



THE AMBUSH

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: The training techniques discussed in this article were developed over the past 11 years by the U.S. Army's Ranger battalions. These tactics and methods have been used all over the world, from the jungles of Panama and Honduras to the frozen ground of the Tanana River valley in Alaska

to the deserts of Egypt, Somalia, and Oman. The authors acknowledge the imagination, hard work, and professionalism of a generation of Army Rangers who developed these proven training approaches.

Light infantry forces are not just lightly equipped infantry; they are infantry units that fight differently to take advantage of their unique capabilities. Their tactics emphasize techniques such as infiltration, stalking, and surprise, and they use their all-weather and all-terrain capability to the fullest.

Light infantry units can appear at the unexpected time and place on the battlefield and attack from the unexpected direction. They can operate in the enemy's rear areas and against his bases and lines of communication.

One of the basic light infantry operations to be performed in the enemy's safe havens is the ambush. This means that, if you are in a light infantry unit, sooner or later, you may have to either plan or conduct one. Like many other infantrymen — officers and noncommissioned officers — you may have learned the basics of the ambush in Ranger School. And although these basics are an excellent starting point, to dominate on the next battlefield, you and your unit must become proficient at some more advanced techniques.

What is an ambush? As most INFANTRY readers probably know, it is a surprise attack against a moving or temporarily halted enemy force for the purpose of destroying or capturing it and its equipment. An ambush is a very effective and economical means of attacking an enemy, because it allows a smaller force to engage and defeat larger, more heavily equipped formations. The enemy's morale and effectiveness suffer heavily from the effects of an ambush and at little cost to the force executing it.

TYPES OF AMBUSHES

There are two general types of ambushes — area and point.

Area ambushes are generally established by platoons, companies, or even battalions. They are used to interdict enemy movement in a given area or to inflict heavy casualties on his forces. Area ambushes are composed of a series of point ambushes, the size and location of which are dictated by a METT-T analysis (mission, enemy, terrain, troops available, and time).

A point ambush is set at the best location from which to inflict damage on the enemy. Even though a point ambush is set at a given location on the basis of an assumed direction of enemy approach, it must be able to accept the enemy force from more than one direction. There may be times when a unit can execute an ambush in only two or three principal directions, but the fourth sector must still be covered by security forces to give early warning and prevent an attack from an unexpected direction.

The basic ambush formation is linear, like the one in Figure 1. This ambush can accept contact from three basic directions — left, right, and front. The rear is covered by a security team,

the size of which depends, again, on the METT-T analysis.

The principal variation on the linear ambush is the L-shaped ambush (Figure 2). The L ambush is formed with the base of the L perpendicular to the expected enemy direction of advance. This is a good ambush for a road, a jungle trail, or any other area in which an enemy force is canalized and you can be sure of its approach route. The L ambush can handle an enemy approaching from the expected direction (toward the base of the L) from the front (the stem of the L) and, although less effective, can also be used against an enemy formation that comes from the opposite direction. In this case, the ambush must be executed when the enemy main body has cleared the base of the L, and the flank security must protect the rear of the L's base. All weapons must be carefully sited to avoid direct or ricochet fire into the ambushing forces.

All the other ambushes you hear about — the Z, the X, the V — are variations on the basic linear and L formations (Figure 3). (WARNING: These more advanced ambush formations are extremely tricky and intricate. You must be an expert in the basics before you can employ them.)

One other type of point ambush is worthy of mention — the mechanical ambush. This ambush consists of claymore mines set in series with a double ring main; it is command detonated or is detonated by a triggering device activated by

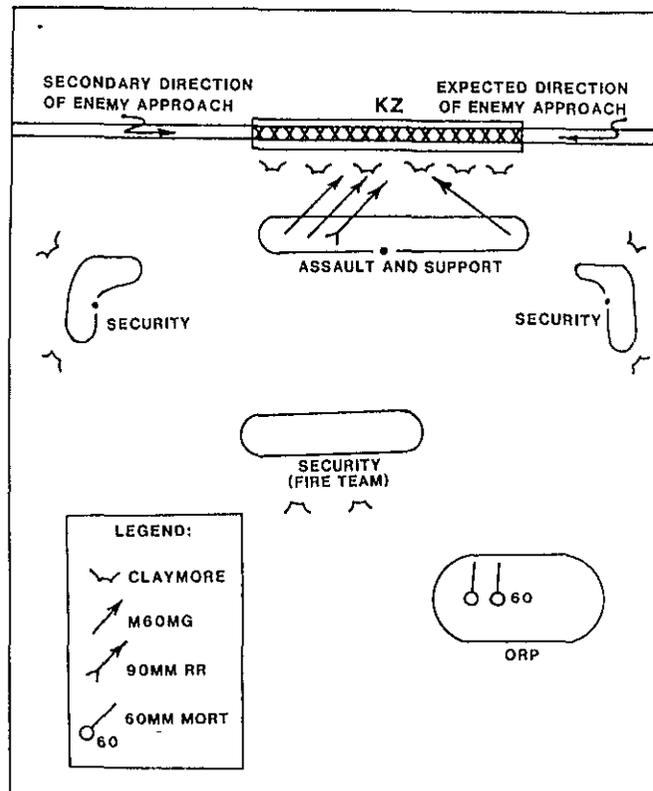


Figure 1. Platoon Linear Ambush.

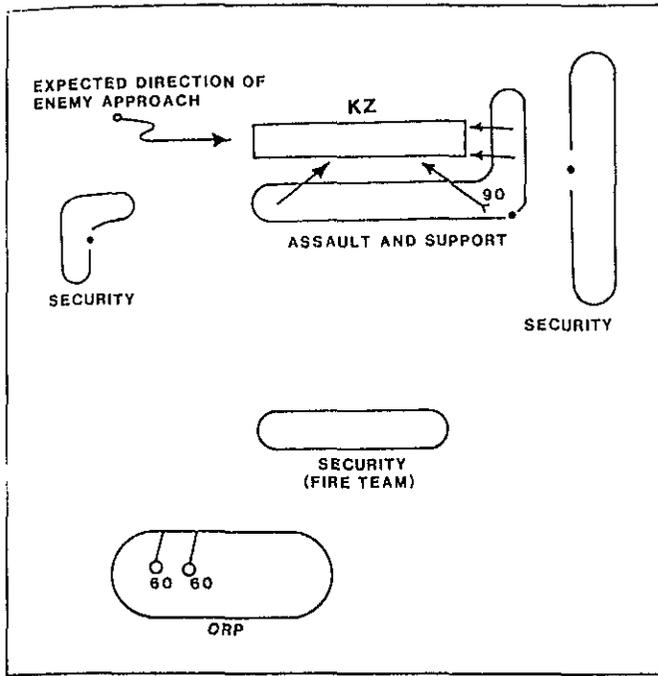


Figure 2. Platoon L-shaped Ambush.

the enemy (Figure 4). As a rule, a mechanical ambush should be manned. All the soldiers in it must be prepared to engage the enemy with organic weapons if the mines do not detonate or if they are not entirely effective. (See also INFANTRY, May-June 1970, pages 53-54.)

Mechanical ambushes are an especially good way of interdicting a large area with a small light infantry force. If a mechanical ambush is effective and the troops do not reveal their presence, the enemy will have no idea what hit him — it could be fire from artillery, mortars, or even aircraft. This uncertainty will have a devastating effect on his morale and effectiveness.

METT-T

If your unit is tasked with setting up an ambush, you must first evaluate it in accordance with METT-T:

Mission. From the outset, understand exactly what the ambush is supposed to do. If your commander issues you a Commander's Intent (and he should), study it carefully to determine what is required. Then fit this into your own Commander's Intent when you issue your order. Be able to state the mission explicitly; for example, it may be to interdict enemy resupply efforts, ambush enemy armor columns, or capture enemy personnel or specified pieces of equipment. Each of these missions is distinctly different and each will have to be planned, organized, equipped, rehearsed, and executed differently.

Enemy. What type of unit is to be attacked? Is it guerrillas, main force troops, supply parties, armor units, or other conventional forces? Consider such things as the size of the enemy force, the enemy's habits when attacked, supporting units, his night vision capability, and his expected time of movement. Also consider what bait he is likely to react to — raid a small site and ambush the relief force, for example.

Terrain. Is it wooded, mountain, jungle, or urban? (Yes,

you can set some formidable ambushes in a city or suburb.) What routes are both available to the enemy and appropriate to his activity?

Troops available. How big is your force? In low-intensity conflicts, squads and platoons are our basic ambush forces. In mid- to high-intensity conflicts, company-sized ambushes may be the norm. An ambushing force should be able to successfully engage a force two or three times its size — but this depends on the enemy and the terrain. For example, a platoon ambushing an enemy tank company in daylight in open terrain is taking a big risk, but a light infantry platoon engaging that same column at night or in a forest may well have a decided advantage.

Organize your ambush forces according to your TOE — by platoons, squads, and fire teams. Do *not* chop up these units to create assault elements, security elements, and support elements. Instead, give your TOE formations these missions with some augmentation. Give a squad the assault mission, for example, and augment it with a fire team; or give a squad the support mission, and augment it with a 90mm recoilless rifle section, an M60 machinegun team, and a 60mm mortar section.

Time. How long will it take to emplace the ambush? A complex, lethal ambush with plenty of "dirty tricks" will take hours to set up, a hasty ambush on a trail, 15 to 30 minutes. How long is the ambush to be in place? What hours of the day? Or will it be at night only? How soon must it be set up? Remember, it's not a good idea to set up an ambush in darkness — even if it is to be executed in darkness. It's an even worse idea to set one up in darkness to be executed in daylight. Try to allow every soldier to "see" and lay in his weapon in daylight. Time is important.

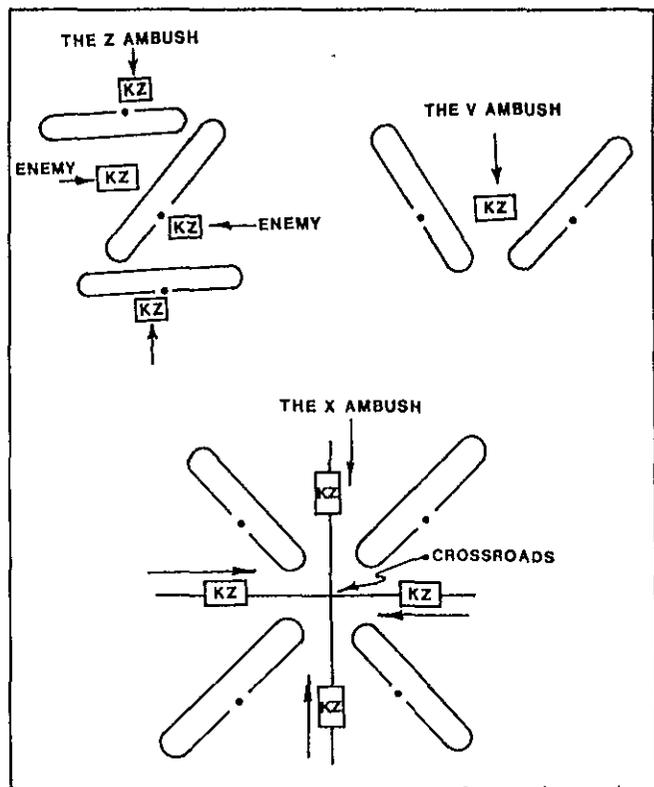


Figure 3. Ambush Variations.

Once you have completed your METT-T analysis and decided on the type of ambush you want to use, you have to look at ways to make it as effective as possible.

First, plan well for security. Since any ambush is a surprise attack on the enemy, security measures are always a fundamental consideration.

As a general rule, don't walk on a road or trail that you intend to ambush, and don't walk in the kill zone. Against a professional, alert enemy, such actions will give your ambush away, and you will be the one to be attacked.

The position's camouflage must be perfect. One leaf turned the wrong way can give away an otherwise perfect set-up. Remember, 360-degree camouflage is necessary in case the enemy approaches from that unexpected direction.

Discipline in the ambush site must be ironclad. Do not allow sleeping, talking, eating, or smoking. If an ambush is to be established for long periods, the elements of the ambush must be pulled back periodically to the objective rally point (ORP) or rally point (RP) for rest. Extended ambushes of 24, 36, or 48 hours require six- or eight-hour shifts around the clock. In these cases, it may take a company to man an extended platoon ambush position.

Don't expect tired troops to man an effective ambush. You can't conduct vigorous patrolling operations all day and then expect your soldiers to be totally alert all night. And one snore or a snort as a sleeping man is awakened is enough to warn an enemy.

Planning for security elements is critical. The element that detects an approaching enemy force must be able to warn the leader when the main body appears, and tell him the size of the enemy's security element and the time most of the enemy troops have passed his position. Security elements must also protect the flanks of the ambush so they won't be rolled up by enemy security or follow-on forces. Remember that an ambush force is vulnerable once it has executed the ambush, because its total attention is focused on the kill zone. The im-

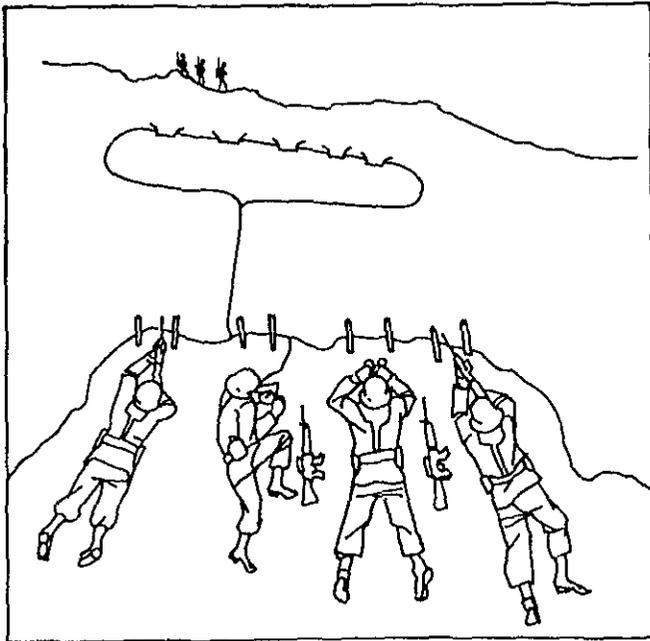


Figure 4. Mechanical Ambush.

portance of the security element in this instance cannot be overstressed.

The leaders in the ambush must have contact with all members of their unit in order to alert them to the enemy approach, but they cannot afford to walk around the ambush site during this critical period. The best method of alerting the soldiers in the ambush is to have strings or vines tied to their legs or arms. A series of tugs on these lines can then be used to alert everyone.

Another security measure is the selection of a good route of withdrawal. Don't forget it as you plan your ambush site. In fact, the best possibility for an ambush position may have to be rejected because it does not allow a good secure way out for the ambushing force. Again, apply METT-T, since the enemy will take immediate evasive action once he is engaged.

EXECUTION

As for execution, the leader at the site must execute the ambush using a device that will cause casualties. For example, a bank of claymores on a double ring main is an excellent device with which to spring an ambush. Another good technique is to use a machinegun or a 90mm recoilless rifle firing antipersonnel rounds. All must be under the leader's direct control. Don't plan to use whistles or pyrotechnics; they give the enemy time to react.

As soon as the enemy unit is hit, the soldiers in the ambush force will have only a second or two in which to kill those enemy soldiers in the kill zone. Then they are going to recover from their initial shock and react — either by directly attacking the ambush or by getting out as fast as they can. So plan your subsequent fires and other banks of claymores accordingly.

The only time the leader of the ambush force does not execute it is when another member of the ambush knows that he has been discovered. Then that soldier has the authority to execute — but he must do so with killing fire, not by yelling.

All weapons in the ambush must be sited with interdicting fires in the kill zone and along likely avenues into and out of the ambush site. The weapons should include M203s and mortars if the terrain permits. Machineguns should always be used with tripods and traverse and elevation mechanisms to lock in fires. All riflemen must use firing stakes with left and right limits and also elevation stakes. (Don't forget the tendency of soldiers in an ambush position to shoot high — especially at night.) M203s should be sited to cover deadspace and routes of escape.

Just as the leader controls the execution, so he must also control the cease-fire, using a whistle or a similar device to get his soldiers' attention. Again, he should not use pyrotechnics. Often they either don't work, are not visible to everyone, or cause confusion.

You must also decide how and when search teams are to be used. (They are not automatic.) Remember, when the soldiers leave the security of their well-chosen, concealed ambush positions, they are subject to the fires of the enemy who may also now be hidden and ready. Be careful. If it is at night,

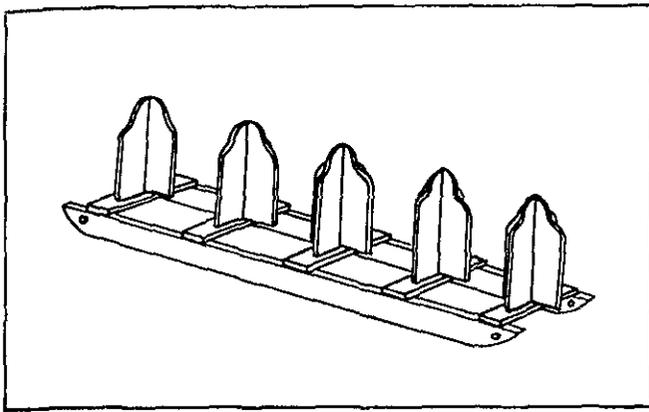


Figure 5. Target Sled.

don't throw trip flares or shoot 60mm or 40mm illumination to light the search areas: Your soldiers will be the ones who are illuminated to a hidden enemy. (And always assume there will be hidden enemy — you will not get them all.) Your soldiers, working as buddy teams, can use narrow-beam white flashlights taped to their M16s to rapidly search an area. If the enemy's return fire is heavy, or if the ambush has missed the enemy's main body of troops, then the leader may appropriately choose to break contact and leave the area.

Breaking contact from an ambush site is tricky business. Security elements must guard the flanks, and it is a good idea to set a series of hasty ambushes covering the withdrawal of the main body from the ambush site and from the ORP. Contingency plans for breaking contact with the enemy must be addressed in the operations order or covered in the unit's SOP.

SMALL POINTS

There are several other small points to remember in planning an ambush:

- Be innovative. Give your imagination and creativity full range as you develop your ambush techniques.
- Put yourself in the position of your enemy. If your ambush is successful and you get him in the kill zone, the results will be physically and psychologically devastating to him. When he is first engaged by your claymores, recoilless rifles, and machineguns, he will be stunned for at least a second; then he will respond — usually by recoiling from your fires and fleeing the area. Plan on this as you set your ambush.

If he runs, it will be along natural lines of drift away from the ambush site — generally downhill. Put banks of claymores down these routes, and put fire teams and squads along these routes to cut him off and engage him. Place well camouflaged punji stakes in areas where he might go to ground to escape your fires. (Note: When you emplace these casualty-producing devices, remember the earlier warning about walking in the kill zone or across the enemy's suspected route of travel. If you must do this to emplace the devices, do it carefully and cover your marks.)

- Leave your rucksacks in the ORP — if you plan to go out that way — or take them with you. But if you take them with you to the ambush site, that's just one more thing to be camouflaged and to hamper movement in the ambush area.

Extensive training in ambush techniques — including live fire training — is absolutely necessary. (Revised editions of FCs 7-14 and 7-15, ARTEP Mission Training Plans, will contain expanded tasks, conditions, and standards for conducting realistic training, to include live fire.)

As in all training in combat techniques, the training must be progressive. Ambush training is characterized by detailed mission analysis and planning, exhaustive rehearsals, dry fire exercises progressing to blank fire then to a MILES-assisted evaluation of progress, and culminating in live fire exercises. Put your unit through this cycle first during the day, then during periods of reduced visibility, and finally in all types of terrain and weather.

It is absolutely essential that you have realistic targets for your soldiers to engage during the live fire portion of their training. Two techniques that have proved effective are the target sled and the suspended silhouette device. (Don't forget to make sure your targets will work before beginning a training event. In fact, in most cases, the ambush training site should be selected on the basis of the suitability of the terrain for the moving target simulators.)

The target sled is a simple device that requires a prime mover of some type — a jeep, Gamma Goat, or CUCV — to pull the targets through the kill zone. The targets can be either E-type personnel targets or threat vehicle silhouettes, or both, attached to a sheet metal sled (Figure 5).

Trees and tree stumps can be used to change direction and to offset and protect the prime move. A 120-foot nylon climbing rope is used to connect the sled to the prime mover. A series of these sleds can be linked to simulate larger forces to be ambushed. Also, local property disposal yards are a source of salvage vehicles for anti-vehicle ambushes.

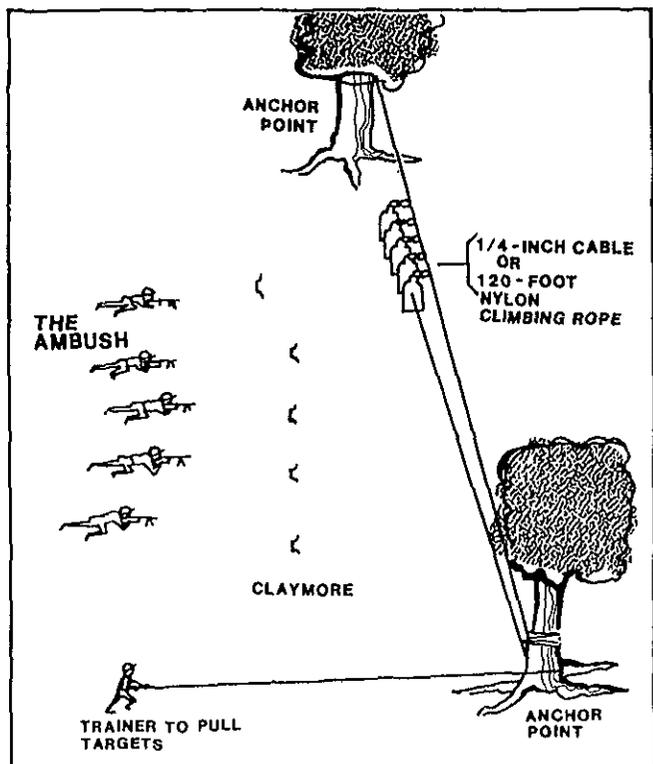


Figure 6. Suspended Silhouettes.

The suspended silhouette training device (see Figure 6) is also simple but quite effective, especially for small ambushes in close terrain. The distance spanned by a taut quarter-inch steel cable is the limiting factor on the width of the kill zone — usually 30 to 50 meters.

A vehicle can be used to cautiously eliminate the slack in the cable during set-up. Manikins, home-made dummies, or E-type silhouettes are attached to the cable by snaplinks. On command, the linked targets are pulled down the cable with a guide rope by a trainer in a concealed, well-protected position outside the kill zone.

It adds a little realism to ambush training if the dummies are dressed in uniforms, and if some with intelligence information are hidden for the search teams to find during their sweep of the kill zone. Foreign language chatter from a tape recorder as the enemy approaches the ambush site adds to the suspense and challenges the nerves of the ambushing force — even in training.

Tactical exercises without troops (TEWTs) are another effective method of training leaders on the basics of selecting sites and emplacing weapons. TEWTs can be conducted while

the troops train on their specialized techniques. The active leadership and participation of battalion and company commanders is essential to teaching these fundamentals.

But reading and talking about ambushes will not make a light infantryman an expert ambusher. The only way to achieve proficiency in planning and executing an ambush is to get out and do it! There will be mistakes in the beginning, but conduct good after-action reviews to learn from both your failures and your successes. Only by learning from experience can leaders and soldiers alike make progress.

While you're conducting your ambush training, concentrate on some of the fine points discussed here, and you will become proficient. We guarantee it.

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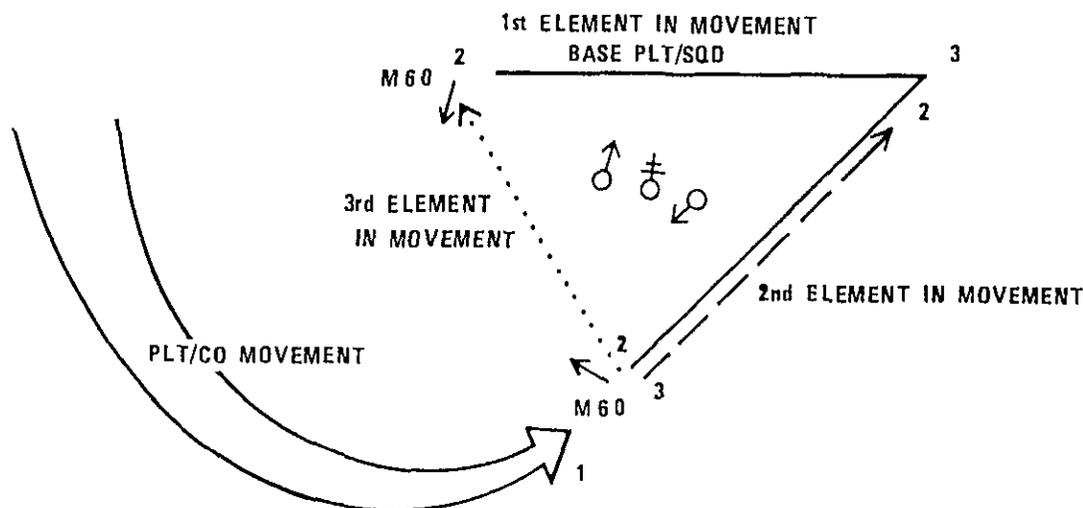
SWAP SHOP



A platoon or company triangle can be used for establishing ORPs or patrol bases, or for temporary halts during movement. It is quick and easy to move into; it provides 360-degree security; it can be used in most terrain; and it cuts down on the movement associated with occupying patrol bases. Chemical lights or the infrared on the AN/PVS-5s can be used to mark the corners of the triangle.

First, the leader halts the patrol short of the tentative patrol base

location. The platoon leader then conducts his reconnaissance, taking several security men with him. Once the security team members are in position, the remaining members of the patrol move forward and pass through the lead security team. Once all the elements have moved into their rough positions, the patrol members seek cover and concealment in the surrounding vegetation. The patrol leader then dispatches soldiers for reconnaissance and security patrols and listening and observation posts.



(Contributed by Captain Timothy L. Canty, Company B, 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry, Fort Ord.)