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# The Alternate Scout Platoon

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The scout platoon is one of the most important elements of a battalion task force. The commander must have complete confidence in the platoons' ability to gather intelligence and report it in a timely manner. It is this information, to a large degree, that determines the success or failure of the entire task force.

At the same time, however, the scout platoon is the battalion's most overworked and endangered element. After three or four days of continuous operations, its efficiency can be significantly reduced by casualties, stress, and lack of sleep. The designation of an alternate scout platoon could relieve the scouts and give them a chance to rest and reconstitute.

When I was an antiarmor platoon leader during a unit rotation at the National Training Center (NTC), I was also designated the alternate scout platoon leader and was called upon frequently to relieve the scout platoon. Since I had been told before the rotation that my platoon would be doing this job, I developed a training plan that would get the platoon ready for both of its missions.

From my experience in training for and operating as the alternate scout platoon, I offer some key points that are critical to the platoon's proper training and use:

**Every battalion should have a platoon permanently designated the alternate scout platoon.** Since this platoon will have to relieve the scout platoon when the task force is involved in continuous operations, it must be trained

on scout tasks, and the platoon leader must be proficient in scout platoon leader tasks. In addition, the alternate scout platoon must be proficient at relieving the scouts during a tactical operation, and the scout platoon must be proficient at being tactically relieved.

Once designated, the alternate scout platoon can follow the principles expressed in Field Manual (FM) 25-101, *Battle Focused Training*. In executing the training cycle, the platoon must understand the mission and METL (mission essential task list) of its higher

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unit before deciding on its own collective tasks. To start developing its collective tasks and a training plan, the alternate scout platoon must know that its direct higher units are both the company and the task force.

The platoon's collective tasks must be approved by both the company and the battalion commander to ensure that they support both types of mission. The platoon's collective tasks must be evaluated externally so the platoon leader can develop a training plan. The company commander should evaluate the tasks to make sure the platoon is trained to carry out the missions he

gives it, and the battalion commander should review the tasks to see that the platoon can perform the scout missions. The alternate platoon must be given enough time to develop a training plan and become proficient in all of its collective tasks.

**The alternate scout platoon should always be aware of the task force situation during tactical operations.** In the field, the alternate scout platoon leader should accompany his commander to all task force meetings. He must know as much as the scout platoon leader knows and then disseminate current information to his platoon. In a tactical situation, it may become necessary for him to assume the scout platoon mission without warning; he may have just enough time to receive a location and mission.

The alternate scout platoon should be considered in the planning process whenever the task force conducts tactical operations. The task force commander must decide at which point he will replace the scout platoon with the alternate, based upon the missions. A scout platoon can quickly become incapable of accomplishing its mission because vehicles have been lost (either from mechanical failure or from destruction on the battlefield). This loss must be factored in when planning scout missions and using the alternate platoon.

**If the alternate scouts are to be used in an operation, it is important to have a support system in place before committing the platoon.** Since support for the scout platoon itself is normally

## TRAINING NOTES

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taken care of, the support slice must be increased to support the alternate scouts.

Whenever the scout platoon is relieved of a mission, one of its noncommissioned officers should be designated to support the alternate platoon. This NCO should be someone other than the platoon sergeant and should rotate each time the scouts are relieved. He should use a scout vehicle to run the support. The scout platoon would already be at the unit maintenance collection point (UMCP) and would be able to get by working through the UMCP.

All classes of support for both platoons would come through the scout platoon first, then to the alternate platoon. The scouts could switch off vehicles between support missions, if all of their vehicles are in need of maintenance. One of the advantages, aside from taking care of the problem of support, would be to give the two platoons a link; the NCO running support could help keep the scout platoon leader in touch with what was going on with the alternate scouts.

Using the antiarmor company as the alternate scout platoon worked well at the NTC for various reasons, but the antiarmor company is now being phased out of the tables of organization and equipment for mechanized battalions. This leaves a Bradley platoon as the only real choice.

There are many things about a Bradley platoon to consider when

deploying it as the alternate scout platoon:

The Bradley platoon has four vehicles (BFVs) while the scouts have six (HMMWVs). Although BFVs offer more protection and firepower than the HMMWVs, being larger and louder, they are also much more likely to be detected by the enemy.

With four vehicles instead of six, the Bradley platoon cannot observe as large an area from its vehicles, but it has great

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dismounted capability. If augmented with extra radios, the Bradley platoon can operate in four dismounted teams of four or five men each to conduct a thorough dismounted reconnaissance.

The BFV's integrated sight unit and TOW system give the platoon an advantage over the HMMWV during screening and counterreconnaissance missions. A BFV can quickly acquire and engage targets at long range.

In designating an alternate scout platoon, a battalion commander should decide first which platoon to choose

and then which lieutenant should lead it. This will allow him to choose from a company that can afford to give up a platoon during tactical operations; an example is a company that is normally left in reserve. Ideally, the leader he chooses will also be one he plans to make the next scout platoon leader. This lieutenant should then be sent to the scout platoon leader school before he leads the alternate scout platoon. Each subsequent leader of the platoon should also come from a rifle platoon leader job and be on his way to becoming the scout platoon leader.

In summary, the alternate scout platoon should be treated as an important element in the battalion task force. It should be led by a competent and experienced platoon leader who is trained to conduct scout missions; it should be permanently designated; and it should be kept abreast of the situation during tactical operations so it is ready to assume the job of scout platoon at any time.

Most important, the task force commander should understand the importance of the alternate scout platoon and make plans for its use.

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# Using Attack Helicopters

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Although the primary mission of an attack helicopter is to destroy armored and mechanized threat targets, this mission changes when the helicopter is employed in a low-intensity conflict

(LIC). In this environment, it may assume a role similar to close air support (CAS) for the units on the ground. With this new role, it is important for infantry units to effectively communicate

with and direct the attack aircraft.

Small infantry units can already call in fire from attack helicopters; this was very common in many combat actions in Vietnam. But the art of providing at-