Platoon EXEVALs
In a Light Infantry Battalion

MAJOR EUGENE J. PALKA

Platoon external evaluations (EXEVALs), using a challenging and realistic scenario that includes a well trained opposing force (OPFOR), are conducted to assess the readiness of a battalion's rifle platoons. In a light infantry battalion, planning and administering platoon EXEVALs requires accurate forecasting, effective coordination, and training and orientation for evaluators and controllers. Moreover, platoon EXEVALs are normally a battalion's most expensive training event of the year in terms of total expenditure of critical resources. These resources include manpower (to orchestrate the event and to support and evaluate the platoons), ammunition, transportation, fuel, training areas and ranges, training aids, and flying hours.

Usually, the evaluators, controllers, range operators, and OPFOR must be provided from the battalion's own internal personnel assets. But perhaps the greatest challenge the S-3 faces is allocating and managing the time needed to plan the exercises, reconnoiter the ranges and training areas, train the evaluators, and conduct the necessary tactical exercises without troops (TEWTs).

The S-3 normally conducts some of this planning well in advance so that he can forecast the resources and program support that will come from support elements. Unfortunately, much of the preparation involving evaluators, OPFOR, and support elements must be accomplished along with other daily activities and priority events just before the EXEVALs.

The following approach to planning and administering platoon EXEVALs in a light infantry battalion may prove helpful. This approach recognizes the need to develop the EXEVAL program in the yearly training guidance, refine it during the quarterly training briefing, and allocate the time to train the personnel to assume their responsibilities during the training event.

An obvious start point for the planning phase is to select the specific platoon tasks that are to be evaluated. The S-3 and the battalion commander carefully choose the appropriate missions, and the S-3 logically incorporates these tasks into a battalion field training exercise with a realistic scenario.

The tasks to be evaluated are selected on the basis of the unit's mission essential task list (METL), unit assessments of the battalion's platoons, the concurrent training opportunities that specific tasks afford, and the available training resources. The METL provides the focus for ensuring that the battalion uses its training resources to train the platoons on the collective tasks they must perfect to support the company and battalion missions.

The unit assessment of each rifle platoon can help the company commanders, the battalion commander, and the S-3 recognize specific trends. From the assessments, these leaders may be able to identify particular tasks in which several platoons are either untrained or need practice and then give such tasks priority during the EXEVALs. Similarly, by reviewing past training exercises and looking at the long-range training calendar, they may be able to identify specific tasks that have been, or will be, performed repeatedly. If most of the platoons are already trained in these areas, the leaders can exclude such tasks from the EXEVAL scenario.

Where possible, the S-3 should attempt to integrate platoons from different companies into a single mission scenario during the evaluation. For example, one platoon may conduct a reconnaissance of an urban area within which another platoon is establishing a defense. The two platoons can then be evaluated simultaneously on two different tasks, using a single training area and no OPFOR, other than what they provide for each other. To make the most of training resources, planners should make every effort to evaluate platoon missions concurrently instead of consecutively.

A commander never wants to limit the quality of training because of resource constraints, but he may have to limit the duration of an EXEVAL or the number of tasks to be evaluated because of a shortage of ranges, training areas, flying hours, or certain types of ammunition. Some resource shortages cause only minor adjustments. At times, though, certain tasks may have to be modified or even eliminated because of a lack of resources.

Lieutenants who have already per-

formed successfully as platoon leaders are the ideal choices for evaluation duty. These officers are probably now assigned as company executive officers or as battalion staff members. During the EXEVALs, they will be expected to remain separate from their parent units or staff sections. This means that company commanders, first sergeants, supply sergeants, and staff section chiefs must pick up the additional workload.

One evaluator is assigned for each of the tasks to be evaluated, and each is responsible for evaluating all of the rifle platoons on his particular task. This approach assures standardization and enables each evaluator to assess each platoon's proficiency accurately in relation to that of the other platoons in the battalion.

The S-3 is responsible for evaluator training. Before the EXEVALs begin, at the least he conducts a TEWT with each evaluator on the piece of terrain where a particular mission will be conducted. In addition, the S-3 walks through the mission using the specified mission training plan (MTP) that is given to the evaluator. The S-3 also provides a copy of the written operations order (OPORD), if it is available during the TEWT, or the fragmentary order (FRAGO) that will be given to the platoon. To ensure that each evaluator is well versed on the task he will evaluate, the S-3 may have to supplement the TEWTs with classes on tactics, troop leading procedures, and presenting OPORDs.

Before each mission during the EXEVALs, the assigned evaluator provides the company headquarters with a written copy of the OPORD before presenting it orally to the appropriate platoon leader. After issuing the order, the evaluator remains with the platoon until the mission is complete. Upon completion of each mission, the evaluator conducts an after action review with the entire platoon and the OPFOR (if one has been used), then privately conducts a critique with the platoon leader and platoon sergeant. He also provides immediate feedback to the company commander.

The evaluators subsequently return to the tactical operations center (TOC) to debrief the S-3 and the battalion commander. The S-3 helps the evaluators summarize their observations and prepare their written comments, maintain the status on each platoon, prepare a packet of written feedback for all company commanders, and consolidate key lessons learned so that a battalion level after action review can be conducted at the end of the exercises. The written feedback and updated platoon assess-

DIVISION OF LABOR

Battalion S-1:
- Process casualty feeder reports in support of the exercise scenario.
- Process POW reports in support of the platoon missions.
- S-1 officer: evaluate task specified by the S-3.
- Maintain accountability and perform normal personnel and administrative operations in accordance with the battalion's tactical SOP.

Battalion S-2:
- Develop paragraph 1a (enemy situation) for all OPORDs and FRAGOs.
- Provide daily intelligence summaries and weather reports.
- S-2 officer: evaluate task number 8-5, area reconnaissance, for all platoons.
- Perform routine duties in accordance with the tactical SOP.

Battalion S-3:
- Assume overall responsibility for preparation and conduct of the EXEVALs.
- Serve as the chief evaluator for the event.
- Coordinate all external assets required to support the exercise.
- Coordinate use of appropriate training areas and ranges.
- Establish and coordinate evaluation procedures.
- Task appropriate units for support.
- Operate the control headquarters and tactical operations center.
- Publish all OPORDs and FRAGOs.
- Conduct TEWTs and evaluator training as required.
- Provide evaluation packets to all evaluators.
- Orchestrate all air mission briefs in accordance with the battalion SOP.
- Provide the S-3 Air to conduct evaluation of air assault missions.
- Orchestrate a battalion level after action review upon completion of the training event.
- Consolidate evaluations and produce a written evaluation packet for each company.

Battalion S-4:
- Assume overall responsibility for the logistical support of the training event.
- Coordinate and control ground transportation as required.
- Request, draw, and deliver Class V in accordance with the S-3's guidance.
- Coordinate Class I, II, III, and IV with the S-3 and units.
- S-4 officer: evaluate task specified by the S-3.
- Establish logistics center in accordance with the tactical SOP.

Communications Platoon:
- Reserve range drops in support of the battalion TOC and trains.
- Lay wire to all company command posts (CPs) and between the TOC and control headquarters.
- Establish FM communications on three nets (battalion command, administrative/logistical, and control).
- Designate spare frequencies for OPFOR use.

Support Platoon:
- Provide a maintenance contact team with the combat trains.
- Provide vehicle recovery assistance as required.
- Pick up and deliver Class V in accordance with the S-3's schedule.
- Conduct normal support operations in accordance with the tactical SOP.
- Support platoon leader: evaluate task specified by the S-3.

Medical Platoon:
- Provide one medic to each rifle platoon.
- Establish the battalion aid station in accordance with the tactical SOP.
- Coordinate ambulance support for all live fire exercises.

Mortar Platoon:
- Establish firing positions and radio nets to support calls for fire.
- Fire high explosive and smoke in support of all live fire exercises.

Scout Platoon:
- Perform OPFOR missions in accordance with the operations schedule.
- Conduct area reconnaissances as directed.

Headquarters and Headquarters Company:
- Provide evaluators in accordance with the S-3's guidance.
- Establish layout for the TOC area and the control headquarters.

Companies A, B, and C:
- Prepare rifle platoons with appropriate organic equipment to undergo EXEVALs.
- Provide logistical and administrative support to platoons per SOP.
- Establish company CPs for control purposes, reporting, and support of the exercise scenario.
- Provide executive officers to perform as evaluators in accordance with the S-3's guidance.

Company D:
- Provide vehicles with mock-ups and drivers to support the execution of antiarmor ambushes.
- Provide evaluator support in accordance with the S-3's guidance.

HSB/Artillery Battalion (DS):
- Provide forward observers for each rifle platoon and the battalion mortars.
- Provide FSE to monitor fire support nets and to control live fire missions.

Engineer Platoon:
- Support platoon defensive positions with barrier materials, minefields, countermobility obstacles, and survivability positions.
- Support attacks on urban areas with the special engineer equipment necessary to breach obstacles.
- Support platoon movement to contact/hasty attack (live fire exercises) by breaching wire obstacles with bangalore torpedos and clearing minefields.

ments are also used to focus future training.

Because the battalion must rely on its own internal assets to conduct the EXEVAL, each rifle company headquarters, the headquarters and headquarters company, the antiarmor company, the specialty platoons, and all of the staff sections are expected to support the battalion training event. It is essential that the S-3 outline procedures, assign responsibilities, and identify support requirements in a well-organized letter of instruction (LOI). The LOI is published six to eight weeks in advance and is briefed to avoid confusion and to fix responsibility, and representatives from all participating elements are included in the briefing.

Final details and administrative instructions are covered during the presentation of the battalion OPORD before the units deploy to the field. As during the briefing on the LOI, all support representatives are required to attend.

A recommended division of labor is shown in the accompanying box that can easily be modified to suit unit needs.

While these elements are actively involved in supporting the EXEVALs, the battalion commander and command sergeant major should take advantage of the training events to observe each platoon leader and platoon sergeant personally. There is no better opportunity for the battalion's senior leadership to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the unit's platoons in a tactical environment. Moreover, since the senior leaders are not actively involved in carrying out the tactical missions (as they are in battalion or brigade field training exercises), this training event offers the battalion commander and command sergeant major an ideal occasion for coaching the unit's platoon level leaders.

When it deploys to the field, the battalion establishes a forward operating base (FOB). Within the FOB, each company is given a sector of responsibility within which its platoons establish their defensive positions. The defense task is evaluated as a progressive effort. After each mission, a platoon returns to its sector to continue with its priority of work in the defense.

The battalion TOC, the combat trains, and the company command posts (CPs) are all established within the FOB according to the battalion's normal SOP. In addition, an evaluator CP is located near the TOC.

It is recommended that at least one of the selected tasks be conducted as a live fire exercise. The movement to contact and hasty attack missions are ideal for this purpose. Engineer assets can be integrated to breach wire obstacles; battalion mortars can support the scheme of maneuver; and a variety of such special weapons as LAWs and

grenades can be employed. Moreover, since there is a natural progression from one task to the next, two tasks can be evaluated by a single evaluator on a given range. Live fire exercises add realism that enables soldiers to gain confidence in their weapon systems and also pose an additional leadership challenge for the platoon and squad leaders.

The use of the multiple integrated laser engagement system (MILES) is strongly recommended for all other missions. The immediate feedback gained from MILES helps an evaluator objectively evaluate a platoon's performance. Accordingly, the detailed inspection of all MILES equipment must be an integral part of the troop leading procedures before each mission for both the platoon being evaluated and the OPFOR. The effectiveness of the MILES equipment depends on the way it is maintained and technically employed. To ensure that these systems have been properly checked and put into operation, each evaluator should carry a controller gun throughout the mission.

OPFOR personnel must be carefully managed. They should not be employed as "details" but should be given realistic ARTEP missions to perform. Unit integrity must be maintained to enable the OPFOR chain of command to exercise its normal SOPs and troop leading procedures. The battalion scouts, the antiarmor company, and the evaluated platoons themselves can all be used to support OPFOR missions.

The battalion mortars are on call to support all platoon missions, and calls for fire are an essential part of each evaluation. Other integrated training includes the use of NBC conditions and air assault operations. Training opportunities in both areas are incorporated into the EXEVAL scenarios to add realism and to reinforce the way light infantry platoons are expected to be able to conduct their business.

During the EXEVALs, the rifle company commanders play a key role in support of the scenarios. Specifically, each commander serves as a safety officer and accompanies each of his platoons during the movement to contact/hasty attack (live fire) mission. Commanders also attend all air mission briefs with their platoon leaders to broaden their own perspective and to help coach their subordinate leaders.

During the mission to attack an urban area, platoons are evaluated as part of a company attack (planned and led by the unit commander) against a platoon in the defense (which is also being evaluated). Throughout the EXEVALs, company CPs are required to send all standard reports in accordance with the battalion tactical SOP.

Rifle platoons are the most basic combat units that the battalion com-

mander employs and manages during a tactical operation. To ensure that these platoons are combat ready, the platoon EXEVALs must be recognized as a priority event on the yearly training schedule.

It is absolutely essential that the event be scheduled at a logical point in the course of the yearly training program, and that the battalion commander, S-3, and company commanders recognize the need for allocating preparation time well in advance of the event. While the train-up period for the evaluators may represent a short term inconvenience to a company or a staff section, it represents a long term investment to the battalion.

The platoon EXEVALs should not be an isolated training event. They should reflect the unit's METL and be closely linked to other highlights of the yearly training program. Moreover, the EXEVAL results must be effectively captured during timely after action reviews, and in writing, and must ultimately be used to plan and guide future training.

Major Eugene J. Palka is assigned to G-3 Operations, 6th Infantry Division, Fort Wainwright, Alaska. He has served on the faculty of the United States Military Academy and in a variety of assignments including company command and battalion S-3 in the 101st Airborne Division. He is a 1978 graduate of the Academy and recently completed the Army's Command and General Staff College.

Infantry Mortar Hipshoot

LIEUTENANT SEAN M. O'BRIEN

In recent years the U.S. Army has developed the M23 mortar ballistic computer (MBC). The intent behind its development was to enable infantry mortars to provide more accurate and timely indirect fires and, essentially, the Army has achieved this goal. However, the MBC is no better to use than the plotting board for hipshoot missions, because it takes roughly the same amount of time to put all the set-up data into the computer as to use the plotting board.

Unfortunately, plotting board skills have deteriorated because many soldiers have chosen to rely exclusively on the computer, little realizing that the computer can fail at any time for any number of reasons and they will then have to use the plotting board.

Admittedly, using the school-taught technique on the plotting board, a hipshot does take a considerable amount of time and computational skill. When computing the data, for example, a leader must first fumble with his map and protractor to determine the direction and distance to the target. The time required to complete this task varies with the leader's navigation skills. He then uses three to four more minutes to set up the board, and probably another 30 to 60 seconds to compute the data.

The accuracy of this technique is also somewhat questionable. For example, given a map, a protractor, and two grids, ten people are likely to give you ten different directions and distances to a target. But looking at the map and plotting board as two-dimensional graphs with X and Y axes intersecting, a leader can produce more responsive and accurate data.

During a field training exercise, the mortar platoon of the 2d Battalion, 27th Infantry at Fort Ord used the following technique with consistently outstanding results. It is easy to understand and compute, and it offers other advantages as well. The direction and the distance are found mathematically—thus eliminating the guesswork associated with the old plotting board technique of using a map, a protractor, and a bar scale—and it is faster and more accurate.

With this technique, a round is enroute to the target in one and one-half to two minutes, while the soldier using the older technique is still computing data. (Remember, the mission of the infantry mortar is primarily to suppress, not to destroy. It is, therefore, crucial to have the most responsive indirect fire system possible.) Another advantage is that, because the direction and distance are known so quickly, the charge book or whiz wheel can be used immediately. It also helps in determining whether or not to use the pivot point of the board to represent the mortar position.

In addition, the method is easy to teach. New soldiers pick it up very quickly, which means all the members of a squad, section, or platoon can compute and fire a hipshot. And because it is so much easier than the school-taught method, squad leaders are more likely to use the plotting board than the MBC for a hipshoot mission. Tactically, this technique increases a mortar platoon's survivability, because it allows gun squads to operate more efficiently and effectively as independent elements.

To understand the concept behind the