

# Maximize Training Time: Using Physical Training to Increase Tactical Training Proficiency

by LTC Esli Pitts

“Guidons, guidons, guidons. This is Black 6. Short count follows. Three, two, one. Crank ‘em. Report REDCON.”

“Black 6, Red 4. REDCON 1, Slant four.”

“Black 6, White 4. REDCON 1, Slant four.”

“Black 6, Blue 4. REDCON 1, Slant three.”

The commander acknowledged each report in turn and then continued: “Guidons, Black 6. Execute Route Iron. Company column, order of march: Red, White, Blue. Move now.”

In sequence, the platoons pulled out of the company assembly area and started movement. In turn, they called start point (SP) on Route Iron, and then release point (RP) two blocks later. On the line of departure (LD), Red 1 called the fire-support officer (FSO): “Black 70, this is Red 1. Fire AB1003, over.” The FSO acknowledged and eventually called shot and splash. Smoke billowed, and the company quickly crossed the open ground and moved into Battle Position (BP) B11. The executive officer reported “set” to the battalion tactical-operations center (TOC), while the platoon leaders briefed their target reference points (TRPs), sectors of fire and alternate and supplementary BPs, and proofed their BPs.

Minutes later, Battle 5 reported “established” to the TOC. The company had barely backed into turret-down positions when the battalion command net crackled with an intel report. “Guidons, guidons, guidons, this is Warhorse 2. Scouts report tanks and PCs five minutes from Phase Line Orange.” Battle 6 relayed the spot report, and so did the platoon leaders.

The company was in a perfect position to engage the enemy from the flank. Based on the compartmentalized terrain, it would be a platoon-level fight – and it wasn’t long before the fight happened. White Platoon saw the enemy first and reported contact. “Black 6, this is White 4. Contact tanks and PCs east, out.”

At the same time, White 1 gave his initial fire command. “White, White 1. Tanks and PCs front. Frontal. Two rounds sabot. At my command.” He paused for a minute before announcing “Top-hat.” He looked left and right to confirm that the other crews had moved up into firing positions. “Ready ... ready ... fire!” Boom! The platoon fired a volley.

At the other end of the field, the members of Bravo Company’s headquarters platoon returned fire and then ran into Red and Blue platoons’ engagement areas (EAs). The headquarters platoon’s Soldiers, role-playing the enemy, pressed their attack on Battle’s exposed flank and forced White to reposition to supplementary positions. Red was conducting muzzle-reference sensor (MRS) updates by section while Blue Platoon, having neglected to move to their alternate BPs, was receiving effective “red rain” on its position.

Battle 6 waved to the training-room Soldiers, and they displaced to the other end of the field to prepare for the company’s counterattack and then a hasty defense (HDEF). When it was over, the leaders ran back to the company while the company commander discussed the training.

## Maneuver PT

How many of you have lamented that you don’t have enough training time? How many of you have struggled to shake out reporting requirements? Cross-talk? Basic radio procedures? Who has wondered why your subordinates don’t understand the basics of maneuver? Assuming you are committed to doing physical training (PT) every day, there is a way to get 60-90 minutes of training as often as you like: maneuver PT.

Why run your platoon in a 4x4 or 4x8 formation when you can run them in a wedge, column, line or echelon? Why do sprints when you can do bounding overwatch? Having run maneuver PT as a squad leader, company commander and battalion commander, I am here to tell you that not only will you get a good workout in, but you can also increase the basic proficiency of your entire formation in communications, reporting, cross-talk and

integration of both direct and indirect fires, and you can work on any battle drill you desire. Maneuver PT is as much or as little as you desire to make of it.

I started doing maneuver PT as a squad leader. Assigned to the Old Guard, we did not get enough time in the field, with the result that we were not the most tactically proficient. I began to use PT as an opportunity to maneuver the squad. Mostly I did it for fun and to alleviate the boredom of running in a squad file everywhere, but it worked well to rehearse cross-talk, reporting, movement formations, movement techniques and basic battle drills.

As a company commander, I was stationed at Ray Barracks, Germany. The unit had just spent a significant amount of time in Bosnia and then Kosovo, and lacked maneuver proficiency. We also lacked enough training areas. Our local training area was barely enough to train at the section level. We couldn't really train on mounted maneuver except at Grafenwoehr or Hohenfels. How could I prepare my company for our upcoming rotation at the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC)<sup>1</sup> without a training area? The answer was maneuver PT.

The rules were simple. First, whatever you had to say, you had to say it as a simulated radio transmission. If you saw a static tank on display, you treated it as an enemy tank. If it was a random humvee driving around, it was an enemy *boyevaya mashina pekhoty* (BMP). If it was Soldiers in Army Combat Uniforms (ACUs) during PT, they were enemy troops. If you were scanning, you were doing squats. If you were firing, you were doing pushups. If you were moving from a turret-down to hull-down firing position, you sprinted. Each mission started in the platoon coil or company tactical-assembly area (TAA) with the tanks shut down. We would go through a short count and come to REDCON 1 before uncoiling and moving into the lane. Once in the mission, we would run in wedge, file, line, echelon or other formation as directed by the platoon leader. He would also select movement techniques and conduct drills as necessary when we were in contact or in response to my cues.

## Application then

I designed basic operational graphics that would move us around Ray Barracks. We began with the three platoon leaders playing three of the four tank commanders in a single platoon, with my executive officer serving as the platoon sergeant and reporting to me as the commander. I would also use him to practice reporting to battalion. In this way, I trained my platoon leaders in how to fight their platoons. After we reached proficiency at platoon level, we began to conduct training as a company. Again, with myself and the three platoon leaders, as well as the executive officer, we rehearsed cross-talk, reporting, movement techniques, direct-fire-control measures and battle drills. To push this knowledge down, periodically I would use one day as a rehearsal for the platoon leaders, and then they would run the same mission with their platoons the next day.

One time, over the course of three days, I conducted a full company defense. On the first day, I conducted a leader's reconnaissance with the platoon leaders, and we identified the EA and assigned sectors of fire, etc. On the second day, the platoon leaders moved their platoons from assembly areas into their BPs and conducted platoon rehearsals. The platoons started with a short count in the TAA and then rehearsed occupying their primary, alternate and supplementary BPs. They also rehearsed platoon fire commands and platoon volleys. At the end, they collapsed back into hide positions and then returned to the TAA.

On the third day, the entire company formed up in the parking lot, by tank crew, in a perimeter. Using radio transmissions, we brought the company to REDCON 1 and moved them down to the large open field we would be defending, then occupied hide positions. The platoons moved forward and established their platoon BPs and rehearsed them, with lots of sprinting and pushups to be seen.

While that was going on, the first sergeant arrived, and each of the platoons executed logistics package (LOGPAC), one section at a time. Not having done a company LOGPAC, this was invaluable. As they arrived at the LOGPAC, my representatives met the sections, who would execute LOGPAC as my representatives talked them through the process. For example: "You are refueling right now; do flutter kicks. Make sure you have goggles, gloves and fire extinguisher, and the vehicle is grounded!" Those sections not conducting LOGPAC were conducting exercises of their own choosing.

After LOGPAC, the headquarters platoon circled around to the far end of the field and replicated the enemy's lead echelon, then circled around to "attack" again as the enemy's main body. There is not much in the headquarters platoon, so the target array isn't big, but it would not die. Instead, they continued to move across the field,

allowing the tank platoons to execute platoon volleys. Periodically they dropped and did their own pushups as they fired at us. The target array and contact required the platoons to displace to alternate positions and manage MRS updates, as well as report battle-damage assessment, Class V consumption and target handoff among platoons as the enemy moved laterally across the EA.

During a rotation at the CMTC at Hohenfels, I was attached to a mechanized-infantry task force. During that rotation, my company killed more enemy than the rest of the task force combined. Not because we were any better, but because we had trained more. Without having any more time in the field than the other companies or battalions, we had already learned many of the lessons on cross-talk, reporting and the fundamentals of maneuver that other units needed the first week or more of the CMTC rotation to learn. In an era of reduced budgets, coming out of large-scale peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, and with limited training time, we had nonetheless learned how to fight.

## Application now

So how does that compare to today?

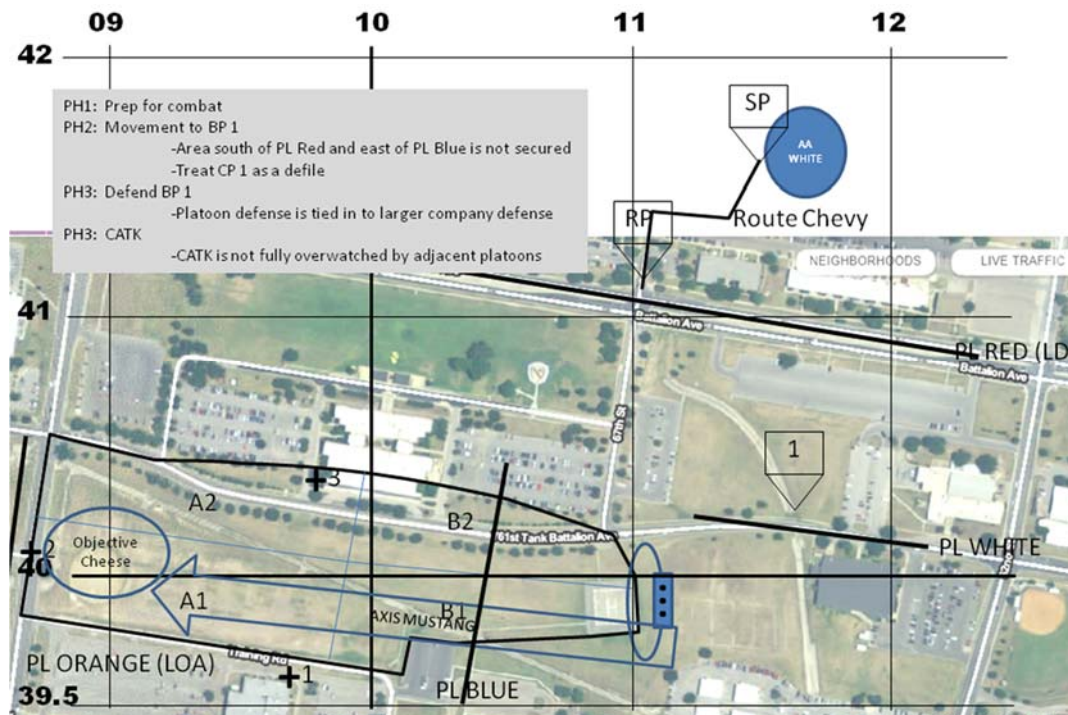
Assuming command of a combined-arms battalion in 2012, I took stock of the leaders in the battalion and quickly realized that the bulk of the knowledge in mounted maneuver resided in ... me. My rifle-company commanders had been light infantrymen serving in Afghanistan. My tank-company commanders had been light reconnaissance, surveillance and target-acquisition platoon leaders serving in Afghanistan. My first sergeants and platoon sergeants had maybe done some heavy-maneuver training as privates and had shot a gunnery or two while spending the bulk of their time in Iraq.

How would we train?

I took a week with the company commanders, training them in how to maneuver a mounted platoon. I conducted PT with them every morning while they played tank or Bradley commanders in a single platoon. I had a specific set of collective tasks I expected them to learn focused on basic platoon maneuver (Figure 1). I then built a basic scenario in which a platoon would establish an HDEF and then counterattack (CATK) through the enemy and establish another HDEF (Figure 2).

| <u>SKILLS/TTPs</u>  | <u>DRILLS</u>   | <u>MOVEMENT/MANEUVER</u>  |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Short count</li> <li>-REDCON 1</li> <li>-Slant</li> <li>-Build EA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TRPs/sectors of fire</li> <li>Routes</li> <li>Alt/supp positions (PSNs)</li> <li>Confirm deadspace</li> <li>Set/established</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>Fight platoon</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Top-hat/Low-sky</li> <li>-Platoon fire commands</li> <li>-Fire patterns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Front</li> <li>Depth</li> <li>Cross</li> </ul> </li> <li>-Class V cross-level</li> <li>-MRS update</li> <li>-Alt/supp BP</li> <li>-Backing up LOGPAC</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Action drill</li> <li>-Contact drill</li> <li>-Missile drill</li> <li>-Survivability moves</li> <li>-Nuclear-biological-chemical</li> <li>-Dynamite: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Passive</li> <li>Active</li> </ul> </li> <li>-Defile</li> <li>-Breach/SOSRA</li> <li>-Trench</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Column</li> <li>-Wedge</li> <li>-Vee</li> <li>-Echelon (left/right)</li> <li>-Traveling</li> <li>-Traveling overwatch</li> <li>-Bounding overwatch</li> <li>-Coil/uncoil</li> </ul> |
|   | <u><b>ACTIONS ON CONTACT</b></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Deploy and report</li> <li>-Develop situation</li> <li>-Recommend course of action (CoA)</li> <li>-Execute CoA</li> </ul>  |   |

Figure 1. Training tasks focusing on basic platoon maneuver.



**Figure 2. Platoon graphics.**

Key to success is finding good terrain on which to train. For example, an elevated helicopter-landing zone in an open field served as a perfect intervisibility line from which to conduct a platoon defense with berm drills. Each morning, I would briefly review the tactical skills and tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) with the company commanders in “the assembly area.” For example, what is a short count, and what does it sound like? Or how does a platoon occupy a coil from a column or wedge without stopping? Then we would start running.

The rules were similar to my previous model when in company command. If you are scanning, you are doing squats. If you are firing, you are doing pushups. If you see static armored vehicles, take actions on contact and develop the situation. My emphasis was on battle drills, repetition and execution of simple plans at the hasty level of detail, where I put leaders in a variety of situations. In the following week, they provided the same instruction to their platoon leaders, and from there, the platoon leaders were free to use it with their platoons if they chose. I did not mandate they do so, but it was evident to me who did so based on their performance during actual mounted maneuver.

After reaching a basic level of platoon proficiency, we switched to training as a company with one commander leading the company and the other three serving as the platoon leaders in a task-organized company/team. Again, we trained on specific tasks and, as with the platoon-level maneuver, I developed operational graphics laid over specific terrain in Fort Hood’s garrison areas that supported my training objectives (Figure 3). For example, I added a narrow sidewalk between two buildings to facilitate a defile drill. Random low railings or barriers worked well as obstacles against which to practice breaches using suppress, obscure, secure, reduce and assault (SOSRA). Before each of these training runs, I would run the route myself and rehearse what contact and drills I would inject.

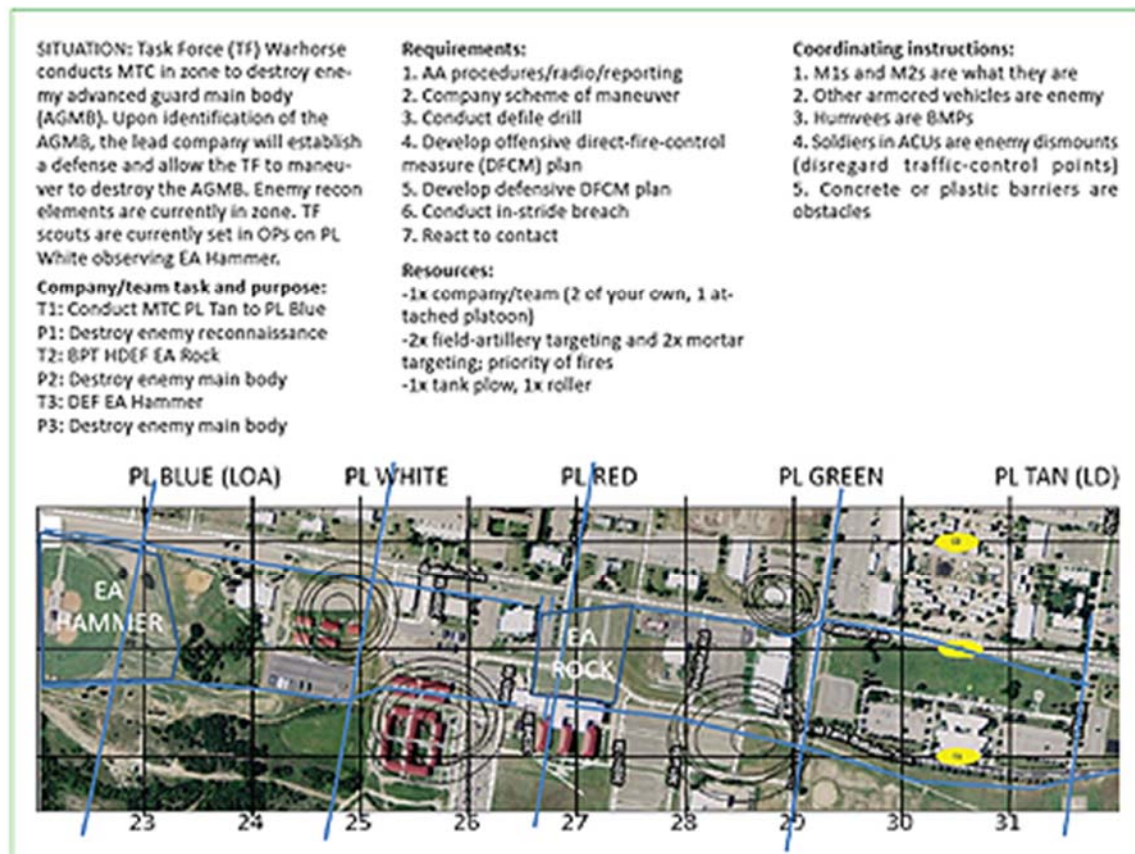


Figure 3. Company MTC.

We were notified we would be participating in a decisive-action training environment rotation at the National Training Center (NTC), but we didn't have a lot of training time to prepare for it. Maneuver PT became the way for me to train the battalion's leaders prior to our rotation, and, following that, to train a second set of officers in platoon and company maneuver. Here are some specific examples of maneuver PT I used to develop proficiency in mounted maneuver:

- Before NTC, I realized the need to train on the basic tasks of uncoiling, conducting a tactical roadmarch and conducting a refuel-on-the-move (ROM). One morning for PT, that's what we did. Not a lot of pushups or squats, but we built an assembly area, a roadmarch route and a planned ROM location. I established an RP after the ROM, at which point companies could break off and finish PT on their own. In execution, my S-3 learned how to control movement out of a battalion TAA; the support company learned how to establish a ROM site; and the vehicle commanders in the line companies and specialty platoons learned how to conduct ROM.
- After our return from the Leadership Training Program (LTP) prior to our NTC rotation, we revised the operations order we had prepared for LTP such that it fit the terrain on Fort Hood. We issued the order and then conducted a battalion movement-to-contact (MTC), culminating in an HDEF, for PT. The audience was vehicle commanders for line companies, specialty platoons, tactical command post (CP) and TOC. My S-2 provided opposing force (OPFOR), wearing battalion PT shirts and armed with green chemlights, which indicated specific threats. For example, a chemlight buzzsaw indicated a Hind helicopter. (See Figures 4 and 5 for the MTC and the battalion's HDEF.)
- As I'd found with company command, despite limited ability to train in real-live mounted maneuver before a combat-training-center rotation, our efforts at maneuver PT allowed the unit to get ahead of the power curve. Going to NTC, we already understood how to cross-talk and report. We understood the steps to actions on contact and how to conduct basic battle drills. We knew which radio nets would be used for what, and who was responsible for them. The platoons, companies and battalion knew how to

maneuver and fight, and how to call for fires. We also validated the battalion's tactical standard operating procedures (TACSOP) and inculcated maneuver tasks at the platoon level. We did not have to spend the first week of the rotation trying to shake these things out, and I'm pleased to say that the results showed in dead OPFOR.

- Following NTC, the inevitable change of leadership occurred, and now I had a new set of officers to train, including new field-grade officers. Again, I spent time with the company commanders, focusing on the new ones, as well as adding captains in the S-3 shop, while the older commanders were able to take the experience to another level of detail. They, in turn, trained their new platoon leaders.

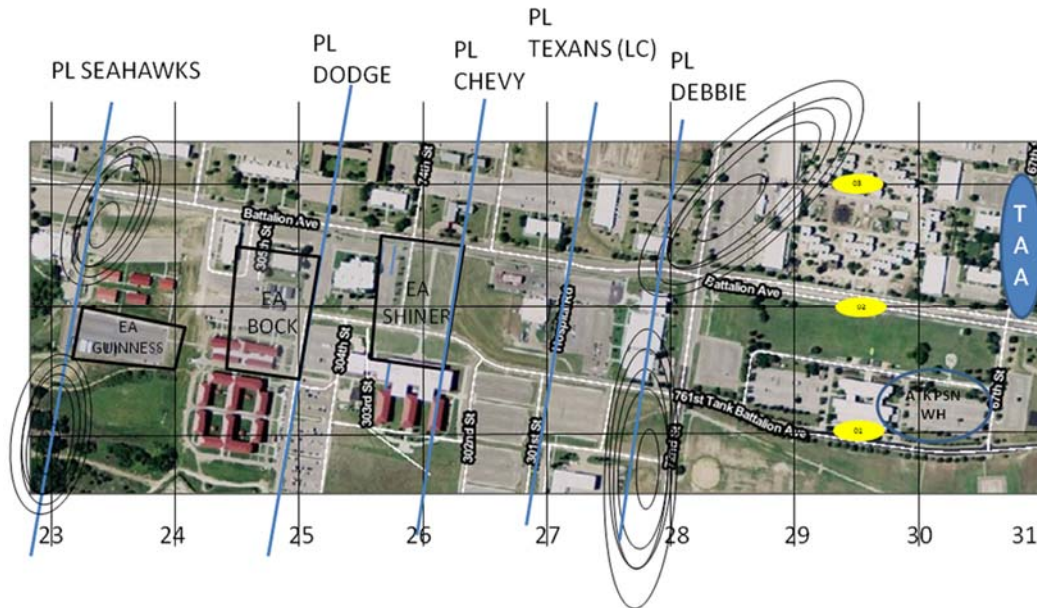


Figure 4. Battalion MTC transition to HDEF.

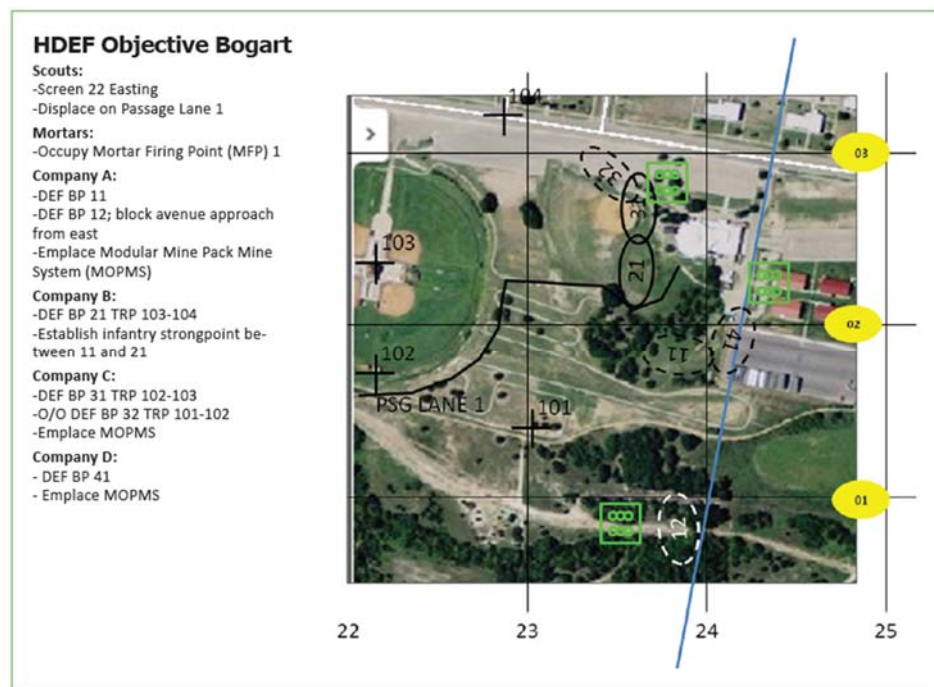


Figure 5. Battalion MTC transition to HDEF.

## **Operation Warhorse Strike**

In the most ambitious instance of maneuver PT, we conducted Operation Warhorse Strike, a battalion nodal attack. Taking the long view of PT, I extended the hours and, unlike previous events, put every available Soldier in the battalion “into the field” for a three-hour long battalion attack to seize two assigned objectives in my own footprint: the battalion headquarters and one of the line-company CPs. Unlike previous events, which focused on battle drills and the fundamentals of maneuver, I went through a full military decision-making process cycle, issued an opord and conducted a confirmation brief, backbrief and rehearsals. The companies also conducted troop-leading procedures.

On the morning of execution, all mission-command nodes were fully operational, and the mortar platoon was established in the motor pool in its tracks. (It would be up to them to get PT in a different way.) The scouts were out, and the medics were prepared to establish an aid station on the objective. The forward-support company was prepared to provide backhaul of enemy prisoners of war using a Light Medium Tactical Vehicle. Company first sergeants were mounted in humvees and able to use some limited routes to assist in casualty evacuation. The S-2 shop fielded a large force of OPFOR and contingency operating bases, manned as appropriate with weapons and cellphones. Unlike normal maneuver PT in PT uniform, this was a complete dismounted operation with all Soldiers wearing their gear, and all radio nets established and operational.

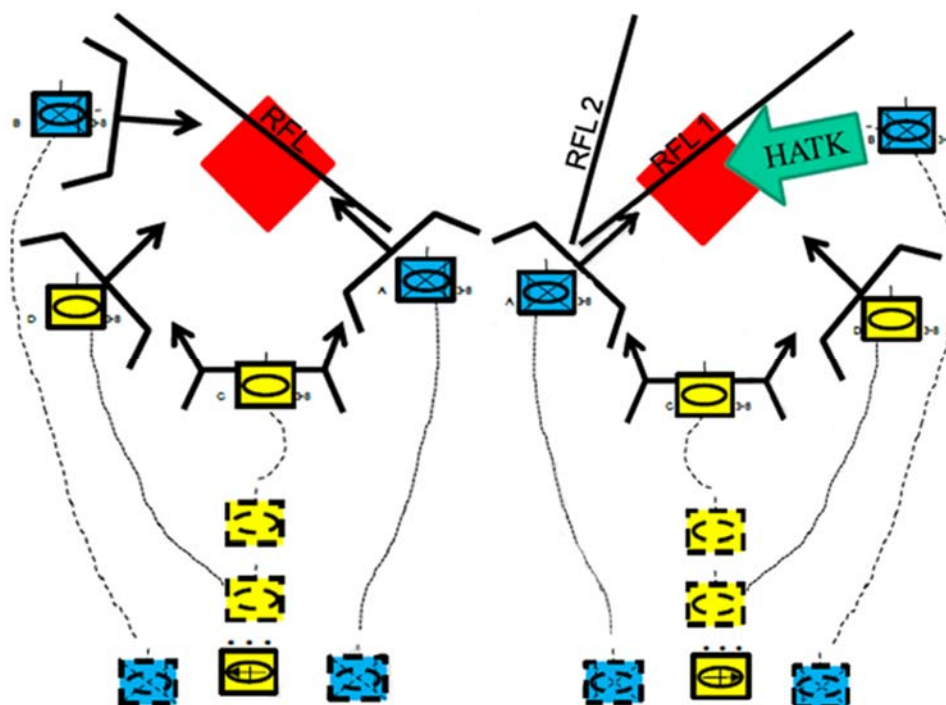
Afterward, we conducted an after-action review, and then the following month, we issued a fragmentary order to the original plan and did it again.

## **Operation Warhorse Hammer**

Operation Warhorse Strike proved that a battalion can conduct tactical training in garrison. Based on that, I planned and executed Operation Warhorse Hammer. Starting as another battalion operation during PT, it eventually turned into a 40-hour-long exercise of the entire battalion. (But it started during PT!)

With several new platoon leaders and company commanders, I built a week-long leader certification program, which would include maneuver PT. The week before, I conducted PT with the commanders in the morning, re-briefing them on the tactical tasks I would have them teach their platoon leaders. During the week of the leader’s certification, the company commanders used PT on Monday through Thursday to train their platoon leaders in tactical-maneuver tasks. The tasks started simply on Monday and built in complexity. On Thursday, they received a simple frago, and then on Friday morning, they executed the mission and had to react to a variety of situations under close scrutiny. My S-3 and I each ran with two companies on sequential lanes for a total of more than six miles. The leader certification culminated in a platoon situational-training exercise (STX) a month later, at which time they demonstrated proficiency in all tasks while mounted.

We designed a battalion battle drill consisting of a “right hook” or “left hook” (Figure 6) and standardized some offensive-movement formations. I then took all the platoon leaders and above in the battalion and spent a couple of PT sessions focused on rehearsing those formations and drills. By the end, I had a formation of leaders who understood my intent for maneuver at the battalion level as well as who saw first-hand the complexity of changing formations or reorienting the battalion.



**Figure 6. 3-8 Cavalry TACSOP. On the left is the left hook with ABF to envelop. On the right is the right hook with hasty attack (HATK) to envelop.**

I've seen the results of using a decent amount of time to train in maneuver during PT. I didn't mandate that my platoon leaders use this technique, though I strongly encouraged it. During platoon training in Close Combat Tactical Trainer (CCTT), Gunnery Table XII or platoon STX, it was evident who had invested the time to train. Some embraced it, and they became my go-to lieutenants. Some developed other ways, such as conducting machinegun crew drills during PT. Some leaders were scared to try something new.

Some leaders may be set in their ways and resistant to change because they have never seen it before. It looks odd. It takes some effort to get the "rules" of the game down, and until then, it feels like you aren't getting much PT in. There will be some nay-sayers in the group (the same ones who resist everything). But when it all starts coming together, and you see and hear that your unit is able to execute routine battle drills routinely, is thinking about integrating indirect fires into each operation and remembers to make survivability moves – and your lieutenants are no longer tongue-tied new officers but are taking charge – suddenly you know your unit knows how to fight and that it will work when you do it for real.

Maneuver PT will never replace mounted maneuver, but much like a run in CCTT, it can get you much farther in the game before you actually play for real. The time is free, and there is plenty of it. It's your choice. You can complain there isn't enough time to train and then go run in a box formation, singing the same cadences again ... and again. ... Or, you can learn to maneuver.

Train to win.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>CMTC was transformed in December 2005 and renamed the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, which is part of the Joint Multinational Training Center, overseeing training for U.S. Army Europe.

## Acronym Quick-Scan

**AA** – assembly area  
**ACU** – Army Combat Uniform  
**AGMB** – advanced guard main body  
**ATK PSN WH** – attack Position White  
**BMP** – *boyevaya mashina pekhoty*  
**BP** – battle position  
**BPT** – be prepared to  
**CATK** – counterattack  
**CCTT** – Close Combat Tactical Trainer  
**CMTC** – Combat Maneuver Training Center  
**CoA** – course of action  
**CP** – checkpoint  
**DEF** – defend  
**DFCM** – direct-fire-control measure  
**EA** – engagement area  
**Est IN Stng Pt** – establish infantry strongpoint  
**FSO** – fire-support officer  
**HATK** – hasty attack  
**HDEF** – hasty defense  
**LC** – line of contact  
**LD** – line of departure  
**LOA** – limit of advance  
**LOGPAC** – logistics package  
**LTP** – Leadership Training Program  
**MFP** – mortar-firing point  
**MOPMS** – Modular Mine Pack Mine System  
**MRS** – muzzle-reference sensor  
**MTC** – movement-to-contact  
**MTR** – mortars  
**NTC** – National Training Center  
**O/O** – on order  
**OP** – observation post  
**Opfor** – opposing force  
**P (with number)** – purpose  
**PC** – personnel carrier  
**PH** – phase  
**PL** – phase line  
**PSG** – passage (lane)  
**PSN** – position  
**PT** – physical training  
**REDCON** – readiness condition  
**RFL** – restricted firing line  
**ROM** – refuel-on-the-move  
**RP** – release point  
**SCTS** – scouts  
**SOSRA** – suppress, obscure, secure, reduce and assault  
**SP** – start point  
**T (with number)** – task  
**TACSOP** – tactical standard operating procedures  
**STX** – situational-training exercise  
**TAA** – tactical-assembly area  
**TF** – task force  
**TOC** – tactical-operations center

TRP – target reference point

TTP – tactics, techniques and procedures



**Figure 7.** The battalion shares the road with members of 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division as it conducts a nodal attack during Operation Warhorse Strike. *(Photo by 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division Public Affairs)*



**Figure 8.** The Warhorse Battalion interacts with civilians on the battlefield during Operation Warhorse Strike. *(Photo by 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division Public Affairs)*



**Figure 9. The author, left, at the battalion's tactical command post during Operation Warhorse Strike. (Photo by 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division Public Affairs)**



**Figure 10. A rifle squad seizes its assigned objective, the battalion headquarters, during Operation Warhorse Strike. (Photo by 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division Public Affairs)**



**Figure 11. A company commander reviews the results of tactical-site exploitation after seizing his assigned objective during Operation Warhorse Strike. (Photo by 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division Public Affairs)**