

TLP Time Management at NTC

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Maneuver company commanders always ask the same question before arriving at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, CA: “What do I need to do to be successful during my rotation?” The observer-coach-trainers (OCTs) consistently give the same answers. Yet, the maneuver commanders who ask this question still come to an NTC rotation and make all the same mistakes mentioned five months earlier. In an effort to remedy this problem and to help commanders be more lethal against a near-peer adversary, this article will identify some common mistakes made by company commanders at NTC and how to fix them.

There are many mistakes that company commanders make, but there is one that destroys the company from within: a lack of troop leading procedures (TLP) time management. The three necessities to successful TLP time management are:

- 1) Having a trained company command post (CP),
- 2) Developing a continuous cycle of intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB), and
- 3) Creating a plan that meets all course of action (COA) screening criteria — suitable, feasible, acceptable, distinguishable, and complete (SFADC).

How does a company make time to plan in a time-constrained environment? These three necessities are the answer. Company commanders may think this is an obvious problem and that they’ve done well with TLPs during home-station situational training exercises (STXs) and company live-fire exercises (LFXs), but they are not taking into account the time constraints of the brigade and battalion at the speed of war. The commander must parallel plan with the battalion at all times. Never wait for the information. Seek it out aggressively and have information dominance.

At NTC, movements and combat operations begin at a fast pace. While the unit prepares for future operations in an assault position, the enemy conducts a spoiling attack. The unit reacts and then the battalion issues a follow-on mission that will need to be executed in five hours with a 20-kilometer movement at night through rough terrain. What does the commander do? The commander needs to ensure that the company is continuously planning in the assault position, but how does the unit get time to plan when it is reporting all sorts of information to its battalion? The company CP is the answer.

The greatest combat multiplier for the maneuver company is the CP. The CP is essential — without it there will be no operation order (OPORD), rehearsal, or synchronization of operations. The CP is one of the most overlooked systems on the battlefield. The company is not given a CP by the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE), but there are ways to create one. A recommendation is that two NCOs be chosen to be the CP NCOICs; one will be on day shift and the other will be on the night shift (Army Techniques Publication 3-90.1, *Armor and Mechanized Infantry Company Team*). These NCOs need to be competent and able to perform their duties with little or no supervision. Although the company is short on Soldiers and this is essentially taking away combat power, the CP is used for planning and preparation only. When it comes time to execute a mission, the personnel taken for the CP will return to their respective platoons or sections.

The CP’s main purpose is to take on the reporting requirements from higher and to perform the predictable things that occur during the planning and preparation phases of an operation. Having the CP complete these tasks will allow the leadership to focus on planning, preparation, and unpredictable situations. The CP is extremely effective for consolidation and reorganization. If the company does not consolidate and reorganize, it will fail to preserve combat power and lose momentum for transitioning to the next phases of operations. It is essential that the CP be set up and validated at home station before deploying to NTC or anywhere else.

Commanders must conduct an effective IPB before planning to maneuver against the enemy. The four steps of the IPB process are:

- 1) Define the operational environment,

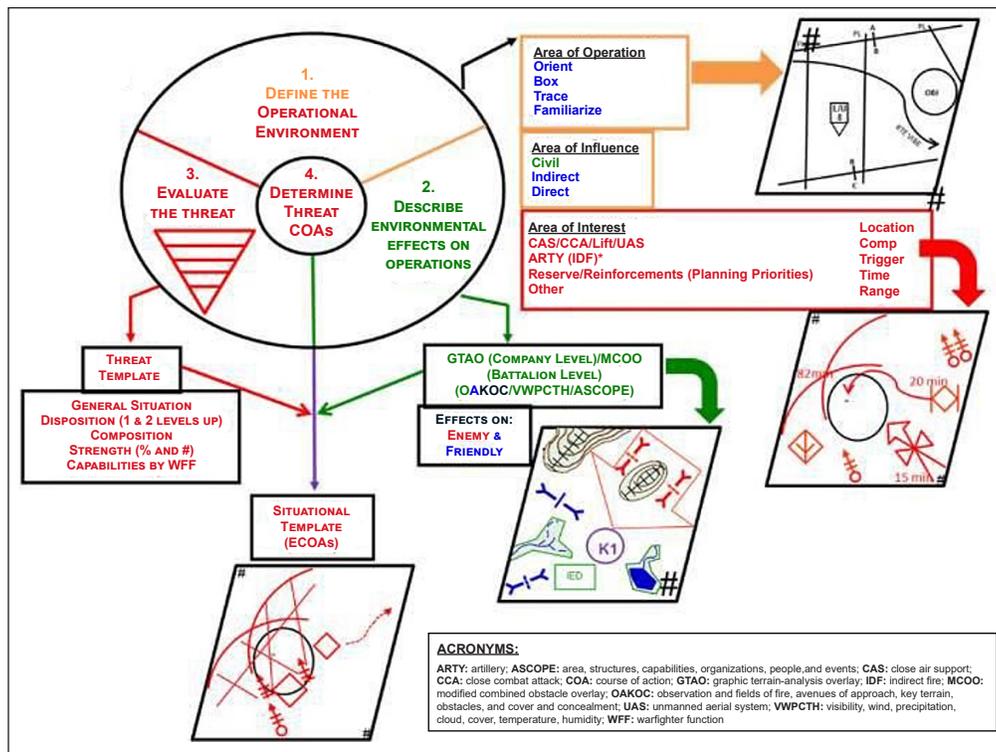


Figure 1 — The IPB Process

- 2) Describe environmental effects on operations,
- 3) Evaluate the threat, and
- 4) Determine threat COAs.

Figure 1 provides a visual review of the cycle as well. While maneuver company commanders will rely on the battalion for the IPB, the company should be conducting its own IPB and making it a recurring cycle of terrain analysis, enemy analysis, and enemy situational template (SITTEMP), or it will not meet the standard for planning. When the company commander first arrives at the rotational unit bivouac area (RUBA), the commander must aggressively engage the S2. Once the information is obtained from the S2, the maneuver commander must conduct the company IPB. After this is complete, the commander needs to have a recurring cycle of terrain analysis and update the enemy SITTEMP while conducting continuous combat operations. The best practice is to conduct the IPB process with your subordinate leaders so they understand the ground they will be fighting on and the enemy they will be engaging. This will reduce the time spent trying to brief the enemy SITTEMP in one meeting. Commanders do not need to conduct the entire IPB process once combat operations begin, but they must focus on terrain analysis (use a map that shows elevation), enemy analysis (where they think the enemy will fight using the terrain), and an enemy SITTEMP. Most of the time, the company will be waiting on the maneuver plan from the battalion. Time constraints and other variables will leave a limited amount of time to plan, but if this analysis has already been completed, the maneuver plan will be more effective and take less time to create. Platoon leaders should continually be receiving the commander's analysis and intent for the operation. This aggressive focus on IPB and a recurring cycle of analysis will dramatically increase TLP efficiency, resulting in effective TLP time management.

The recurring cycle of terrain analysis, enemy analysis, and enemy SITTEMP must be done before a company begins movement. A key factor to a consistent battle rhythm is having the fire support officer (FSO) present; this will provide a consistent targeting cycle with indirect fire assets. OCTs consistently mention to commanders that they need to conduct an analysis every time they look ahead at future operations. This analysis should drive two possible maneuver COAs. If time permits, commanders must also teach platoon leaders the maximum effective ranges of enemy weapon systems. For example, the max effective range of the AT-5 is five kilometers. What does this mean? It means that the company will transition from movement to maneuver at about five kilometers from the enemy's AT-5 weapon system, which is called the probable line of deployment (PLD). In a metaphorical sense,

the terrain and enemy analysis and an updated enemy SITTEMP are the canvas and the maneuver plan is the paint; without either, there is no painting.

Lastly, company commanders must create a plan that meets all the SFADC COA screening criteria. Now that there is a good battle rhythm of seeing the terrain and enemy SITTEMP and the commander has a CP, how does the unit develop a good plan with so little time? Company commanders are usually trained to plan and prepare their own OPORDs, but the company team must plan in unison with platoon leaders and sergeants at a minimum. Doing this reduces the briefing time, and it helps the commander be more detailed when he or she begins to forget things due to fatigue from combat operations. In addition, the commander can be in a battalion OPORD brief, write down a mission statement with commander's intent, and give it to a radio-telephone operator (RTO) to transmit to the company CP. The platoon leaders and sergeants can then begin planning a simple and logical plan. The commander will probably get back to the company about one hour prior to movement and at that time can add changes or clarify specifics in the plan, but the end state is that PLs will already have three fighting products:

1. Graphic control measures,
2. A target list worksheet, and
3. An execution matrix (at the company level).

How do they know the platoon leaders and sergeants will have time to create these fighting products? It should be easy if the analysis of the terrain and enemy has been shared with subordinate leaders. Subordinate leaders should not have a hard time planning against an enemy and terrain if they have good situational awareness. This recommendation can only work with a continuous cycle of terrain analysis, enemy SITTEMP, and a company CP. If the unit continually seeks information dominance of the battlefield and our Soldiers understand it as well, morale will increase and the unit will surely defeat the enemy.

In conclusion, TLP time management is the greatest mistake maneuver company commanders make at NTC. The company needs a CP; it is essential for planning. A CP does not necessarily need to be used during current operations, but it is the linchpin for continuous planning at the company level. Commanders cannot conduct planning if they are



**Soldiers assigned to Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 198th Armored Regiment, Mississippi Army National Guard, plan for an attack on 29 May 2017 at Fort Irwin, CA.
(Photo by SGT DeUndra Brown)**

the ones sharing the predictable reports and sustainment needs that are required by the battalion from the company. If these are handled routinely by an effective company CP, then leaders can focus on planning and preparation.

Next, maneuver leaders continually make the mistake of not conducting a continuous cycle of terrain analysis, enemy analysis, and enemy SITTEMP. The commander must begin this cycle to stay afloat in the fast and complicated pace of combat. The time spent conducting the modified IPB will pay dividends once a short-notice mission comes down the pipeline. As great leaders have always mentioned, "Never pick up the blue pen till the red pen is down!" In other words, there is no maneuver plan without an enemy to plan against. Even when conducting a movement to contact, units still need to have target reference points (TRPs) on potential enemy positions and a PLD to transition from movement to maneuver. Lastly, commanders need to create a plan that meets the SFADC COA screening criteria. This plan should also produce three fighting products (graphic control measures, target list worksheet, and company execution matrix) for platoon leaders.

A good battle rhythm of planning will win the day and create TLP time management in a fast-paced combat environment. The recommendations mentioned above need to be done during home-station training and validated prior to deploying to NTC or a combat zone. These recommendations, based in doctrine, are from observations of 10 Armor and Infantry companies. This information should help units create their training plan that make companies more lethal and ready for continuous combat operations.

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