

Training Notes



Engagement Area Development in a Compressed Timeline

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In 2015, the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, LA, transitioned the focus of its crucible training event from a mission readiness exercise (MRE) to a direct action training environment (DATE). This transition moved the focus of brigade combat teams (BCTs) away from stability and counterinsurgency (COIN) operations within a nodal defense construct out of combat outposts to an intelligence-driven, intensive permissive training environment focused on hybrid and near-peer threats. One of the most difficult transitions has been the necessity for doctrinal defensive operations, specifically a rifle company's execution of the seven steps of engagement area development (EA DEV).

Light infantry formations typically struggle to conduct EA DEV suited for an armored/mechanized near-peer threat in a compressed timeline. The compressed timeline presents unique challenges and requires a change to the methodology by which we conduct our planning processes and how we execute the defense.

From my observations as an observer-controller-trainer (OCT) at JRTC, the challenges primarily lie in three areas:

1) Our military decision-making process (MDMP) is not conducive to supporting subordinate organizations' execution of EA DEV due to the extensive time requirements.

2) Organizations do not effectively utilize collaborative and parallel planning to maximize the unit's lines of effort in the defense.

3) Company troop leading procedures (TLPs) do not have the requisite systems to effectively conduct EA DEV; junior leaders are not experienced in the field craft-intensive requirements of the defense; and company TLPs are truncated so much it is nearly impossible for companies to effectively conduct planning.

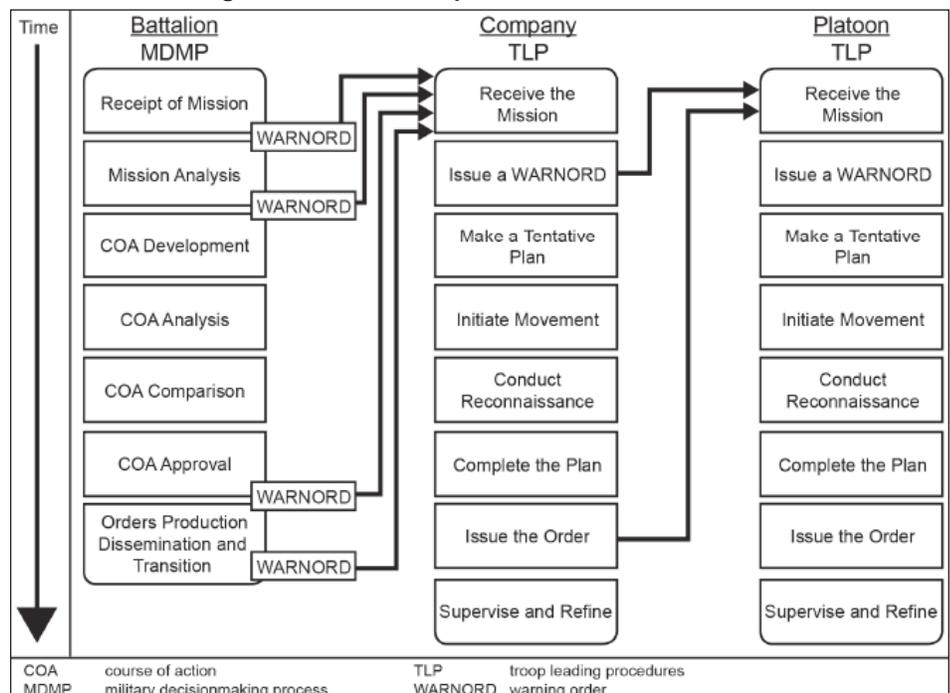
The focus of this article is to propose adjustments to assist in streamlining

our planning processes to efficiently conduct EA DEV and establish an effective defense within a condensed timeline. This problem set is complex and difficult to synchronize, and we as an Army are still improving our organizational knowledge base for defensive operations in this environment. I will not be addressing tactics of the defense for company and enabler employment or defensive techniques against specific enemy capabilities but rather focus merely on our systems processes to facilitate subordinate commanders.

MDMP

One of the largest issues is the requirement of our MDMP for the development of operation orders (OPORDs). If we merely look at the one-third/two-thirds rule that we espouse into our orders process, it is nearly impossible for companies to be successful in the defense. Although this will not always be the case, an organization must prepare for the most probable

Figure 1 — Parallel Sequences of MDMP and TLPs



Field Manual (FM) 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*

and dangerous course of action (COA), and more frequently than not, this includes a transition from the offense to a finite period to establish the defense. Let us examine the current four-day model at JRTC (for the sake of ease, I will round out my estimates). There will be just over one day for the brigade's MDMP for the issuance of an order; we are now down to three days. A battalion takes just over a day to conduct its MDMP; we are now down to two days. The company takes up to 12 hours to conduct company TLPs. As a result, we are now less than 36 hours out from the execution of the defense. Nearly all parties involved would agree this is not enough time to deliberately establish a defense within a DATE and at the very least is substantially less than optimal.

A few caveats to this analogy, this is assuming that higher-level staffs strictly adhere to the one-third/two-thirds rule. Additionally, this does not account for enemy action within the assigned area of responsibility and the potential reallocation or adjustment to the unit's task organization. This also allows no time to account for friction as described by Carl van Clausewitz. So, in a perfect system with no friction, company teams have less than 36 hours to conduct a deliberate defense against a superior enemy armored force. If you look at this issue by itself, it makes an already daunting task nearly impossible.

We routinely observe companies at JRTC receiving their OPORD or executing their battalion's combined arms rehearsal (CAR) requiring substantial refinement due to a lack of detailed planning from the warning orders (WARNOs) or OPORD the day of execution. This leaves companies with less than a day to reposition forces, conduct EA DEV, physically emplace obstacles, establish direct fire control measures (DFMCs) within their companies and with adjacent units, and somewhere during this frenetic time conduct an EA rehearsal.

So what is the fix? Fundamentally, it is collaborative and parallel planning. However, within the MDMP, staffs can make numerous adjustments. The primary improvement is information sharing. Staffs need to publish information in an orderly and timely manner. There are three WARNOs programmed into a complete MDMP cycle before the final WARNO or OPORD.

Throughout my tenure as a company commander and recently as a senior company OCT at JRTC, I find there are certain information requirements company commanders need to execute their EA DEV. The following is not an all-inclusive list of information, but it addresses the primary information requirements companies need in order to nest within their battalion's overall defensive scheme of maneuver (SoM).

Information Requirements (Proposed):

- Commander's intent
- No later than (NLT) defend time
- Location of company defensive position
- Battalion's battle array (adjacent unit locations)
- Enemy situation (at a minimum the following)
 - Situation template (SITEMP)
 - Most likely course of action (MLCOA)
 - Most dangerous course of action (MDCOA)
- Engineer assets available

- Reconnaissance assets available
- Counter-reconnaissance plan
- Class IV available
- Indirect fire (IDF) assets available
- Resupply method
- Battle position guidance

Staffs will not develop all this information immediately, which is why we have a structured MDMP. The following are some improvements, which I believe are both feasible and necessary for the effective execution of the defense at the company level and below.

During my tenure at JRTC, a primary issue is the tendency of staffs to waste time developing perfect solutions rather than a 70-percent solution that satisfies the checklist above. The 70-percent solution allows for initiation of movement earlier and protects subordinate leader's timelines. We as an organization have to adhere to the constraints within our doctrine, which are there to protect planning timelines for subordinate leaders.

Regarding the structure of our MDMP, if we can prioritize the dissemination of the aforementioned information requirements, we can drastically improve the efficacy of our planning process and facilitate our junior leaders. I believe we can achieve this by tethering these requirements to the already codified WARNOs. After receipt of mission, staffs are supposed to publish the first WARNO. The key outputs are minimal, but if the staff can provide any information regarding the following it will drastically increase the time available.

MDMP Outputs (Current):

- Initial commander's guidance
- Initial allocation of time

Additional Information Output (Proposed):

- NLT defend time (if available)
- Location of defensive position(s) (if available)
- Enemy situation (anything available)
- Engineer assets available
- Reconnaissance assets available

For engineer and reconnaissance assets available, this does not mean describing the task organization, task and purpose, or any specified guidance but rather the total assets available to the higher headquarters. This will help companies determine the scope of their defense. For example, if the battalion only has one Improved High Mobility Engineer Excavator (IHMME) team, the company commander better understands the availability of this asset to his formation and the amount of protective obstacles he can feasibly request. It would be wasteful and unsupportable to request fighting positions for his entire company and its vehicles (requires D7 or Armored Combat Earthmover [ACE]). This will prevent superfluous planning and provide expectation management for their organic capabilities.

The location and battle array are also very important as they allow the companies to orient their battle positions and start necessary movement for establishing battle positions and individual protection positions. Notice that we have yet to

establish the company’s task and purpose. If available, this is key information for the company, but it is not essential at this point since the commander’s task and purpose will generally be tied to the obstacle plan.

After mission analysis, this is where the higher headquarters staff can greatly facilitate its subordinate command teams. The key outputs are still conceptual, but at this point there should be a basic understanding of the operation. If there is a command-directed COA, this becomes even more feasible.

MDMP Outputs (Current):

- o Mission statement
- o Initial commander’s intent
- o Initial planning guidance
- o Initial commander’s critical information requirements (CCIRs) and essential elements of friendly information (EEFIs)
- o Updated information preparation of the battlefield (IPB) and running estimates
- o Assumptions

Additional Information Output (Proposed):

- NLT defend time

- Location of defensive position(s)
- Reserve organization and type (armor, heavy weapons, light infantry, etc.)
- Refined enemy situation
- IDF assets available
- Resupply method (tailgate vs. service station)

To reiterate, most of this information shapes and frames the defense for the company commander and confirms what will and will not be available to them for the fight. At this point, a general understanding of the overall task and purpose of the company’s defensive position and the battalion’s overall defensive SoM is paramount to success.

The next WARNO is after COA approval. This is where a significant gap occurs in the information requirements to the company during a compressed timeline. The recommendations I provide become more ambiguous because the situation will heavily dictate the mode and timeline for dissemination. At this point, companies routinely “wait on the word” as most of these outputs during the MDMP will be fluid estimates until the completion of COA approval. However, as demonstrated in the one-thirds/two-thirds rule analogy, this does not provide sufficient time to transition to and execute the defense. If a brigade had more than a week, our systems would be conducive to this planning timeline, but rarely do we train to, or expect to, have that amount of time afforded to our organizations in combat.

At some point before the COA approval WARNO (the sooner the better), the companies need the following information to finalize their planning priorities and achieve some semblance of parallel planning with their higher headquarters.

Additional Information Output (Proposed):

- Enemy MLCOA and MDCOA
- Battalion battle array (locations of forward, left, right, rear, and reserve forces)
 - Battle position guidance (task and purpose nested against battalion decisive operation and any constraints or requirements mandated from the battalion commander)
 - Counter-reconnaissance plan (which should be developed during IPB with the scout platoon leader and S2 to address battalion priority information requirements [PIR] with reconnaissance assets initiating movement sometime between COA development and approval)
 - Engineer support plan (assets available and prioritization of support)
 - Class IV allocation by company (even a conservative estimate will allow the company to execute some level of initiative in establishing its obstacles)

Our current doctrine is effective in establishing a deliberate defense against a near-peer threat when there is abundant time available. Intrinsicly, the issue with our MDMP is that in a condensed timeline staffs do not have the experience to effectively disseminate information to maximize time for subordinate commanders. Unlike offensive operations, the defense is a more labor-intensive operation requiring the completion of a myriad of pre-executed tasks (fighting position development, key weapon emplacement, counter-

Figure 2 — MDMP Steps

Key inputs	Steps	Key outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher headquarters’ plan or order or a new mission anticipated by the commander 	<p>Step 1: Receipt of Mission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commander’s initial guidance • Initial allocation of time
Warning order		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher headquarters’ plan or order • Higher headquarters’ knowledge and intelligence products • Knowledge products from other organizations • Design concept (if developed) 	<p>Step 2: Mission Analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission statement • Initial commander’s intent • Initial planning guidance • Initial CCIRs and EEFIs • Updated IPB and running estimates • Assumptions
Warning order		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission statement • Initial commander’s intent, planning guidance, CCIRs, and EEFIs • Updated IPB and running estimates • Assumptions 	<p>Step 3: Course of Action (COA) Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COA statements and sketches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tentative task organization - Broad concept of operations • Revised planning guidance • Updated assumptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated running estimates • Revised planning guidance • COA statements and sketches • Updated assumptions 	<p>Step 4: COA Analysis (War Game)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refined COAs • Potential decision points • War-game results • Initial assessment measures • Updated assumptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated running estimates • Refined COAs • Evaluation criteria • War-game results • Updated assumptions 	<p>Step 5: COA Comparison</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluated COAs • Recommended COAs • Updated running estimates • Updated assumptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated running estimates • Evaluated COAs • Recommended COA • Updated assumptions 	<p>Step 6: COA Approval</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commander-selected COA and any modifications • Refined commander’s intent, CCIRs, and EEFIs • Updated assumptions
Warning order		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commander-selected COA with any modifications • Refined commander’s intent, CCIRs, and EEFIs • Updated assumptions 	<p>Step 7: Orders Production</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved operation plan or order
<p>CCIR commander’s critical information requirement</p> <p>COA course of action</p>	<p>EEFI essential element of friendly information</p> <p>IPB intelligence preparation of the battlefield</p>	

Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, *The Operations Process*

reconnaissance, etc.) before executing the actual defense against an enemy force. This process takes time, which we need to maximize for subordinate commanders. The primary way to execute a defense in a condensed timeline is to execute a level of collaborative and parallel planning with subordinate commanders.

Collaborative and Parallel Planning

The MDMP facilitates collaborative and parallel planning as the higher headquarters solicits input and continually shares information concerning future operations with subordinate and adjacent units, supporting and supported units, and unified action partners through planning meetings, warning orders, and other means. Commanders encourage active collaboration among all organizations affected by the pending operations to build shared understanding, participate in course of action development and decision-making, and resolve conflicts before publication of the plan or order.

– Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 5-0, The Operations Process

Collaborative and parallel planning is an integral aspect of our planning processes. It allows for shared understanding at multiple echelons and allows commanders to inject requirements and changes to the proposed plan before the publication of the OPOD, decreasing wasted planning time. Company commanders are generally the best planners behind the operations officer, executive officer, and battalion commander because they have experience (having served as a planner or operations officer before command) and have the best situational awareness regarding the capabilities of their organizations. The planning process would be faster and more efficient leveraging the subordinate commanders. There are numerous shortcomings regarding our utilization of these aspects:

- Staff and commanders executing collaborative planning
- “Bottom-up” refinement
- Enabler management

First, from my observations during DATE rotations, many staffs tend to default to insulated and isolated execution of planning. There are numerous reasons for this, which include:

- 1) The dislocated nature of our formations in a DATE environment is a major contributing factor; and
- 2) Our staffs do not realize the importance and benefits of including subordinate units in the planning process (e.g., increasing shared understanding, utilizing commanders to assist in COA development). Staffs also tend to insulate their planning until they have a “briefable” product to push the companies rather than tying them into the planning process early and often ultimately wasting time.

Insulating themselves in their planning efforts is not isolated to staffs; frequently, company commanders do the exact same thing. There are a myriad of reasons for this, but if a commander can incorporate his junior leaders into the planning process, it allows for multitasking, decentralized execution, and most importantly, allows the commander to focus on direct fire control

measures (DFCMs), graphic control measures (GCMs), arrayal of key enablers, and refinement of EA DEV. One key to fixing this issue is utilizing true bottom-up practices.

Bottom-up refinement is when a subordinate unit identifies friction points and requests changes to mandated constraints to support its maneuver. This refinement provides additional GCMs and DFCMs developed by the lower command to maintain the higher commander’s common operating picture (COP) and further facilitates battle tracking through routine and priority reporting. We commonly misuse the term bottom-up refinement. Often, staffs push a substandard plan that lacks requisite detail and GCMs to control the maneuver of subordinate organizations. Routinely, we have altered the term as a cover for our inadequacies in detailed maneuver planning, as opposed to seeking subordinate input on an executable and developed plan. This issue is not isolated to the battalion level. This is a problem from brigade to battalion, battalion to company, and company to platoon. However, at the company level, far too frequently, commanders are “waiting on the word” from their higher headquarters.

More disruptively, company commanders fail to identify company versus platoon “fights” and responsibilities. This manifests in micromanagement of defensive efforts and a lack of situational understanding of the battalion’s overall defensive SoM. The top recommendation I provide to commanders is to inject themselves into their battalion’s MDMP — not to take it over but to gain an understanding of the defensive techniques their company and battalion will utilize, assist the S3 with any planning shortcomings or requirements the company may need that the staff did not foresee, and to gain situational awareness on the enemy and friendly situations. All of these would allow commanders to execute disciplined initiative and start necessary movement with their formations.

Enabler integration is a routine friction point in the planning efforts of units generally because units are not properly integrating enablers into their organizations immediately upon arrival. There needs to be an inculcated process for when an enabler arrives; units need to have a routine or standard operating procedure (SOP) for reception, integration, and involvement within the planning process and subsequent maneuver. Our enablers are the subject matter experts on their particular skillset. For the defense, units frequently mismanage engineers at multiple echelons. It is common practice for sapper platoon leaders to act as battalion protection officers; however, they are generally young lieutenants who may not sufficiently understand the requisite needs to resource, plan, and control a battalion obstacle plan. The Maneuver Captains Career Course (MCCC) teaches our commanders how to manage engineer assets, and the key is through a detailed sync matrix. This is hit or miss if battalions create this synchronization measure, but more frequently, a poor sync matrix is due to a lack of planning or the inability to enforce this planning tool. This generally is a function of the executive officer (for example, ensuring proper hand over and reception of the enabler and maximization of the blade hours available based on the battalion’s priority of engineer support). Simply put, we need to plan for the initial

Priorities of Work

Security (Continuous)

- Passive and active security measures
- Readjust after R&S teams complete
- Employ all organic elements and weapons
- Assign sectors of fire, develop sketches, and fires plan
- Confirm location of fighting positions for cover, concealment/observation and fields of fires
 - Assign fighting positions
 - Primary
 - Alternate
 - Supplementary
 - Subsequent
- Assign entry/exit point
- Hasty fighting positions (minimum 18" deep with slight upward slope)

Withdrawal Plan

- Platoon leader (PL) designates the signal for withdrawal, order, and rendezvous point/procedures
- PL designates when withdrawal plan transitions from hasty to deliberate (subsequent fighting positions)

Communications Plan

- Must be maintained with higher headquarters, observation posts, and all subordinate elements at all times

Mission Planning and Preparations

- Use patrol base to plan, issue orders, rehearse pre-combat checks and inspections (PCC/PCI), and prepare deliberate positions

Water Resupply

- Platoon sergeant (PSG) organizes watering parties as necessary. Platoon has equipment and resources as additional equipment. PL/PSG ensure communications are maintained at all times and contingencies are planned for.

Mess and Rest Plan

- Mess/rest must be conducted off the line at least 1-3m. Rest, mess, maintenance, and hygiene are all done off the line.

Figure 5 — Priorities of Work

commanders to analyze reoccurring tasks, identify who is responsible for execution, and decide the standard to which one must execute. Battle drills are a fundamental way we fight and one we are familiar with, but the key to battle drills is that they are clearly defined and rehearsed. If you can break down the process of the defense, you can provide a framework and establish a sequential battle drill for the defense.

Another key fundamental I observed in the effective execution within a compressed timeline is a platoon's ability to initiate movement and priorities of work (PoWs) immediately. This, much like a battle drill, has a structure and only needs amending through basic commander's guidance. Again, it does not need to be complex; PoWs are similar to those we execute for patrol base activities, and the primary difference is the emplacement of key weapon systems against an obstacle plan and focused principle direction of fire. If platoons can get into their PoW quickly, the structural (labor intensive) tasks of the defense can begin while the company's leadership conducts detailed planning. These all create more time for commanders within the defense through simple systems and products within their SOP.

Command Post (CP) Operations

CPs are facilities that include personnel, equipment,

Squad Leader Priorities of Work

- Establish local security:
 - Position squad, weapons, and soldiers; assign sectors of fire
- Ensure wire is laid to squad (if available)
- Ensure Soldiers manning observation posts (OPs) have a position to return to:
 - Issue Soldiers a contingency plan with azimuths and tentative grids to current location and black/gold plans
- Draw a sector sketch and submit a copy to platoon leader
- Walk the position. Check sectors of fire, range cards, aiming stakes, and dead space by getting into each position and sighting weapons
- Coordinate with left and right squad and adjacent units
 - Ensure overlapping sectors of fire from last man on each side
- Have Soldiers begin digging after platoon leader checks position
- Issue rations, water, ammunition, pioneer tools, and barrier material
- Pass additional information and changes to plans
- Supervise wire and mine teams
- Give warning order for planned patrol missions
- Set up squad alert and security plan
- Reconnoiter alternate and supplementary positions, routes, and counterattack plan with the platoon leader, then brief team leaders
 - Designate squad urine areas
 - Post and brief OPs
 - Rest and conduct personal hygiene
 - Supervise and refine

Figure 6 — Example Squad Priorities of Work

information systems, and networks, guided by processes and procedures that assist commanders in the exercise of mission command. Commanders employ CPs to help control operations through continuity, planning, coordination, and synchronizing of the warfighting functions... CP functions directly relate to assisting commanders in understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing operations.

— Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 6-0.5 Command Post Organization and Operations

Commanders too frequently fight out of their pocket and off the top of their head. Commanders still need to function like a staff. The top deficiency I observed during my last year at JRTC consistently has been the inability of companies to conduct CP operations and maintain a COP. I realize this is an extremely difficult thing to do for a company. Companies do not have a staff. Additionally, the new ATP 6-0.5 does not address CP operations at the company level; it only addresses battalion and above. However, it is not difficult to work this out. If platoons are sensors for a company and a company is a sensor for the battalion, all should be nested. As such, company and platoon CPs and systems should be small-scale versions of their higher headquarters, and this is one of the first shortcomings — companies do not nest their CPs against their battalion's mission command (MC) SOP. Platoons are even worse than companies at nesting against their higher headquarters; their MC systems are often nonexistent. CPs do not have to be complex. They need to be tailorable to the environment, but this does not mean minimizing CPs so much they become nonexistent or "pocket litter."

Commanders need to maximize their headquarters

personnel with additional duties. To be frank, the default for most company headquarters (outside of the command team and fires personnel) is to hang out near the company trains watching the vehicles. Companies need to have administration and logistics operation center (ALOC) functions (S1 and S4) — normally your XO and 1SG — but they cannot be the only ones tracking this. Company CPs need to continually update themselves when the commander is busy running missions or trooping the line. A company cannot have its CP press “pause” every time the commander does something.

You can build redundancy at the headquarters (orderly room clerk and supply sergeant as the primary persons doing S1 and S4 functions), but this implies that you take the time to build the system and trackers. You need current operations (CUOPs) and future operations (FUOPs), which could be the fire support officer (FSO) and radio-telephone operator (RTO) running CUOPs. This would free the commander to focus on FUOPs. You can run down every staff function of a battalion or higher staff, but companies do not force the function. Companies do not rehearse CP operations, ensure routine updating, codify them into SOP, and violently enforce them.

A CP is a central location where a commander can quickly ascertain the current situation and COP to make sound tactical decisions. If a company does not use or enforce CP operations, it cannot effectively maintain a COP. If a company cannot maintain an updated COP, it CANNOT make sound tactical decisions. The confusing part of this identified shortcoming is the simplicity of a COP. Although vague in its description, fundamentally a COP is paragraph one of an OPORD (weather, light, terrain, enemy, and friendly forces) that is continuously updated — that is it.

The best aspect of a CP is that the commander is not the only one who can quickly understand the COP from a functioning CP. Subordinate leaders will benefit from an effective CP in numerous ways: it helps them maintain their own COP and CP, provides updates (especially when you are not there, preventing the pause of operations), and receives updated tasks and priorities (multitasking).

More importantly, the CP allows for a central location for the commander to get subordinate updates and conduct routine battle rhythm events (commanders should only have to publish information once rather than three times at three locations). This does not mean it has to be elaborate with large tents and massive display boards, but it needs form. Commanders need to develop them against a standard, and leaders must actively support and enforce that standard.

In summary, the primary way to execute a defense in a condensed timeline is to execute a level of collaborative and parallel planning with subordinate commanders. I typically do not see companies with proper MC systems or TLP SOPs in



Photo by SSG Daniel Love

Platoon leaders in C Company, 3rd Battalion, 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, plan the defense of an urban center during the unit's Joint Readiness Training Center rotation on 20 February 2016.

place. They do not effectively execute CP operations, struggle at maintaining a COP (companies are even worse at disseminating the COP to platoons), do not have SOPs established for PoW, and struggle with organizational experience and knowledge regarding requisite field-craft required for the defense. Echelons above the company need to find ways to provide essential information down to companies as early as possible to allow them to start necessary movement. Companies need to do the exact same thing within their organizations and find ways of creating time through involvement in their higher headquarters' MDMP.

- Tailoring the WARNOs within the MDMP will allow companies to get key information for the defense to start time-consuming PoW. Key to this is effectively conducting parallel planning with quick intent and clearly defined fights between a higher headquarters and their subordinates.

- Inclusive planning at all echelons will only improve efficiency, create shared understanding, facilitate disciplined initiative, and allow commanders more avenues to accept prudent risk.

- Company and platoon systems are paramount to their success. Companies need to establish detailed MC SOPs for the defense focused on their CP, creating minimum defense checklists/SOPs and execution products for the defense to allow platoons to start necessary movement and display the same initiative company commanders so aggressively seek for themselves.

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