

**THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia**

**STUDENT MONOGRAPH
Advanced Infantry Officers Course
Class #1
1953-54**

**TITLE
DEFENSE ON A WIDE FRONT**

Capt Stephen E. Lance

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Preface	ii
Introduction	1
Discussion	3
Conclusions	10
Bibliography	11
Appendix	12

PREFACE

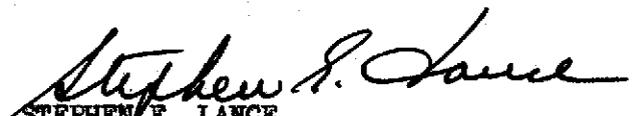
It is hoped that this study can help overcome some of the reluctance on the part of commanders, both high and low level, to extend frontages beyond the limits presently set forth as doctrine, by indicating some of the methods which can be used to make such a defense not only workable but highly successful.

I would like to express my appreciation to the staff of the Infantry School Library whose unselfish and untiring efforts have helped immeasurably in the gathering of material for this study.

Although there are many references listed in the bibliography having a classification of Confidential and higher, these were used solely as background material. Any mention of these references was carefully avoided in the text, to allow this study to be more readily available to a wider dissemination than would be possible if it contained extracts of highly classified material.

Except as noted, the views and opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official doctrine of either the Department of the Army or of The Infantry School on this subject.

7 December 1953


STEPHEN E. LANCE
Captain, Infantry

INTRODUCTION

It has been evident for some time that there is a need for an overall evaluation of our defensive doctrine insofar as standard, or normal, frontages are concerned. For many years we have put forth the doctrine of three hundred to six hundred (300-600) yards as the normal frontage for a platoon, successively higher units having frontages in proportion, and eventually arriving at a frontage of from twenty-four to forty-eight hundred (2400-4800) yards for a regiment.

Indications that a revision of our teachings might be necessary first appeared in World War II and to a much larger degree in Korea where Regiments were required to deploy over ten to twenty miles of front in some instances. This was especially true in the first few months of the fighting, both in the Pusan perimeter and later in the United Nations Troops' rapid advance to the Manchurian Border in the fall of 1950.

There are three prime factors which make it necessary for us to consider the fact that a defense, occupying a frontage many times that presently taught as doctrine, is not only necessary, but highly desirable. First, the advent of newer, more powerful weapons firing projectiles of great range and destructive effect and the inclusion in the arsenal of "weapons for war" of atomic energy which is capable of producing the widespread devastation noted at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, would make it highly desirable to "spread out" beyond the relatively cramped quarters of placing an infantry regiment within the confines of twenty-four to forty-eight (2400-4800) yards of front.

Second, we must accept the realization that in a future war we will once again be on the defensive initially, and we will once again be forced, as in Korea, to defend the maximum frontage with a minimum of manpower.

Third, the realization that in a future war, we may once again, as was true in Korea, be faced with an enemy force vastly superior in num-

bers to any force we can deploy against him. In order to defeat such an enemy, it will be necessary for us to occupy wide frontages in one portion of the theater of operations in order to concentrate offensively a mass superior to the enemies' in another sector. Let me explain at this time that by "mass", I do not mean a mass of manpower but mass of combat power. This combat power being a combination of our manpower, firepower, communication, logistical support and mobility. Although we may be inferior to the enemy in manpower, a superiority in the other items can overcome this deficiency and give us the desired 3 to 1 superiority over the enemy.

In consideration of these things I feel that we must therefore take stock of our tactical doctrine and examine it to see what changes will be necessary to enable us to disperse our forces as a passive means of defense against the widespread destructive power of newer weapons and at the same time permit us to wage an effective defense against the mass tactics which we faced in Korea and which we may well face again in future conflicts.

It is believed that this study suggests one means of accomplishing these objectives. It is hoped that in addition to suggesting one such method, it may also stimulate the mental processes of sound thinking individuals throughout the service and possibly overcome some of the reluctance inherently present in all of us to separate and spread out.

DISCUSSION

In any discussion of tactics involving a change of doctrine, I believe that we must first determine what benefits might be gained by making such a change. The advantages of having a defense deployed on a normal frontage are quite obvious to the average military man. Such matters as the ability to provide flanking mutual support between weapons and men; and to coordinate the fires of all weapons of the battle position into a "wall of fire", not to mention the psychological advantage of the feeling the men occupying the battle position gain through the company of their fellow soldiers.

The disadvantages in the standard type of defense are primarily those mentioned in the introduction to this study, namely, the concentration of force which makes it a prime target for atomic weapons, and the fact that we cannot use the standard doctrine of defense, either in the initial stages of a war, when we are trying to hold the maximum ground with a minimum of manpower, nor even later if we are faced with an enemy force which is vastly superior in numbers to our own.

What of the wide front defense? Will it solve the disadvantages mentioned at the expense of the advantages, or will it, if properly organized, allow us to retain the majority of the good points in the normal frontage type of defense and at the same time overcome the majority of the disadvantages? I believe it can.

Let us examine exactly what a defense of this type would be like. Needless to say, it will occupy a larger frontage. For a regiment, instead of a frontage of twenty-four to forty-eight (2400-4800) yards and a depth of fifteen ~~hundred~~ to three thousand (1500-3000) yards, let us consider a frontage of about twelve thousand (12000) yards and a depth of from seven to eight thousand (7000-8000) yards. By deploying on a frontage of this width, we will have to a large degree gained our first objective - that of establishing a passive defense

against such weapons as atomic energy. For by deploying our forces over such a wide front, the enemy no longer has targets profitable enough to warrant the use of such a weapon.

Obviously we cannot occupy a front of this length using standard methods of deployment. To do this would require assigning a frontage of six thousand (6000) yards to a battalion, three thousand (3000) yards to a company and fifteen hundred (1500) yards to a platoon. It would further require, using single foxholes, spacing these holes about fifty (50) yards apart, obviously unsound.

We must therefore utilize a somewhat different system for the deployment of our forces. One made up of strongly defended positions, ("islands of resistance"¹, so to speak) with the intervening spaces covered by wire, mines, and above all, by fire. To back up these positions would be a strong, highly mobile, counterattack force. In establishing such positions, the selection of key terrain features would be increasingly important. The "islands of resistance"² would have to be strong enough to be almost self-sustaining, and would on many occasions require air resupply for logistical support. These positions would be of battalion size, organized in a perimeter defense, with crew served weapons located to cover intervening ground so that if the enemy endeavored to drive through the gaps between our positions, a heavy volume of fire could be brought against him and the maximum casualties could be inflicted.

The principles of defense involved in the standard type of defense are equally if not more important in the extended type defense. Let us briefly examine each to determine how it might apply.

Organization of Key terrain. This principle gathers increased importance, since it will be by the proper organization of these few,

1. E. M. Postlethwaite, "Corps Defense on a Broad Front", Military Review, (July 1949).

2. Ibid.

extremely vital areas in our zone that we will be able to canalize the enemy's main effort along a route which will enable us to hit him with a strong counterattack force and inflict a decisive defeat. Postlethwaite stated this as follows: "Small groups of enemy can penetrate anywhere, anytime. Road nets and terrain will limit the axis of strong attacks. Islands are concentrated to control these axes."³ Small groups which infiltrate need not cause us a great deal of alarm since they can easily be handled by killer patrols, organized out of reserve units. It is the large enemy force which has the capability of overrunning and destroying our positions, and it is this force which we must take steps to drive off or kill. Since the advance of any large force must of necessity, be governed by the terrain and road nets, we must organize to canalize his advance into a position where he will be vulnerable to a strong attack force. We can only hope to effect this canalization by effective organization of terrain.

Mutual Support. This principle takes on a two-fold meaning. We must consider not only mutual support for all the forces occupying the perimeter of each position, but we must also incorporate into our plans, methods or fires which will support the position to our right and left, by long range fires of our 57, 75, and 105 recoilless rifles and our heavy 30 and 50 caliber machine guns. Light 30 caliber machine guns may or may not be useful, depending on the range. By such planning, an enemy force endeavoring to drive thru the gaps between positions will be required, in addition to clearing paths thru the wire, mines and other obstacles in the gaps, to run the gauntlet of fire from strong positions on his flanks. Also, if the enemy endeavors to drive its attack against one of our positions, it will of necessity, expose itself to flanking fire from at least one and normally two other positions.

Organization in Depth. We must consider depth in two ways. First

3. Ibid.

the depth of each position along the main line. This will be accomplished in the same manner as with any standard perimeter type defense. The other way in which we must consider depth is depth to the front or sector as a whole. Here we must have strong concentrations of artillery to deliver fire to the front, flank and rear of units along the front, and also to fire into the gaps between these positions. Also we must provide a counterattack force capable of great mobility and firepower to complete the task of destruction once the enemy has been led into the right spot by our canalization of his attack.

All around defense. This will apply in particular to the positions along the main line since by the very location of these positions we have provided gaps thru which the enemy might infiltrate small groups and units at night to attack us from the rear and flanks. We must therefore organize a position from which we will be able to withstand an enemy attack from any or all directions with equal efficiency, and on which, although there may be some points which will be stronger than others, there will be no weak points.

Coordinated fire plan. As in any defense we must coordinate the fires of all the weapons on each defensive position so that we can deliver the greatest volume of accurate fire against a given target. In addition we must plan and coordinate fires in the gaps between positions and make plans for these weapons in our position to deliver fire in support of adjacent positions. Since, as we shall see in a few moments, the reserve will have the primary mission of counterattack to complete the destruction of the enemy force, and it will only be in cases of absolute emergency that it will be utilized to reinforce a front line position. In view of this, the front line battalions will be required to defend their positions as long and as fiercely as possible to try and force the enemy to commit his reserves. This will necessitate increased emphasis on the coordination of all available fires into a tight wall around each of our positions.

Coordinated Anti-Tank Defense Plan. Here also we will make the same coordination as in any type defense. The major difference will be that in addition to the placing of mines and obstacles in and around each position, we must make extensive use of all types of obstacles in the gaps between positions, both as an anti-tank and also as an anti-personnel measure.

Flexibility. Within each defensive position, this principle will apply as in any other type of defense. The major difference will be in the strong, highly mobile counterattack force which can be held out to the rear for commitment as needed.

Although not actually one of the principles of defense, there is one other factor which bears consideration. That factor is Security. This factor also gains increased importance in a wide front defense. We must provide adequate security forces to the front of the battle position as we have always done. In addition we must emplace small detachments at intervals along the gaps between positions, to block enemy attempts to clear paths thru our obstacles at night or during periods of low visibility. Also, due to the ease with which small groups of enemy can infiltrate the gaps in our line, we must put increased emphasis on security of rear area installations such as headquarters and artillery positions.

So far in my discussion, I have repeatedly made reference to a strong counterattack force and have ignored the mention of a reserve. I do not mean to infer that the reserve, as such, will be done away with and that each defensive position must hold its ground solely with the forces it has on position, with no hope of reinforcement from the normally constituted reserve, because if absolutely necessary, the reserve (counterattack force) may be committed in such a role. I do feel however that as far as possible, each battalion on the main line, must hold out as long as possible in an attempt to draw the enemy into committing his reserves prior to our counter-

attack force entering the fight.

E. M. Postlethwaite has stated this concept as follows:

If the defense is to be successful, the divisions, within their respective sectors, must withstand the initial attack to the extent that the enemy commander is forced to commit general reserves in an attempt to gain a decision.

In conducting the defense, the Corps Commander must avoid piecemeal commitment of his reserves, seeking always to employ them in mass and in a decisive roll. On occasion, but rarely indeed, he may be justified in utilizing reserves to strengthen or reinforce front line units.⁴

Although this quotation refers to a higher level of command than is considered in my discussion, the principle, I believe, will apply to any level, at least in part.

Exactly how then will this defense work. Let us take a hypothetical case and trace through the possible actions that take place. Let us assume that our regiment is deployed on a frontage of twelve thousand (12000) yards as shown in the schematic diagram attached as appendix A. 1st Battalion is on the left, 2nd Battalion on the right, 3rd Battalion (motorized for mobility), with attached regimental tank company, in reserve, in a covered position to the rear. In the gaps between 1st and 2nd Battalions are minefields and barbed wire. For the purposes of simplicity only the recoilless weapons and the location of the 105, 4.2 and 81 barrages and concentrations are shown. Other weapons would be employed similarly, according to their individual characteristics. Let us now assume that a strong enemy attack is launched against 2nd Battalion as shown. When the objective of the attack is known, the security forces in the gap will be withdrawn. Those in front of the battle position will be withdrawn as in any standard defense. As the attack starts, artillery, mortars and other weapons will open up with long range fires. As the enemy draws within range, weapons from 1st Battalion and from the left battalion of the 2nd Infantry Regiment will open up and fire into the enemy flanks. The

4. Ibid.

fire will grow in intensity in an effort to force the enemy to commit his reserves. If he continues to assault the 2nd Battalion, at a crucial time, as determined by the Regimental Commander, the 3rd Battalion and tank company (or a portion thereof, as necessary) will attack the enemy on his flank to, in effect, close the jaws of a pincers. If however he slides off into the gap between battalions and continues his advance, both battalions will continue their fire into his flanks and rear, planned concentrations of artillery and mortars within the gaps will be called for, and again, when the enemy's control is at a minimum, our reserve battalion will be committed against his flank.

In a standard defense, our main effort is directed toward halting the enemy's momentum, causing him to slow down, if not halt, thus enabling us to either kill him or drive him off. In the type of defense under discussion, we do not have a solid line of emplacements, consequently we cannot expect to halt his attack. We therefore must direct our main effort toward disrupting his control, by causing his attacking force to split, as a river splits in going around an island. By splitting his attack force, we can lessen the effectiveness of his control and communication, thus causing confusion so that at a decisive moment, when our reserve is committed, we can more effectively win a decision.

CONCLUSIONS

For some time it has been increasingly evident that if we are to compete against the overwhelming mass manpower tactics used by certain of the other nations of the world, we must revamp our defensive doctrine to enable us greater flexibility than is available if we stick to the doctrine of defense as it is now taught. This flexibility can only be obtained by utilizing a principle of holding maximum ground with a minimum of manpower in one sector of a theater, thus enabling us to mass our combat power in another sector to secure a decisive defeat of the enemy, sector by sector.

In addition, we must devise some means of dispersing our forces to avoid giving the enemy a profitable target for the use of atomic weapons but at the same time enable us to organize a position capable of withstanding the enemies attempts to drive us off.

These two objectives can, I believe, only be accomplished by placing more emphasis in our defensive teachings on the principles of organizing a wide front defense. The methods outlined in the foregoing discussion are, it is believed, one solution to this problem, a method of holding an extremely wide front with one-half to one-third the force required under present doctrine.

We must not lose sight of one very important fact however. No defense, no matter what kind, can be effective unless the commander organizing the defense has the ability to organize his position properly, capitalizing on all available natural advantages offered to him by the terrain. Nor can a defense be effective unless the will to fight and hold is present in everyone on the position, since in essence, it is the individual soldier, the human being - the unknown quantity - that spells the difference between victory and defeat.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Infantry School Library

- "Conduct of the Defense on Extended Frontages", Infantry School Quarterly, (Oct 1947), 5-31.
- Evans, F. R. "Artillery in Defense of a Wide Front", Military Review, (Aug 1952).
- Gatta, Giovanni, Col. "The Evolution of Defensive Action", Military Review, (Apr 1951).
- Headquarters, The Infantry School, Frontage, Infantry Battalion, Fort Benning, (Apr 1938), U 165.3 .U 2.
- Huck, Frederick, Major. Are We Prepared to Defend Against Soviet Type Attack? Student Monograph, Fort Benning, 1952-53.
- Postlethwaite, E. M. "Corps Defense on a Wide Front", Military Review, (Jul 1949)
- Russell, George H., Regiment in Defense of Extended Frontages - 23d Infantry Operations 29 August to 16 September 1950, Naktong River Line, Student Monograph, Fort Benning, 1952-53.
- Williams, Harry O. Whats Wrong with Our Defensive Teachings - Should They be Revised? Student Monograph, Fort Benning, 1952-53.
- Young, W. R. Capt, MC, Royal Artillery, "Lines or Localities, An Examination in Modern Defense", Military Review, Mar 1945.