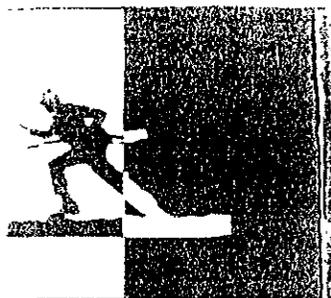


TRAINING NOTES



Light Infantry 60mm Mortars

CAPTAIN MICHAEL T. NATUSCH

Light infantry units rely on soldier power—well trained troops who use the indirect approach. Much of the training for light units is structured on the assumption that their soldier power will be used in a low intensity conflict. These units expect to operate in an environment of rugged, restricted terrain, and they expect to have air superiority. They do not expect to fight a linear battle but guerrilla forces who fight in mostly squad-to-platoon size elements (sometimes up to battalion size). The enemy may be in any direction, and light infantry soldiers will strike at him accordingly.

As a light infantry company commander prepares for an offensive mission, he must consider several things that could affect his 60mm mortars. First, he has six men in his mortar section—a staff sergeant section leader, a sergeant squad leader, two gunners, and two ammunition bearers—and he is concerned with how best to use the combat power these soldiers and two tubes can give him. The availability of mortar rounds and security for the company's only organic indirect fire support element are of equal concern. And where the terrain would totally or partially restrict vehicle traffic, the economical use of his mortar rounds becomes critical. The commander must also have a thorough fire support plan that includes the attached fire support team's role in calling for fires and in integrating all available fire support.

Many units in addressing these concerns have devised innovative techniques. This is the way the companies of one battalion use their indirect fire systems.

In the order of march, the mortar section travels between the second and third platoons. When a target is identified, the forward observer calls the mission over the mortar section frequency, and the crews go into action. The first gun is set up in the hand-held mode, and the squad leader uses his M2 compass and firing table to execute the direct-lay mission. (Of the means of indirect fire support available to the infantryman, this system is the fastest.) As a company's soldiers engage enemy targets, they are assured by the knowledge that the mortar rounds they can hear exploding out front are friendly, while the enemy soldiers experience some discomfort in finding out that indirect fire is already being adjusted upon them.

HANDHELD

The hand-held 60mm mortar, however, is not nearly as accurate as the bipod-mounted mortar, nor does it have as much range. For this reason, while the first gun operates in the hand-held mode, the second gun sets up in the bipod mode. The section leader computes the gun data, and the section is quickly able to deliver its most accurate fire. As soon as the second

gun is operating, the first also sets up in the bipod mode.

The availability of mortar rounds to the mortar section, of course, is crucial to its ability to deliver effective fire support. As there are no organic vehicles in the company, the task of transporting the rounds falls upon the soldiers. In his mission planning, therefore, the commander must decide how many rounds the company will carry. His decision is affected by his mission, the distance and terrain he will cover, the availability of alternate fire support assets, and the enemy situation. If he decides on carrying a large number of rounds, each soldier may find himself tasked to carry two mortar rounds, which will add roughly eight pounds to his load. Any decision to exclude certain soldiers from this task—M60 machinegunners or radio-telephone operators—must be made by the commander. The mortar section itself will carry at least six rounds that will be available for immediate use by the gun assigned to fire in the hand-held mode.

When a fire mission is called, the platoon that follows the mortars in movement must move to where the 60mm mortars are set up and off-load its mortar rounds. This platoon is also responsible for the security of the mortar position if that mission is determined necessary by the commander or his pre-established designee—executive officer, platoon leader, or first sergeant.

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Upon making contact, the soldiers in the first two platoons in the formation drop their rucksacks and immediately begin fire and maneuver. The first sergeant and the executive officer must ensure that the mortar rounds get to the mortar section as needed and, after contact has ended, that the mortar rounds are redistributed as the company consolidates and reorganizes. If the supply of mortar rounds has been depleted, the company must request a resupply of them. In the light infantry, however, this will depend upon the availability of helicopter support or upon the company's accessibility by wheeled ve-

hicles. At times, these prospects may not be favorable, and this demonstrates how crucial planning is in preparing for a mission.

In most situations the mortar section travels with the company's main element. Although situations may arise in which a commander decides to move his mortars by displacement, the six soldiers in the section in this scenario (or three, if displacing by gun) will be highly vulnerable. The section is authorized only one PRC-77 radio, which makes displacement by gun more difficult. The section leader must identify firing positions while

moving, similar to the way a patrol leader identifies rallying points. When contact is made, the section must quickly go to that location and set up. In deciding whether or not to use displacement, the commander must weigh the mortar section's possible difficulty in navigating in the terrain, its vulnerability, and its access to a supply of mortar rounds.

The fire support team (FIST) attached to the company plays an important role in helping the commander use his 60mm mortars efficiently and effectively and in drawing upon other available fire support to augment his combat assets. The company fire support officer (FSO) must keep the commander informed of the status of 60mm mortar ammunition, whether the mortars can set up in a particular location, and whether nonorganic fire support assets are available. He must also keep the battalion fire support officer (FSO) informed. The battalion FSO has a key responsibility to help the battalion commander use and allocate battalion assets.

On missions that require the company to go beyond the range of the battalion's 81mm mortars or that of any support artillery, the management of the 60mm mortar ammunition is of great importance, especially if the mission and the enemy situation indicate that heavy contact is likely. Here the battalion mortars provide a larger support commitment to the company before it leaves their range fan. If chance contact is made and indirect fires are needed, the FIST will call on the 60mm mortar section for fire. When the company FSO hears the call for fire, he will relay the call to the battalion mortars, and they will take over the mission as soon as they can deliver rounds. This technique can reduce the number of 60mm rounds to be expended, along with the need for a resupply. This often allows the company to continue to go beyond battalion fire support range and still maintain the number of 60mm rounds required to conduct its mission.

This procedure is also followed when a company's mortars are not able to fire immediately because of overhead canopy or restrictive terrain. As the company moves, its FSO keeps track of the 60mm mortar section's ability to fire by using a green, amber, red system. Green indicates that the mortar section is set up or could



7th Infantry Division soldier lays 60mm mortar.

set up where it is; amber indicates that the section can be set up and firing within ten minutes; and red indicates that the section will not be able to fire within ten minutes. The mortar section sergeant keeps the FSO abreast of his section's status, and the FSO keeps the company commander and the battalion FSO informed.

The battalion mortars monitor and keep track of the status of each company's mortar section. This allows the battalion mortars to set their guns to respond quickly to the unit that is in the least favorable situation. The battalion commander, through his FSO, determines priority when the battalion mortars are in general support and more than one unit is in a red or amber status.

Even when a company is beyond the range of nonorganic fire support, the green, amber, red system should still be used. If a company's mortars are in red status and out of range of nonorganic fire support, they may still be within the range of another company's mortars. By keeping track of the status and location of each company, and of the range of each company's mortars, the battalion FSO can

significantly increase the battalion's ability to meet a company's need for indirect fire.

When a company is nearing an objective, is in red status, and out of range of another company's mortars, the battalion commander may elect to have the company stop, which allows him to position another company so that additional indirect fire support is attainable. This could prevent a unit from making enemy contact when it has no indirect support available.

FIRE SUPPORT

The FSO keeps track of the availability of all organic and nonorganic fire support assets. He can direct the fires of the company and battalion mortars on single or multiple targets as they are needed. He can integrate any supporting artillery to further ensure timely, adequate support.

When the battalion has close air support available, the company mortars have the capacity to spot targets for the close support aircraft. In terrain where landmarks

are not distinct, a company commander can guide the aircraft by firing HE rounds at the target. This technique has proved effective and easy to do. It allows a company to be well beyond range of all nonorganic indirect fire support and still deliver a devastating blow to the enemy.

At first glance, a light infantry company commander may conclude that his two 60mm mortars are not sufficient to give him effective indirect fire support and that resupply constraints will further reduce their effectiveness. By concentrating on what his equipment will allow, however, and by conducting in-depth mission analysis and planning, the commander's capacity to use his own indirect fire support to defeat an enemy, and to save his soldiers' lives, will be dramatically increased.



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Live Fire Drills

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Historically, the unit that fires first in an engagement has an advantage, and the unit that fires first and most accurately probably has assured victory. Although this has been known for over 40 years, the Army has done little to train units to gain this initial accurate firepower.

One of the critical reasons that this training is not done is that units tend to draw distinct boundaries between types of weapon training—range firing, MILES/tactical training and live fire exercises.

There are several reasons for this, but the primary ones are a perception (as opposed to knowledge) that Army Regulation 385-63 prohibits certain exercises; a "we've never done it that way" attitude; and a belief, usually well-founded, that training inspectors and others who happen by will not understand anything different.

As one watches a unit go through its training, several observations become readily apparent. During range firing,

soldiers move in orderly lines, are supervised by NCOs who often are required to wear color-coded helmets, and take orders from someone in a range tower by way of a public address system. (In this article "range firing" refers exclusively to 10-meter, 25-meter, field fire, known distance, and record fire ranges.)

During tactical training, units move in tactical formations, there is little direct control over the soldiers, and commands are shouted above the noise. During live