Working the Point

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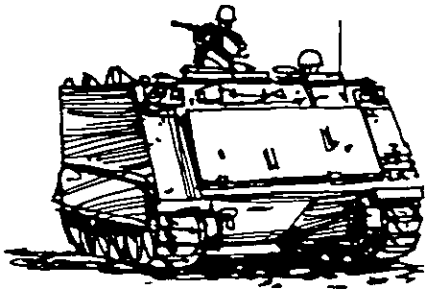
The lead vehicle in a mechanized infantry company or battalion movement to contact is expected to move forward faster and harder than the others. The squad leader is expected to react quickly so the momentum of the attack can be maintained. He is responsible for making sure that the task force is on the right route; that he finds the enemy before the enemy finds him; and that he develops the initial situation for the unit's leaders to act upon. In other words, he goes out, finds trouble, and then lets the company or battalion task force bail him out. Clearly, this vehicle should be manned by the best squad in a platoon.

The techniques discussed here may be helpful to squad leaders and soldiers who are assigned this role.

During the preparation phase, and after the squad leader has received the fragmentary order (FRAGO), the squad leader, his track commander, and the platoon leader go over the platoon leader's map again. The squad leader and track commander ensure that their routes, checkpoints, phase lines, and target reference points (TRPs) are the same as the platoon leader's. Then they go over likely areas of contact and ensure that TRPs have been plotted for those areas. If there are none, the squad leader gets with the platoon fire support team and sees that some are designated. They discuss the best approaches to crossing danger areas and decide in which direction the vehicle will turn at various intersections.

The squad leader then briefs his squad on the enemy situation, the route, and the battle drills they can expect to execute on contact. The track commander and squad leader go over the route one more time.

Once it completes its preparations for combat, the lead squad crosses the line of departure at the time prescribed in the FRAGO. Although the FRAGO or a unit SOP will probably specify convoy speed and distance between tracks or other vehicles, this should not apply to the lead track. The squad leader must be given some freedom to move away from his platoon to investigate possible ambush



sites or other danger areas, but he must remember to stay on the axis of advance and within sight and range of the second track's direct fire weapon. An analysis of METT-T (mission, enemy, troops, terrain, and time) and the squad leader's judgment should dictate this.

It is the driver's responsibility to alter his speed at irregular times during movement. (In my unit in Korea, we referred to this as *stuttering*.) The vehicle might move, for example, at five miles per hour for 30 seconds, seven miles per hour for 20 seconds, and ten miles per hour for 15 seconds. This helps keep enemy gunners from tracking the vehicle and getting a clear shot at it.

During the movement, the squad leader must keep his handset glued to his ear, one eye on the map, the other eye on the terrain and surroundings, and his mind on the six-digit grid coordinates of his exact location. The platoon radio is kept clear for him and the platoon leader to talk on—nobody else. He reports all phase lines, grid lines, and TRPs. He calls in evidence of vehicle movement, changes in the terrain, and any feelings or suspicions he may have.

The track commander must have binoculars for increased observation. He must constantly scan in all directions and investigate suspicious areas. Three men besides the squad leader should be standing in the cargo hatch (if the vehicle is an M113), one facing the front and two facing the rear. All should have sectors designated for them by the squad leader and should report any findings to him.

At those times when the track must stop, the driver automatically seeks a good hull-down position, maintaining observation to the front and flanks, while the rest of the unit catches up.

Once enemy contact is established—when the enemy opens fire—the squad's main objective is to survive the initial ten seconds. The driver seeks cover without being told where to go, and the track commander engages the enemy with his machinegun. The squad leader calls in an abbreviated situation report, which might be, "Tanks 200 meters past Phase Line Blue" or "Tanks and automatic weapons fire 300 meters north of the bridge on the right." The platoon leader, who should be following the squad leader's progress on his map, then sends this information

along with approximate grid coordinates to the company commander. Once the squad leader gets his vehicle under cover, he can then call a SALT (size, activity, location, type) report back to the platoon leader and turn control of the battle over to him.

The lead vehicle in a movement to contact calls for a squad leader who is smart, resourceful, and daring. The decisions he makes and the information he sends could affect the entire course of the battle. Unit leaders should ensure that the best squad leaders are at the point; and those squad leaders should ensure that they know their jobs well enough to be able to direct the lead vehicle in a movement to contact.

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The Foot March
A Tactical Maneuver

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The U.S. Army's concern for battlefield mobility, along with the formation of our light divisions, has fostered a renewed interest in foot marching. An article in the May 1989 issue of ARMY Magazine ("Hitchhiking into Battle: The Lost Art of Marching," by James A. Huston) discusses the importance of being able to move on foot when the situation dictates and implies that all units, both light and heavy, should train to execute foot marches. (See also "Road-marching and Performance," by Lieutenant Colonel John S. O'Connor, Michael S. Bahrke, Captain Joseph Knapik, and James A. Vogel, INFANTRY, May-June 1990, pages 31-33.)

Infantry leaders must understand, however, that foot marches are not merely physical training exercises, athletic events, or qualification races for the Expert Infantryman's Badge (EIB). In fact, the speed-at-all-costs mind set has severely reduced the value of unit foot marches, because the soldiers are often too exhausted when they reach their final destination to accomplish anything else.

The essence of effective foot marching is discipline. Unlike the "every man for himself" attitude that prevails during the individual-oriented EIB speed march (12 miles in 3 hours), leaders must establish a realistic objective that most of their soldiers can meet. They should conduct a unit march like a tactical maneuver that will allow their unit to reach an objective area in the proper physical and mental condition to fight. The concept of a tactical maneuver also tends to focus the soldiers' attention on the mission that awaits them at the end of the march rather than on the march itself.

OPERATIONS ORDER

An effective foot march requires an operations order. It should be a simple one and should contain an overlay that addresses the march route and the control measures. The order should accomplish the following:

• **Orient the unit on a specific tactical mission.** The purpose of the march is to move the unit into a position from which it can either accomplish that mission or prepare for another one.

• **Sequence all subordinate units and establish tactical integrity.** Units should not be allowed to pass each other or compete for the fastest time, but should complete the march as a cohesive, disciplined force ready to spring into action. Subordinate units should be assigned a start point and a start time. These, coupled with an order of march and the march speed, should ensure that the units will not bunch up and present a lucrative target for enemy air attacks or indirect fires.

• **Designate a march speed.** The march speed chosen should be a factor of the unit's physical conditioning as well as the time the unit expects to arrive in the objective area. Leaders must determine how fast their unit can realistically move over the distance to be covered and still be fit to fight. This decision must be reassessed throughout the march, however, and the march speed adjusted as necessary.

• **Direct a 10- or 15-minute break for every 45-50 minutes of marching.** During breaks, foot checks should be made and other medical concerns addressed. These breaks should not be opportunities for the soldiers to socialize; security must be maintained and noise and light discipline enforced.

• **Establish a combat load, the special equipment to be carried, and a uni-**