

LESSON ONE

INFANTRY PLATOON TACTICAL DEFENSE

Soldiers Manual Tasks:

- * NSMT Identify and analyze the fundamentals of defense and other considerations.
 - 071-331-0820 Analyze terrain using the five military aspects of terrain in the defense.
 - 071-410-0019 Control organic fires.
- *No Soldier's Manual Task.

OVERVIEW

Task Infantry Platoon Tactical Defense

Description:

TASKS: Identify and analyze the fundamentals of defense and other considerations, analyze terrain using the five military aspects of terrain in the defense, and control organic fires.

CONDITIONS: Given the subcourse material for this lesson, a training scenario, the student will complete the practice exercise at the end of this lesson.

STANDARDS: The student will demonstrate his comprehension and knowledge by identifying and analyzing the fundamentals of defense and other considerations, analyzing terrain using the five military aspects of terrain in the defense, and controlling organic fires.

REFERENCES: The material in this lesson was derived from the following publications:
FM 7-8
FM 7-10
FM 21-3

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of defense is to defeat the enemy's attack and gain the initiative. Defense is a temporary measure conducted to identify or create enemy weaknesses that allows for the early opportunity to change over to the offense. Initially outnumbered, the defender uses maneuver and firepower to first blunt the attack, then concentrate combat power to counterattack and direct friendly strength against enemy weakness.

Defensive operations achieve one or more of the following:

- Destroy the enemy.
- Cause an enemy attack to fail.
- Deceive the enemy.
- Gain time.
- Concentrate forces elsewhere.
- Control key terrain.
- Wear down enemy forces before conducting offensive operations.
- Retain terrain.

As stated, the immediate purpose of any defense is to defeat the attack. Other purposes, while important, are not the primary focus of the defense.

Defense is used to gain time for reinforcements to arrive or to economize forces in one sector while concentrating forces for attack in another. In either case, a defense or a delay may achieve these purposes.

In other cases, portions of a force may be required to retain key or decisive terrain or essential strategic, operational, or tactical objectives. Even in offensive operations, air assault, airborne, or amphibious forces may need to defend deep objectives until a larger force can link up with them. Whatever its larger purpose, the immediate challenge of any defensive operation is to recapture the initiative and thus create the opportunity to shift to the offensive. All activities of the defense must contribute to that aim.

PART A - FUNDAMENTALS OF THE DEFENSE

1. General.

Infantry defends best in rugged or heavily wooded terrain or in urban areas which restrict vehicular movement. It relies on a well-positioned, well-prepared, relatively fixed defense. This is called a "position defense."

2. Position Defense.

Once in position, the infantry is relatively fixed and only minor movements are planned. This is the position defense. The intent of the position defense is to hold occupied terrain. The deployment of the rifle company varies according to the mission, enemy, terrain and weather, and troops and time available (METT-T), as well as the amount and type of combat support available.

A rifle company normally defends as part of a battalion to deny an area to the enemy, protect flanks, or disorganize and destroy the enemy. The company defends by stopping the enemy by fire forward of the company position or by repelling him if he reaches that position.

The battalion commander assigns the rifle company a sector or battle position (BP) which is part of the battalion sector or BP. To some degree, he controls the way the company deploys by prescribing the size of its sector/BP and the terrain it will defend. If he thinks the company needs more firepower to defend its sector/BP, the battalion commander may attach some combat support company elements to it. If the battalion has tanks assigned, the battalion commander may put a platoon of tanks under the operational control (OPCON) of the company. He may give the company priority of battalion mortar or artillery fire including final protective fire. An engineer squad or

platoon may also be in support or under OPCON of the company to help it construct obstacles and positions.

Operational control is a relationship which places a unit under a commander for assignment of tasks, designation of objectives, composition of subordinate units, and authoritative direction to accomplish a mission. OPCON does not imply responsibility or authority for administration, combat service support, discipline, internal organization, or training. The commander's relationship with OPCON units is otherwise the same with organic or attached subordinate units.

The company commander considers METT-T when selecting platoon and weapon positions and deciding the allocation of combat power. He attains depth and an all-round defense by assigning platoons and weapons primary, alternate, and supplementary positions.

The company commander must know how to employ his company and also how the battalion defends. He must know the capabilities of the combat support units that may help his company defend.

Your platoon will normally defend as part of a company to deny an area to the enemy, protect flanks, or disorganize and destroy the enemy.

A platoon defends by stopping the enemy by fire forward of its position or by repelling him if he reaches that position.

3. Fundamentals of Defense.

At company level, the planning, preparation, and conduct of the defense are based on the fundamentals listed below.

- **Understand the Enemy.** The company commander must be thoroughly familiar with the capabilities and limitations of the enemy. He must know the organization of enemy units and how they are deployed in the attack. He must also be aware of the capabilities of enemy weapons and equipment and how they are used.
- **See the Battlefield.** Prior to the battle, the company commander must try to acquire, develop, and disseminate all possible information on the enemy's location, organization, and strength. He positions himself where he can observe the battlefield. Once the battle starts, he must have a continuous flow of information on enemy activities to augment his personal observations in order to make timely and accurate decisions. He must deny the enemy similar information with operations security efforts.
- **Concentrate Combat Power at Critical Times and Places.** The first means of concentrating combat power is through the use of artillery and mortar fire. These assets can be quickly shifted to critical points to delay, disrupt, or destroy an enemy attack and then be shifted again to concentrate against other threats. Concentrating fire of infantry weapons, because of their limited range, requires positioning sufficient units and weapons before the battle. Other direct fire weapons such as tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided (TOW) missiles and tanks can more easily concentrate their fire. TOWs, because of their accuracy at extended ranges, concentrate fire primarily through assignment of primary and secondary sectors of fire. Tanks, because of their mobility and protection, more often reposition to concentrate fire.

The second means of concentrating combat power is to reposition units to occupy alternate or supplementary positions in depth in the path of the enemy attack. Reserves may be positioned near critical terrain or likely enemy avenues of attack. Blocking positions, alternate positions, or even strong points may be established to deny the enemy the chance for a rapid breakthrough. If armored units are available, they can be used to concentrate forces or counterattack at critical times and places. Counterattacks by dismounted infantry against armored forces are very difficult. However, certain conditions provide dismounted infantry a distinct advantage over the enemy before being detected. Infantry counterattacks against dismounted infantry can and should be conducted whenever necessary to maintain the integrity of the defense and to defeat the attacker.

- **Exploit the Advantages of the Defender.** When given time, the commander has a number of advantages which allow him to defeat an attacking force much larger than his own. He analyzes the terrain in detail and is intimately familiar with features that increase his chance of success. The attacker must feel his way over the terrain, seeing the area for the first time. The commander has his company prepare positions, construct obstacles, and conceal its efforts in advance. The attacker must guess where the defender is located. The commander initiates the fight from prepared, stationary positions which are difficult to detect and which provide cover from enemy fire. The attacker must react to the defender and either fire while moving or lose momentum by seeking covered positions. The commander develops flexible plans for control of fire, movement, communication, and logistics to fit any predictable situation.
- **Fight as a Combined Arms Team.** Field artillery, engineers, infantry, air defense artillery, tanks, tactical aircraft, and attack/assault helicopters can all contribute to mission success. The commander integrates available assets so that their combined effect on the enemy is far greater than their individual effects. Each asset, in given circumstances, can be the arm most critical to the defense. In very rugged terrain, infantry locates targets so that massive firepower can destroy them. With assault helicopters, infantry may be capable of moving to block enemy attacks over much larger areas. In more open terrain, artillery-delivered mines and engineer-prepared obstacles may be used to slow enemy armor. Tactical aircraft and antitank weapons then become the key systems. The commander must insure that each member arm is integrated so that the strengths of each are maximized and their vulnerabilities minimized.

In addition to the fundamentals of defense, the company commander must consider the following when planning his defense.

- **All-Round Defense.** Although a defense usually is prepared to repel an attack from one general direction, the company must be ready to defend against a ground attack from any direction. It does this to some extent by having supplementary positions, tying-in with adjacent units, posting observation posts (OPs), and conducting patrols. It is always prepared for an air attack. Air defense consists of both active measures; use of surface-to-air missile and small arms fire, and passive measures; concealment from air observation.
- **Defense in Depth.** The company attains depth by the positioning of its units and weapons. This is done to keep the attacker from easily flanking the defense or exploiting a penetration. When antiarmor weapons are positioned in depth, they are less likely to be suppressed simultaneously.
- **Mutual Support.** Units and weapons are positioned so that their sectors of fire overlap, and so that they can fire at enemy troops attacking adjacent weapons and units.

- **Security.** The defender takes all steps necessary to preclude surprise. As the attacker has the initiative to pick the time, place, and direction of the attack, the defender posts security for warning. Security measures include OPs, STANO (surveillance, target acquisition, and night observation) and ground sensor devices, mines, boobytraps, and patrols. The company may deploy security elements to its front, flanks, and rear. Security should be strong around the clock and in all weather conditions.
- **Maximize Effectiveness of Key Weapons.** The commander must organize his defense around weapons most effective against the attacker. When facing a major armor force, the allocation and positioning of antitank weapons (for example, TOW missiles, Dragon missiles, mines, and tanks) are the chief means of defense while other assets serve to supplement them and compensate for their vulnerabilities. Against an enemy infantry threat, infantry-defeating weapons (for example, machineguns, mortars, artillery, and small arms) and antipersonnel obstacles (such as wire and mines) are integrated to create a barrier to stop the enemy and destroy him forward of defensive positions. Antitank weapons strengthen this barrier. The effectiveness of all defense weapons is increased when they are concealed so as to escape enemy suppressive fire.
- **Use Obstacles to Strengthen Positions and Complement Fire.** Obstacles are positioned to stop or canalize the enemy. Natural obstacles can be reinforced by; manmade obstacles such as minefields, abatis, road craters, ditches, and tactical wire. Large obstacles are normally planned by higher commands, but the company may be required to help the engineers build them.
- **Use Antiarmor Weapons to Kill Armor.** In the defense, it is desirable to kill enemy armor well forward of the company's position. Though the company is relatively fixed, its TOWs are mobile. They may first fire at enemy tanks from positions forward of the company's position and then move to positions with long fields of fire well behind the forward rifle platoons. This adds depth to the defense and exploits the TOW's range advantage over tank guns. Dragons are positioned within the platoon positions to engage targets from short to medium ranges. Light antitank weapons (LAW) are used to engage targets at short ranges.
- **Maximum Use of Offensive Action.** The commander must be alert to gain the initiative by offensive action. Aggressive patrolling helps keep up the offensive momentum and helps the commander see the battlefield. Counterattacks are normally conducted by battalion or brigade, but the company may use its reserve to conduct a small scale counterattack. The company may also use its reserve to block a penetration, until the battalion's counterattack is launched.

4. Summary.

This concludes the discussion on fundamentals of the defense. During this portion of the subcourse we discussed how infantry platoons defend and the fundamentals of the defense at the company level. We will now move to the next phase which is analyzing the military aspects of terrain in the defense.

PART B - ANALYZE MILITARY ASPECTS OF TERRAIN IN THE DEFENSE

1. General.

On receipt of a company defense order, you, as the platoon leader, must start your troop leading procedure, and make an estimate of the situation. The estimate considers METT-T.

2. Analyzing Terrain.

To plan a defense, you must analyze the terrain on which you will defend to determine its effects on the actions of friendly and enemy forces. The aspects you must analyze are:

- Observation and fields of fire. You must decide where weapons will have the best fields of fire to cover the platoon sector. Observation is needed to gain information of the enemy, to adjust indirect fire, and to shoot direct fire accurately. Fields of fire are cleared at least out far enough to kill the enemy before he can assault or throw hand grenades into fighting positions. Fields of fire are improved by selectively clearing grass, brush, trees, and rubble. Fresh cuts are camouflaged so the enemy cannot see what has been done.

Before clearing a field of fire, you and your squad leaders should estimate how much clearing can be done in the time available. You can then decide what clearing is to be done.

Your soldiers should:

- not disclose the unit's position by careless or too much clearing;
- leave a thin natural screen of vegetation to hide defensive positions;
- remove or thin dense brush which obstructs the field of fire;
- cut weeds only where they obstruct observation;
- drag away cut brush, limbs, and weeds to places where the material will not be seen by the enemy or hide him from the position;
- remove all cuttings;
- cover cuts on trees and bushes forward of the position with mud, dirt, or snow; and
- in clearing, leave no trails as clues for the enemy.

In thick woods, complete clearing of a field of fire may not be desirable or possible in the time available. Riflemen and machine-gunners just thin undergrowth and remove lower branches of trees. Grenadiers must clear fields of fire on the ground and overhead.

- Cover and Concealment. Cover is protection from the fire of enemy weapons. It may be natural or manmade. Each soldier must use terrain to gain cover and concealment, and he must supplement natural cover and concealment with camouflage ([Figure 1-1](#)).



Figure 1-1. Cover.

Natural cover includes logs, trees, stumps, ravines, hollows, reverse slopes, etc. Manmade cover includes fighting positions, trenches, walls, rubble, abandoned equipment, and craters. Even the smallest depression or fold in the ground gives some cover. Soldiers must look for and use every bit of cover the terrain offers.

When the enemy approaches a defending platoon's position and brings it under direct and indirect fire, there must be cover to protect the troops. Natural cover is best as it is most difficult for the enemy to spot.

To increase the protection afforded by natural cover against enemy direct and indirect fire, soldiers build fighting positions. The type and extent of preparation will depend on the mission and the length of stay.

You should have your soldiers prepare a simple prone shelter first; then, as time allows, prepare a more fully developed position, up to a completed fighting position with overhead cover and trenches connecting it with other positions.

A fighting position, well placed and well built, gives the defender a big advantage over an attacker ([Figure 1-2](#)). It must:

- Protect Against - small arms fire, indirect fire fragments, tanks and antitank guided missile (ATGM) fire, and aerial and ground observation; and
- Provide For - mutual support with other fighting positions, observation, and a good field of fire.

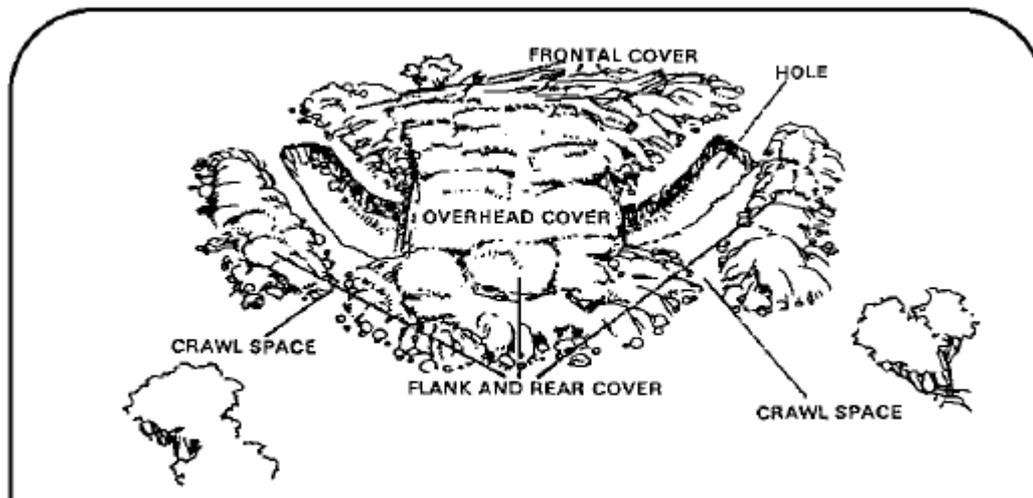


Figure 1-2. Fighting Position.

Protection from enemy weapons' effects reduces the chances of casualties.

As stated natural frontal cover (trees, rocks, logs, rubble, etc.) is best. Because, it is hard for the enemy to see a fighting position concealed by natural cover. Dirt from the hole may be used to improve protection. Bags of wet, packed sand also give good protection.

Frontal cover must be thick enough (at least 18 in/46 cm of dirt) to stop small arms fire, high enough to cover the heads of the men shooting from it, and far enough in front of the hole to allow room for elbow rests and sector stakes so that the men can fire to the oblique. It must be long enough to give cover to two men and to hide the muzzle blasts of their rifles when shooting to the oblique.

Positions should be made so that when they come under frontal fire, the troops can move behind the frontal cover and shoot to the oblique.

Complete protection comes from the addition of overhead, flank, and rear cover. This protects against indirect fire that bursts overhead or to the flanks or rear of the position and against the effects of friendly weapons supporting from the rear, for example small arm fire, or discarded sabots from tank gun rounds.

Crawl spaces are left in the rear cover to let soldiers enter and exit positions without exposing themselves.

The hole should not be too large. The smaller a position is, the less likely it is that enemy rounds, grenades, or airburst fragments will get into it. But, it should be large enough for two men in full combat gear. It should extend as far beyond the edges of the frontal protection as necessary to let the men fire to the front when not suppressed. The extension of the hole is usually straight, but may curve around the frontal protection if necessary.

No matter how much protection a position may have, the enemy may be able to defeat the defender if his position is easy to see. Positions must be so well hidden that the enemy will have a hard time seeing them even after he is in hand grenade range.

When moving, soldiers use a route which puts cover between the friendly unit and the places where the enemy is known or thought to be. They use ravines, gullies, hills, wooded areas, and other natural cover to keep the enemy from seeing and shooting at them. They avoid open fields. Units avoid skylining on hills and ridges. In a desert, rock formations and depressions are cover.

- Concealment. Concealment is anything that hides a soldier, unit, position, or equipment from enemy observation. Discipline in the control of camouflage, light, noise, and movement must be enforced. Well-hidden fighting positions help conceal a unit's location from the enemy ([Figure 1-3](#)).

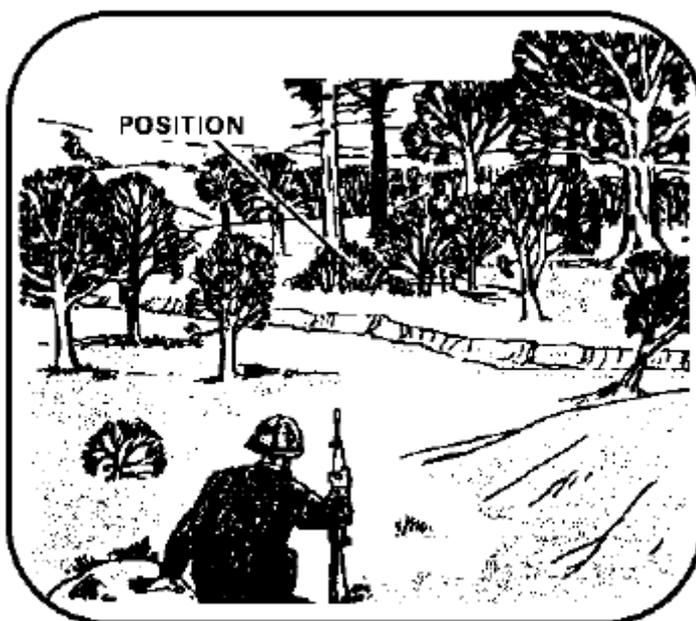


Figure 1-3. Concealment.

The best way to use natural concealments is to refrain from disturbing it when the unit moves into an area. Darkness alone does not hide a unit from an enemy who has night vision and other detection devices.

Camouflage involves using the environment and other natural and manmade material. Used well, it reduces the chance of detection by the enemy. If camouflage material is needed, it should be brought from outside the platoon's position. It can be branches, bushes, leaves, and grass. It can be attached to vehicles with old communications wire. Live foliage is best because dead foliage and manmade material may not blend with surroundings. Good camouflage will conceal places which at

first seem open and exposed.

- Obstacles (natural and manmade) (Figures 1-4 through 1-8). These stop, delay, or divert movement. Obstacles that can stop tanks and BMPs may not stop enemy troops on foot. Defending troops must reinforce natural obstacles, such as deep creeks, steep ravines, and dense brush, with wire and mines. If wire and mines are deployed in thick woods with large trees, enemy armor and infantry can be slowed or stopped. Troops must cover obstacles with fire. Obstacles that stop or slow armor include:
 - Slopes over 60 percent.

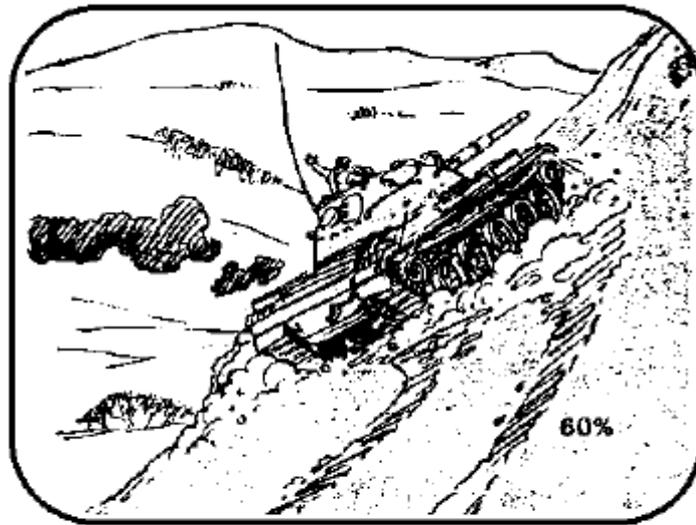


Figure 1-4. Slopes Over 60 Percent.

- Steep banks and walls over 1 1/2 meters high.

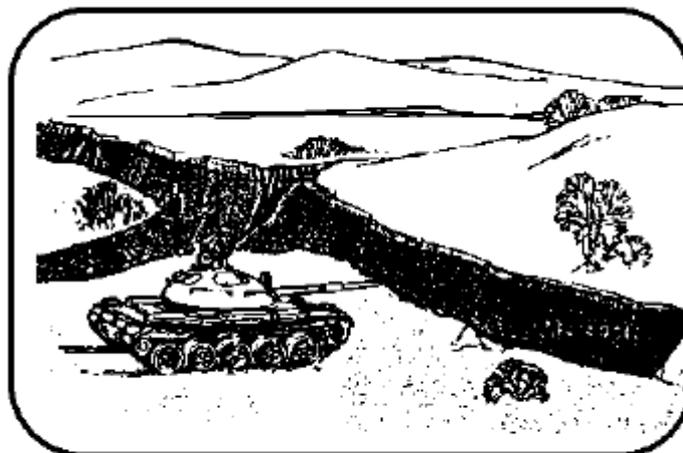


Figure 1-5. Steep Banks and Walls.

- Gullies, ravines, and ditches over 5 meters wide.

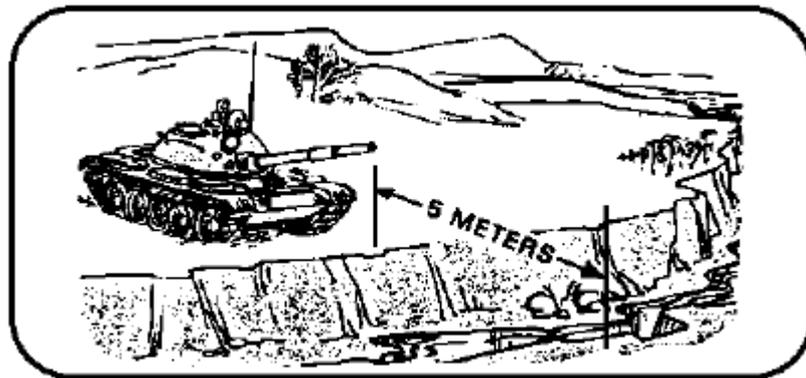


Figure 1-6. Gullies, Ravines, and Ditches.

- Trees 45 cm (18 in) thick or larger limit tank movement if the trees are close enough together to keep tanks from going between them. Smaller trees limit BMP movement. If they are close together or on a steep slope, they limit tank movement.

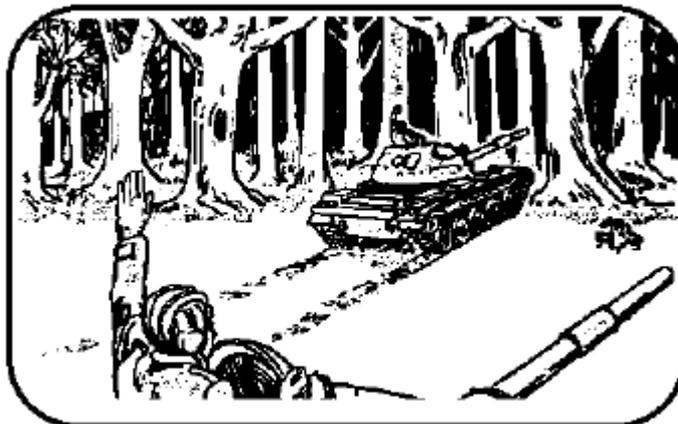


Figure 1-7. Trees.

- Streams, canals, and marshes stop vehicles and force the attacker to bypass or to build a means to cross.

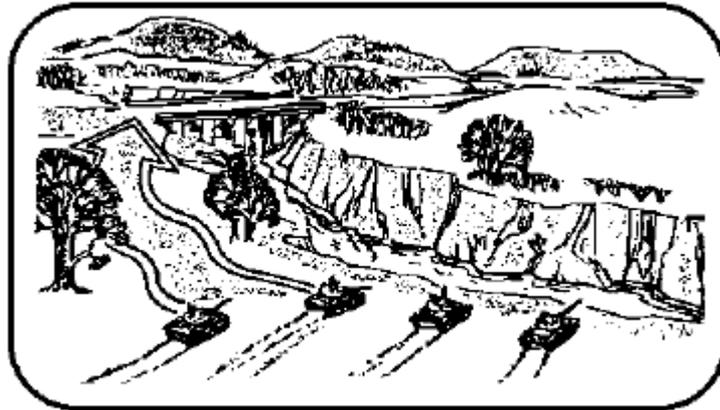


Figure 1-8. Streams, Canals, and Marshes.

- Key terrain. This is that which, if occupied, gives a marked advantage to the unit that holds it. A key terrain feature is any point or area whose seizure or control affords a marked advantage to either force. "Seizure" means physical occupation of the terrain by a force, whereas "control" may or may not include physical occupation. The selection of key terrain varies with the level of command, the type of unit, and the mission of the unit. Key terrain for a platoon's defense is that which has good observation and fields of fire. Key terrain (hills, roads, and fords) forward of the defensive position that may help attackers must be covered by fire. You and your forward observer (FO) must plan indirect fire on key terrain.
- Avenues of approach. You must analyze the avenues of approach into your position available to the enemy in terms of both foot and vehicle movement (roads, draws, or ridges). This is the basis for the deployment of men and weapons. You must also look at approaches which may be hard to traverse, but which may be used by the enemy to gain surprise.

The analysis of an avenue of approach is based on the following consideration:

- Observation and fire. (The avenue of approach provides favorable observation and fire for the force moving on it.)
- Concealment and cover. (The avenue of approach provides favorable conditions of concealment and cover. This consideration is frequently in conflict with the preceding one.)
- Obstacles. (The avenue of approach avoids obstacles that are perpendicular to the direction of advance and, whenever practical, takes advantage of those that are parallel to the direction of advance.)
- Use of key terrain.
- Adequate maneuver space.
- Ease of movement.

The analysis of an avenue of approach is based solely on terrain considerations.

3. Summary.

This concludes the discussion on Analyzing the military aspects of terrain in the defense. During this portion of the subcourse we discussed how you should analyze terrain on which you will defend, and the importance of cover and concealment, as well as the use of obstacles. We will now move to the next phase which is defense control measures.

PART C - DEFENSE CONTROL MEASURES

1. General.

Leaders use graphic control measures together with oral orders to prescribe how the defense is to be conducted. The control measures in [Figure 1-9](#) are the ones you will use:

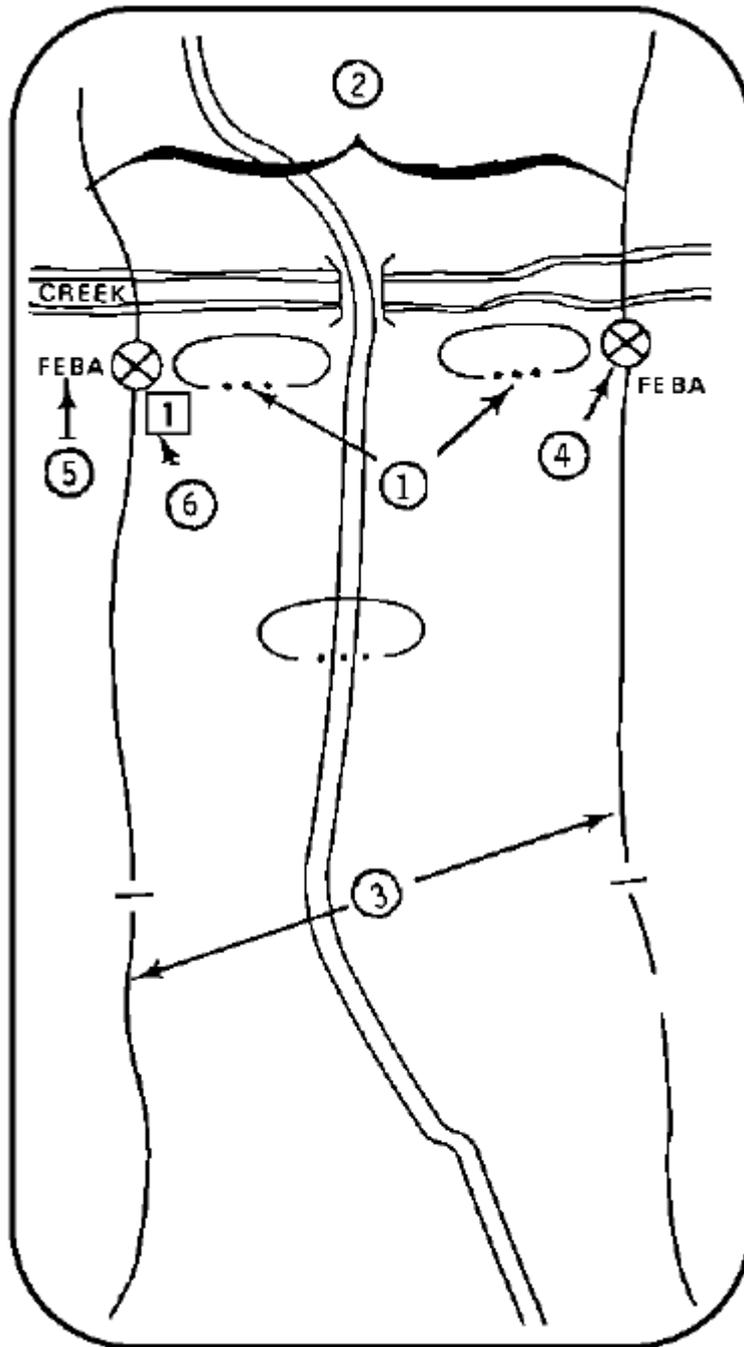


Figure 1-9. Control Measures.

- 1. Battle Position. This is the position on which a unit defends. A unit assigned a battle position is located within the general outline of the battle position. Some security elements may operate outside the battle position for early warning.

- 2. Sector. This is a defensive area designated by boundaries within which a unit operates and for which it is responsible. Companies may be assigned sectors but platoons normally are given battle positions.
- 3. Boundaries. Boundaries are used to delineate areas of responsibility of companies and higher. Platoons are not normally assigned boundaries. A unit may cross a boundary after coordinating with the adjacent unit. Units may not shoot indirect fire across boundaries without approval of the unit on the other side of the boundary. They may shoot direct fire across boundaries at positively identified enemy targets.
- 4. Coordinating Point. These are places on boundaries which serve two purposes. They indicate the ground trace of the forward edge of the battle area (FEBA), and they are the places where adjacent leaders coordinate and tie in the defense for mutual support.
- 5. Forward Edge of the Battle Area (FEBA). This is the foremost limits of the main battle area along which defending ground combat units (excluding the security force) are deployed.
- 6. Contact Point. A contact point is a place on the ground where two or more units must make physical contact.

2. Summary:

This completes lesson one. You should know how to identify and analyze the fundamentals of defense and other considerations, how to analyze the military aspects of terrain in the defense and how to identify control measures for the defense. After reviewing all the material in this lesson, you should complete the practice exercise for lesson one. Answers and feedback for the questions in the practice exercise will be provided to show you where further study is required.