

the platoon leader designates a time and place for the platoon to link up, he can coordinate with the S-4 for a pre-planned aerial resupply near the ORP. The squads can pick up their share of the resupply before leaving the ORP.

Using this technique, the scout platoon can honestly report that it has reconnoitered its zone, not that it has looked at a few specific NAIs in passing. If a zone reconnaissance turns

up enemy activity in one area, the platoon leader can increase his coverage there by introducing more troops to that area and by fine-tuning his operation to include area reconnaissance and observation points.

The scenario and the terrain described here are not the "approved solution" for scout platoon operations or IPBs at the JRTC. But using the proper techniques for zone reconnaissance as cited in

ARTEP 7-92-MTP will greatly improve the performance of scout platoons at the JRTC and elsewhere.

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Long Range Planning A Different Perspective

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One of the most difficult tasks leaders at company and battalion level must perform is developing coherent long range plans. I would like to offer a somewhat different view of this planning process.

My suggestions are focused on the company level for two reasons—this is the lowest level at which anyone really worries (or ought to worry) about long range planning, and it is also the first level at which a leader has command responsibility. But these ideas could easily be adapted to units at higher levels.

First, intuition tells us that to be successful we must establish priorities, but this is easier said than done. Our priorities come from many different sources, and we have to make a logical effort to sort them out and apply them to specific units and circumstances. The cumulative priorities approach will not work—a company commander cannot simply add his own priorities to those established by all the commanders above him.

Several years ago, for example, while working in a battalion operations shop,

we attempted to map out all the requirements imposed upon us by headquarters at brigade level and higher. We found that in a year's time, we were required to accomplish tasks totaling 53.5 weeks worth of work. This did not include anything that the commanders or staffs at battalion or company level wanted to do.

Plain and simple, there are some tasks that we cannot and should not do. The question then becomes, "How does a company commander determine his priorities?"

PRIORITIES

First, I recommend that commanders at all levels adopt a set of universal priorities that transcend all others. I call them the "Big Three"—readiness, training, and taking care of soldiers. Taking care of soldiers is something we do all the time. Readiness and training are closely interrelated yet distinct portions of the Army's mission. Readiness relates to the ability to deploy a combat effective force rapidly;

training relates to the ability to win the fight once we get there.

Admittedly, these are broad categories that encompass numerous tasks, but they do provide a suitable framework upon which a commander can base his own long range planning process. Units can refine the Big Three to fit their particular situations, but the key is universality.

Using this simple model, a commander can think of many tasks that fall within the Big Three, and these should be unit priorities. He can also think of many tasks that fall outside the bounds of the Big Three, and these are the "nice-to-haves," which should be done only after the Big Three tasks and should in no way detract from the true priorities.

The first step in achieving a consensus on priorities is to establish communications between the various levels of the chain of command. Some units do this better than others. Often there is good communication one level up (from company commander to battalion commander), but there are often insurmountable barriers to

communication two levels up. If the process is to be productive, these barriers must come down. There are many ways to do this—training briefs, counseling, office calls, desk-side briefings. The point is that all levels must communicate. In short, there must be interaction among the brigade, battalion, and company commanders.

If his unit is to be proficient at the Big Three, a company commander must be able to say “No” to certain nonessential tasks. He should be able to look his brigade commander in the eye and tell him what he can and cannot do. At some point, the two should be able to reach an agreement. The company commander can then execute his plan while his battalion and brigade commanders understand the company’s limitations.

Before a company commander can successfully defend his priorities, though, he must know his unit’s capabilities. For example, an infantry rifle company, in theory, has the ability to accomplish a set number of tasks in a given period of time—a year, for example—and all of the rifle companies in a brigade or division should be capable of doing the same amount of work.

We know, however, that this equality does not exist in reality. The reason it does not is our own inefficiency. No

company can be 100 percent efficient for an entire year. Therefore, it will never achieve an amount of work equal to its potential. A unit that is operating at 50 percent efficiency, for example, can accomplish only half of the tasks it is potentially capable of accomplishing. The higher its efficiency level, the more tasks it can do.

A commander can get a relative appreciation of his unit’s standing by looking at a few indicators. He can look at how well his company performs in certain activities, and compare that with the performance of other companies in the battalion or brigade. If he is always swamped and finds that the other companies are in the same boat, all of them may have a problem with unit priorities. But if he finds his company is in a quagmire and sinking fast while the others are not, he may have an efficiency problem.

The answers to some specific questions will provide certain indicators: What is the unit’s status on missed or late suspenses? What is the status of its training schedules? Do the soldiers know what is going on? Does everyone in the unit understand multi-echelon training? Are unit tasks executed concurrently or sequentially?

A unit’s potential capacity is a difficult idea to nail down, but if the concept is translated into work, it is

much simpler. When we think about work, we think about man-hours. This highlights the two most important resources a unit has with which to accomplish any task—time and troops. The engineers, for example, do a great job of planning their work. Before they install an obstacle plan in a defense, they compute the available blade hours and squad or platoon hours. Then, based on the commander’s priorities, they begin to work on the individual obstacles. The infantry company commander should use the same thought process in developing his long range plans.

Since time and troops are the most important resources, they are also the biggest factors in inefficiency. A major cause of inefficiency is personnel turnover, especially at the officer level. It seems that as soon as a platoon leader learns his job, he is moved and the platoon starts over. Outwardly, it appears that we can never build an adequate base of institutional knowledge, but this is not true. Otto von Bismarck once said, “Only fools learn by experience; wise men learn by the experience of others.” Our penchant for constantly reinventing the wheel more often than not lumps us with the fools. Because we fail to do our homework, we are condemned to inefficiency and its inevitable bedfellow, mediocrity.

It is most unlikely that anyone at battalion level or below is really breaking new ground. If a leader believes he has a genuinely new idea, he has probably not looked around at what others are doing.

If a commander in a light unit wants to know about infiltration tactics, for example, he should examine the German offensive in 1918. (Even our high-speed vocabulary is old. Sir B.H. Liddell Hart coined the term “expanding torrent” in the years between the two world wars.) To hit closer to home, in a brigade—with more than nine rifle companies, each with the same mission essential task list (METL)—there is little chance that only one leader is working on a particular problem. Someone else



either has done it, is doing it, or is thinking about doing it. Looking around for good ideas and using them will save a commander valuable time in the long run and allow him to devote more effort to the Big Three.

A second cause of inefficiency is "time wasters." Meetings in general are time wasters, and two aspects of meetings multiply their negative effect.

The first of these is "waiting for the word," which is so prevalent in many units. One example is holding soldiers until the evening hours so they can be given all the information that has been distilled during the many meetings throughout the day. Invariably, these soldiers waste many hours only to be told they should report for PT at the usual time the next day.

The second aspect deals with the content of the meetings. Only a tiny percentage of the information given out in any meeting deals concretely with any topic that is part of the Big Three. This results in what I call "the tyranny of minutia." In this case, commanders are so overwhelmed by the sheer number of relatively unimportant requirements that they totally lose sight of their priorities. Every once in a while, a commander should stop a meeting and ask, "How will this information save lives in combat?" The silence would be obvious.

Another major time waster is doing tasks sequentially instead of concurrently. In the field, if a unit does not conduct concurrent planning at all levels, it will invariably cross the line of departure before all of its soldiers know the mission. Too, a multi-echelon approach results in simultaneous training at all levels. Anything else is less efficient.

Finally, delegating and working in a decentralized manner greatly improves a unit's ability to conduct concurrent tasks. A unit's efficiency is directly related to its ability to do multiple tasks at various levels all at the same time.

A commander's goal, therefore, should be to reach an efficiency level equal to or above that of his peers. The more efficient he is, the more work he can do with a given set of resources and

the more tasks his unit can accomplish. If his efficiency diminishes, however, he will find himself making sacrifices—either eliminating tasks or performing the same tasks at lower standards.

In trying to link unit priorities to unit potential and efficiency, a commander can use the budget process as an ideal model for long range planning. A budget normally covers an entire fiscal year, the same as a company's long range calendar. The need for long range planning is more obvious with a unit's budget, because it deals with dollars—a limited asset that is easy to quantify. To make the money last an entire year, a leader must plan the whole year in detail.

An infantry company's potential is just as limited as the money in a budget. The only difference is that potential is more difficult to measure. When developing a budget, as with a training plan, a commander must determine which of the many tasks he can do and which he cannot. When developing training, he "funds" a training event by committing his resources to it. He devotes a portion of his unit's total potential—troops, time, and other resources—to a task.

Another tool of the budget process—the decrement list—can also be applied to the development of a long range training plan. This is a comprehensive list of all projects that must be funded for a given fiscal year. Everything is listed, regardless of how much money is available. The items on the list are arranged in priority order from highest to lowest. In a column alongside the tasks, the cumulative cost of all is recorded. Once the decrement list is complete, the total funding is applied to it, and a cut line is added. Items that lie above the line are funded. Those that fall below are not.

If a company commander wants to construct an effective, coherent long range plan, he must also make a decrement list of his unit training requirements. The first step is to identify all the tasks the unit should accomplish and list them in priority order. Tasks that relate to the Big Three are near the top; those that don't

are at the bottom. Then he examines the cost of each task. This cost, or the work or energy required, can be expressed in terms of the two most precious resources—troops and time. The commander keeps a cumulative total as he works down the list of tasks and finally, he draws his cut line. The tasks above the line (the essentials) go on the long range training calendar; those below (the "luxuries") are done only if the resources become available.

A key point to remember is that the commander should be able to defend this list and his cut line to his battalion and brigade commanders. As a commander, he is paid to make important judgment calls, and the positioning of the cut line is one of these decisions. His unit's efficiency directly affects the cut line. The more efficient it is, the lower the cut line can be. Conversely, if the unit is inefficient, he must either move the cut line up and reduce the total number of tasks to be done, or he must take resources away from his Big Three tasks to fund the tasks lower down on the list.

A training calendar, like a budget, must be flexible. In a budget, some funds are usually set aside for unprogrammed requirements—essential items that are sure to crop up later in the year.

A commander can handle unexpected tasks in a training calendar in a similar manner. This system is also flexible because the commander can move the cut line. If extra money becomes available, he can drop the line and fund more projects. If extra time shows up on a training schedule, he can reach below the cut line and perform tasks that were previously unscheduled. He can think of the items below the cut line as a list arranged in order of importance for hip-pocket training.

There is a system now in place throughout the Army that, properly used, will greatly reinforce this concept and the underlying principle that a unit cannot do everything. This is the command inspection program.

In previous years, we had the dreaded Annual General Inspection. This was usually a bunch of highly proficient

inspectors who checked to see if a unit had done things according to every obscure regulation they could find. This type of inspection clearly caused us to divert many precious resources away from the Big Three tasks and to focus our attention on more mundane things.

With the new command inspection program, the commander who approves the company's priorities and its training plan is also responsible for the inspection. If a company commander

and that inspector jointly decide that certain items are not important and they would rather concentrate on others, then the inspection focuses on those other items. Such an integrated program greatly bolsters unit priorities, and it will undoubtedly have a positive effect on combat readiness.

I have not introduced any new ideas here. I have merely linked some old ones in somewhat different ways. If a commander realizes that universal priorities are critical, and that at some

point he must just say "No," then I have achieved my goal. I hope that by thinking of long range planning as a kind of budget process, he may gain new insight into long range planning.

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Platoon Fire Control

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During gunnery training at the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) in Germany, it was discovered that there was a general lack of understanding of platoon fire planning and control. Too many of the platoons succeeded because of outstanding individual gunnery performances, not because they had well-rehearsed and well-executed fire plans for all of their weapon systems.

A platoon on the combined arms battlefield must have detailed fire planning and control if it is to achieve the results that are expected. The major problem is the lack of definitive guidance in our "how to" manuals and an incomplete training and evaluation outline (T&EO) in ARTEP 7-8 MTP. (Fire planning should be made a critical task in the outline and the destruction of the enemy in accordance with the fire plan should be a critical task.)

In the absence of definitive guidance from these sources, members of our brigade developed a fire control memorandum of instruction for its mechanized infantry platoon leaders and their squad and section leaders. We

would like to share some of the ideas in that document on how the principles of fire control and distribution can be applied in practical terms in mechanized infantry units. We will outline common terms, offer some illustrations of fire patterns and techniques, and show how an effective fire plan and execution matrix are developed.

We used the following common terms and techniques in planning and executing a fire plan:

Target reference point (TRP). A specific point on the ground that is used to control direct and indirect fires.

Trigger line (TL). An imaginary line drawn across the battlefield that is used to initiate direct and indirect fires.

Engagement criteria. Conditions that must be met before a unit can initiate fires on the enemy (for example, three BTRs crossing TL A).

Disengagement criteria. Conditions that must be met before a unit can disengage.

Fire pattern. The manner in which direct fire systems engage a target area. There are three fire patterns:

- **Frontal**—the standard fire pattern assumed unless otherwise directed. This pattern is used when targets are dispersed laterally to the unit and all friendly elements can engage the targets.

- **Depth**—employed when targets are exposed in depth in a column formation moving directly toward or away from the unit.

- **Cross**—employed when targets are exposed laterally and when obstructions prevent all weapon systems within the unit from firing to the front.

Firing technique. The manner in which all weapon systems are fired. There are three firing techniques:

- **Simultaneous**—used when moving or unprotected, with all weapon systems firing at the same time in the target area.

- **Alternating**—used when one weapon of a section is firing at a target area and as its firing is being completed, the other weapon in the same section begins firing into the target area.

- **Observed**—used for both indirect and direct fires. This technique is used