

individual and collective warfighting skills and to improve movement and mission execution. Our confidence in ourselves and the equipment went up all the time.

We did not, however, allow these devices to supplant traditional land

navigation skills or to replace visual command and control. If they are used habitually at the combat training centers and in home station training, numerous other uses for them will be found, and they will be fully realized as combat multipliers.

Captain John R. Sutherland, III commanded a company in the 24th Infantry Division during Operation DESERT STORM and served as an observer-controller at the National Training Center. He is now an Infantry Officer Advanced Course small group instructor. He is a 1983 ROTC graduate of Northern Arizona University.

Troop-Leading Procedures

A JRTC Observer-Controller Editorial

MAJOR KEVIN J. MCKINLEY

What must a company commander do to plan a mission, write an order for it, and prepare his unit to accomplish it? Troop-leading procedures (TLPs) may seem ambiguous when trying to complete this process, but understanding them is essential to success.

During more than two years as an observer-controller at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), I saw all kinds of commanders, good and bad. I also made mistakes as a company commander, but I hope my observations at the JRTC and the lessons I learned from them will provide some insight into the proper use of TLPs.

Field Manual (FM) 7-8, *The Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*, and FM 7-10, *The Infantry Rifle Company*, make up the doctrinal bible at the JRTC. Read them, understand them, and apply them, and you will succeed. Although you may find the reading and understanding parts simple while you're sitting in your office, they may not seem that simple in the field:

For example, you've been operating in the maneuver box for six days. You haven't slept. Your unit just fought a successful defense, but you lost 30 of your soldiers, including your executive officer and first sergeant. Your company is low on chow, and your battalion

is having trouble resupplying you with rations and water. The battalion S-3 just called to give you a warning order for a deliberate night attack: *Because you have the most combat potential in the task force, the battalion commander has designated your company the main effort. The battalion order occurs in two hours. Be prepared to attack in 24 to 36 hours.*

Tough situation. Yet this is exactly the situation company commanders often

First, get out a warning order that is as fast and as detailed as possible. Then start a number of actions in parallel.

find themselves in at the JRTC. Where do you go from here?

Go back to the basics. Take that "smart book" from your rucksack and look at the eight steps for TLPs:

- Receive the mission.
- Issue a warning order.
- Make a tentative plan.
- Initiate Movement.
- Conduct Reconnaissance.
- Complete the plan.
- Issue the order.
- Supervise.

Then ask yourself, *Am I doing everything I can do? Are the platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and squad leaders doing everything they can do? Are we working plans and preparing for missions, or just making our lives harder than they have to be? Are we using common sense? What condition is my company in right now?*

Unfortunately, I can't give exact answers to these questions. There is no secret formula or magic solution that will cause your TLPs to have a positive effect on the execution of a mission, but the eight steps do offer some proven guidelines. The steps can be conducted at the same time; although some naturally come before others, they don't necessarily have to be done in a specific order.

Here are some observations I've jotted down from watching light, airborne, and Ranger companies plan, prepare, and execute their missions:

Use parallel planning and preparation. First, get out a warning order that is as fast and as detailed as possible. Then start a number of actions in parallel. The key here is to get your NCOs involved. Initiative is essential. For example, if you know you're the main effort in the deliberate attack, you can save time by task organizing and

giving your platoon leaders a generic task and purpose before giving your operations order (OPORD). The assault element at the company level in support of the battalion can expect to task organize into three elements—assault, breach, and close support. Before the OPORD is given, each element can rehearse its basic actions and work out some issues. NCOs can get this done for you, with a little guidance. This frees your key leaders to help you wargame your courses of action (COAs). You can save more time by having your NCOs backbrief you and your key leaders on any problems that came up during the rehearsals.

As information becomes available, consider giving more than one warning order to facilitate planning and preparation at the platoon and squad levels.

Pay attention to the analysis of METTT and COA development. Too often, company commanders only pay lip service to METTT (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time) and COA development. But a good METTT analysis greatly affects the way you determine your COAs. Although combat situations have no approved tactical solution, company commanders often fix too early on one COA. Platoon leaders should be integrated into the process to help determine the best one. They can give you feedback and provide another view of an issue in a COA that you may not see clearly. But you must ultimately make the decision on the COA you will follow. Company commanders also often forget to plan for their most likely contingency. This is their best guess on what to do if the enemy fails to react as expected, and it should be incorporated into the plan.

In developing COAs, think through the plan from the objective area backwards. Too often, commanders focus on how to get to the objective, satisfied that their units can take care of business on the objective so long as they can get there in one piece. Focus on actions at the objective area, and make this your foremost priority for rehearsals. Don't forget to visualize the mission from start to finish, thinking through the way you plan to engage the

enemy with more than one asset to make the most of your combat potential.

Don't overtax your best platoon. Frequently, a commander fails to analyze the "T" for troops during his METTT analysis. He overtasks his best platoon, which blurs task and purpose for the platoon leaders and burns them out. Stress and lack of sleep will affect key leaders, even in your best platoon, and this fatigue will eventually translate into a lack of detail in their planning and preparation. Give task and purpose clearly and concisely, and make it part of your initial briefbacks after the OPORD. Rotate the platoons through the difficult missions. They may surprise you.

Use formatted orders and annexes. Using blank, disposable OPORD formats and annexes eases the pain of having to memorize them. Pre-formatted orders can save you time and, if the for-

Don't forget to visualize the mission from start to finish, thinking through the way you plan to engage the enemy with more than one asset to make the most of your combat potential.

mat is complete, will include all aspects of the order. This includes warning order formats and annexes for movement by air, truck, or foot. Also consider formatting blank execution matrixes inside the OPORD, but keep them simple.

Coordinate with adjacent units. You have to know what the unit next to you is doing. If you don't, the synchronization the battalion is trying to achieve is likely to suffer.

FM 7-8 is an excellent reference for adjacent unit coordination. Include the format in your tactical standing operating procedures (TACSOPs), and include the guidance in your planning. This coordination will fill in the gaps in the plan and make it easier to synchronize, especially when rehearsals are conducted along with the adjacent unit.

Make it a priority in your planning, especially if your unit's actions depend on what the other unit must be able to accomplish, or vice versa.

Prepare a detailed schedule. A detailed schedule is the most effective TLP tool. If you can hold your unit to the task and timeline in planning and preparing for the mission, you will be more effective during the execution. Three techniques in this area may help:

First, link a detailed time schedule to tasks in the warning order. This includes responsibilities given for the OPORD paragraph, terrain model, or concept sketch preparation, soldier's load, route planning, annex preparation for movement, any generic rehearsals (or individual task refreshers such as preparing fighting positions or making range cards in the defense), and OPORD time.

Second, reverse the time schedule in the OPORD, beginning with the jump-off time and working backward. This not only gets the company focused and organized, it also allows the NCOs to fill in the blanks for their own preparation of soldiers for the mission. Squads and platoons need time blocked off for them; they are the elements that will be doing the fighting on their level after the first rounds are fired. Remember to include rest plans in this timeline, or your soldiers will do it for you at a time you haven't planned. This is the time to get your NCOs closely involved, because it's where you need their help the most. If you can keep them focused here, your execution will benefit greatly.

Last, check on the progress of your timeline periodically, and readjust priorities on the basis of the time that is left. Situations will change, distractions will occur. Based on what you've accomplished so far, determine how much time is left to get ready and redo your preparation task priorities to get the most mileage out of the preparation. One technique is to call your key leaders together, find out their status, make your adjustments, then put out the updated timeline. Stay focused on the most important priorities of work, especially during your preparation of the defense. Priority tasks on the

timeline are rehearsals and inspections. Never scratch them.

Prepare and review your TACSOP. A simple, concise, and workable TACSOP eases the burden of planning and preparing. It can get the company on line on how you expect business to be done in the area of TLPs. The TACSOP should be a living document. Review it constantly, but avoid the temptation to keep it in draft form. Ensure that it supports the battalion TACSOP. Periodically, give your key leaders quizzes on it.

Remember that a TACSOP is ultimately what you do, not what you've written. Its ultimate purpose is to standardize actions within your company and make them routine. You must train your unit in its use before you begin combat operations. A TACSOP is supposed to save you and your unit time and effort, not burden it. Word-of-mouth procedures don't work, and making up a technique is just a quick fix.

You might consider putting the following into a TACSOP to facilitate TLPs:

- Designate key leaders and soldiers to help you in planning the route and route reconnaissances from assembly area to attack position; making concept sketches or terrain models; writing paragraphs four and five of OPORDs; directing initial guidance on soldier's load; preparing formats for briefbacks; and conducting inspections. This delineation of responsibilities establishes the standard you expect to see in practice.

- Give the NCOs a focus during preparation. This TACSOP focus sets forth the tasks you expect your NCOs to perform during TLPs. These can range from ensuring that soldiers are kept informed of the situation to supervisory standards during rehearsals and inspections. Your NCOs will exhibit the initiative to accomplish TACSOP tasks with little or no supervision. All they need to give them the necessary focus is the TACSOP, plus training.

- Include individual task training—TACSOP-directed tasks that can be rehearsed, on the basis of the time

available and the type of mission to be conducted. Don't assume your soldiers can construct individual fighting positions to standard if you haven't trained them on it lately.

The individual tasks your company rehearses should depend on the nature of your mission. For example, you can designate that all soldiers will review making range cards and constructing fighting positions in the defense as a task within the timeline. NCOs can make this happen. It will both tighten the defense and increase the probability of survival for your soldiers.

You don't have to make this a time-consuming task. The intent is to reinforce the critical basics that can sometimes sway the fight for either side.

At the squad and platoon levels, briefbacks provide another form of rehearsals that may be conducted along with inspections. AT company level and above, they're part of the planning process.

At the point of decisive action, the side that best executes the basic tasks often wins the fight.

Conduct multiechelon rehearsals. I observed a company commander conducting a key leader rehearsal with his platoon leaders while the NCOs conducted rehearsals of consolidation and reorganization, casualty evacuation, running the casualty collection point, doing mortar battle drills, and the like. The unit had previously conducted rehearsals of a generic nature unique to the mission. When the company's key leaders were ready, the soldiers did a walk-through, then a run-through, rehearsal of the mission.

That night, the unit conducted another walk-through rehearsal, then a full-force, full-speed rehearsal using the same rotary wing aircraft (previously coordinated) that would be used in the actual mission. Actions included pickup zone operations, actual flight, landing zone operations, movement to the objective, and actions at the object-

ive, including consolidation and reorganization. They went so far as to use support troops to role-play villagers and U.S. citizens. The actual mission was a great success, accomplished exactly as intended with little loss of life.

In conducting rehearsals, you can use your own imagination, within the time and resources available. The standard to strive for is full-force, full-speed rehearsals, with all attachments, during the same time period as the actual mission, and on similar terrain. The quality of these rehearsals is paramount. Badly conducted rehearsals only confuse soldiers and lead to badly executed missions.

Conduct effective briefbacks. Platoon leaders should expect to conduct two sets of briefbacks before their OPORD. Too often, briefbacks become wargaming sessions, or time for the company commander to clarify his plan, but this is not the intent. The briefbacks are intended to help the company commander see how well his key leaders have understood his message.

The first briefbacks should be in some type of format so that both the briefers and the commander know what's to be expected. Briefers should be given a small amount of time to gather their thoughts in the suggested format, and this format can be made part of the TACSOP.

The intent for the second set of briefbacks is twofold: First, leaders can explain their task organization, concept, and maneuver to the commander so he can ensure that these will support what the company is trying to achieve. Second, the commander can share any updated information he may have received about the situation, changes that may affect the company concept and, in turn, the platoon concept as well. At least, this will enable the platoon leaders to adjust their plans before giving their orders. This is also a good time for the commander to confirm any synchronization issues between the platoons.

All platoon leaders and other key leaders should be present in both briefbacks so that each element knows what the others are doing. Final internal

coordination between platoon leaders may be discussed at this time to further synchronization.

Conduct inspections. FM 7-8 provides an excellent discussion of inspections, including their frequency and conduct. At the squad and platoon levels, briefbacks provide another form of rehearsals that may be conducted along with inspections. At company level and above, they're part of the planning process.

Initial inspections should identify shortfalls that may make execution less effective, and on-the-spot corrections are performed accordingly. In any case, a standard needs to be set on the conduct of both the initial and the final inspections, and this should be specified in your TACSOP.

The initial inspection is run by NCOs. Leaders note shortfalls and give time for corrections before the final inspection. NCOs quiz soldiers on mission, intent, and concept. Special teams—aid and litter teams, prisoner and search teams, demolition teams—are quizzed on their anticipated duties. This is also a good time to update soldiers on any changes in the situation. When casualties occur, some of those soldiers you briefed may find

themselves in charge of their teams and squads.

The platoon leader or the appropriate section leader should conduct the final inspection. He should spot-check special equipment and quiz selected soldiers on what the unit is about to do. He should check, too, to see how effectively his NCOs have disseminated the platoon plan. The senior leader in the element absolutely must be confident that his soldiers know what goal the unit is to achieve.

Conduct reconnaissances during planning. At times, there may be an opportunity to recon the ground during a phase of preparation and before the OPORD is issued. This is especially true before the defense, when the unit is already in the general vicinity of the area they'll be defending. Platoons can be given tentative locations in a warning order or fragmentary order. Before occupation, they can move up, temporarily secure the area, then conduct a cursory reconnaissance that may help them in planning. After the company's key leader reconnaissance, the platoon leaders can conduct a detailed key leader reconnaissance to confirm their plans. Even squad leaders may have a chance to take their squads up to show

them the ground before the platoon OPORD. The key here is to make the best possible use of whatever time is available. Although this is just an example, there are many opportunities to take the initiative in furthering your preparation.

Any idea that contributes positively to execution should be incorporated into your TLPs. Use your TACSOP to get the most out of your tasks and the time available. On the other hand, don't stifle initiative by being so structured in your TLPs that there's no room for deviation.

Rest plans are a must. Effective planning and preparation will promote initiative, set standards, use time to the advantage of the unit, and substantially increase the probability of success in execution. Ultimately, effective planning and preparation will cause your unit to ensure that it has the necessary combat potential at your decisive point when and where it's needed, and it will save lives.

Major Kevin J. McKinley recently completed an assignment as a maneuver observer controller at the JRTC and is now on assignment with the Saudi Arabian National Guard. He previously served in various light and mechanized infantry assignments in the 3d Armored Division and the 7th Infantry Division.

Automatic Grenade Launchers Prelude to the Future

STANLEY C. CRIST

In September 1989 the United States Army published its Small Arms Master Plan, part of an ongoing effort to develop the ultimate weapons for infantry combat. The plan focuses on fielding and improving current

weapons—the MK 19 Mod 3 grenade machinegun, the M249 machinegun, the M16A2 rifle/M203 grenade launcher, M24 sniper rifle, M4 carbine, M9 pistol—while developing a three-member family of future small arms.

The proposed Objective Family of Small Arms would consist of an individual combat weapon, a crew-served weapon, and a personal defense weapon. At this stage, it is anticipated that both the individual combat