

Unit Battle Drills

CAPTAIN JOHN F. ANTAL

Units, not individuals, win battles. But to be effective in combat, a unit must have been trained as a team so that it can react quickly and decisively to any enemy contact. This action-reaction cycle is, in fact, the essence of combat; to survive and win, a unit must be able to react to the changing conditions of battle faster than the opposing unit does. But each reaction must be the correct one; reaction without prior training can lead to disaster.

Battle drills are one way for a unit to get this training. Unfortunately, these drills now seem to be almost a lost art, although they proved effective for units in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. It is past time for this concept to be returned to the training schedule.

Designed for platoons and smaller units, unit battle drills consist of chronological sequences of tasks that a unit must do instantly when faced with particular battlefield situations. The drills are based on the assumption that most battle situations have one correct sequence of responses. Thus, by planning and rehearsing these responses, a unit can prepare itself to respond positively and aggressively to enemy action with little loss of time.

In the process, the unit also learns to reduce its exposure time, which, in turn, reduces its casualties. The actions a unit must take, for example, when receiving incoming artillery fire, when occupying a battle posi-

tion, or when breaching a hasty minefield, must be accomplished quickly and efficiently if casualties are to be kept down. In combat, once a unit begins receiving hostile fire, or once one of its tanks or APCs hits a mine, the chaos of battle leaves precious little time for its commander to influence the battle's action-reaction cycle. But if his unit has been well trained in battle drills, the leader can decrease its reaction time by issuing short coded signals that everyone will understand and quickly act upon.

EXAMPLE

As an example, the following battle drill can be used to train a mechanized infantry unit to react decisively when it encounters an enemy minefield while acting as the forward element in a movement to contact. The drill consists of a series of actions that the platoon performs in order:

- In areas where mines are expected, the lead element moves 100-150 meters in front of the platoon.

- Upon contact with a minefield, the lead vehicle activates its smoke projector and plasters the area to the front and flanks of the mined area with machinegun and main gun fire. (Most minefields are also covered by fire.)

- The platoon moves to hull-down firing positions that offer visibility and clear fields of fire of likely enemy

direct fire ambush positions on the far side of the mined area.

- The platoon leader calls for artillery or mortar support to provide immediate suppression and continuous smoke on the far side of the minefield; then he reports to the commander.

- The platoon attempts to bypass the minefield, but if it cannot, it conducts a hasty breach. Under the cover of smoke and the suppression of its direct fire weapons, the platoon dismounts a four-man breaching team to detect and mark the mines using mine detectors or non-metallic probes. (No attempt should be made to remove the mines; the team should mark them with white crosses made from engineer tape and destroy them in place using demolitions, Claymore mines, or white phosphorus grenades.)

- The platoon covers the breaching team with fire and supplemental artillery fires or mortar smoke screens as required.

- The breaching team clears two lanes that are wide enough to allow the platoon's vehicles to cross safely to the far side and marks the lanes with engineer tape.

- Once the lanes have been cleared, the platoon moves quickly through the minefield and adjusts artillery or mortar support as necessary.

Battle drills such as this one lend structure to the chaos of combat because, by giving the unit repetitive training in carefully thought-out bat-

- PROPOSED UNIT BATTLE DRILLS**
- Reacting to enemy contact.
 - Conducting a hasty attack.
 - Occupying a battle position (same for assembly area).
 - Clearing a hasty point minefield.
 - Laying a point minefield.
 - Reacting to a Sagger attack.
 - Reacting to an artillery attack.
 - Securing a bridge or ford.
 - Conducting a passage of lines.
 - Reacting to an enemy air attack.
 - Reacting to a strikewarn message.
 - Performing hasty decontamination of vehicles following a chemical attack.
 - Practicing the actions of survey and monitoring teams.
 - Practicing the actions of chemical detection teams.
 - Resupplying ammunition and fuel.
 - Crossing a contaminated area.

tle responses, they give the unit both tactical expertise and confidence.
The Army Training Board at Fort

Eustis, Virginia, has recognized the value of unit battle drills and is in the process of developing a standard manual of combat battle drills. In the meantime, units can develop their own drills using ARTEP 71-2 and the approved Soldier's Manuals as guides. (Some proposed battle drills are shown in the accompanying chart.)

Each unit should select the drills most appropriate for it and then thoroughly research and wargame each to produce the best possible tactical response. The next step for a unit is to practice these drills until they become second nature to the squads or platoons that will have to execute them under combat conditions. (With relatively few well-learned drills, any unit can increase

its efficiency dramatically.)

No unit leader will be able to win the action-reaction race against his opponent on the battlefield of the future if he has not trained his unit to respond automatically and correctly to his opponent's specific actions. In short, unit battle drills are vital to a unit's success in combat, and it is up to its leader to see that it is ready.



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Training Lieutenants

MAJOR JAMES W. TOWNSEND

The Infantry Officer Basic Course gives new infantry lieutenants an excellent tactical and technical background, but it certainly does not complete their training, nor is it intended to do so. The lieutenants master the knowledge they need to survive and win on the modern battlefield only through further training in their units, and that training requires time and a good deal of effort on the part of their company commanders.

With all the other challenges he faces, this is no easy task for a commander. But there are some principles that can guide him in the training of his new lieutenants. He must

- Establish clear objectives.

- Emphasize technical and tactical proficiency.
- Demand the time to train.
- Set the example.

Clear objectives are essential, and they must be supported by a simple, well thought-out training plan. In its simplest form this plan is nothing more than a list of tasks and a schedule of events he will use to train his lieutenants.

Along with the training plan the commander must set clear standards for technical and tactical proficiency so that his lieutenants will know what to study and practice. Every unit event offers an opportunity for learning, and he must demonstrate to his

lieutenants through personal involvement the hard work and study it takes to achieve technical and tactical proficiency.

To do this he will have to spend a considerable amount of time observing, talking, and listening to his lieutenants, and he must take the time to do so. He must be bold and stick to his plan, briefing his battalion commander on it and keeping him informed of its progress.

Finally, and most important, the company commander has to set the example. Lieutenants tend to mirror the actions of their commander — as he wants the lieutenants to be, so he must be. If he wants his lieutenants to