

A Stay-Alive Checklist

LIEUTENANT THEODORE H. RHODES

The idea of trying to survive on the battlefield can be overwhelming. There is so much technology on today's battlefield and so much material to read—training manuals, field manuals, changes, updates, doctrine, messages, and professional manuals. Soldiers tend to view the subject of battlefield longevity as they do any other complicated concept—they accord such concepts a low priority while emphasizing training for common task and skill qualification tests. An individual soldier's focus, therefore, tends to be on the areas in which he is going to be evaluated.

Many soldiers, in fact, try not to think about battlefield longevity. Some think they will probably die anyway if they are sent to war. Others think battlefield longevity is something they can train for only on a live battlefield. Then they are overtaken by apathy, because they cannot see what they can do about it.

To counter this apathy, I have devised an easy five-point checklist for soldiers to memorize, a list that will help them monitor their longevity performance at any given moment when they are in the field. If they comply with all five checks, they will be doing everything within their own power to keep themselves alive. I call this checklist "the checks of five to stay alive."

Security. As fundamental as security is, it is still neglected occasionally, most often in patrol bases and assembly areas. Security really falls apart after a tough, all-night mission when there is a strong tendency to "go admin" for a while. Junior leaders must enforce tactical posture at all times.

Maintaining security means staying awake and being alert to any movement beyond the unit perimeter. When on patrol, it means keeping a 360-degree

lookout. During movement, it means constantly looking around in all directions instead of at the ground or at the rucksack ahead.

Cover. This check has three sub-categories—cover head, cover position, and cover route. To cover his head, a soldier must keep his kevlar helmet on at all times. When possible, he must position himself behind a tree, a berm, or a log and keep his head down.

A soldier must dig his individual fighting position immediately. To minimize digging, he should settle into a steep water cut if he can. The only times he does not dig in are at short halts, at objective rally points (ORPs), or when the mission calls for extreme stealth. An individual fighting position should be improved with overhead cover whenever there is time.

To cover his route, a soldier should use the terrain to his advantage, traveling inside gullies, ditches, and ravines, and moving behind berms, hills, and ridges. The basic rule is for a soldier to keep something that will stop bullets between him and the enemy. Concrete or masonry is best, of course, but 18 inches of wood, earth, or both will suffice.

Concealment. A soldier must understand the direct relationship between his ability to stay alive and his use of concealment. If a soldier stays concealed, he stays invisible to his enemy, and the odds of his staying alive greatly increase.

Like the cover check, the concealment check is also broken down into three sub-categories—individual, stationary position, and route.

The most important piece of individual equipment to camouflage is the helmet. Every time I have been caught sneaking up on an objective, I have learned in the after-action review that I was identified

by the distinctive outline of my helmet. If a soldier doesn't camouflage any other item of personal equipment, he should at least camouflage his helmet.

When in the defense, he should also camouflage his individual fighting position. A visible fighting position is worse than none at all. Noise, light, and litter discipline are important for static positions and even more important during movement, where stealth is crucial.

Moving through gulches, ditches, and ravines for cover will automatically conceal a route, and moving in the moonshadow at night can conceal a soldier's silhouette. Moving through vegetation, however, does cause noise. Soldiers can take advantage of any external noises in their immediate area to move rapidly. Strong wind gusts can also cover the sound of movement.

Dispersion. This simply means keeping the proper interval between individuals and elements during movements and at halts. Soldiers have a natural tendency to bunch up, and the more tired they get, the more they tend to bunch up. Sometimes they get so close together that one grenade could wipe out an entire platoon.

At night, the proper interval fluctuates, depending on the amount of moonlight and on the density of the foliage the soldiers are moving through. Each one should stay just close enough to maintain visual contact with the man in front, but not so far apart that they lose touch with the unit. It is up to each individual soldier to keep a proper interval between him and other soldiers in the formation.

During movements and at halts, junior leaders should make interval spot corrections. In patrol bases and assembly areas, these leaders dictate the rate of dispersion. We constantly preach cover and concealment, but usually do not give

dispersion the attention it deserves.

Fragmentation. Soldiers have to make the most of their fragmentation weapons such as hand grenades and claymores. They should always use these against an enemy at the farthest possible distance to keep him from discovering their own positions.

When they are attacking, if the enemy is too close for the supporting mortars to be called in, soldiers should lob a volley of M203 rounds on the objective before assaulting it. When they get closer, they

can throw hand grenades. The goal is to pulverize the objective to the point that their assault will amount to little more than a bounding police call.

The fragmentation check, therefore, means thinking about how to engage the enemy with fragmentation weapons—claymores, grenades, and indirect fire—before trying to sneak up on him with an M16.

That's the list—security, cover, concealment, dispersion, and fragmentation. This five-item checklist is all soldiers

need to monitor their tactical posture. It is a simple list that all soldiers can easily memorize. These "checks of five to stay alive" give soldiers the confidence they will need to face the reality of the battlefield.

Lieutenant Theodore H. Rhodes is assigned to the 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii. Commissioned through the Officer Candidate School in 1987, he previously served with the 1st Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg.

SWAP SHOP



Light infantry scouts are always in danger of being compromised with essential elements of information in their possession. And because they usually operate several kilometers forward of the battalion area of operations, they frequently find it difficult and time-consuming to get that information to their commanders or the tactical operations center (TOC).

But their commanders must have the information as soon as they possibly can get it so that they can plan and execute their units' missions. While serving as a scout platoon leader in the 10th Mountain Division, and after corresponding with other scout platoons, our platoon perfected a working system that greatly improves upon the combat information process. All that is needed is a standard sketch format and FM secure communications.

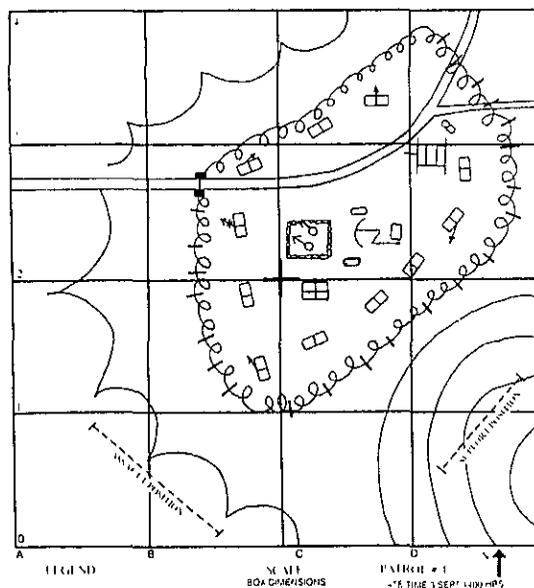
Each member of the scout platoon (and of the S-2 section at the TOC) has a blank copy of the sketch format covered with acetate. The sketch format uses a simple grid reference system similar to that for locating a point on a military map. The scale of the sketch is determined by the size of the objective. Small objectives may have a grid box of 10 meters, larger objectives, 20 meters. Weapon systems, bunkers, vehicles, and the like are drawn to the approximate scale of the sketch.

After a thorough reconnaissance of the objective, the scout team or squad leader prepares his sketch on the blank form. Once the sketch is complete and oriented north, he transmits the message to the TOC using the grid reference system.

The squad leader describes the objective starting at the top of the sketch and working clockwise. If a bunker is located in the northern sector of the objective, for example, the squad leader transmits the location using the grid reference system. The orientation of the position is sent using the magnetic azimuth. For example, "an M60 fighting position is located in box C-3; right 7, up 4; oriented on an azimuth of 360 degrees." The TOC radio telephone operator finds the inter-

section of the lines C and 3. From there he reads right seven in the box and up four, just as in map reading. Then he draws to scale the symbol for an M60 oriented on an azimuth of 360 degrees.

By sending two points and the magnetic orientation, the squad leader can describe woodlines, roads, high ground, and obstacles. For instance, for an obstacle he would report, "a single strand of concertina wire running southwest to northeast



from C-3; right 3, up 2; runs to D-3; right 1, up 9." The squad leader continues this process until the entire sketch is complete. The TOC radio man's finished sketch should be as accurate as the squad leader's.

With practice, this system can be effective in getting the scouts' picture to the maneuver leader before his link-up with them. With this timely information, a commander can then plan and execute his combat missions more effectively.

(Submitted by Lieutenant Douglas M. Keepper, 2d Battalion, 22d Infantry, Fort Drum, New York.)