

PLATOON TEST

INFANTRY STAFF

In peacetime, an infantry leader's most difficult but most important job is to prepare and conduct training properly. And training that is properly prepared and conducted is the mark of a professional unit.

Today, the Army Training and Evaluation Program (ARTEP) is at the base of all collective training. The ARTEP, by design and intent, is a training and evaluation program.

Commanders and leaders should use the ARTEP to provide the tasks, the realistic combat conditions, the standards, and the training support requirements that are needed to conduct performance-oriented training. The ARTEP is the primary source that helps the commander assess training proficiency, establish training objectives, and program resources.

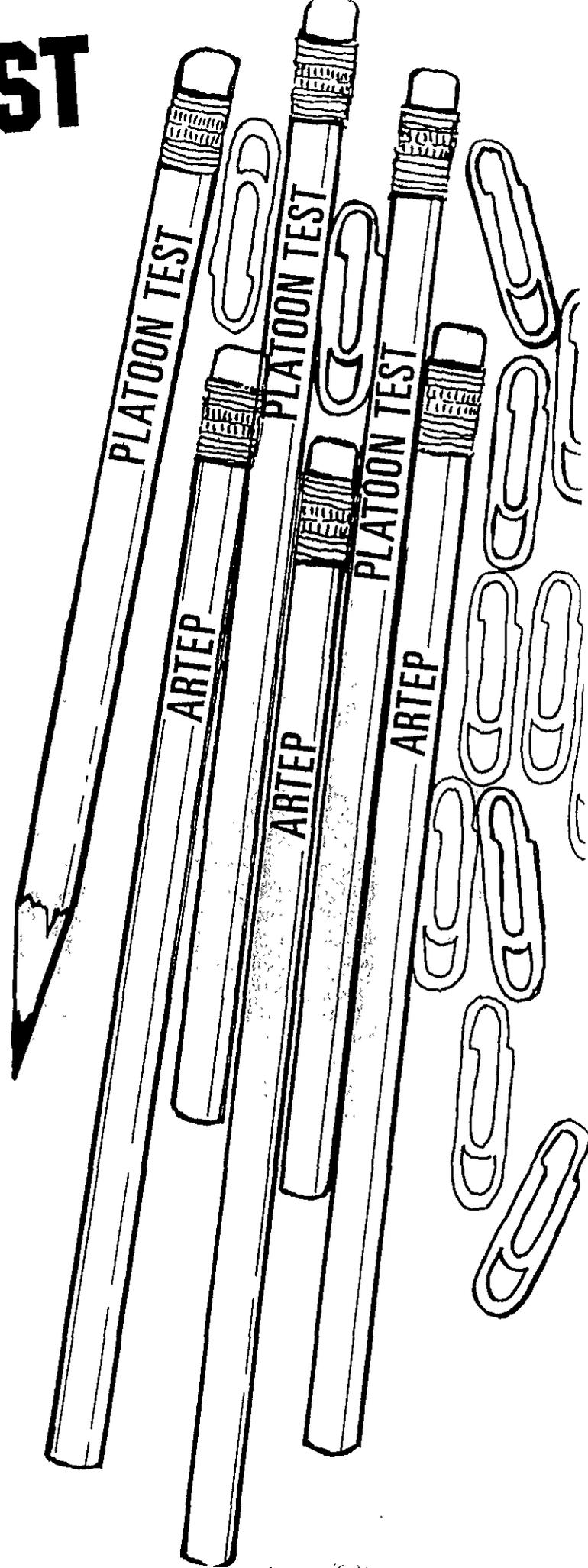
Although the ARTEP is used to evaluate training proficiency at the platoon level, it is felt that a more detailed and comprehensive test is needed to fully assess the combat readiness of platoons. The Army Training Board, working with the Army Research Institute and the U.S. Army Infantry School, is developing such a test. The proposed test will be performance-oriented and will be administered annually to each line infantry platoon by its parent battalion. The purpose of the test will be to provide comprehensive, externally evaluated, diagnostic information to a battalion's chain of command.

In essence, each unit will still train and be tested within the framework of the ARTEP. The major differences will be these: The test will be conducted in a continuous series of missions without stopping to reinforce deficiencies, and the standards will be more detailed and therefore will hold subjective evaluations to a minimum.

The test results will be used by a battalion commander and his staff to identify additional training requirements and to provide the necessary resources for conducting that training. The test, in effect, will permit the ARTEP to be what it was intended to be — a training and evaluation program. And the test will be the only part of the Army Training System that will require a unit to demonstrate its ability to perform selected missions and tasks in a realistic manner under conditions involving stress.

As now proposed, the test is to be a quality control check, or measurement, of a platoon's maximum capabilities. It will use a strictly controlled opposing force (OPFOR) to make things happen. This standardization is considered vital, because the OPFOR must present the same picture to each platoon it engages. The platoon leaders will receive their orders and instructions from the evaluators, and then they will be on their own; their company commanders will not be permitted to provide guidance and assistance.

In spite of these basic differences between the proposed





test and the ARTEP, there is a close relationship between the two. Thus, the tasks that an infantry or a mechanized infantry platoon will be called on to do during its test will be the same as those listed in ARTEP 7-15.

The new test will not change any current training doctrine. But it will modify our existing evaluation doctrine. Platoons will continue to use the ARTEP for training purposes throughout their training year, and that training will continue to be evaluated both internally and externally. The platoon test, on the other hand, will be used just one time during a training year, and the platoon will be evaluated externally. The test should not be confused with the informal external training and evaluation that may be conducted by a battalion headquarters or with the internal training and evaluation conducted by a company or a platoon.

The new test will consist of a number of tasks — usually 15 — selected from ARTEP 7-15 by the battalion commander whose platoons must be tested. The tasks will then be incorporated into a continuous, logical test scenario that can last from 36 to 48 hours. As with any test, the platoon test, if it is to be successful, must be adapted to local conditions and conducted under stress.

A team of evaluators — probably five all told — will objectively determine how well a platoon meets the established standards. Each evaluator will answer a series of questions for each task: Yes (the activity was accomplished to standard), No (the activity was not accomplished to standard), NE (the activity was not evaluated because the question was inappropriate or the evaluator

did not see the activity, for whatever reason). The evaluators will have to give their reasons for all of their NE answers.

SCENARIO

Historically, time and personnel have proved to be the two most difficult resources to manage in units. By way of comparison, equipment — or the lack of it — may cause some management frustrations, although these are usually resolved one way or another. Equipment is either available or can be made available, or it is not available and cannot be obtained. Usually, though, if an item or type of equipment is considered critical to the success of a particular mission, higher echelons or support units will ultimately provide that equipment.

Time and personnel problems are less easily resolved. People and time are harder to get and harder to retain. Accordingly, *every commander and training manager must make do with what he has.* For example, a commander should not augment understrength platoons or replace personnel for purposes of the test.

Time will always be a problem. But there is a way in which a platoon test can be conducted that will not require a unit to spend an inordinate amount of time on it. Considering the important results that a unit can get from the test, the time spent will pay rich dividends.

All nine platoons of a battalion should be evaluated during one compact, seven-day period. There would be a 12-hour lag between platoons at the starting point. For

instance, one platoon would begin at 0600 on Day 1, followed by another platoon at 1800 on Day 1, and by the other platoons at 12-hour intervals. Thus, the ninth platoon would start at 0600 on Day 5 and finish at 0600 on Day 7.

An important part of the proposed test plan will be a comprehensive, formal after-action review. This will offer the single most comprehensive and most readily available use of the test results at the small unit level.

If the battalion commander requests a computer-assisted analysis, reports have been developed that include reports for the platoon, the company, and the battalion.

The report given to the platoon will consist of three parts: a task performance and casualty report, a functional area report, and a tactical systems employment report.

The report of task performance and casualties will list each task that was evaluated and will show the overall number of "yes" ratings for a whole platoon, for its platoon leaders, for each of its squads, and for the forward observer. It will also show a platoon's total number of casualties as well as the casualties for each evaluated task. The report will further break down each task into its subtasks and standards showing the number of standards checked "yes" for each subtask and the number of "yes," "no," and "NE" responses for each standard for an entire platoon, its platoon leader, each of its squads, and the FO.

FUNCTION

The functional area report covers a "function" such as command and control as it applies to any or all the tasks. Because this report will show the inherent strengths and weaknesses of all the tasks tested, the platoon leader will be able to use it to spot deficiencies and to plan corrective training to remedy those deficiencies.

The tactical systems employment report will help the platoon leader spot the need for corrective training on the tactical employment of his weapon systems and vehicles. Thus, the platoon leader will be able to visualize and compare systems employment, and he will be able to look at each system in terms of its functional and subfunctional components and in terms of the related standards for each.

The company reports of platoon performances will be aggregates of the overall performance of each platoon by task, functional area, and tactical system. The reports will be arranged so that a company commander can compare his platoon's performances by looking at the percentage of "yes" answers recorded for the evaluated standards.

Similarly, the battalion report will show the platoon performances by company and by task, functional area, and tactical system. The information will be so arranged that a battalion commander can compare his companies by the results earned by their platoons.

The battalion will also receive platoon environmental and demographic comparisons. The performance data provided by the environmental comparisons will not single out any one unit but, rather, will reflect the actions performed by all the platoons in the battalion under each type of condition. The data will be displayed by functional and subfunctional categories to show a platoon's fundamental strengths and weaknesses as they relate to different environments. For instance, a unit may actually do better under bad environmental conditions than under good conditions.

The demographic comparison will be shown by functional and subfunctional categories to highlight the fundamental strengths and weaknesses as they pertain to a platoon's soldiers. The categories will range from one in which a platoon's leaders have been in their positions an average of 12 months or less with the platoon at or near full strength to one in which the platoon's leaders have been in their positions for an average of 24 months or less with the platoon's strength at or less than 80 percent.

In any test in which evaluators must tabulate performance in an objective yes-or-no, black-or-white manner, large gray areas can exist. There are times during such a test when neither "yes" nor "no" is a truly accurate answer, when an answer of "yes, but..." would more accurately reflect the unit's performance. But for the most part, during the proposed test the gray area will be covered by an evaluator's remarks in the appropriate column of the test question sheets. Even so, it is possible that, overall, a platoon may look either bad or good on the test but with extenuating circumstances that might alter an objective view. Therefore, a judgmental evaluation will be built into the test to allow the chief evaluator to give his opinion on how well that platoon performed on the test.

During recent months, the test design has been evaluated by several Active Army units, and, generally speaking, it has received favorable notices.

Negative comments, though, have come from other sources. These are:

- Everything the new test is designed to accomplish is currently being accomplished by the ARTEP.
- The ARTEP — no matter the intent — is being used by many units as a test; therefore, there is no need for another test.
- Let's not add to our already overburdened training program, one that is seldom carried out fully now because of the many training distractors, but let's support our unit training by producing better ARTEPs and by giving our commanders more time to train their units.

Tests of the new concept will continue in the months ahead. The Infantry School is interested in your comments on the proposed platoon test. You can either mail them to the Director of Training Developments, ATTN: Collective Training Branch (Platoon Test), USAIS, Fort Benning, Georgia 31905, or call AUTOVON 835-4759/1317.