

Battalion Counterreconnaissance

“Flooding the Zone” at the NTC

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Successful counterreconnaissance operations greatly increase a unit's chances of succeeding in the defense at the National Training Center (NTC). This means the unit must deny the opposing force (OPFOR) knowledge of its preparations and dispositions until the OPFOR enters the engagement area. An enemy that locates a unit in the main battle area (MBA) can template the battalion, formulate a valid plan, and conduct a coordinated attack that allows him to mass on one company team, defeat it, and penetrate the battalion defense.

In the technique described here, a unit uses mass and deception to build an impenetrable wall or, in football terms, “flood the zone” to stop the OPFOR reconnaissance effort.

During normal defensive operations at the NTC, a battalion often covers a frontage of 12 kilometers or more. If the unit is to build an impenetrable security zone, it must cover every trail, valley, and hill in the battalion zone, and this requires mass. Asking one company team, even a reinforced one, to do this is simply too much, as has been demonstrated repeatedly at the NTC. In the “flood-the-zone” technique, a counterrecon force of three company teams—consisting of the supporting effort companies of the battalion defense—occupies the security zone while the main effort company team occupies a tactical assembly area to the rear of its intended battle position (Figure 1). This technique enables the heavy battalion to apply mass to keep the OPFOR from observing defensive preparations.

The flood-the-zone counterrecon-

naissance is conducted in five phases (see Figure 2):

Occupy the Counterreconnaissance Line. The battalion occupies the counterrecon line with a force consisting

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of three company teams and the battalion scout platoon.

The security zone is at least four kilometers deep, with the scouts positioned about three kilometers forward of the com-

pany teams. The security area must be well forward of the positions from which the battalion intends to defend. All distances should be based, however, on an analysis of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time) and the unit's command and control capability. This occupation gives any OPFOR reconnaissance elements remaining in the zone a false picture of the battalion's dispositions. It also gives the battalion time to completely secure the MBA before moving to its final battle positions. In essence, the battalion positions itself well forward of its main defensive positions and pulls back to occupy them, instead of occupying assembly areas behind their battle positions and moving forward into them.

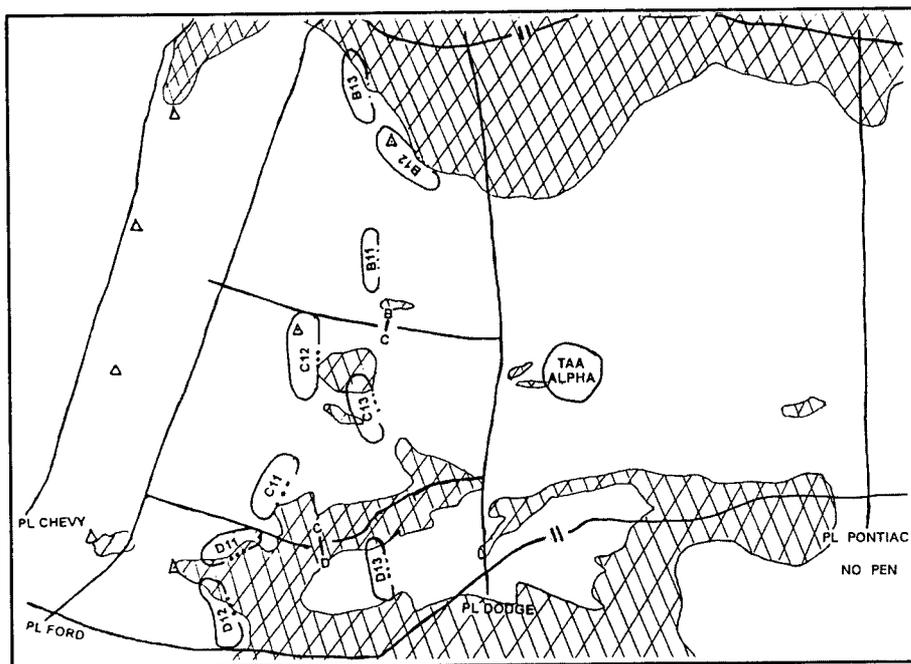


Figure 1

Secure the Area of Operations. The reconnaissance and security operation is directed at eliminating OPFOR stay-behind reconnaissance forces positioned in zone. This phase, which is executed primarily behind the counterrecon screen, consists of extensive patrolling and the occupation of terrain that provides the best OPFOR observation of the MBA (Figure 3). The battalion S-2 plans named areas of interest (NAIs), which are cleared by units actually passing through them. The operation is controlled by the battalion tactical operations center (TOC).

One technique for maintaining positive control of the operation is to have an S-2 or S-3 representative stand at the site of the main effort with a map and radio to see for himself that each NAI is cleared. He can also identify key observation points that were missed during the initial map reconnaissance and then direct pa-

An artillery battery may have to deploy forward in zone to execute this and other indirect fire requirements forward of the counterrecon screen.

trols to clear them. Battalions with airlift support can improve the effectiveness and speed of the clearing operation by using a platoon of dismounted soldiers and a UH-60 helicopter to clear and control dominant terrain in the area of operation.

The main effort's fire support team (FIST), in addition to preparing the engagement area, is used to execute harassing and interdiction fires on suspected OPFOR observation posts (OPs). An artillery battery may have to deploy forward in zone to execute this and other indirect fire requirements forward of the counterrecon screen.

One of the keys to the flood-the-zone technique is the actual occupation of the best OPs in the MBA. Occupying key points with friendly dismounted soldiers keeps the OPFOR from using them. This also places friendly elements in a position to observe other possible OPFOR OPs and identify OPFOR infiltrations, which can then be destroyed by artillery or mortar fires. This can easily be done with three to five dismounted infantry

		H-42	H-24	H-12	H-06	H-HOUR
		Hours of Darkness			Hours of Darkness	
EXECUTION MATRIX	PHASE 1 OCCUPY	PHASE 2 CLEAR	PHASE 3 MAINTAIN	PHASE 4 COLLAPSE		
A CO	H-40 18G INIATES MVT H-38 XO RECONS TAA H-37 OCCUPY TAA ALPHA NLT H-38 ALL PRIMARY POSITIONS STAKED	NLT H-30 CLEAR NAI 8				
B CO	H-40 XO RECONS CR POSITION H-38 XO POSITIONS VEHICLES H-37 ALL VEH POS IN BP STAKED NLT H-38 OCCUPY BP# B11, B12, B13	NLT H-38.5 CLEAR NAI 5 NLT H-30 OCCUPY OP B1 NLT H-23 CLEAR NAI 3 NLT H-19 CLEAR NAI 2 NLT H-15 CLEAR NAI 4	H-23 1 PLT TO BP H-19 2 PLT TO BP H-16 3 PLT TO BP	H-3 1 PLT BEGINS MVT TO BP H-2 2 PLT BEGINS MVT TO BP H-1 3 PLT BEGINS MVT TO BP		
C CO	H-40 XO RECONS CR POSITION H-38 XO POSITIONS VEHICLES H-37 ALL VEH POS IN BP STAKED NLT H-38 OCCUPY BP# C11, C12, C13	NLT H-38.5 CLEAR NAI 7 NLT H-30 OCCUPY OP C1 NLT H-23 CLEAR NAI 9 NLT H-19 CLEAR NAI 6	H-23 1 PLT TO RESERVE POS REHEARSE MVT TO ABF 1-2 H-19 2 PLT TO RESERVE POS REHEARSE MVT TO ABF 3-4 H-15 3 PLT TO RESERVE POS REHEARSE MVT TO ABF 5-8	H-3 1 PLT BEGINS MVT TO BP H-2 2 PLT BEGINS MVT TO BP H-1 3 PLT BEGINS MVT TO BP		
D CO	H-40 XO RECONS CR POSITION H-38 XO POSITIONS VEHICLES H-37 ALL VEH POS IN BP STAKED NLT H-38 OCCUPY BP# D11, D12, D13	NLT H-38.5 CLEAR NAI 10 NLT H-30 OCCUPY OP D1 NLT H-23 CLEAR NAI 11 NLT H-19 CLEAR NAI 12 NLT H-23 ALL VEHICLE POS IN BP STAKED	H-23 1 PLT TO BP H-19 2 PLT TO BP H-16 3 PLT TO BP	H-3 1 PLT BEGINS MVT TO BP H-2 2 PLT BEGINS MVT TO BP H-1 3 PLT BEGINS MVT TO BP		
ENG	H-39 DOZERS DIG IN MORTARS/ADA H-37 DOZERS READY TO DIG IN MAIN EFFORT (A Co)	H-27 DOZER HANDOFF TO B Co	H-15 DOZER HAND OFF TO D Co			
BN	H-43 8 ISSUE INITIAL WARNING H-41 8 TOC ISSUES MVT ORDER H-32 8 BN ISSUES DETAILED WARNING H-28 8 BN AAR H-26 8 COMB MEET FOR BA DEVELOPMENT	H-26 8 BN ISSUES OPCODER H-24 BACKBRIEFS	H-16 8 BN REHEARAL			

Figure 2

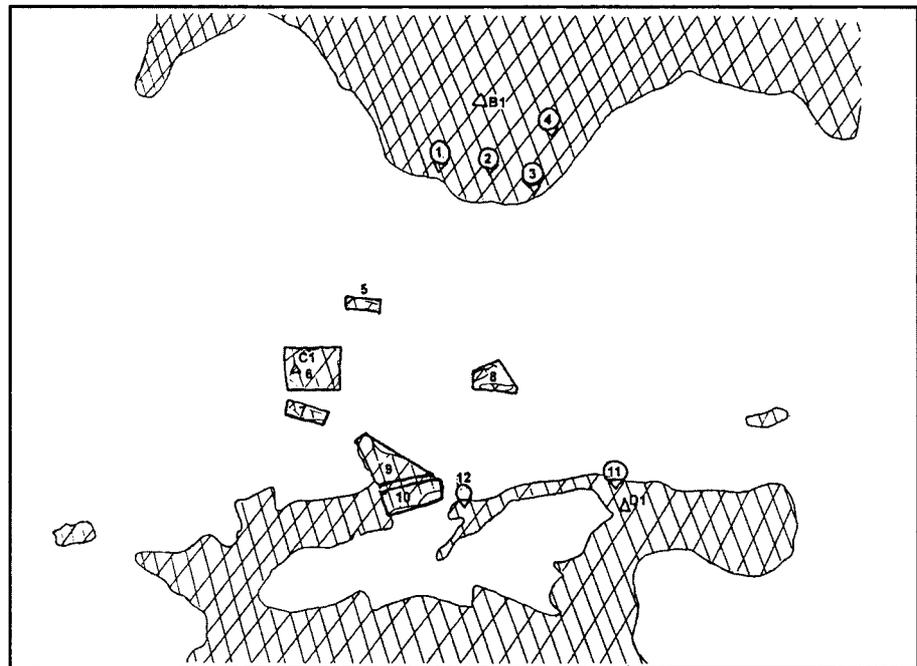


Figure 3

squads. During the actual conduct of the defense, these squads can remain in position—acting as OPs, providing additional information on the OPFOR, and calling assigned indirect fire targets—or they can act as antitank hunter-killer teams that move as necessary to influence the battle. Additionally, since the major focus of OPFOR artillery is on the mechanized infantry and armor battle positions, these

dismounted soldiers stand an excellent chance of surviving OPFOR artillery attacks.

Maintain the Counterreconnaissance Screen. With three companies forward on the screen line, complete security is established across the battalion front from one terrain feature to another. This allows two companies to concentrate on controlling the high ground on both

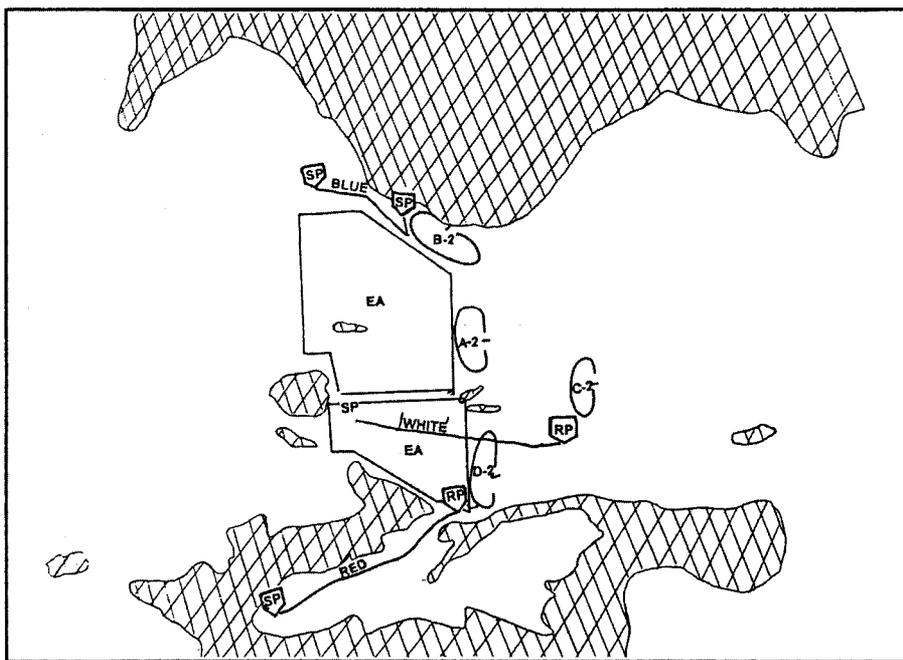


Figure 4

flanks while a third company focuses on the valley floor. With companies now occupying smaller frontages, they can realistically prevent the penetration of the security zone, develop real depth in the zone, and actually execute a rest plan.

The company FISTs should be posi-

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tioned to make maximum use of Copperhead munitions, which should be the weapon of choice of companies on the screen line. This is especially true for destroying the regimental reconnaissance force, which often has tanks. Initially, the OPFOR reconnaissance elements will try to infiltrate the security zone. If this effort is not successful, they will try to find the weakest point in the screen, create a penetration with tanks, and then push through as many reconnaissance elements as possible. This usually occurs around 2300 on the night before the attack.

While the companies in the supporting effort are forward in the counterrecon screen, they must also prepare their battle

and reserve positions in the MBA. Because the OPFOR habitually tries to infiltrate during hours of darkness—and because it is easier to maintain security with fewer vehicles during daylight with planning and coordination—the companies should still be able to complete their defensive preparations in the MBA (Figure 4). Of course, the main-effort company remains in the MBA and initially receives the priority for engineer assets. This gives the other companies time to conduct leader reconnaissance, develop engagement areas, and site and mark individual vehicle fighting positions. Once engineer assets are available, the executive officer and a few key personnel can secure the engineers, proof individual vehicle fighting positions, and prepare the defense.

It is worth noting that engineering operations take place behind the main body of the battalion, providing a secure area for the engineers and any other defensive preparations. Also, each platoon is rotated to the company battle position as a rehearsal of its move from the counterrecon line to the position and to site or stake vehicles and complete other defensive preparations.

Transition to the Defense. At about 0300 on the anticipated day of the attack, the counterrecon force begins to thin the counterrecon screen. Initially, the main

effort platoons of each company move along marked and rehearsed routes to their respective battle or reserve positions and are met by guides and placed in their fighting positions. The other platoons follow the same procedure, on order. The battalion TOC plans and controls the movement of each platoon to eliminate any chance of fratricide and to make sure all units are in position before dawn. The companies are responsible for seeing that no OPFOR recon elements mingle with their vehicles and follow them into their battle positions.

As the companies pull back into their battle positions, the scouts move to OPs from which they can cover the main OPFOR avenues of approach if needed. Company FISTs must move with one of the platoons to prevent fratricide and maintain adequate security. At the end of this phase, the battalion is prepared to defend its zone while forcing the OPFOR to fight blind.

The flood-the-zone technique provides a framework for the successful combination of mass and tactical deception. When combined with a good METT-T analysis, this technique confronts the OPFOR with an aggressive counterrecon force to deny the force an accurate template from which to plan its attack. Winning the counterrecon battle ensures that the OPFOR will not be able to mass its efforts. Thus, the unit is in a position to control the situation and destroy the OPFOR when and where it decides.

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