Platoon Maintenance Program

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: I wish to recognize the assistance given me during the preparation of this article by Captain James Skopek and Captain Andrew J. Hill (now retired).

By the time an officer has completed the Infantry Officer Basic Course (IOBC) he has been exposed to a tremendous amount of material on what his duties and responsibilities will be as a platoon leader. And he is probably a bit confused. But his effectiveness as a leader and a manager of resources will depend on how well he applies the instruction he has received.

In applying that instruction he may especially need some pointers to help him with his maintenance responsibilities. While the mechanics of doing his maintenance job are easy, the difficulty is to motivate his men, to see that they do their jobs "by the book," and to see that they achieve a well-defined maintenance standard.

The first thing a platoon leader has to do is to understand what his company commander expects and how his own efforts will fit into the company's overall maintenance operation. The company commander's orientation should provide some of that understanding, but the company's SOP (standing operating procedures) will be the platoon leader's primary guide; it represents the commander's view of how maintenance doctrine and procedures apply to the company's operations.

During his review of the SOP, the platoon leader should concentrate on the responsibilities of each leader in the chain of command, on the company's key maintenance personnel (including the armorer and the NBC, motor, and communications sergeants), and on the system maintenance team of each vehicle. (This team is nothing more than the squad members cross-trained in the operator level maintenance on that vehicle.) In addition, the platoon leader must understand how each maintenance team cooperates with the organizational maintenance people to accomplish the mission — such as, who must be present during quarterly service and what to do if something can't be fixed at the operator and system team level.

(When the platoon leader becomes more involved in the maintenance program, he should resolve any discrepancies he has noted between the SOP and the way in which the actual maintenance operations are being conducted.)

After he has reviewed the SOP, the platoon leader should take a good look at the condition of his equipment and at how well his soldiers perform their maintenance drills. When checking the equipment, he must use the appropriate manual for each item to determine his platoon's maintenance posture and, more important, he must see that his soldiers are using the manuals too.

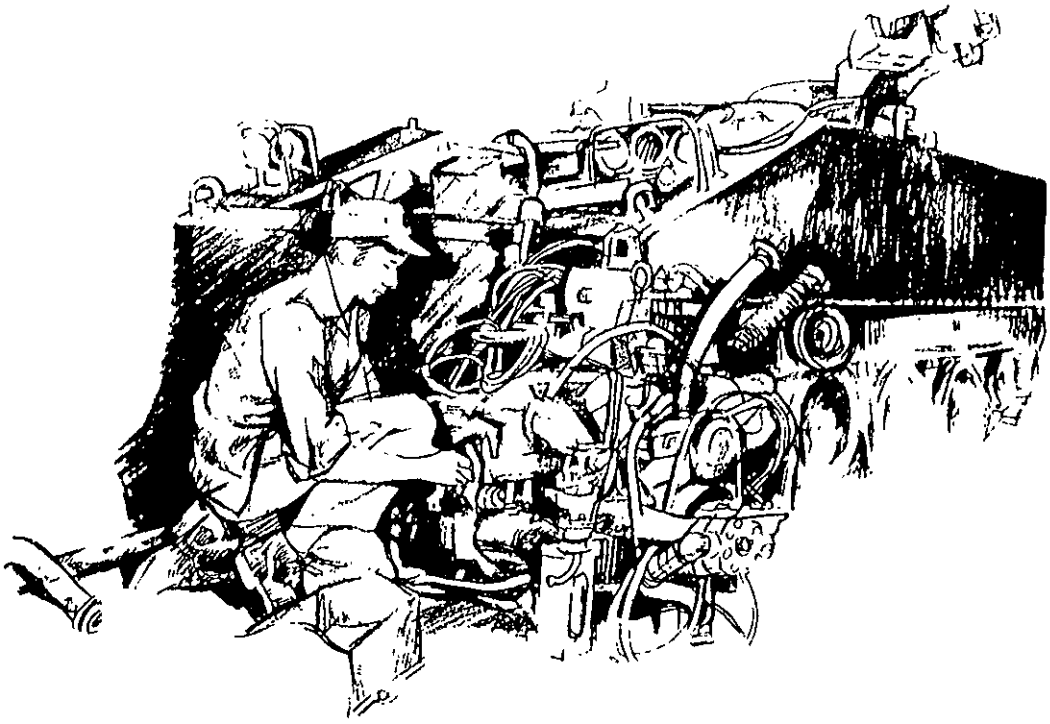
While in the motor pool he should ask questions and then evaluate and verify the answers using the SOP and the appropriate manuals. This is an excellent procedure for determining how well his soldiers know and perform the maintenance procedures outlined in the SOP and in the operator's manual. It is his responsibility, too, to see that the system maintenance teams for the equipment assigned to his platoon are trained through effective maintenance drills during scheduled motor stables.

The platoon sergeant should be able to provide explicit detail on the platoon's maintenance operations and on any shortcomings noted in the past. This information must include at least two points: The actions taken when organizational maintenance is required, and the strengths and weaknesses of each system maintenance team.

KEY MAN

It is especially important for the platoon leader to examine closely the relationship between the squad leaders and their soldiers. After all, the squad leader is the key man in the maintenance program. He supervises the first link of the maintenance chain — the operator — and trains his squad to operate as a system maintenance team to achieve the desired standards.

The platoon leader must thoroughly understand the forms and records that are used when equipment is dispatched. These forms include the Motor Equipment Utilization Record (DD Form 1970), the Equipment Inspection and Maintenance Worksheet (DA Form 2404); the



Operator's Report of Motor Vehicle Accident (SF 91); and the Accident-Indentification Card (DD Form 518). Other forms he must be familiar with are the Preventive Maintenance Schedule and Record (DD Form 314) and the Materiel Condition Status Report (DA Form 2406). (The key manual in the preparation of these forms is TM 38-750, The Army Maintenance Management Systems, with interim changes, I01, I02, I03.)

Another critical subject area is the timely and valid requisition of repair parts. The platoon leader must understand the entries on the document Register for Supply Actions (DA Form 2064). (DA Pamphlet 710-2-1, Using Unit Supply System, explains how to prepare this form.) He must use these manuals! It is his responsibility to know the correct and accurate status of all the equipment assigned to his platoon. And his commander will certainly ask about it!

Once the platoon leader has mastered the company's maintenance plan and its daily maintenance operation, has evaluated his soldiers' strengths and weaknesses, and has determined his present maintenance posture, he must develop a simple and comprehensive platoon maintenance plan. His plan should list specific training objectives with standards that can be achieved on either a daily, a weekly, or a monthly basis. The objective of the plan should be to promote unit cohesiveness and teamwork through effective maintenance training. He must also remember that maintenance is training.

The company commander will allocate maintenance time on the company training schedule. Often, he will give such specific guidance as "Before, during, and after operations PMCS will be accomplished." Normally the platoon leader will want to supplement the required training. This additional training should include subjects that have been identified as weaknesses in the platoon. The schedule might read, "In addition to PMCS, a 35-minute class will be given in the proper use of DA Form 2404 in quarterly services operations."

All training should focus on the team and not primarily on a single individual in the section or squad. When additional training is planned, the platoon leader must see that the individual responsible for presenting the instruction is well prepared. Then he should brief the commander informally on his maintenance plan and on the actions he plans to take to train his platoon in maintenance procedures.

Above all, throughout the entire maintenance process, the platoon leader must *use* all the manuals he has — TM 38-750, DA Pamphlet 710-2-1, and all the -10 manuals. The first two are essential in preparing forms properly and the -10s are essential in maintaining the platoon's equipment properly.

If the platoon leader applies these pointers, provides leadership, and demands that the operator and team maintenance be performed "by the book," he will have a good platoon maintenance program. And that program, in turn, will make a substantial and positive contribution to his unit's combat readiness.

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