should echelon fires. Echeloning fires is a technique by which a commander uses multiple fire support agencies in succession to achieve continuous suppression on an objective, allowing the maneuver element to close. This economy of fires uses the minimum amount of ammunition necessary to effectively fix and suppress the enemy. For example:
    - The maneuver element will be exposed to the enemy 800 meters from the objective. Artillery begins firing on the objective when the maneuver element is 800 meters from the objective. In this situation, 400 meters is as close as the commander wants to get to the artillery fires in order to avoid fratricide.
    - At 500 meters from the objective, the commander initiates 81mm mortar fire on the objective. This allows the mortars to be on target and effectively suppressing when the artillery fire on the objective ceases.
    - At 400 meters, the artillery ceases or shifts to a deeper target (such as enemy reinforcements or withdrawing units). 60mm mortar fire begins on the objective.
    - At 300 meters, 81mm mortar fire ceases or shifts to a deeper target.
    - At 250 meters, the support by fire element begins suppression on the objective. The support by fire element will achieve effective suppression faster than indirect fires because they do not have to rely on a forward observer.
    - At 200 meters, 60mm mortar fire ceases or shifts to a deeper target.
    - At 50 meters, support by fire suppression ceases or shifts to deeper targets, and the maneuver element finishes the assault using fire and movement.
- Fires in support of consolidation. These fires target likely enemy withdrawal and counterattack routes.

Tasks

Tasks provide subordinate units with their missions. Tasking statements should include an appropriate tactical task and a clear purpose for what the commander intends the unit to accomplish. When tasking subordinates utilize conditions for the "when" that can be observed on the battlefield. This maximizes decentralized execution at the platoon and squad level. Avoid overloading tasking statements with implied tasks ("ensure your radios work before stepping off") or coordinating instructions ("you will be first in the order of movement"). Ensure that supporting effort tasking statements are worded so that supporting efforts understand how they support the main effort. For example:

- 1st Squad: ME. Upon effective suppression, destroy the enemy on the southern half of Co Obj A IOT allow the

Tasks (Continued)

company to continue its attack to the north.
    - The ME is the platoon's bid for success and, as such, will accomplish the platoon's mission (destroy enemy IOT allow the company to continue its attack north).
- 2nd Squad: SE 1. Upon effective suppression, destroy the enemy on the northern half of Co Obj A IOT prevent the enemy from withdrawing from or interfering with the ME attack. BPT assume the ME mission.
    - In a flanking attack, the ME squad is probably the only one destroying the enemy's main defensive line. SE 1 will be destroying enemy behind the main defensive line; this may be enemy withdrawing from the ME attack (enemy attempting to retreat or move to alternate or supplementary positions), or enemy interfering with the ME attack (enemy supporting assets such as communications or logistics, or enemy reinforcements). Since this will probably involve less fighting than the ME, the commander may shift this effort to the ME mission to maintain tempo if the ME is significantly slowed by heavy fighting.
- 3rd Squad: SE 2. Upon effective IDF suppression, suppress the enemy on Co Obj A IOT allow the ME to close with the enemy right flank.
    - SE 2's suppression will fix the enemy in place, preventing them from reorienting or effectively firing on the ME attack.

Coordinating Instructions

Detailed coordinating instructions support the rest of the order. They coordinate actions between two or more units, and include any of higher's coordinating instructions that pertain to your unit. They include, but are not limited to, the examples provided in your Combat Orders Student Handouts.

Administration and Logistics

Ensure the platoon has enough ammunition, chow, water, batteries, special equipment, transportation, fuel, etc. to accomplish the mission and plan resupply for any known follow-on missions. Have a plan to deal with casualties and EPWs during any part of the attack.

Command and Signal

Some additional signals necessary for an attack using a support by fire are:

- Commence: When to begin firing. If occupying by force, this will also be the signal to seize the position. Remember:
    - Original: the signal will not be confused with other events on the battlefield.
    - Appropriate: the signal should be received by the

Command and Signal (Continued)

intended unit in a timely manner. A smoke grenade is not an appropriate signal for a night attack because it is not visible. It is also not an appropriate signal for commence or cease fire, because it takes time to billow up and be recognized.

- Redundant: Radio is usually the primary signal, but the commander should have back-up signals in case the radio does not work. Just because there is a redundant signal does not mean it should be used—remember that part of the intent of a support by fire is to draw enemy attention away from the maneuver element so that they can achieve surprise. If the commander fires a pop-up to tell the support by fire element to occupy, he has revealed the maneuver element's location to the enemy.
- Simultaneous: the primary, alternate, and tertiary signals should occur at the same time if possible.

- Shift (sometimes): When the maneuver element reaches the objective, the support by fire element may still able to safely suppress deep targets or another part of the objective.
- Cease: When support by fire element can no longer support the maneuver element without the risk of fratricide, or when their fires are no longer needed.
- Displace: Tells the support by fire element to execute the displacement criteria, usually briefed in scheme of maneuver and/or the support by fire element's task. Sample displacement criteria can be found in the example scheme of maneuver above. Displacement criteria are:
  - Method: By unit or by echelon. By unit means the whole unit will pick up and displace at once, which is ideal for speed. By echelon means the unit will split and one half will move while the other covers their movement, which may be used if security is more important than speed.
  - Objective: Where the unit is going.
  - Route: Most direct or most covered and concealed. Most direct is simply the fastest route, and may not necessarily translate to a straight line (instead of fording a river, the support by fire element may detour a little bit to cross a bridge). Most covered and concealed is used when security is more important than speed.
  - Time: The displacement signal.

Issue the Order

The platoon commander will issue the order to the platoon. If time permits the platoon commander will issue the order to the entire platoon over a terrain model large enough to accommodate all three squads and attachments. The platoon commander will use the order issuing techniques taught in combat orders.

Supervise

Supervision that the commander should conduct in the preparatory phase includes, but is not limited to:

- Rehearsals: Rehearsals ensure that the commander's plan is both valid (realistic and within the unit's capabilities) and understood by subordinates.
- Pre-Combat Checks: This is an individual Marine responsibility. Based on criteria (checklists or guidance) provided by the commander, Marines will ensure that mission-essential gear is present and functional.
- Pre-Combat Inspections: This is a unit leader responsibility. Leaders at all levels are responsible for ensuring that their Marines have completed the pre-combat checks.

Supervision in the conduct and consolidation phases involves the commander ensuring that subordinates are adhering to his orders and intent.

Conduct Phase

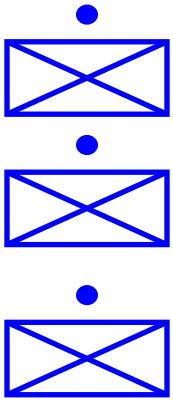
MOVEMENT TO THE OBJECTIVE

During movement to the objective, terrain is the primary cover. The platoon commander controls the unit using formations and tactical control measures, reporting progress and any significant changes to the situation or scheme of maneuver to higher. Fires are used as necessary to clear or bypass enemy security elements, but should be avoided if possible to achieve surprise.

Formations during movement to the objective are based on METT-TC, and will reflect the relative importance of speed/control versus security/deployability. The order of movement in the formation should protect the main effort until the unit is ready to conduct actions on the objective.

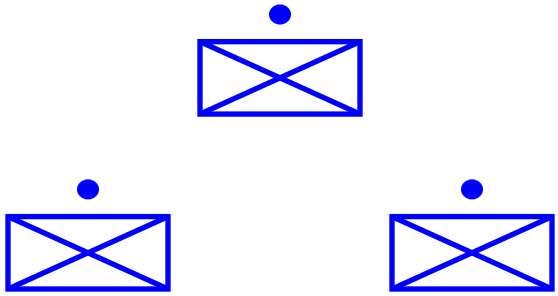
Column

Column provides the best speed and control, and is ideal when conducting night operations or moving through thick vegetation and canalizing terrain. Column provides the best security and deployability to the flanks, but the worst to the front.



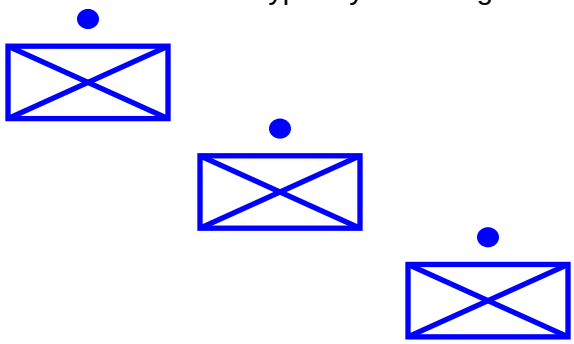
Wedge

Wedge is a flexible formation that provides good speed and control and good all-around security and deployability. It is used when the enemy situation is uncertain.



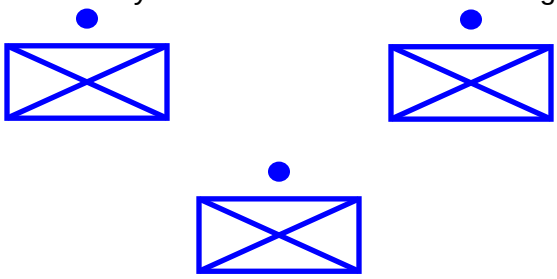
Echelon

Echelon is slower and more difficult to control than many formations. It provides excellent security and deployability to the front and in the direction of the echelon. It is typically used to guard an exposed flank.



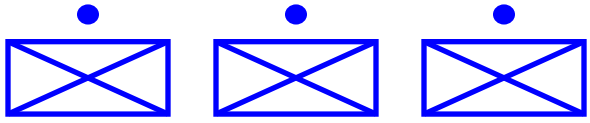
Vee

Vee is slow and difficult to control because there are two lead elements. Security is excellent to the front and good to the flanks. Vee is typically used when the enemy is to the front or when crossing a large open area.



Line

Slowest and most difficult to control. Excellent security and deployability to the front, but poor to the flanks. Line is typically used in the assault once oriented on a known enemy.



Actions on the Objective

Actions on the objective begin when terrain no longer covers our normal movement from enemy main body fires. Fires are the primary cover. All maneuver must be covered by terrain or fires; if not, it will result in heavy casualties. For example:

- Terrain covers the maneuver element's movement to the assault position and the support by fire element's movement to its last covered and concealed position.
- Mortar fire suppresses the enemy defense, allowing the support by fire element to destroy an enemy OP/LP and commence firing on the enemy defense.
- Suppression from the mortars and the support by fire element allow the maneuver element to close with the enemy defense.
- While the maneuver element destroys enemy defense using fire and movement, mortars and support by fire isolate the defense by destroying withdrawing and reinforcing enemy.

Only EFFECTIVE fires allow maneuver. A commander achieves this by:

- Ensuring that rounds are on target and suppression is adequate before exposing a maneuver unit in an area where they could be engaged by the enemy.
- Ensuring proper distribution of fires across the objective. If everyone focuses their fires on one machinegun, suppression overall will not be effective. Distribute fires by using target reference points and ADDRACs to guide subordinates' fires. For indirect fires, consider using linear targets (if enemy location and orientation is known in advance).
- Ensuring targets are prioritized. If the entire enemy force cannot be effectively suppressed, focus fires on the highest priority targets. For example, crew served weapons and enemy positions with the best fields of fire on the maneuver element. If the maneuver element is attacking the enemy's right flank, it is more important that those positions be effectively suppressed than the left flank positions (unless the enemy attempts to maneuver his left flank for a counterattack).

Support by Fire Considerations

Rates of fire typically used by the support by fire position are sustained and rapid, and the capabilities and limitations of each are listed below:

- Sustained: The sustained rate of fire provides average suppression and conserves ammunition—in most cases, a round on target every five seconds will keep the enemy's head down as effectively as two or three rounds every five seconds. The sustained rate of fire will not overheat weapons, and should be the default rate of fire unless a higher rate is needed to achieve effective suppression.
- Rapid: The rapid rate of fire provides more suppression, but uses double the ammunition. This will cause weapons to overheat and malfunction more often, and begins to affect soldiers' load—a machinegun squad will go through 14 pounds of ammunition per minute at the rapid rate. The rapid rate can be used to achieve fire superiority when commencing fire, when the maneuver element slows because of effective enemy fire, or when the maneuver element is about to reach the objective.

The commander must take time/distance into account when planning for the assault. During the assault, the commander and the support by fire element leader are both responsible for maintaining situational awareness on how much ammunition remains in the support by fire position versus the maneuver element's distance from the objective:

- $A \geq S \times M$
- A is ammunition, S is suppression, and M is maneuver
- S = Weapons firing × average rate of fire (in rounds per minute)
- M = Distance to objective (in meters) ÷ average rate of movement (in meters per minute)
- For example, a support by fire squad has 9 M16s and 3 M249s. The commander estimates the M16s will have an average rate of fire of 20 rounds per minute and the M249s will have an average rate of fire of 150 rounds per minute (between the sustained and rapid rates). The maneuver element has 200 meters of open ground to cover to reach the objective, and the commander estimates the maneuver element can move at 50 meters per minute with effective suppression. The M16s need at least (9×20) × (200÷50) rounds, or 720 rounds. The M249s need at least (3×150) × (200÷50) rounds, or 1800 rounds.
- Once in the assault, the amount of ammunition and distance to the objective are constants. Weapons firing, the rate of fire, and rate of movement are variables. That means that if the maneuver element is moving more slowly than planned, the commander has three options:
    - Reduce the overall rate of fire.
    - Reduce or cease fires on lower priority enemy, such as the opposite flank from the maneuver element (reduce the amount of weapons firing).
    - Increase the rate of movement for the maneuver element. This may require temporarily increasing the rate of fire if effective enemy fires are slowing the maneuver element.

Support by Fire Considerations (Continued)

Where to place leadership and automatic weapons in the support by fire position is another consideration:

- Automatic weapons. Placing automatic weapons on the flank the maneuver element is assaulting provides better suppression on targets that affect the maneuver element most, as well as better geometries of fire. Distributing them across the support by fire position provides better overall distribution of fires.
- Leadership. Placing the support by fire element leader in the center of the position provides the best overall control of fires; however, the flank the maneuver element is assaulting is the point of friction. From that flank, the support by fire element leader can more effectively direct the fires that will support the maneuver element most, as well as have a better perspective on the geometries of his fires as they affect the maneuver element.

Platoon Commander Considerations

During actions on the objective, the platoon commander has several responsibilities:

- Control fire support and the support by fire element. The platoon commander must ensure that the objective is effectively suppressed and isolated before exposing his maneuver element to the enemy fields of fire. This will involve calling for and adjusting fires and ensuring that timing between agencies is correct when fires are echeloned. The platoon commander must also track geometries and rates of fire—slowing rates of fire to conserve ammunition, raising them to increase suppression, or ceasing them to prevent fratricide.
- Control the maneuver element. To do this, the platoon commander will use his base unit. Remember that the base unit is not always the main effort or the center squad; it is the unit that best allows the platoon commander to control the formation. The base unit may be the lead element in the platoon column for movement, or a unit that will advance along a guiding feature in the assault. The base unit may not be the same throughout the entire attack. The platoon commander controls maneuver element fires by giving TRPs and ADDRACs to his squad leaders in order to ensure proper distribution of fires. The platoon commander controls movement by issuing specific direction to his base unit. “Shift left” and “shift right” invariably leads to a “slinky effect”, where everyone overcorrects in one direction and then the other. The platoon commander should pick identifiable objects ahead of the base unit where he wants the base unit to be: “1st Squad, left flank on that dead tree, right flank on that bunker”. The base unit shifts to between those objects and the other unit(s) adjust off its movement.
- Coordinate with higher and adjacent. This may involve requesting casualty evacuation or reinforcement, or updating them on a changing situation (such as enemy withdrawing into an adjacent unit AO).

Consolidation Phase

As the attack culminates on the objective and the determination is made to transition into consolidation, the platoon commander's primary focus becomes establishing local security in order to prepare for a potential enemy counter-attack or reinforcement and provide the opportunity to reconstitute his forces. The platoon commander achieves this most rapidly through a systematic approach utilizing the acronym SAFE. The squad leaders are the primary executors of the SAFE process however the platoon commander will direct the initial actions to ensure unity of effort and then supervise their follow-on activity:

- Security. Interlocking sectors of fire must be assigned to each of the subordinate units to prevent any gaps from occurring in the perimeter of the consolidation plan. Sectors of fire should intersect as close to the frontage of the consolidation plan as the terrain will allow.
- Automatic weapons on avenues of approach. The platoon commander will have the most extensive knowledge of the objective area and therefore should identify which avenues of approach pose the greatest threat to the platoon and should oversee the emplacement of automatic weapons accordingly.
- Fields of fire and Entrenchment. As the length of time that the platoon should expect to remain in place becomes more apparent, the platoon commander can decide to begin with further improvements of his position to begin the transition to defensive operations.

Prior to any other events occurring, the platoon commander must next determine his capabilities and level of combat effectiveness following the attack. This can be done by analyzing the information collected from the subordinate leaders utilizing ACE reports. These reports are ideally submitted concurrently to the SAFE process to some other unit leader within the platoon – potentially the Platoon Sergeant. This will then allow the platoon commander to make informed decisions as he begins to look ahead.

- Ammunition. Redistribute ammunition and prepare for counterattack.
- Casualties. Collect and evacuate casualties and EPWs. Aid and Litter teams and corpsmen are primarily serving this function. Reassign key billets vacated by casualties.
- Equipment. Account for weapons, equipment, ammunition, fuel, batteries, water, and chow. Consolidate shortfalls and identify necessary items for resupply.

The platoon commander should also submit reports to higher; at the minimum, this should include a SITREP. It may also include specialized reports as required, as well as any resupply requests that the platoon needs to accomplish follow-on missions. At this point, the platoon commander should plan—execute pre-planned—follow-on operations. Follow-on operations may be offensive, defensive, or retrograde.

References

Reference Number	Reference Title
FMFM 2-7	Fire Support in MAGTF Operations
MCDP-1	Warfighting
MCDP 3-11.1A	Commander's Tactical Handbook
MCRP 3-11.1B	Small Unit Leader's Guide to Weather and Terrain
MCRP 3-11.2A	Marine Troop Leader's Guide
MCRP 3-16A	Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for the Targeting Process
MCRP 3-16C	Support for the Combined Arms Commander

MCWP 3-1	Ground Combat Operations
MCWP 3-11.1	Marine Rifle Company/Platoon
MCWP 3-11.2	Marine Rifle Squad
MCWP 3-11.3	Scouting and Patrolling

Notes