

Time Management In the Defense

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At the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), defensive battles are sometimes lost before the first shot is fired. The reason is that, during the preparation phase, units fail to manage time and perform the tasks necessary for a successful defense. On the basis of our experience at the JRTC, we would like to identify some ways in which rotational units mismanage time and to offer some possible remedies.

Ironically, the tasks most often sacrificed for time during the defense are those that are essential to defeating a determined enemy:

- Courses of action are developed in haste, resulting in an incomplete plan and no operations order (OPORD).

- Units do not conduct a thorough reconnaissance of the sector, and there is rarely an occupation plan that provides a smooth transition into the defense. As a result, soldiers must be repositioned after combat positions have been prepared, and combat power is not concentrated at the decisive time and place.

- The duties of the first sergeant and the executive officer (XO) are not defined to help the commander prepare the defense.

- Priorities of work are either not established or do not follow the unit's own standing operating procedures (SOPs).

A unit's actions from the time the commander receives the warning order or operations order up to the actual occupation of the defense should be like

a battle drill. Once the commander receives the order, he should immediately call back to his command post (CP) with the message that the unit is preparing to defend. The more information he can provide in that transmission, the better, but the mission to defend should be enough to generate several events that facilitate preparation:

The XO should gather the orders group—which should include the first sergeant, the platoon leaders, the mortar section sergeant, the communications sergeant, the nuclear, biological, chemical (NBC) NCO, and the fire support NCO. If the area of operation is known, the orders group can construct a terrain model. If the task mission is known, the XO should attempt to coordinate the movement of the attachments to the CP. Also, classes of supply and mission essential equipment should be coordinated with the S-4 and the company supply sergeant.

When the commander arrives at the CP, he should issue a warning order and begin developing courses of action (COAs). COA development must start immediately upon receipt of the warning order. Ideally, the unit should receive its mission and area of operation, which are enough to begin the planning process. It is critical that as much information as possible be disseminated to subordinate leaders to allow concurrent planning. Effective concurrent planning is best achieved when the platoon leaders participate in the COA development. Too often, the

commander conducts his planning alone while the platoon leaders idly wait for guidance. If the platoon leaders help in the planning process, they will already understand the concept and their mission when the OPORD is issued. This allows them to focus during their planning while the commander completes the order. Concurrent planning allows a degree of COA analysis and wargaming that rarely occurs during the commander's estimate because of a lack of time.

Determining the decisive point or points is central to COA development. A thorough map reconnaissance will help identify terrain that offers an advantage to the defender while exploiting the weakness of an attacking force. From the terrain analysis and identification of likely enemy avenues of approach, a tentative plan for the employment of reinforcing obstacles and indirect fire targets can be developed. Since the main effort and the supporting effort should be arrayed around the decisive point, their tentative locations can be pinpointed. To provide focus for his reconnaissance, the commander should mark on his map the locations of subunits, the decisive point, target reference points (TRPs), indirect fire targets, and obstacle locations.

Complete OPORDs are rarely given in the defense at the JRTC. Instead, several fragmentary orders (FRAGOs) are issued as the plan develops. The danger is that the plan will never be fully integrated. A confirming order needs

to be issued that ties all the pieces together and resolves any issues that remain. "Fill-in-the-blank" formats save time and help ensure that all critical information is provided. These formats should be laminated and issued down to squad level.

Although the reconnaissance and occupation of the defense are separate plans, they are closely linked during the execution of a mission. Unfortunately, the occupation often precedes the reconnaissance, and time is wasted shifting forces later when the concept changes. Also, the reconnaissance is usually conducted as a part of COA development rather than for the purpose of confirming or denying information in a plan that is already complete. Several events pertaining to both reconnaissance and occupation should occur simultaneously, but the unit should not occupy its positions until the reconnaissance is complete.

The reconnaissance is the most critical event because it should be conducted during daylight; all effort must therefore be made to begin the reconnaissance as soon as possible. Although transportation support is not always available in a light infantry unit, a vehicle greatly helps time management during the reconnaissance. If a support high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV) cannot be obtained, the fire support vehicle or an attachment's TOW HMMWV, tank, or Bradley can be used. It is also important that the appropriate personnel be taken on the reconnaissance and that the task organization be effective immediately to ensure that the necessary attachments are present.

The following personnel should participate in the reconnaissance—company commander and radiotelephone operators, all platoon leaders and attachment leaders, the fire support officer (FSO), and the mortar section sergeant. If transportation allows, additional personnel can be included to provide security and guide the company into the assembly area. The FSO should have a global positioning system (GPS) to plot unit locations, targets, and obstacles. In addition, the unit should

bring the following aids to facilitate the reconnaissance and the eventual occupation of the defense: engineer tape, spray paint, VS-17 panels, chemical lights, long pickets, and MRE (meals, ready to eat) boxes.

The reconnaissance plan should include a precise sequence of events and a timeline, and these must be strictly followed. The reconnaissance should begin at the decisive point where the leaders observe this critical area from both the friendly and the enemy perspectives. Once the decision point is confirmed, a picket marked with engineer tape or a VS-17 panel should be placed there as a reference for the rest of the reconnaissance. This point should be confirmed by the GPS and may be



designated as TRP 1. Any reinforcing obstacles to be employed at this location may be marked in a similar manner.

The next step is to confirm or deny the location of the main and supporting efforts. A concurrent reconnaissance may take place while the commander and the main effort leader conduct their reconnaissance. After the main effort position is verified, the commander moves to the supporting efforts. The commander should verify that the positions meet his intent, and the positions of key weapons should be designated. Engineer tape can be used to outline the positions of M60s, TOWs, and Dragons, and spray paint may depict sectors and the orientation of fires. The platoon leaders may designate tentative squad locations, which will be verified with the squad leaders once they link up with the company. Platoon assembly areas should also be identified to make the occupation easier.

While the platoon leaders are completing their reconnaissance, the commander and mortar section sergeant reconnoiter the mortar firing position. In addition, sites are designated for the CP and for casualty and enemy prisoner of war collection points. The FSO can plot indirect fire targets and establish TRPs on the basis of the commander's guidance. If time allows, man-made TRPs can be made and emplaced to ease direct-fire planning.

While the reconnaissance is being conducted, the first sergeant should be moving the rest of the company to the assembly area by either foot march or vehicle convoy. An element may be sent forward under the NBC or communications NCO to quarter the assembly area. Once the leader's reconnaissance is complete and the company has occupied the area, the platoon and squad leaders should conduct their reconnaissance and the rest of their elements should move to platoon assembly areas. Squad leaders should mark fighting position locations with spray paint or engineer tape, and sector stakes may be emplaced. Before the soldiers move forward, the commander should make one more walk-through to verify the company trace and platoon locations.

During the reconnaissance and occupation, the XO should be coordinating for classes of supply and engineer assets. He should have verified logistic release points (LRPs) for class IV and V and pioneer tools. Once these supplies are on station, he should personally see that they are dropped off at the appropriate location. Pre-configured Class IV and pioneer packages save a great deal of time in preparing the defense. At the least, the supply sergeant, who is usually located at the field trains, can assemble pioneer packages and other related defense items such as water cans, MOPP gear, M-8 alarms, platoon early warning devices, Dragon antiarmor weapons, and water cans. These packages should be configured at the lowest possible level.

In addition to assisting the commander during the initial preparation

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of the defense, the XO and first sergeant are also needed during the final phases of the preparation. Once the SEE (small emplacement excavator) or dozer is on site, the first sergeant can be used to ensure that these assets are used as efficiently as possible. Once he gets the engineer vehicle, he should stay with it until the work is complete or the allotted time for its use has expired. The first sergeant should direct the vehicle from one location to another and ensure that the positions are dug to standard. He should arrange for the operator to eat while the vehicle is being refueled. Once the work is done, he should see that the vehicle links up with the next company.

After the XO has ensured that Class IV and V supplies have been dropped off at the appropriate locations and all supply issues are resolved, he can become responsible for the emplacement and construction of obstacles and man-made TRPs. If an obstacle is being emplaced in the company's sector, the XO should link up with the engineer in charge and see that the obstacle meets the intent of the battalion or company commander. He should also supervise and inspect the construction of company level obstacles, including the emplacement of protective, tactical, and

supplemental wire and hasty protective minefields.

The priority of work most often neglected due to time constraints is the rehearsal of the engagements and contingency plans. Unfortunately, commanders at the JRTC rarely use any of the three types of rehearsals—backbriefs, reduced force, and full force. When time is short, the backbrief can be a very effective technique if it is used as a synchronization tool. The commander can gather his subordinate leaders and verbally fight the battle by asking, "What happens when . . . ?" questions to stimulate the unit to take the appropriate action. He can also accomplish this using a terrain model or the company fire plan sketch. If the leaders cannot be gathered at one location, a similar rehearsal can be conducted by radio.

Units that rotate through the JRTC usually have SOPs for conducting the defense. These SOPs generally outline priorities of work and provide examples of range cards and sector sketches. But they do not address timelines for accomplishing the tasks or a division of labor for the best use of the time available. Since most of the tasks during the preparation phase of the defense

require a very limited decision-making process, the preparation of a defense can be made into a battle drill. An execution check list is an excellent way to outline the steps of the drill. Then, like all SOPs or battle drills, it must be practiced.

If time is not used wisely in the defense, it can be as great an enemy as the attacking force. When time is used to the fullest during the preparation of the defense, more effort can be dedicated to rehearsing and resting soldiers for the upcoming fight.

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SWAP SHOP



Protect Your Ear Protection

The Army issues you a pair of ear plugs, inside a carrying case. But what good will they be if, within moments after use, they pop out and are lost in the woods? What if you want to remove them briefly to listen for sounds of the enemy? You don't want to fumble with—or worse, search for—tiny rubber ear plugs in the dark in deep vegetation.

Many commercial ear plugs have built-in cords to catch them when they fall out. And the U.S. Army Soldiers Integrated Protective Ensemble (SIPE) has a corded ear plug/radio receiver that will let you go to normal hearing quickly and listen for sounds of the enemy.

But you don't have to buy commercial plugs or wait for SIPE gear. You can dummy cord your own issue ear plugs:

- Take about 12 inches of 550 parachute cord, and remove one of the seven inner strands.
- Thread the strand on a large sewing needle.
- Run each end of the cord through an ear-plug handle, and tie an overhand knot to secure the ends.

You can wear the plugs with the cord loose, stored in the issue carrying case, or at the back of your head; if the plugs pop out, they will stop at your neck instead of falling loose on the ground. Or you can wear them tied by a girth hitch to the inside of the helmet or BDU cap for more secure carry and storage out of the way, inside your head gear.

Either way, your ear protection will be protected.

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