

LESSON THREE

COORDINATING WITH ADJACENT PLATOONS, AND EXECUTING A PLATOON DEFENSE

Soldiers Manual Tasks:

071-326-5775 Coordinate with adjacent platoons.
071-430-0006 Conduct a rifle platoon defense.

OVERVIEW

Task Coordinate with Adjacent Platoons; and Execute a Platoon Defense.
Description:

TASKS: Identify how to coordinate with adjacent platoons, and how to execute a rifle platoon defense.

CONDITIONS: You will be given the subcourse material for this lesson, and a training scenario. You will complete the practice exercise at the end of this lesson.

STANDARDS: The student will demonstrate his comprehension and knowledge by identifying how to coordinate with adjacent platoons, and how to execute a rifle platoon defense.

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

PART A - COORDINATE WITH ADJACENT PLATOONS

1. General.

Coordination is normally conducted from left to right, and from front to rear. You, as the platoon leader, coordinate with adjacent platoons, and your squad leaders coordinate with adjacent squads, to see that all positions and all units are mutually supporting. This coordination will also ensure that any gaps between units are covered by either fire, observation, patrols, OPs or sensors. Information exchanged includes:

- Location of primary, alternate, and supplementary positions and sectors of fire of machineguns, Dragons, and subordinate units.
- Location of deadspace between units and how to cover it.
- Location of OPs.

- Location and types of obstacles and how to cover them.
- Patrols to be conducted to include their size, type, time of departure and return, and routes.

You must coordinate with adjacent platoon-size elements well enough to:

- Insure that no gaps exist between your element and an adjacent element.
- Insure that the fires of your element and an adjacent element are interlocking.
- Insure that movement routes, in the offense, will allow mutual support by fire and/or maneuver.

When you receive an order for a defensive operation and begin your planning phase, you must consider coordination with adjacent elements. If you receive the order while all other platoon-size-element leaders are present, take the opportunity to coordinate as much as possible to avoid delays later in the operation. While many of the details that must be coordinated will vary with the situation, essential items must always be coordinated.

In the defense, you must coordinate to insure that there are no gaps, and that fires interlock and are mutually supporting. Information coordinated includes:

- Location of positions (primary, alternate, and supplementary).
- Location of key weapons.
- Sectors of fire.
- Deadspace between units.
- Location of observation posts (OPs).
- Signals.
- Patrols and ambushes (size, type, time of departure and a return, and routes).
- Location and types of obstacles.

If a final protective fire is allocated to your platoon, it must be coordinated with the FIST FO and be integrated into your platoon's fire plan for the element.

2. Summary.

This concludes the discussion on coordinating with adjacent platoons. During this portion of the subcourse we discussed the importance of coordinating to ensure no gaps exist, and fires are interlocked. We will now move to the next phase which is executing a rifle platoon defense.

PART B - EXECUTE A RIFLE PLATOON DEFENSE

1. General.

The conduct of a defense by a forward platoon starts when the platoon sees and shoots at the enemy. As the enemy advances, he is brought under an increasing volume of fire. Men in OPs report information about the enemy, and the FO calls for and adjusts indirect fire. When the enemy's advance threatens the OPs, they are withdrawn by you.

All leaders and the FO search for indirect fire targets. If no enemy armor appears, Dragons may shoot at other vehicles or crewserved weapons. If no suitable targets appear, Dragon gunners withhold their fire and shoot their rifles. Machinegunners, automatic riflemen, riflemen, and grenadiers shoot at targets in their sectors.

The rate of fire should increase as the enemy approaches the platoon position. If tanks and infantry are attacking, fire is placed to force tanks to button up, and to separate foot troops from tanks.

If attacking formations are not broken up forward of the platoon's position, the enemy will assault. You then call for your FPF. Machineguns that have an FPL shoot on the FPL. Those that do not have an FPL shoot along their PDF. Mortars and artillery shoot FPF. All other weapons shoot during the firing of the FPF. They shoot until the assault has been halted. A prearranged signal, such as a flare, is used to stop the firing when the assault has been halted. An FPF expends a lot of ammunition, therefore, it should not be called for unless necessary to stop an enemy assault from closing on the position. If the enemy gets through the FPF, he is repelled by close combat. If the platoon is threatened from the flanks or rear, you may move your troops to fight from supplementary positions.

If the enemy is repelled, local security is again sent out and patrols may be sent forward to retain contact. Indirect fire is called on areas where the enemy is likely to regroup. Squads reorganize. Your platoon sergeant controls the evacuation of seriously wounded casualties, and the redistribution and resupply of ammunition. Troops make repairs on positions and continue to improve them.

During the conduct of the defense, all leaders keep their next higher commander informed. You and your squad leaders do not fire except in close combat or when the fire is required. You and the squad leaders may fire to point out a target or as a signal to open fire. The main concern is with directing and controlling the fire of the men and any supporting fire.

There are several important activities leaders must concern themselves with during the defense, leaders must:

- Supervise to see that the security system is followed.
- Control and direct fire.
- Call for and adjust supporting fire.
- Move men within the platoon position.
- Provide more ammunition and equipment as needed.
- Reorganize and reestablish the defense during lulls in combat.

2. Conduct of the Defense when Visibility is Poor.

When visibility is poor, patrols, OPs and night vision devices help detect the advance of the enemy.

Local security elements report the enemy's advance and call for illumination and supporting fire. As in a daylight defense, troops in OPs are withdrawn before they become engaged in close combat.

As the enemy approaches, illumination and night vision devices are used to detect him. Tripflares give warning and some illumination. When surprise is desired, troops fire on order only. As a rule, troops do not shoot until targets are visible. Strict fire control is needed to prevent the disclosure of fighting positions. Machineguns and Dragons use night vision devices and range cards. All troops use aiming stakes. If the company commander has used mortars or artillery to provide illumination, your platoon can add to this as required with grenade launchers using illuminating rounds.

3. Reserve Of A Forward Rifle Company.

If a forward company has a reserve, it may be positioned in the rear of the forward platoons. The reserve may be a platoon, one or two squads, or formed from available personnel in the company headquarters or weapons platoon. It adds depth to the company's defense. The commander gives the reserve a primary position and one or more supplementary positions. It may move from one position to another as required. If your platoon has been designated as the reserve, it may have one or more of the following missions, generally assigned in a priority:

- Block penetrations.
- Secure the company flanks and rear.
- Support a forward platoon by fire.
- Man OPs and conduct security patrols.
- Prepare to counterattack.
- Evacuate prisoners.

You organize a reserve position in about the same manner as that of a forward platoon or squad. As it has a greater area of responsibility, and because it will have more avenues of approach to cover, it normally has one machinegun on each flank. The machineguns do not have FPLs. As the reserve, you normally plan no indirect FPF. Except for that, the fire plan is the same as that of a forward platoon or squad.

The reserve CP-OP is where you can best see your area of responsibility and control your fire. It should have observation of the forward platoons' positions and the company flanks and rear.

You post local security just like a forward platoon or squad.

4. Missions of the Reserve.

- Block Penetrations. Your reserve platoon blocks an enemy penetration by fire ([Figure 3-1](#)). The forward platoons help by shooting across the neck and flanks of the penetration. They continue to hold their flanks. When you are blocking a penetration, a counterattack to eject the penetrating force is usually made by the battalion reserve. Indirect fire helps to contain

and reduce the penetration.

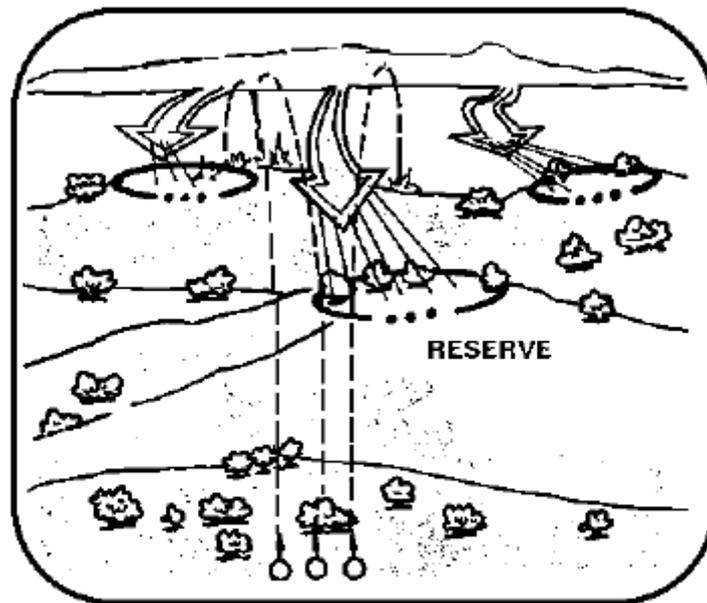


Figure 3-1. Block Penetrations.

- Secure the Company Flanks and Rear. You prepare supplementary positions to protect the company flanks and rear. The company commander tells you which approaches to block. To protect a flank, the reserve's position must tie in with the supplementary positions of the forward platoons and with adjacent units. Your reserve platoon may have to take a position to protect a flank when the sector of an adjacent company has been penetrated. ([Figure 3-2](#)).

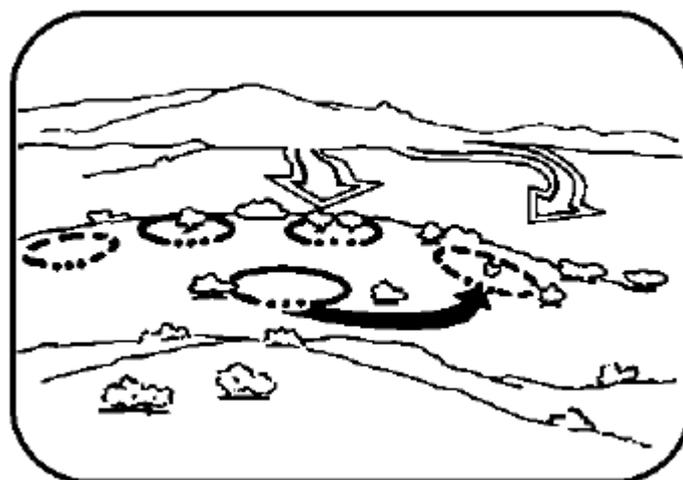


Figure 3-2. Secure Flanks.

- Support a Forward Platoon by Fire. For this mission, your reserve platoon is positioned where it can shoot into unoccupied areas between forward platoons and on their flanks and rear. The position must be close enough to the forward platoon's primary position so that it can hit enemy troops that penetrate that position. Your platoon is normally kept intact and is

moved by the company commander as the situation dictates. (Figure 3-3).

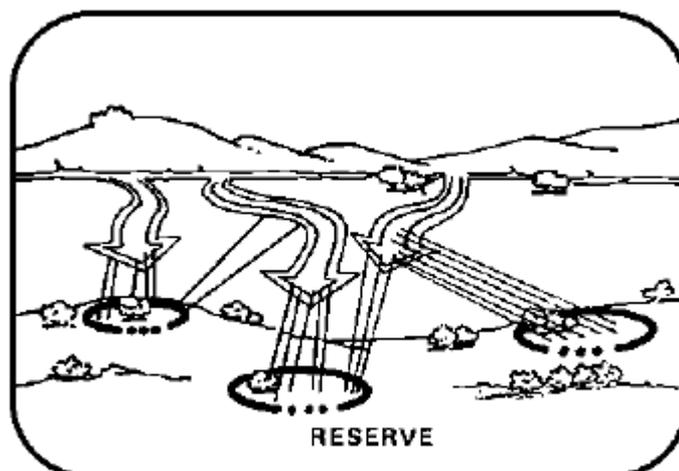


Figure 3-3. Support Forward Platoon.

- OPs and Security Patrols. The commander prescribes what security and surveillance responsibilities the reserve will have. These may require the use of guards, OPs, and security patrols. You may have nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) detection devices, night vision devices, tripflares, antipersonnel mines, and noisemaking devices for early warning. You may post guards for the company CP, mortar squads, and crews of supporting weapons in the company sector. OPs watch unoccupied parts of the company sector. They watch avenues of approach and key terrain. Security patrols reconnoiter those areas which cannot be seen by other means and keep contact with adjacent units. They can also be a means of communications between OPs (Figure 3-4).

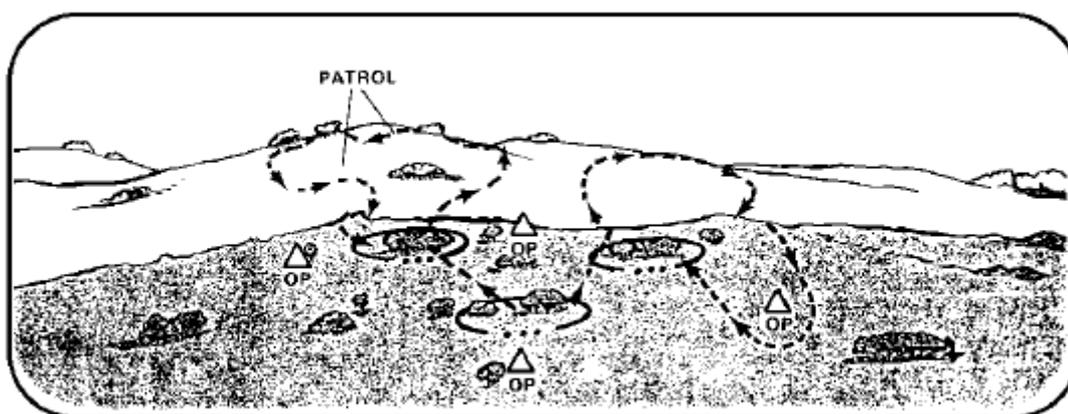


Figure 3-4. Observation Posts and Security Patrols.

- Counterattack. The objective of a counterattack is normally to destroy the enemy in a penetration or eject him from the penetration. You plan a counterattack on one or more likely penetrations. Each is a complete attack plan. Each has a tentative objective and a direction of attack. A plan may have an line of departure (LD) and an attack position. With time, each counterattack plan is rehearsed. At least, a dry run or walkthrough of the attack is done. This helps inform the forward platoons of the plans. You conduct your other tasks until the

counterattack order is given. Your platoon must then attack with speed and fury. It must be given massed fire support ([Figure 3-5](#)).

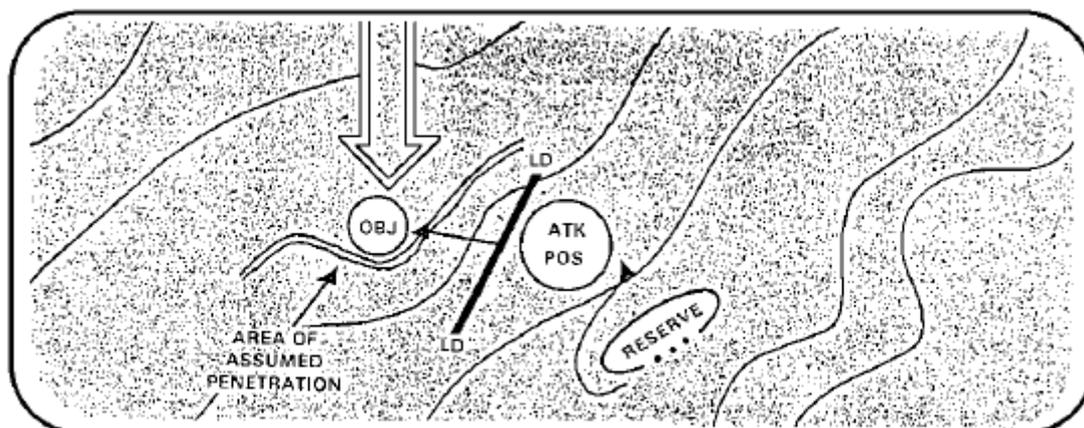


Figure 3-5. Counterattack.

5. Planning.

Your planning as the leader of the reserve is much the same as that by the forward platoon or squad, with these exceptions:

- Because of the variety of missions and positions which the reserve may have, reconnaissance and planning are more extensive.
- Coordination must be made with all nearby units.
- You must know the defensive plans of forward platoons and adjacent companies.

6. Preparation and Conduct of the Defense by the Reserve.

The preparation of the reserve's positions is much the same as that of a forward platoon or squad, with these exceptions:

- Because of the number of supplementary positions, the reserve may work on two or more positions at the same time. The positions are continually improved. The reserve occupies its primary position and is ready to move to supplementary positions at any time.
- You must be able to assemble your troops quickly from widely separated positions at any time.

7. Other Positioning Techniques.

When your platoon is defending, you may have to deviate from the defense pattern described in Part A lesson one. Such deviations may include defending on a reserve slope, in a perimeter, or as a roadblock.

- **Defense On A Reverse Slope.** An infantry company may organize a defense on the reverse slope of a hill. This defense is on that part of a hill or ridge which is masked by the crest from enemy direct fire and ground observation. The crest must be controlled either by fire or

by physical occupation.

Your platoon may defend from a reverse slope position when:

- the forward slope can not be occupied because of enemy fire,
- the terrain on the reverse slope affords better fields of fire than the forward slope,
- possession of the forward slope is not essential for observation, or
- defense from the reverse slope will deceive and surprise the enemy.

The advantages of defending from a reverse slope are:

- Enemy ground observation of the position is masked.
- There is more freedom of movement on the position due to the enemy's lack of ground observation.
- Enemy direct fire weapons cannot hit the position.
- Enemy indirect fire is less effective because of lack of observation.
- The defender gains surprise.

Disadvantages of defending from a reverse slope are:

- Fields of fire and observation for direct fire are probably short.
- The enemy may seize the high ground in an attack and his assault will then be downhill.

Forward platoons are positioned from 200 to 500 meters from the crest of the hill where they can have the best fields of fire and still have the advantages of the reverse slope.

If it can be in supporting distance, an overwatching platoon is positioned on the forward slope of the next high ground to the rear.

Indirect FPFs are planned on or short of the crest of the hill to deny that area to the enemy and to help break up his assault as he crosses the crest.

You position OPs on, or just forward of, the crest to watch the whole platoon sector of fire. The OPs may vary in size from two men to a squad reinforced with machineguns and antitank weapons ([Figure 3-6](#)).

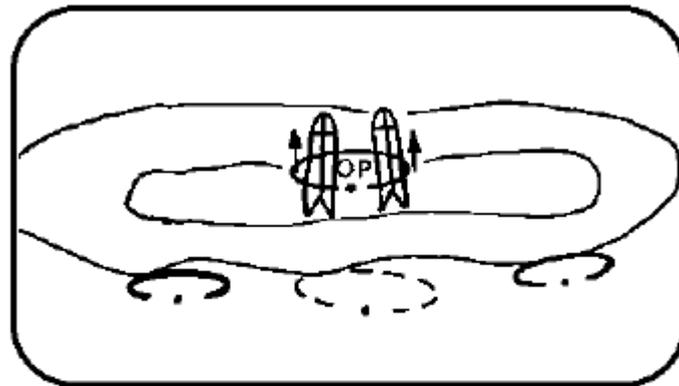


Figure 3-7. Observation Post.

You position machineguns and automatic rifles where they can shoot the most effective surprise fire on the enemy as he crosses the crest. You must also plan machinegun FPLs as in a defense of a forward slope.

The conduct of the defense from a reverse slope is generally the same as from a forward slope. However, the OPs forward of the position not only give warning of the enemy's advance but delay, deceive, and disorganize him by fire. They withdraw before they are closely engaged with the enemy. Machineguns with the OPs withdraw first so they can occupy their primary fighting positions before the enemy reaches the crest. As the OPs withdraw, indirect fire hits on the forward slope and on the crest of the hill to slow the advance of the enemy. Troops in primary positions hold their fire until the enemy crosses the crest. As the enemy moves over the crest of the hill, he is hit by all available fire.

- Perimeter Defense. Preparing a perimeter defense is the same as discussed in Part C, lesson one, with these exceptions:
 - The trace of the front is circular rather than linear.
 - Unoccupied areas between squads are generally smaller.
 - The flanks of the squads are bent back conform to the plan.
- Defense of A Roadblock. A roadblock stops or slows enemy movement beyond a point on a road. It usually incorporates an obstacle that is covered by fire.

Roadblocks may be employed to the front, flank, and rear of friendly units. They are employed most in delay and withdrawal operations and against enemy exploitation. The defensive position should allow fields of fire which cover the approaches to the obstacle to keep it from being breached.

The friendly defensive position should be inaccessible to the attacker ([Figure 3-7](#)).

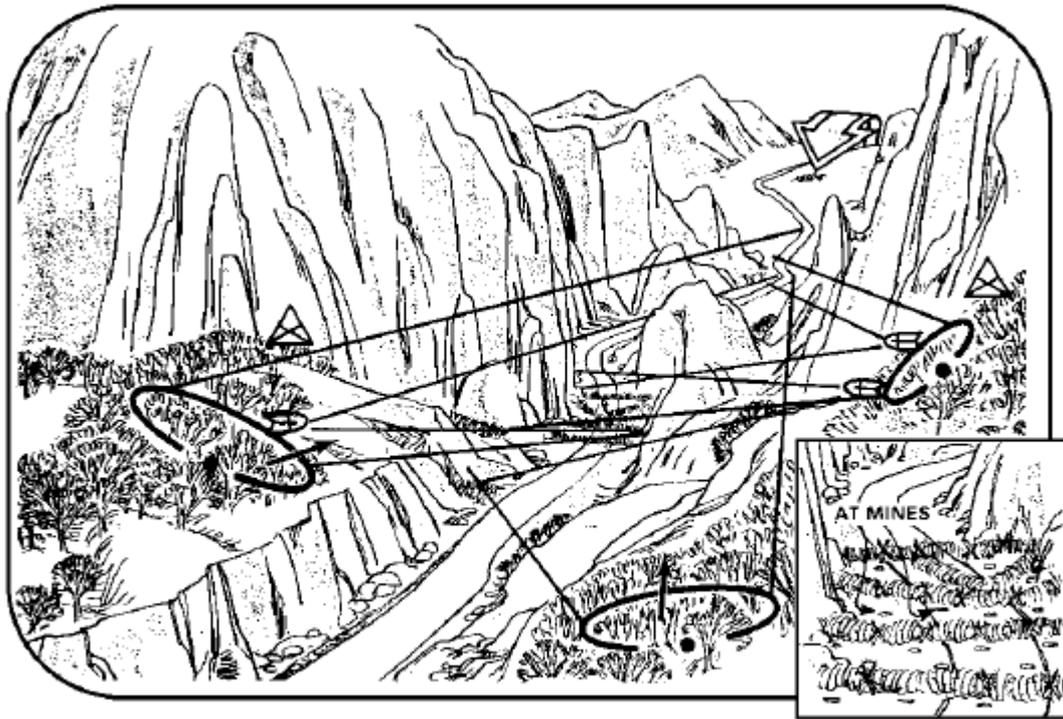


Figure 3-7. Roadblock.

- Characteristics of a Roadblock:
 - Blocks an avenue of approach. It should be difficult to bypass.
 - Takes advantage of natural obstacles. A roadblock is best positioned where movement to its flanks or around it is restricted by natural obstacles, for example, cliffs, swamps, rivers, towns. Manmade obstacles can be built to tie in with and reinforce natural obstacles.
 - Gains surprise. To gain surprise, an obstacle can be placed near a sharp bend in the road, just over the crest of a hill, or where a road passes through a heavily wooded area. Troops and manmade obstacles must remain concealed until it is too late for the advancing enemy to react well. Mines, demolitions, and cratering charges are effective, easily concealed obstacles. They can be quickly armed or disarmed as the situation changes.

- Secure routes to the rear. Secure routes ease resupply and withdrawal ([Figure 3-8](#)). You must insure that withdrawal routes remain secure in order to permit resupply and rapid withdrawal.



Figure 3-8. Secure Routes.

- Planning the Roadblock. On receipt of the mission, you follow the troop leading procedure. You plan for:
 - the positioning of squads and weapons where they can cover the obstacle and surrounding area in order to prevent the enemy from breaching or going around the obstacle;
 - the positioning of manmade obstacles to reinforce the natural obstacles;
 - fire to support the defense (this includes planning for smoke to conceal the withdrawal);
 - the disengagement and withdrawal of the platoon (successive reward positions are planned to allow reward fire and maneuver or bounding overwatch); and
 - all other aspects of a regular defense.

- Conduct of the Defense of a Roadblock. As the enemy nears the roadblock, OPs warn the leader. On order, the OPs withdraw on planned routes to the defensive positions.

To achieve surprise, the defending force does not prematurely disclose its position. It waits for the enemy to reach the obstacle before it shoots. At that time, it shoots direct and indirect fire on the enemy and the approaches to the obstacle.

As the enemy deploys, the rate of direct and indirect fire is increased to break up his formations ([Figure 3-9](#)).

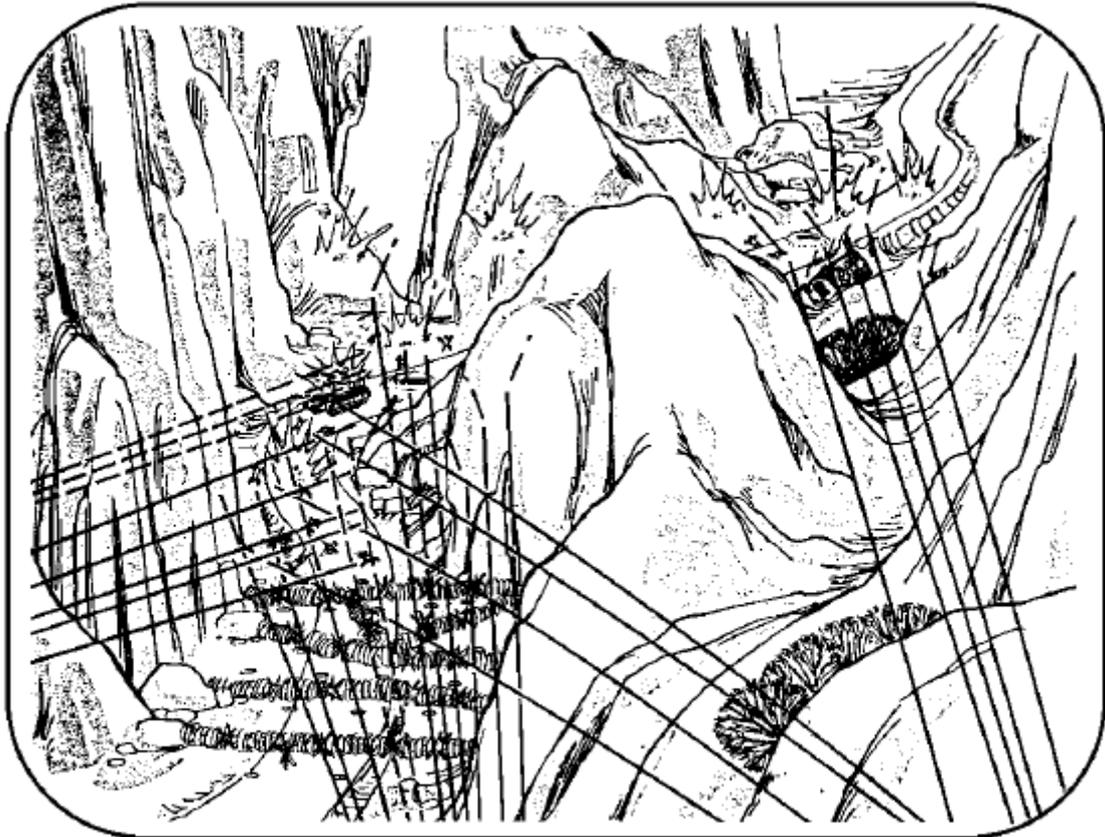


Figure 3-9. Increase Fire.

8. Withdrawal.

In a withdrawal, a company disengages from the enemy and repositions for some other mission. That mission may be to delay the enemy, to defend another position, or to attack some place else.

There are two types of withdrawals: not under pressure and under pressure.

In a withdrawal not under pressure, a company disengages and moves to its rear while the enemy is not attacking ([Figure 3-10](#)). Platoons must be ready to fight their way to the rear or to resume the defense should the enemy attack.

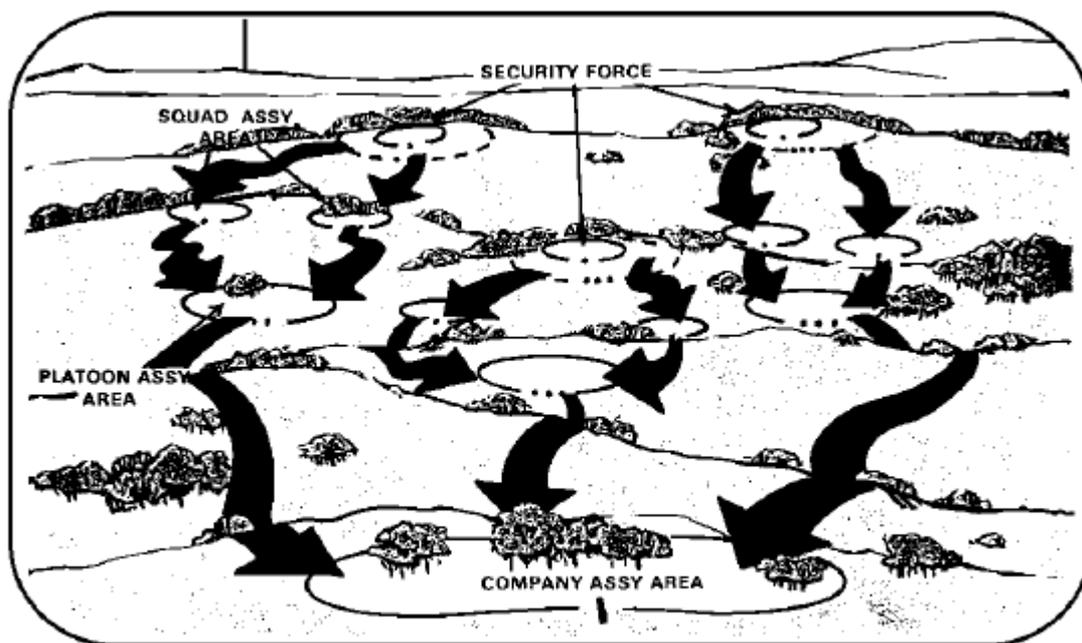


Figure 3-10. Withdrawal Not Under Pressure.

In a withdrawal under pressure, a company disengages and moves to its rear while the enemy is attacking. Platoons disengage by fighting their way to the rear.

9. Withdrawal Not Under Pressure.

A withdrawal not under pressure is conducted with speed, secrecy, and deception. It is best done at night or during other periods of reduced visibility (fog, snow, rain, or smoke). Usually, all platoons move to the rear at the same time. The company leaves a security force to cover the withdrawal by deception and by fire and maneuver when required.

10. Security Force.

The size, composition, and mission of the company security force are directed by the company commander. He will also designate the security force commander, normally the company executive officer or a platoon leader.

The company commander may decide to leave one platoon as the company security force or have each platoon leave a platoon security force. The three platoon security forces then make up the company security force.

If your platoon is selected as the company security force, you must reposition squads and weapons to cover the company's withdrawal ([Figure 3-11](#)). This normally includes repositioning a squad in each of the other platoon positions to cover the most dangerous avenue of approach into that position, and repositioning weapons to cover the most dangerous avenues of approach into the company's position.

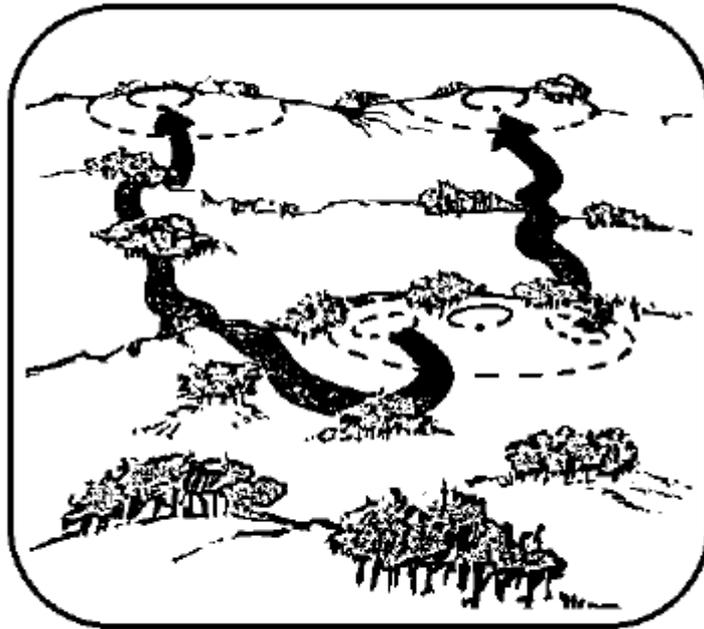


Figure 3-11. Repositioning Squads.

If each platoon is to have a security force, it normally consists of one squad, one machinegun, and two Dragons. The platoon security force leader is normally the squad leader of the squad left in position. When the withdrawal starts, each platoon security force comes under the control of the company security force commander.

The security force strives to conceal the withdrawal and deceive the enemy by continuing the normal operating patterns of the company. If the enemy attacks during the withdrawal, the security force covers the withdrawal by fire. Once the company is at its next position or a designed distance from the old positions, the company security force commander will order withdrawal of the security force. These orders should be given by telephone or codeword over the radio. The security force withdraws using the same basic plan as the company main body did. If under attack, the security force may have to conduct fire and maneuver to the rear until contact is broken and then assemble to move to the rear.

11. Quartering Party.

The company commander may send a quartering party to the next position before the withdrawal starts. This party is normally made up of company headquarters troops, and representatives from each platoon. Platoon representatives are usually the platoon sergeant and a guide for each squad.

When at the next position, the platoon representative reconnoiter and, as appropriate, pick positions, sectors, routes, and OPs for the platoon. When the platoon arrives, the squad guides meet and guide their squads into position. Your platoon sergeant will meet and brief you on the position and any other important information.

12. Planning.

The company commander normally tells his platoon leaders:

- when the withdrawal will start;
- where the company assembly area is and what each platoon is to do upon arrival in it (when the company is assembled, it moves under its commander's control to the next position);
- where each platoon assembly area is;
- what route to take from the platoon assembly area to the company assembly area;
- the size, composition, and commander of the security force; and
- what the company's and platoons' next missions are.

Based on the information received from the company commander, you and the platoon leader plan for and tell their squad leaders:

- when the withdrawal will start;
- where the platoon assembly area is and what each squad is to do on arrival in it;
- where the squad assembly areas are;
- what routes to take from the squad assembly areas to the platoon assembly area;
- the size, composition, and commander of the security force; and
- what the platoon's and squads' next mission are.

13. Withdrawal Under Pressure.

A withdrawal under pressure is conducted when a company is forced from its defensive positions by the enemy. The company may move to other positions to continue the defense or disengage and move elsewhere for another mission. Each platoon tries to disengage from the enemy by fire and maneuver to the rear. Once a platoon has disengaged and moved to the rear of its original position, the company commander will direct what it is to do next. This may include covering the rearward movement of other platoons, occupying a new defensive position, or moving to perform another mission.

14. Sequence of Withdrawal.

The company commander controls the sequence in which platoons withdraw. His decision on which to withdraw first is usually based on where the enemy attacks and how heavily each platoon is engaged. Once the company must withdraw, he normally withdraws the least heavily engaged platoon first. This platoon then disengages and moves into a position where it can overwatch the disengagement of the more heavily engaged platoons. The platoons then change roles and leapfrog to the rear using fire and maneuver ([Figure 3-12](#)).

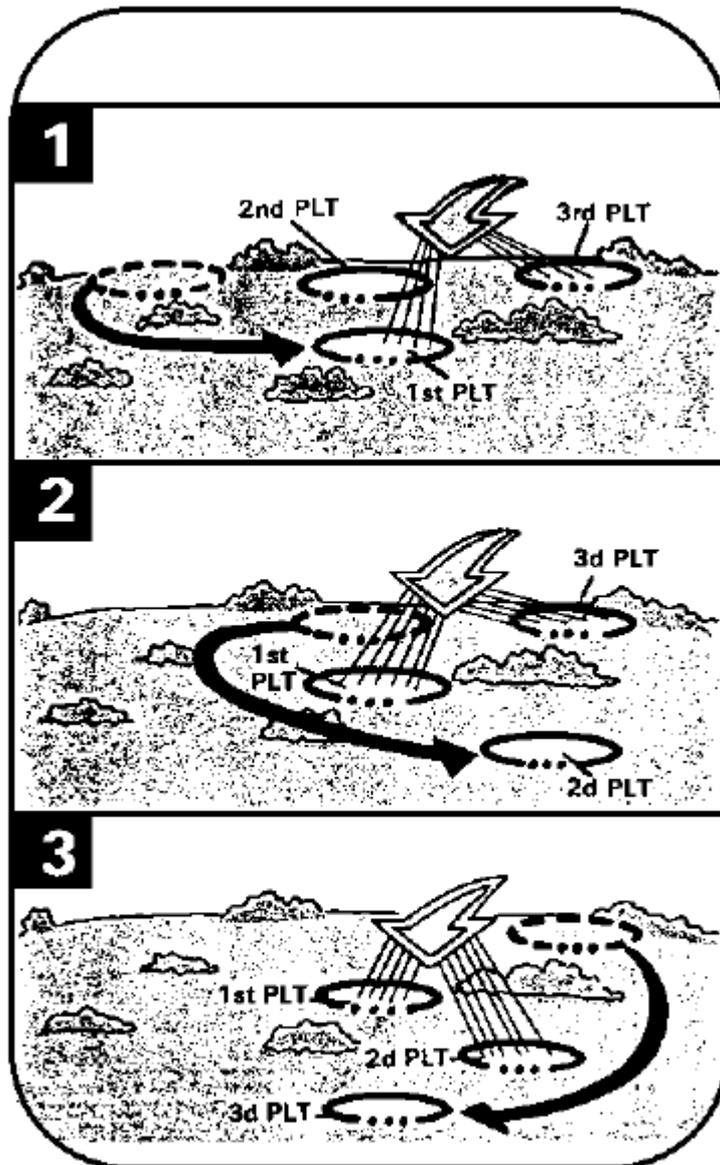


Figure 3-12. Withdrawal Under Pressure.

15. Methods of Disengagement.

Platoons have three basic methods of disengaging from the enemy; by thinning the lines, by fire teams, and by squads. Fire and maneuver and bounding overwatch are keys to each method. The degree of, and level at which, fire and maneuver and bounding overwatch take place depends on how closely the enemy follows and the pressure he applies.

- Disengagement by Thinning the Lines. The first stage of the fire and maneuver rearward is in the squads. Squad and team leaders have men move rearward singly to where each takes a firing position to cover the move of the other as they, in turn, move back ([Figure 3-13](#)).



Figure 3-13. By Thinning the Lines.

- Disengagement by Fire Teams. If enemy fire is such that thinning the lines is not necessary, or if, after having moved back far enough, it becomes no longer necessary, squads move back by fire teams. One fires and one moves. They alternate roles with each move ([Figure 3-14](#)).

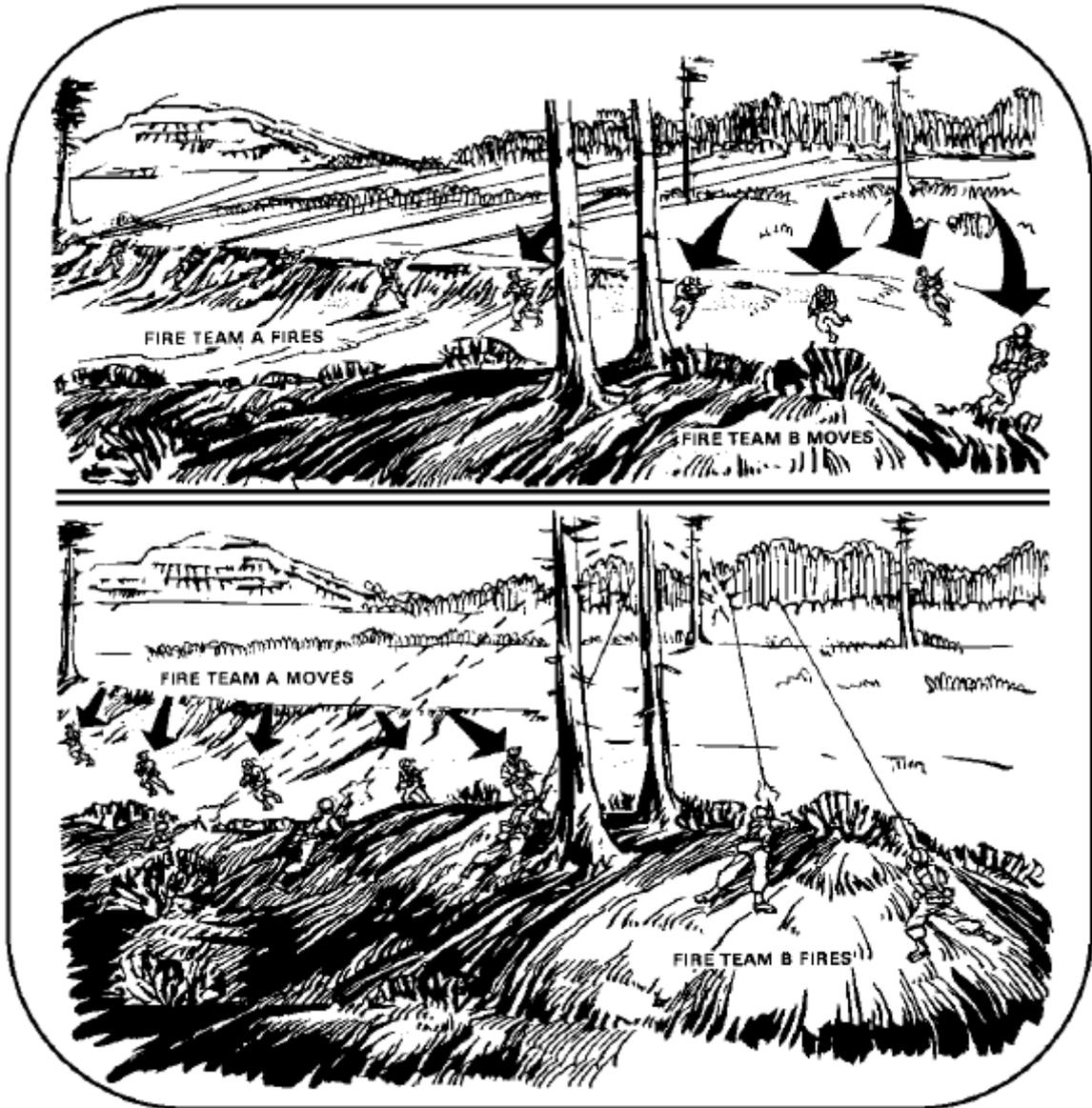


Figure 3-14. By Fire Teams.

- Disengagement by Squad. If enemy fire is such that fire and maneuver by fire teams is unnecessary, or if squads have moved back to a point where it is no longer necessary, the platoon moves back by squads. You have each squad, in turn, move back covered by the fire of the others ([Figure 3-15](#)).

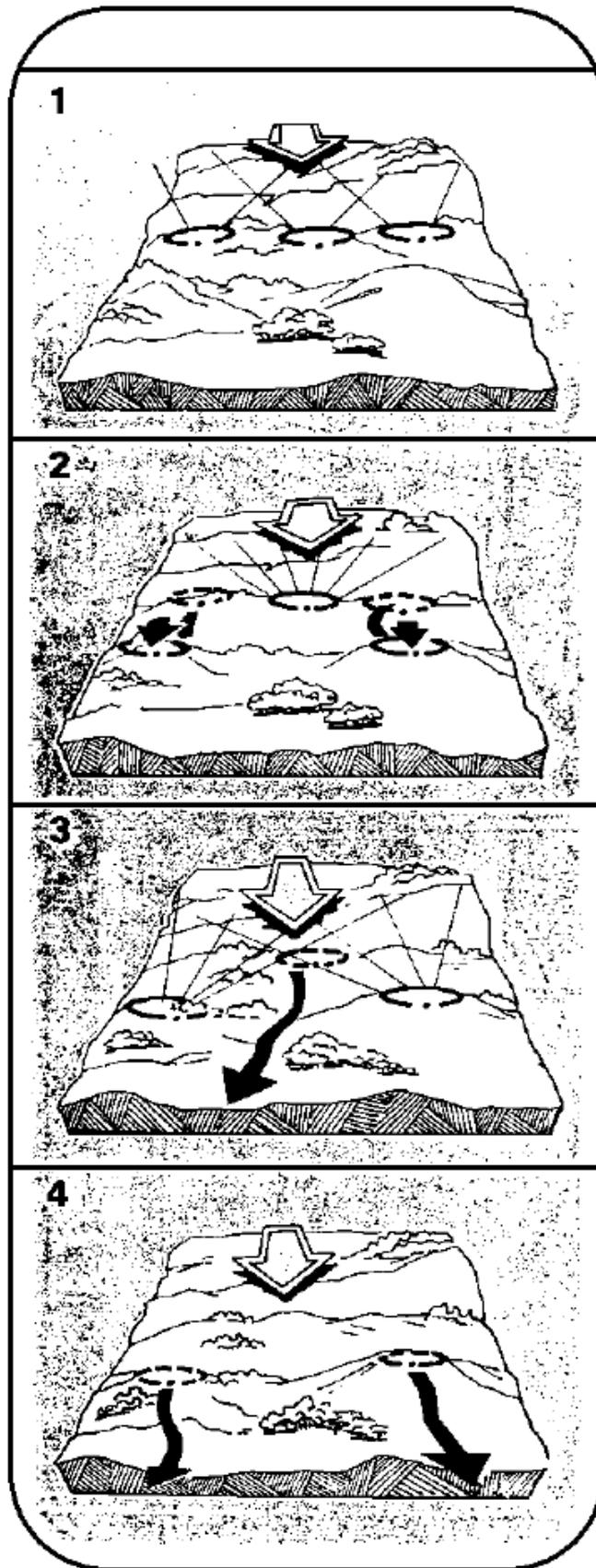


Figure 3-15. By Squads.

Your platoon may use all three of these methods as it moves rearward. As enemy fire on it lessens, the platoon changes to the next faster method of disengagement (first by thinning the lines, then by fire team, and then by squads). It uses only those methods (or that method) which are necessary for its safety while moving.

At some point in this action, your the platoon can stop fire and maneuver. It will then continue its withdrawal by bounding overwatch (to the rear). This occurs when the platoon is no longer under enemy direct fire or when another platoon is covering its move. Once disengagement is complete, the platoon moves as directed by the company commander.

16. Delay.

In a delay, a unit trades space for time. The intent is to slow the enemy, cause enemy casualties, and, if possible, stop him without becoming decisively engaged. This is basically done by defending, disengaging, moving, and defending again. Platoons do not conduct delays independently but fight as part of their company in a delay.

17. Quartering Party.

As explained in the withdrawal not under pressure, the company commander may use a quartering party to reconnoiter the positions to the rear and to help the platoons on arrival at each position. This aids preparation and occupation of positions and eases supply problems.

18. Planning.

The company commander, platoon leaders, and squad leaders reconnoiter positions and routes as much as possible before the delay starts. The company commander normally gives each platoon:

- an initial position to defend;
- subsequent positions to the rear;
- a platoon assembly area behind each position where the platoon moves after disengagement;
- the location of the company assembly area, when used;
- a general route to follow from position to position;
- his plan to conduct the defense, disengagement, and movement; and
- instructions about the quartering party, when used.

19. Disengagement.

The company and platoons disengage from the enemy as described in a withdrawal under pressure. Once disengagement is complete, a platoon either moves to its assembly area and then to the company assembly area, or it moves directly to its next position and defends again. The method used will be specified by the company commander.

20. Control.

The company commander controls the conduct of the delay. You and the other platoon leaders must keep him informed of all enemy activity and the condition of his platoon. If communications are lost with the company commander, you must use your judgment and disengage only when seriously endangered or according to the company plan. If you act independently, you immediately take steps to notify the company commander of the platoon's actions.

This completes lesson three. You should know how to coordinate with adjacent platoons and execute a platoon defense including defending when visibility is poor, as the reserve of a forward rifle company, defending on a reverse slope, and a roadblock. Withdrawal and delay operations were also discussed. After reviewing all the material in this lesson, you should complete the practice exercise for lesson three. Answer and feedback for the questions in the practice exercise will be provided to show you where further study is required.