

ILLUMINATED



NIGHT ATTACK

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A night attack presents some unique challenges for the infantry in terms of command and control, movement to and maneuver on the objective, and the integration of fire support assets. Night attack training raises some real questions for an infantry company commander (light, air assault, or airborne): Should the attack be supported or nonsupported, illuminated or nonilluminated? Will the scheme of maneuver use so-called conventional tactics (wire, release points), or will daylight tactics be used (overwatch force, maneuver force)? How many night vision goggles are available to the company? Will its ammunition allocations provide the artillery and mortar illumination necessary? Is high-explosive ammunition available to fire a coordinated mission?

Presented with these challenges, a battalion of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) had an opportunity to examine the night attack exercising three different techniques on the same objective.

This opportunity grew out of an external evaluation of the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry, in which the battalion had carried out extensive night operations while conducting missions within a mid-intensity scenario. During the after-action review, it was noted that the company tactics employed on two separate nonilluminated night attacks had been a mixture of day-

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light and limited visibility tactics. The key leaders said that although daylight tactics, according to doctrine, are employed during an illuminated attack, they are often substituted for tactics that should be used during a traditional nonilluminated night attack.

This raised the issue of whether traditional night tactics might be too cumbersome and outdated. Further discussion brought out an interesting tactical dilemma: If an attack that begins nonilluminated is illuminated at some time during the attack, a company might be caught in the middle of executing night tactics where daylight tactics would be more appropriate. Although we arrived at no "approved solution," this did give us an opportunity to look more closely at three different ways of conducting such attacks—a nonilluminated night attack, a night attack by infiltration, and an illuminated and supported night attack.

The traditional nonilluminated night attack, as history shows, is one of the most difficult missions for any infantry unit to plan and execute. More stringent control measures must be used, and wire is the primary means of communication. Companies systematically use a point of departure (PD) when crossing the line of departure (LD) at night, then deploy on line using a series of release points. A probable line of deploy-

ment (PLD) helps the company maintain its attack formation as it closes upon the objective.

Unfortunately, this method of attack is somewhat restrictive, because it often leads to a frontal assault in order to bring the full strength of the unit's firepower against the enemy. Also, if the PLD is not perpendicular to the direction of attack, it is difficult to keep the unit on line and oriented on the objective. In short, this tactic often sacrifices maneuver and flexibility for increased control.

Infiltration is a more innovative maneuver to use in conjunction with a night attack. If the enemy has widely separated defensive positions, a commander may choose to bypass the strength of the defensive positions and infiltrate his units to a position from which they can conduct combat operations in the enemy's rear area. Ideally, the objective would be unoccupied key terrain that would compromise the enemy's defensive positions and force his withdrawal.

Such favorable conditions are rare, however. More realistically, a night attack conducted by infiltrating the enemy's forward trace would take the form of a raid. Each sub-element (support, assault, and security) would infiltrate to its respective position, conduct the assault, and then hold the key terrain until relieved, or until it exfiltrated. Operations of this sort are possible at company and battalion level, but they require an extremely high level of training. After all, an infiltration is a highly complex operation—the sub-elements leave friendly forward lines from several departure points, then move along multiple lanes at different times to link up at a single rendezvous point, all during hours of limited visibility. By any standard, this is a tall tactical order.

A night operation that incorporates infiltration to respective support and attack positions requires soldiers of the highest caliber. And few infantry units have the personnel stability they need to sustain the proficiency necessary for this maneuver.

PRACTICAL SOLUTION

A more practical solution for coping with the problems of control during limited visibility operations is to plan for the use of illumination. Although current doctrine supports this idea, it is unclear as to the best time to employ illumination and what tactics should be used once an attack has started.

Current doctrine (FM 7-10) states that "a night attack that initially begins nonilluminated should have illumination planned, regardless." Additionally, the illumination should not be used until the assault begins or until the attack is detected. The current manuals also tell a company commander conducting a nonilluminated attack that if he is detected before crossing his final control point, he should initiate illumination and continue as if it were a daylight attack.

But there is a radical difference between traditional night tactics and daylight tactics, and to succeed in using daylight tactics at night under fire (even with illumination) would be difficult. There are just too many variables.

A unit needs to have a specific time, place, or set of circumstances for initiating illumination, and every soldier should know and understand it. Knowing in advance that illumina-

tion will be used would give both commanders and soldiers more freedom. Under illumination, leaders could then concentrate their efforts on their maneuvering elements using the control measures associated with daylight tactics instead of wasting time and energy trying to use nighttime tactics. The commander would also have more flexibility because he would no longer be locked into release points and PLDs, which make for a set-piece maneuver. Instead, the use of an assault position in which an overwatch element could deploy into its attack formation would be ideal.

As far as the soldiers are concerned, their self-confidence would be increased by the knowledge that illumination would help them place and control direct fires—a real danger *without* illumination.

We concluded that illumination should prove to be the best method to use in a night attack. And our battalion's training exercise confirmed this conclusion.

CONDUCT OF EXERCISE

This is how we conducted our exercise:

The battalion deployed to the field, and while most of the battalion conducted squad external evaluations, Company A conducted the three variations on the night attack. On the first night, the company conducted a nonilluminated attack and encountered the same problems normally associated with a "traditional" night attack. Surprisingly, though, the use of wire for communications was not a problem. In fact, because of planning and several rehearsals, the use of wire was a rather simple and successful addition. Wire was used effectively down to the platoon level while maintaining communications with battalion. The only real problem was the limited amount of wire and number of switchboards authorized by the TOE.

The company used release points successfully and, in short order, deployed on line in the direction of the objective. Because of terrain limitations, however, no recognizable PLD was available, and the unit encountered its first problems as it moved forward to attack. Control of the formation quickly diminished as rugged terrain and darkness hindered the company's movement.

As the enemy initiated contact, the control of maneuvering soldiers and of direct fires deteriorated. Once the objective had been seized, consolidation and reorganization took on a new meaning as soldiers tried to regain contact with their elements.

They performed as well as could be expected on unfamiliar terrain, with no illumination, against stiff resistance, and with enemy obstacles to breach. Nonetheless, in actual battle, heavy casualties probably would have been incurred from the lack of control and from friendly fires.

On the second night, the company executed an infiltration into the objective area. The overwatch element used one lane, and the maneuver element moved along another, leaving from separate departure points at different times. The commander simplified the infiltration by not dividing the separate elements into smaller sub-elements. Consequently, no linkups were required in the objective area. This sacrificed stealth for the sake of control, yet adhered to the principles of the maneuver tech-

nique. Because the maneuver element was smaller (two platoons instead of three), soldiers and direct fires were easy to control once the attack began.

Finally, on the third night, the company executed an illuminated and supported night attack. In preparation for this last variation, maneuver space was selected to provide an objective area adjacent to an artillery impact area. Firing points were carefully selected for the 81mm mortar platoon and a battery of 105mm howitzers. These positions enabled the indirect fire support elements to make the most of their illumination capabilities within safety constraints.

Once this was accomplished, fire support planning was conducted by the battalion fire support officer, the company commander, and the company fire support officer. Plans were made for supporting fires along the route, on the objective, in blocking positions, and just forward of the limit of advance. Since illumination rounds were in short supply, the unit was instructed to be as frugal with them as possible. Consequently, a lateral spread of only two rounds was planned, but this proved to be more than adequate—ideal, in fact.

The company crossed the LD and moved in column to its assault position just at EENT (end of evening nautical twilight) and as preparatory fires began to hammer the objective. The support element split off and assumed its overwatch position as the maneuver element cleared the assault position and swung wide to attack the enemy's flank. As the assault element neared the enemy's triple-strand concertina wire and booby traps, preparatory fires were lifted and direct fires begun. As the support element opened fire, the illumination was initiated and the company aggressively breached the obstacles and maneuvered across the objective.

The illumination greatly improved the control of the maneuver force and the supporting fires, because it allowed the soldiers to conduct fire and movement freely and also allowed

the support element to acquire targets safely until their fires were lifted and shifted. Additionally, the unit was able to consolidate and reorganize quickly because it was not as intermingled as during the nonilluminated attack. By and large, illumination closed the gap between utter confusion and a well-controlled night operation.

The battalion's leaders and soldiers learned a great deal from this opportunity, because we were able to exercise three different versions of the night attack. The tasks and standards remained the same, but the conditions varied. The results also varied. Unequivocally, the illuminated and supported night attack conducted with daylight tactics proved the most successful. That is not to say this is the approved solution, but it does point out the need for leaders to continue examining different techniques and ideas.

The battalion found a better way to incorporate illumination into its night operations, and the 101st Airborne Division now has a training vehicle for other companies and battalions to use in executing their own illuminated and supported night attacks. The end result will be an improvement in the division's proficiency during hours of limited visibility.



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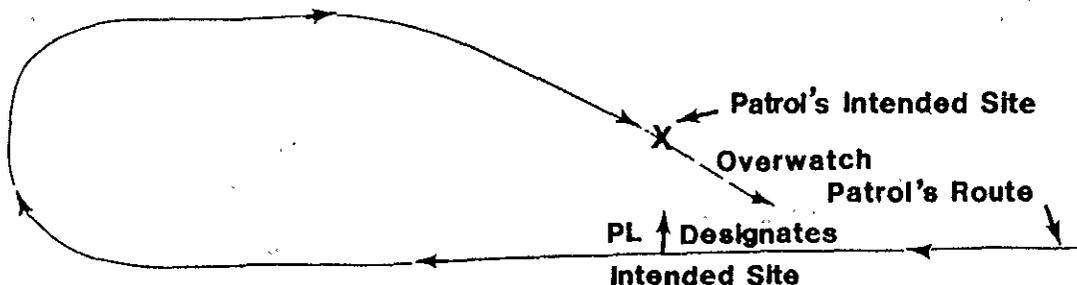
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SWAP SHOP



Patrol sites should be occupied only during periods of limited visibility. The patrol leader designates the patrol site (ORP, OP, patrol base) as the patrol passes it. The patrol continues moving on the same azimuth, passing the site and not moving through it. About 100 to 200 meters past the site, depending on the terrain, the patrol makes a loop and enters the site from a different direction without crossing its route.

The patrol establishes a perimeter with the patrol leader designating each man's position (this should be preplanned and rehearsed). A grenadier and a squad automatic weapon gunner should be the first into the site, and they should establish an overwatch on the patrol's original route. The patrol is then prepared to ambush a pursuing force or to evacuate the site as the situation requires.



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