
Platoon Rollout Program

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The primary means of evaluating readiness for leaders at the platoon, company, and battalion levels have been ARTEP (Army Readiness, Training, and Evaluation Program) and now MTP (Mission Training Plan) standards. But the cost in both time and resources has been high, perhaps too high.

Too often we have devoted an inordinate amount of manpower and time to spit and polish, painted rocks, and multiple rehearsals that disguised the true readiness picture of a unit. Typically, "ramping up" for one of these events begins with isolating the unit as it prepares itself and ends with a major sigh of relief (or despair) as the load plans, briefing charts, and equipment are stored away and normal operations resumed.

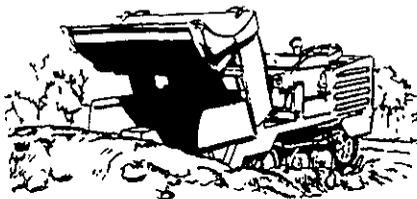
But in terms of a "come as you are" readiness review, how meaningful are the results? We have found that a true go-to-war snapshot is difficult to capture. Critical issues lose their "freshness" to days of fine tuning, by-the-numbers walk-throughs, multiple in-process and after action reviews, and replies by endorsement.

An alternative approach does exist that provides a low cost, quick, and more realistic way of measuring a unit's combat readiness. It centers upon unannounced, platoon level, situational exercises. We call it the Platoon Rollout Program, and it can be used by all platoons.

A platoon rollout is a no-notice readiness check of a platoon's preparedness to deploy and accomplish the missions on its mission essential task list (METL).

The emphasis is on a 20-part system check. We look at the platoon's ability to deploy bag and baggage, accomplish "on the run" missions, and return safely to home station.

There are two phases to the program. Phase I focuses on the organization, accountability, and serviceability of the personnel and equipment within a platoon. It is the basic check of the platoon's effectiveness and survivability. Phase II is the roll-and-perform portion of the program, which emphasizes deployment missions. Simply stated, the Platoon



Rollout Program is the certification of the platoon.

This article describes Phase I, which has proved to be a valuable part of the 14th Combat Engineer Battalion's readiness system for more than a year.

Why platoon level? There are three reasons:

First, the platoon is the largest size force the battalion commander can evaluate at an internally sustained inspection level of one rollout every week. No major planning or logistical resources outside the battalion are required. In short, the program isn't a show stopper. The battalion continues to function normally. To attempt anything larger would do lit-

tle more than stress out both the staff and the companies.

Second, the two-echelon distance rule of evaluating and mentoring is maintained. When a battalion evaluates a company, the distance is too short. When a battalion attempts to reach down and evaluate a squad, the distance is too long.

Third, and most important to us, the program focuses on the workings of the smallest "plan and execute" multiple mission unit. It is the platoon that performs most of the missions, with its officer, NCOs, and soldiers working as a team. A platoon's proficiency can be clearly graded in a series of on-the-move accomplishments recorded throughout the rollout program.

Phase I consists of a no-notice alert issued at 0530 hours, an in-depth inspection of 20 functional areas critical to a platoon's ability to deploy for combat successfully, and a final critique at 1600 hours. This critique is led by the battalion commander and attended by the staff, the platoon's chain of command, the company commander, the executive officer, the first sergeant and the company's operations, motor pool, and supply leaders.

The battalion command group selects the company, and the company commander selects the platoon to be tested. This brings the company into joint program ownership. The only restrictions to the process are that if a platoon has passed an inspection within the last six months it is exempt, and platoons that have not been recent participants have

TRAINING NOTES

priority over platoons that have failed and need to be retested. Although it is a platoon that will be evaluated, there is little doubt that the company's support systems will also be tested.

The battalion commander provides the command emphasis that is vital for the overall success of a rollout program while the staff sections inspect the 20 functional areas during the day's evaluation. For example,

- The executive officer administers the program for the battalion commander and maintains the program's memorandum of instruction, statistics, and status board. He identifies problem trends and develops staff actions to correct these problems.

- The command sergeant major notes the platoon's shortcomings and works with the company's first sergeant in monitoring the progress of the platoon sergeant and the squad leaders.

- The S-1 inspects the platoon's POM (preparation for overseas movement) records to determine whether they have been prepared in accordance with rapid deployment standards.

- The S-2 validates the security requirements within the platoon and inspects to see if proper clearances have been obtained.

- The S-3 inspects all of the platoon's assigned NBC equipment, including masks, carriers, alarms, radiacmeters, dosimeters, chargers, and maintenance records.

- The communications section inspects all of the platoon's communication equipment, including vehicle mounted radios, antennas, field telephones and switchboards, and maintenance records. Test meter (PRM-34) checks are accomplished during the evaluation. Communications security (COMSEC) materials are also inspected and accountability is verified on all equipment.

- The S-4 inspects a reliable sample of the platoon's KSOs (kits, sets, and outfits) to make sure they are serviceable and properly marked and to identify any shortage or excess items. He also inspects all basic issue items, all of the platoon's clothing records and load plans, and the serviceability and accountability of tentage.

14TH COMBAT ENGINEER BATTALION PLATOON ROLLOUT PROGRAM					REMARKS	
	1ST	PLATOON	2 ND	3 RD	SPT	COMPANY -
PLT LEADER	ZLT ROCK					
AREA/INSPECTION DATE	21 NOV 89					
S1						
NON-PURCHASES	ES					
S2						
SECURITY CLEARANCES	NI					
S3						
NBC EQUIP	ES					
S4						
PLT/SQD TOOL BOXES	MS					
VEHICLE LOAD PLANS	MS					
VEHICLE OVM	MS					
CLOTHING RECORDS	ES					
HAND RECEIPTS	NI					
TOOL KIT GEN MECH	/					
TENT GP MED/SMALL	MS					
TENT MAINTENANCE	/					
CESO						
COMMUNICATIONS	MS					
SMD						
VEHICLES/TRIS/ENGR	ES					
PIONEER TOOL TRAILERS	MS					
WEAPONS	ES					
SMOKE GENERATORS	/					
DECON APPARATUS	/					
GENERATORS, ELECTRIC	MS					
CHAIN SAWS	MS					
MINE DETECTORS	ES					
OVERALL RESULTS:						
Total Number of Areas Rated NI: <u>2</u>						
Overall 0 - 1 = ES						
Overall 2 - 3 = MS						
Overall > 3 = NI						
Vehicles/Tris/Engr MS or better? <u>Yes</u> No						
Weapons MS or better? <u>Yes</u> No						
Platoon must have yes responses for above questions.						
Platoon is ES <u>MS</u> NI						
ES = EXCEEDS STANDARDS MS = MEETS STANDARDS NI = NEEDS IMPROVEMENT						

Sample Score Sheet.

- The property book officer inspects a reliable sampling of the platoon's KSOs and driver operator items to validate hand receipts down to the user level.

- The battalion maintenance officer inspects, to the standards of the applicable technical manuals, all of the platoon's assigned vehicles, engineer equipment, generators, and weapons, as well as the maintenance records.

EVALUATION

The functional areas are evaluated using DA Forms 2404 to list the deficiencies and the strong points. These overall ratings fall into three levels of readiness—gold (exceeds standards), black (meets standards), and red (fails to meet standards). Objective measurements are used to determine whether the platoon meets the standards; subjectivity is kept to an absolute minimum.

Scores are recorded on score sheets that explain the standards and on a spreadsheet that allows for easy identification of the problem areas and trends. If a platoon fails to meet the standards in either the vehicle and engineer equipment or weapons categories, it is automatically eliminated from achieving an overall "meets standards" rating.

The company commander is given a copy of all the DA 2404s, and the results

are posted on the platoon rollout master-board inside the entrance to the battalion headquarters. For all who enter, there is no doubt as to a platoon's readiness. (A sample scoresheet is shown here.)

A combat ready platoon is recognized at a battalion formation at which a special platoon rollout certificate is presented to the platoon.

The program offers many benefits. It not only identifies weak areas within a particular platoon and highlights systemic problems in a company or across the entire battalion, it provides positive tips as well. Great commonsense ideas continue to be developed within the tested platoons, and these ideas are shared by all the platoons. In addition, this battlefield readiness program focuses on accountability and brings frontline leadership involvement back to the forefront of priorities. The platoon leaders are placed in the limelight and made accountable for their actions.

The program allows the battalion commander to have one-on-one discussions with those for whom he is senior rater and also provides him a forum for reemphasizing the battalion's standards and its training focus. In addition, the noncommissioned officers are really brought into the action—all the way through the out-brief in front of the battalion commander. (Problem areas with a platoon's leader-

ship are not easy to hide.)

As for the battalion staff, each member becomes more proficient in his own area of responsibility. He acts to correct functional areas before they become repeated 2404 gigs highlighted in a series of platoon rollouts. In other words, the benefits accrue across the board as the other platoons improve their readiness posture and the battalion staff rapidly matures in subject matter expertise.

Although placing a constant command interest in one specific program has a cost, this one is worth that cost. The

“ramp up” approach of announced inspections has been replaced by a program that demands true “band of excellence” performance based on valid combat readiness standards. The platoon rollout program is a great way to reach and sustain a state of total combat readiness.

In summary, this program offers an affordable method of regularly checking the combat readiness of platoons; its demands are well within a battalion’s capabilities. It provides healthy competition to clear standards. All become winners in the program.

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SWAP SHOP



TRAINING STANDARD FOR KY-57 VINSON DEVICE

The following is a proposed training standard for using the KY-57 VINSON device with the AN/PRC-77 radio. I wrote it for the training SOP of the 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, while I was assigned there. If it exists elsewhere in the Army’s training literature, I have not been able to find it.

TASK: Install and operate the KY-57 VINSON device with the AN/PRC-77 radio.

CONDITIONS: Given the following resources:

- A complete, disassembled AN/PRC-77 with battery.
- A complete, disassembled, keyed KY-57 with radio cable and battery.
- A distant station keyed with the same variable.
- An assigned frequency and call sign.

STANDARDS:

1. Within two minutes, install the equipment in accordance with these standards:
 - Install the battery in the AN/PRC-77 and close the latches on the battery box.
 - Attach the short whip antenna to the AN/PRC-77.
 - Install the battery in the KY-57 and close the latches on the battery box.
 - Connect the radio cable between the POWER connection on the radio and the RADIO connection on the KY-57.
 - Connect the handset to the AUDIO connection on the KY-57.
 - Set the KY-57 fill switch to 1.
 - Set the KY-57 mode switch to C.
 - Set the radio to the assigned frequency.

2. Within two minutes, pass secure and nonsecure radio traffic in accordance with these standards:

- Turn the function switch of the radio to SQUELCH.
- Turn the function switch of the KY-57 to ON.
- Press the push-to-talk switch once to clear the KY-57 alarm.
- Make a radio check and pass a message to the distant station.
- On order from the distant station to go nonsecure, turn the function switch of the KY-57 to OFF. Do not change any other switch settings or cable connections. Make a radio check and pass a message to the distant station.
- On order from the distant station to return to secure operation, turn the function switch of the KY-57 to ON. Press the push-to-talk switch once to clear the KY-57 alarm. Make a radio check and pass a message to the distant station.

The time standards above will produce a basically proficient soldier. Experienced soldiers can do these tasks much faster. The most common mistake in installing the equipment is to attach the handset to the radio instead of to the KY-57.

To go nonsecure, the mode switch of the KY-57 can be set to P, but there is a risk of pulling the switch off its mounting, as has been documented repeatedly in *PS Magazine*. The preferred method is to turn the KY-57 off as described.

In addition, the basic radio procedures that are covered in many common training references cannot be overlooked.

(Submitted by Captain Thomas J. Martin, Signal Corps, 558th USAAG, in Germany.)