Weapon Positioning
The Circular Technique

LIEUTENANT COLONEL PIERCE T. GRANEY, JR.
ROBERT H. SULZEN

The Army's defensive doctrine is evolving from one of engaging the enemy at *maximum* range to one of massing fires on the enemy in a manner that will surprise, disrupt, and destroy him (FM 71-2J). The best way for a heavy task force to mass defensive fires that will surprise the enemy is through an approach that positions its weapons in depth with mutual support at the *optimal* range for each system.

When commanders focus on engaging the enemy at maximum range they tend to develop linear positions. This in itself seems to offer several advantages that should be enough to give a task force the winning edge in a defensive battle—the range offset over Soviet weapons, for example; the maximum engagement time gained; and the avoidance of decisive engagement.

Actually, though, engaging an enemy force at maximum range from a linear position has some distinct disadvantages: The enemy is more likely to get early warning about the task force's positions with more time to react; the signatures of the task force's antitank weapons, when they are fired from the front at maximum range, give the enemy more time to take evasive action during the missiles' time of flight; and at maximum range, the task force's ballistic direct fire weapons have a lower hit probability. In addition, linear positions are subject to easy detection, are easily smoked, and are more easily suppressed by artillery fire. Most important, the task force is less able to mass its fires or surprise the enemy.

From our experience at the National Training Center, we have developed another approach to positioning weapons that we have chosen to call "the circular technique." What we really want to achieve, though, is not just weapon positioning but a better overall organization of the defense, a different way of thinking about setting up a defense.

The main advantage to a defensive organization of this kind is that it gives a commander an opportunity to use his initiative to interfere with and confuse the enemy, something called for in AirLand Battle doctrine. He can mass his fires from multiple directions, entrap the enemy, reduce his ability to return fire, and hit him at his most vulnerable point. And when he accomplishes these things, he also surprises the enemy.

There are four key principles to follow in the circular technique of positioning weapons: mass fires, maintain mutual support, engage as many targets as possible from the flank and rear, and achieve surprise fire.

Most commanders know that they should mass fires and provide mutual support, but using flank and rear engagements extensively may be something new to them. There are two reasons for these kinds of engagements: To take advantage of the vulnerabilities of armored vehicles and to reduce the enemy's return fire. Most soldiers (enemy and friendly) tend to focus their attention in the direction in which they are facing or traveling. When the enemy is engaged from multiple directions, he tends to return fire in the direction from which he has observed the opposing fire (often to his front).

Engaging the enemy from multiple directions also helps achieve surprise fire, another key principle. When fire control techniques, such as target reference points (TRPs), are used to mass fires suddenly, the enemy is surprised. If the enemy suffers heavy casualties at the same time, he is not only shocked, he also has fewer weapon systems with which to return fire. It is under these circumstances that a task force has the greatest chances of destroying the enemy and accomplishing its defensive mission.

To surprise an enemy force with massed, mutually supporting fires from multiple directions, a unit must keep that force unaware of its detailed plans. Warsaw Pact forces are likely to use division reconnaissance teams (DRTs) to gather information on their opponent's activities. Therefore, our commanders must do their best to locate and capture the teams, even though it may not be possible to detect and eliminate all of them.

Instead, a commander should try to mislead the enemy as to his units' final dispositions and at the same time prepare to concentrate his forces by repositioning them at the proper moment to cover the avenues of approach he has invited the enemy to take. His command can better achieve its goals by preparing supplementary positions from which to engage the oncoming enemy force.

Most of a task force's weapon systems should occupy supplemental positions for lengthy periods where it least wants the enemy to come (hopefully discouraging him from these avenues and encouraging

him to come into the task force's prime engagement area). The weapons should also spend some time at other supplementary positions but avoid the primary positions from which they will employ rear and flanking fire. (Exceptions would be when preparing the positions and range cards—usually by single vehicles—and during dry fire and repositioning rehearsals.)

The weapons should occupy the primary positions at the critical moment in the battle. Determining the critical moment will depend upon the soldiers' ability to reposition (as tested during the rehearsals) and upon the enemy's inability to adapt his plans to the task force's actions (as an estimate, two hours before his expected line of departure time).

We have developed six steps for employing the circular technique of weapon positioning:

Step 1. Identify the engagement area (EA) where the enemy will be especially vulnerable to massed, mutually supporting flank and rear fires.

Step 2. Draw a series of circles around the EA at the maximum effective range of the weapons.

Step 3. Analyze the terrain and the enemy avenues of approach to determine suitable weapon positions. Analyze the suitable portions of each arc for positions that would place the most fires on the EA.

Step 4. Adjust the proposed positions to maintain command and control, ease of supply, and the like.

Step 5. Position each weapon on the ground, prepare range cards, fighting positions, and so on. Inspect each position and then conduct a rehearsal.

Step 6. Adjust on the ground the weapons that were unsatisfactory during the rehearsal, prepare the new range cards and fighting positions, and conduct a final rehearsal.

These six steps are taken along with the usual procedures in establishing a task force defense. Using as an example a task force with M60 series tanks and M113 armored personnel carriers, we will illustrate the process.

The first step of identifying the primary EA is taken during the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) process (Figure 1). As we identify the EA, we will also perform other tasks in our analysis of the terrain. For instance, we will look for the best location for obstacles (one that will encourage the enemy to take the lines of least resistance on the avenue we want him to take). Another task will be to consider where to place our indirect fire support to inflict casualties on the enemy if he chooses to breach the obstacles.

The second step, which involves drawing circles at the maximum ranges of the weapons, is a little new. The circles define the outside limits of each weapon system. Their actual locations, however, should be determined more by the terrain

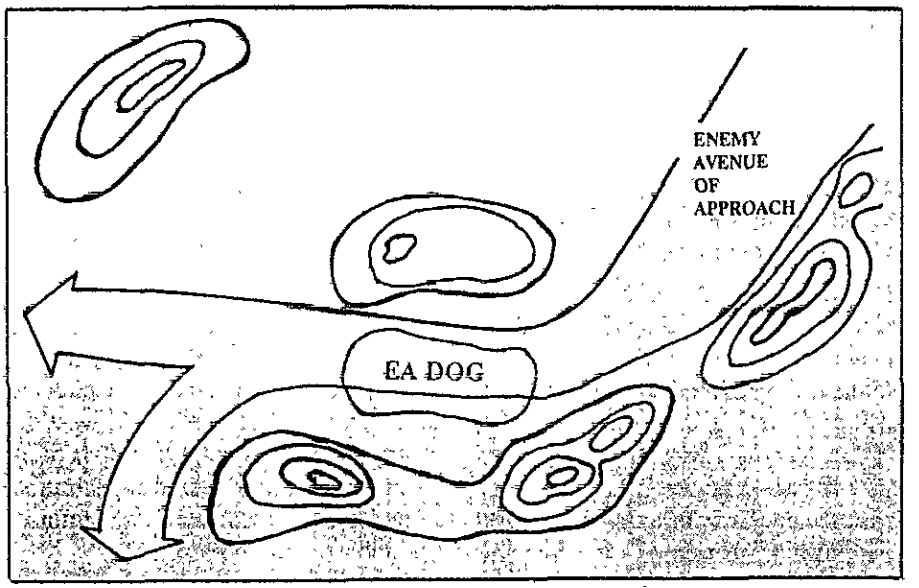

Figure 1

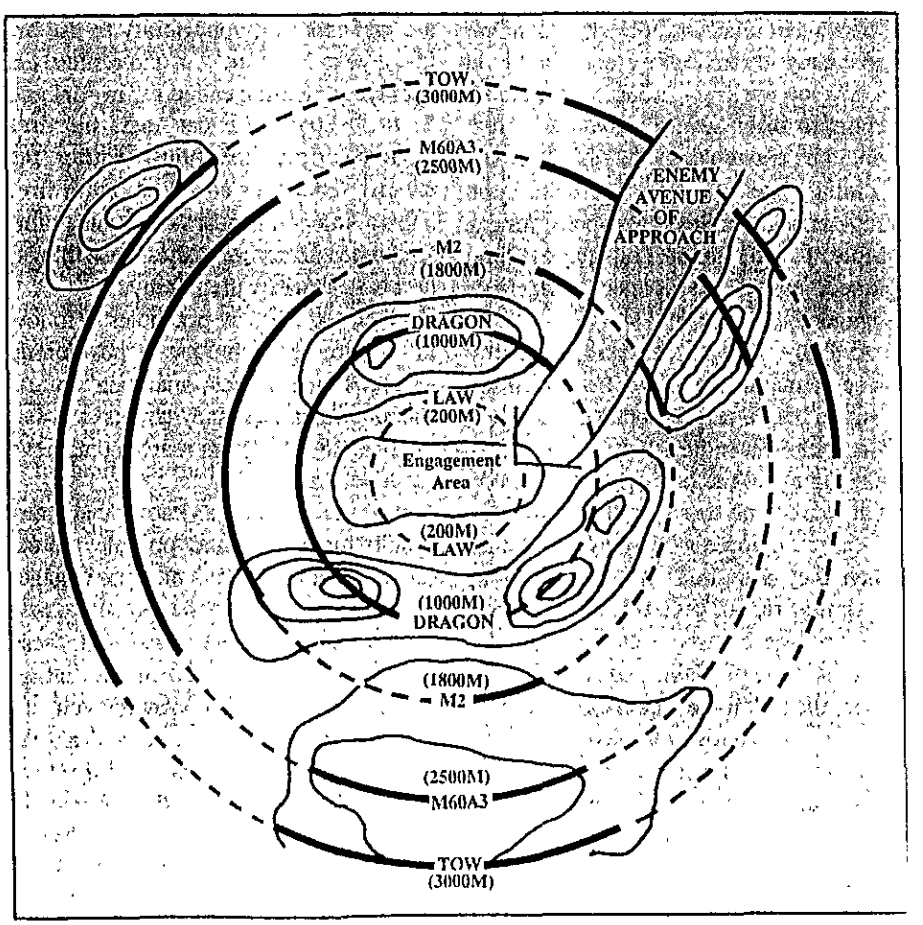

Figure 2

and the probability of achieving surprise than by the maximum effective range.

Figure 2 shows a series of circles drawn around our hypothetical primary EA—DOG. The circles delineate the farthest out each of these systems can reasonably be employed—200 meters for the LAW, 1,000 meters for the Dragon, 1,500-1,800 meters for the M2 .50 caliber machinegun, 2,500 meters for M60 series tank, and 3,000 meters for the TOW. (The maximum effective range for M1 tanks and M2 Bradley fighting vehicles would be 2,000 to 2,500 meters for the 25mm chain gun, 2,800 meters for the M1, and 3,750 meters for the TOW II.) Clearly, the avenue through EA DOG is the approach we want the enemy to take. For this reason, we must invite him to choose this route over any others in the sector.

This also implies that we must reposition our weapons in time to fire into this EA. Because it will be difficult to reposition them again once they are configured around the EA, we must have a high degree of confidence that the enemy will take this avenue and that we will be able to surprise him when he does.

Also in Figure 2, we have analyzed the terrain (primarily for the avenue of approach into the EA that we want the enemy to take) according to Step 3 and have darkened the arcs in the areas that are suitable for weapon positions. We do this because some terrain may not be usable, and the positions directly in the path of the enemy approach may be untenable. Step 3, when coupled with the adjustments of Step 4 for maintaining command and control and ease of supply, develops into a wargaming process to determine the best possible weapon positions.

After conceptually positioning the weapons as called for in Step 3, we may then find it necessary to group platoons for command and control in a way that precludes the use of some of the positions we had tentatively selected (Step 4). After this process, we should be able to take Step 5, in which each of the weapon systems is positioned, range cards are prepared, and fighting and survivability positions are prepared.

The last part of Step 5 is to rehearse firing from the positions. We should conduct this rehearsal by driving a tactical vehicle along the enemy avenue of approach while our weapons are manned and sighted on the vehicle. Dead space can be identified, range cards checked, and command and control procedures verified. Since some weapon systems may be facing each other on opposite sides of the EA, it is critically important to work out coordination among these units to preclude fratricide.

We should also rehearse the repositioning that we will most likely have to do before the enemy takes our selected avenues of approach, and include indirect fire rehearsals at the same time. Most important, during this rehearsal we will convey the commander's intent to the soldiers and their leaders.

Figure 3 shows a way to defend the EA with the circular technique of positioning. We have weighted this part of the task force sector with two company teams (one tank heavy and one mechanized infantry heavy) and the antiarmor company. The dismounted elements of our two company teams are located close to the EA so that they can use their portable antiarmor weapons and make it difficult for the enemy to breach our barrier system.

To prevent tipping our hand to the enemy, we should probably prepare the obstacles at the west end of EA DOG last, preferably during the hours of darkness. Team A (Tank) should position its mounted elements (M60 tanks and M113 armored personnel carriers) on another avenue of approach or forward as part of the security (counterreconnaissance) force until shortly before the attack is expected. Team A's dismounted elements may assist by emplacing the barrier and preparing Dragon positions on the north side of EA DOG.

Team B (Mechanized) could be positioned as shown or in a position nearby. Team B's dismounted elements could be employed with Dragons on the south side of EA DOG and on or near the barriers to thwart breaching efforts. Again, because Team A's troops are particularly endangered by the fires of Team B, and their fires may also cause Team B problems, these elements will need to coordinate their fires carefully.

The antiarmor company could employ one platoon on the hill northwest of EA

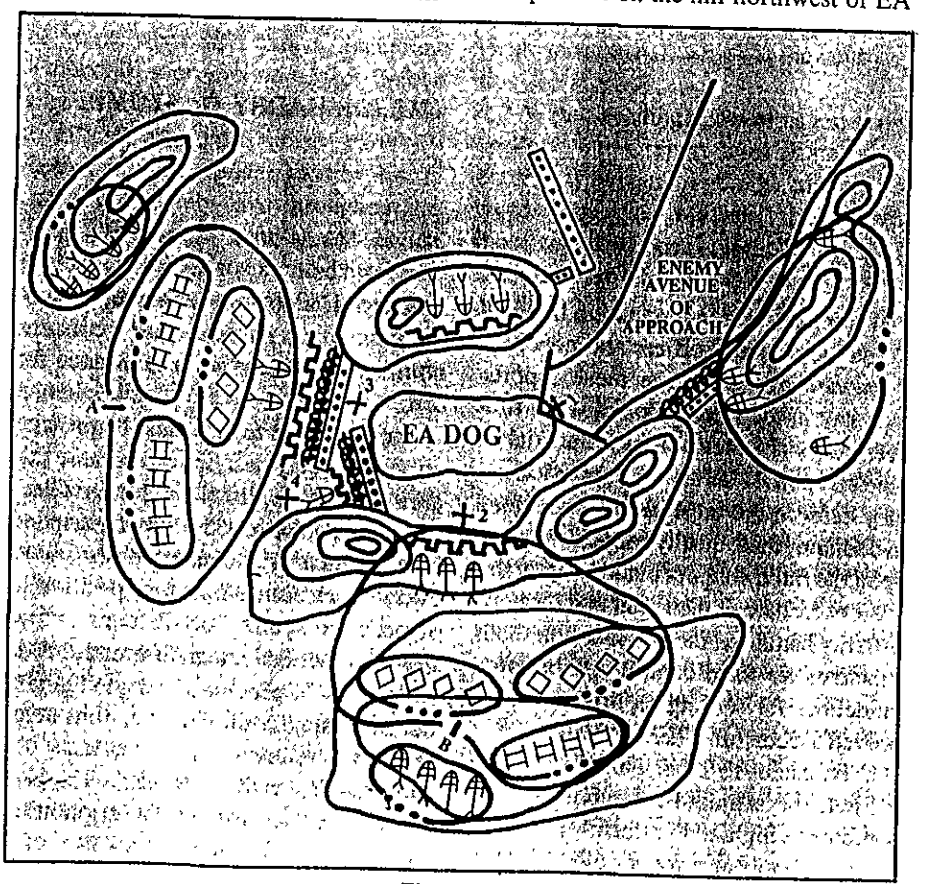

Figure 3

DOG to fire into that killing area at long range. A second TOW platoon could be emplaced to the south on the hill with Team B's tanks. The third TOW platoon could occupy the hill northeast of EA DOG and in the low ground southeast of the hill. Since it is the least likely to be detected, this last TOW platoon should do the most damage.

To achieve surprise fire and to control our own fires, we have designated four TRPs. TRP 1, at the east end of EA DOG, marks the point where our fires begin when the enemy arrives. TRP 2 may be used at the task force level to mass fires if the enemy attempts to breach or bypass our obstacles. TRP 4 is the final exit for the enemy from our series of obstacles or a location where he could be constrained and targeted.

Our order directs Team B to engage the enemy from TRPs 1 to 3 and to be prepared to mass fires on TRP 2 on order. Team A should synchronize its internal fire control by engaging the enemy from TRPs 1 to 3 with the south tank platoon firing on the lead enemy elements and the north platoon firing on the trail elements. Team A would also place heavy fire on the enemy between TRPs 3 and 4.

The antiarmor company would be directed to fire on the enemy between TRPs 1 and 3 and to mass fires on TRP 2 on order. The first and third antiarmor platoons would be directed to fire on the enemy between TRPs 3 and 4.

In this example, we have demonstrated a thought process that can be used to implement tactically the tenets of Air-Land Battle doctrine at a heavy task force level. This technique emphasizes retaining the initiative and interfering with and confusing the enemy.

The destruction of the enemy can best be achieved by using the four key principles and positioning weapon systems around the killing zone from which the task force can achieve surprise and mass its fires from multiple directions (primarily from the flank and rear) from mutually supporting positions arranged in depth. Our experience has shown that this approach can work well.

Lieutenant Colonel Pierce T. Graney, Jr., now Commander, Operations Group, Combat Maneuver Training Center in Germany, was formerly commander of the Mechanized Infantry Combat Training Team at the National Training Center. He recently completed the Army War College and is expected to assume the command of a brigade in August 1989.

Dr. Robert H. Sulzen is the team leader of the Army Research Institute–National Training Center Research Team. He is also a colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve with 11 years of experience training with tactical engagement simulations. His article "Winning with Tactical Engagement Simulation" appeared in the May 1987 issue of *Military Review*.

Writing Efficiency Reports

MAJOR HARRY D. STUMPF

Writing efficiency reports is a big part of the job of every officer and noncommissioned officer. Since these reports will stay in the rated soldiers' files forever, and since they will be influential in the selection of soldiers for promotion, they deserve the most careful attention. In addition, their quality reflects not only upon the rated soldiers but also upon the professionalism of the writer and his unit.

In my battalion, the 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry, we have come up with some guidelines for writing reports that have proved successful. These guidelines may also be useful to other units.

First, the standard for reports in the battalion is high and uniform—the same for a corporal and for a colonel. That standard is to produce a meaningful report with a correct narrative, to submit it on time, and to see that it contains no mistakes. There is no allowance for error.

A meaningful report must begin with an accurate duty description, because this area becomes a discriminator in selections for promotion. The duty description block is often a significant problem, however, because the same duty position in adjacent companies or platoons is frequently described much differently. FMs 7-70 and 7-71 provide some good guidelines for infantry duty descriptions at all levels with references for all military occupational specialties (MOSs). The best overall reference for duty descriptions is AR 611-201, Enlisted Career Management Fields and Military Occupational Specialties. It is on hand in the battalion personnel actions center (PAC).

A duty description should be developed by both the rater and the rated soldier at the beginning of the rating period. This is required for officer efficiency reports, but it is equally important for enlisted efficiency reports. When a soldier is involved in describing his duties, he has a clearer understanding of what those duties are.

At the same time, duty descriptions should be tailored to the individual to some extent. The exact duty description of the incumbent, although it can be used as a guide, will not necessarily be appropriate for his successor. Additional duties, personal strengths and weaknesses, personalities, the training schedule,