

- What alternative actions are available to him?

- Based upon the reconnaissance, what modifications should be made to the enemy situational template that was developed during the estimate process?

From the friendly perspective:

- Can the friendly unit at this site accomplish its mission? Would other weapons or units be better suited?

- What obstacles are there? Are more obstacles needed? What type? Where?

- Does the avenue of approach support the friendly course of action? What can be done to block this avenue to the enemy?

- Does this terrain offer good cover and concealment for friendly forces?

- Does the terrain allow adequate observation and fields of fire? Where might key weapons be placed to suppress the enemy?

- Is this key or decisive terrain to friendly forces?

- What alternative actions are available to friendly forces?

- What modifications should be made to the friendly course of action on the basis of the reconnaissance?

Along with these military aspects of the terrain, the leader must integrate the military aspects of the weather (visibility, precipitation, wind, tempera-

ture) to determine its potential effects on both the friendly and the enemy courses of action. Weather factors often alter terrain and affect the ability of both sides to use it.

By evaluating the enemy factors, the leader can refine the situational templates that were developed during the estimate process. Among the many



items the leader should try to identify are prepared and occupied positions, the location of key weapon systems, gaps and weak points in his positions, fire sacks, and locations for deploying his forces.

An evaluation of friendly factors follows the same flow as enemy considerations in determining whether the reconnoitered area supports the leader's plan. For example, the leader should evaluate the location of key weapon systems, engagement areas,

positions for supporting fires, and sub-unit objectives. The specific task and nature of the operation determines what the leader must consider for friendly factors.

Observation posts that "stay behind" after the reconnaissance can help the leader maintain surveillance on the enemy and can ensure that the best and most current information will be used to execute the plan.

Personal reconnaissance is the commander's key to success on the AirLand Battlefield. To gain the most from it, however, he must carefully analyze the time available, the priorities, and the tasks to be accomplished during his reconnaissance effort.

After action reports from the National Training Center, as well as historical combat examples, consistently point to the need for effective leader reconnaissance. The offensive nature of the AirLand Battle will require that leaders use reconnaissance to gain and maintain the initiative and to help them focus overwhelming combat power on the enemy.

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Dragon Assault Position

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Motorized infantry is organized and equipped for, trained in, and committed to the conduct of combat operations that are characterized by high mobility, speed, and the deliberate and conscious choice of a time and place for engaging the enemy. Its primary advan-

tage over light infantry is found in its increased mobility and firepower, both of which must be at their best to achieve success on the highly fluid AirLand Battlefield.

The Dragon fighting position currently found in STP 7-11B1-SM, dated

July 1985, as task number 071-317-3307, is not well suited to the rapid and volatile tactical operations needed for the effective employment of a motorized infantry company's 15 Dragon systems.

In an article titled "Using Dragons

Effectively," which appeared in the September 1982 issue of the *Marine Corps Gazette*, Lieutenant D.W. Szelowski introduced an alternate position called the Dragon assault position. While I was assigned to the 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry at Fort Lewis, we tested this position extensively—during our monthly individual Dragon qualification and sustainment training; during continuous tactical operations at Yakima Firing Center in Washington; and during two actual live fire exercises with a total of ten live Dragon missiles. All the results were positive and proved the Dragon assault position advocated by Lieutenant Szelowski to be quite effective and much better suited to the demands of motorized tactics than the currently accepted position.

The Dragon assault position has four basic variations—below ground, standing and kneeling, and above ground, standing and kneeling (Figures 1 and 2). Its construction is simple. Once the site for the position has been selected, pre-filled sandbags are dropped into place. The time and the number of sandbags needed to construct each position, as well as the position's specific dimensions, are all dependent upon both the type of position selected and the size of the soldier building it. Construction time averages two hours, however, from start to finish, as opposed to about 15 hours for a Dragon fighting position.

In testing the Dragon assault position, we noted several specific advantages:

It provides more stability. When firing, the gunner rests the tube on the sandbags, which absorb the immediate shock effect of the fired missile (provided the gunner pulls backward and downward on the tube during firing).

The Dragon can be placed into operation more quickly. Since the legs are not used to fire it from this position, all the gunner has to do is pick up the Dragon and begin tracking.

It is easy to camouflage. Since it has a low silhouette and requires that little or no earth be dug at the construction site, it does not need much camouflage.

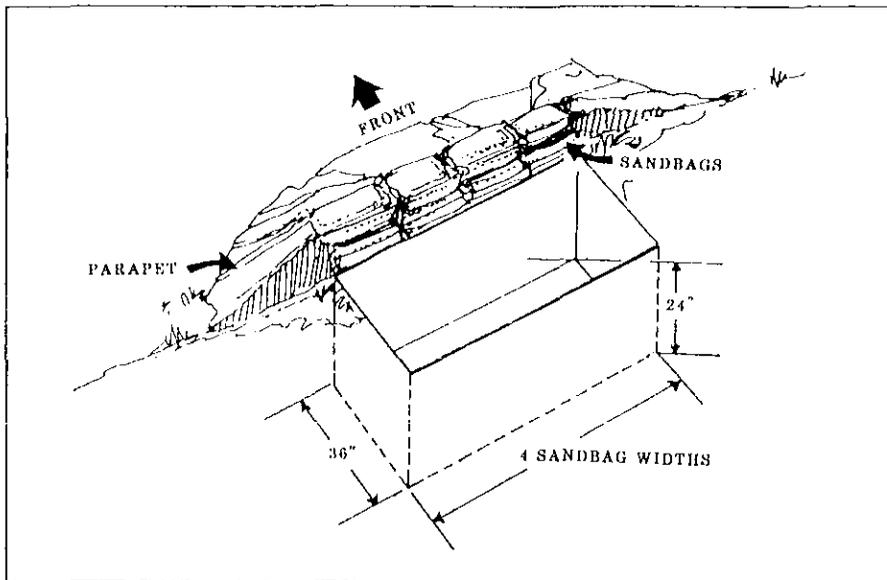


Figure 1. Below-ground Dragon assault position, kneeling. The broken lines indicate dimensions extending below the ground's surface. For a below-ground standing position, a soldier merely digs deeper or builds sandbags higher, or both. The dimensions shown are averages; specific dimensions depend upon both the gunner's size and his preferences.

Additionally, when engaging from the assault position, whether in the standing or kneeling version, the gunner exposes only his head and hands. This gives him more confidence in his ability to engage armored targets successfully. (Although this is a psychological advantage and difficult to measure, particularly under peacetime conditions, it is one that many of the battalion's Dragon gunners noted.)

It is tailored to the gunner by the gunner. The Army now teaches four basic Dragon firing positions—sitting, prone, standing supported, and kneeling supported. Without exception, the

gunners in our battalion preferred either the standing supported or the kneeling supported position to either the sitting or the prone position. Since the Dragon assault position is built for either of these preferred positions, each gunner can construct his position according to his personal firing preference.

Less time and energy are required for construction. Because it took one-eighth the construction time of the Dragon fighting position, the soldiers who constructed this position were considerably more rested and ready to fight than those who built the other position.

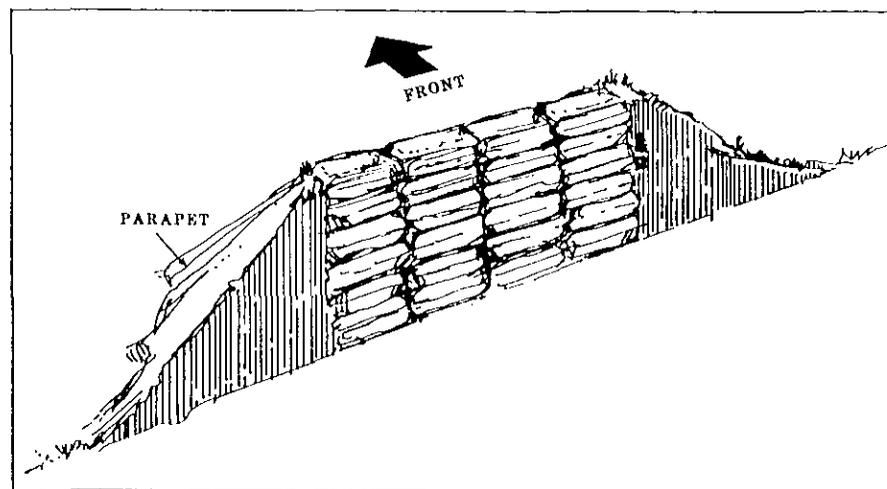


Figure 2. Dragon assault above-ground position, kneeling. For a standing position, a soldier builds up more sandbags.



Additionally, platoons that used the assault position were always prepared to engage the enemy long before their counterparts who had to build a Dragon fighting position.

It can be easily constructed anywhere. Because the assault position can be built by simply stacking up sandbags from ground level and then camouflaging them, the position can be emplaced anywhere—even on solid rock. In our unit, sandbags were filled and then layered on the bed of the M998T HMMWV squad carriers in the assembly area as part of the assembly area SOP. These bags were then used over and over. As a platoon or squad moved into position, it dropped its sandbags off and was almost immediately ready to engage the enemy from covered Dragon positions. Additionally, the platoon leader did not even have to consider the physical composition of the ground. If the gunner could not dig down, he merely built up. He did have to pay closer attention to the camouflage of his position, however, because of its higher silhouette.

During the 2d Battalion's testing of the assault position, some *disadvantages* were also noted:

- The front of the tube must extend unobstructed at least six inches beyond all sandbags and above all camouflage. If it does not, the missile's fins may get caught as they extend when the missile leaves the tube during firing. Although this is a distinct disadvantage, it can be easily overcome with gunners who are well-trained on the proper construction of the position.

- Tracking is limited to about 30 degrees right or left of a neutral position. Our gunners did not find this to be a significant shortcoming, however, in the numerous tracking drills and firings conducted with both the launch effects trainer (LET) and launch environment simulator (LES) systems.

Of the ten live missiles fired from the assault position, only five were hits, but the five misses did not result from a flaw in the assault positions themselves. In fact, only one miss occurred because of gunner error, and all the gunners who fired said they felt very stable while

firing. (Three of the misses resulted from improper positioning of the Dragons; specifically, the Dragons were placed so that they were firing uphill and the normal dip in the trajectory of the missiles resulted in their "grounding out." The other miss occurred when the missile wire broke.)

In short, the Dragon assault position has so far proved that it is not only superior to the Dragon fighting position but also far better suited to the demands of motorized infantry. The doctrine for employing motorized infantry exploits its advantages of speed and firepower. On today's highly lethal and volatile AirLand Battlefield, the Dragon assault position provides the commander with a better alternative for the effective employment of his Dragons.

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