

job is not done. Field trains commanders can benefit from attending the FSB/BSA after-action reviews (AARs), although many fail to attend. Granted, HHC commanders are always busy, but AARs produce lessons learned, and the BSA/FSB always benefits from a field trains commander's input during an AAR.

It is extremely rare for field trains commanders to be included in FSB/BSA leader professional development programs. A field trains commander who hasn't been invited should ask the FSB S-3 for invitations to events concerning

BSA operations. Although not all of the scheduled topics will apply, most of them will benefit from his attendance and input. The HHC XO and other field trains leaders will also benefit from attending.

The goal of the FSB commander is to provide responsive CSS to sustain fighting task forces. This includes defending CSS assets when necessary, which can be done only with the participation of the field trains. If field trains leaders can build productive training relationships with the BSA and FSB staff, these relationships will only increase the BSA's

inherent CSS and security advantages. As a result, the task forces receive the combat service support they must have to fight and win.

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# The Platoon Drill Attack

## Is It a Drill or Not?

CAPTAIN DAVID M. TOCZEK

Looking forward to the 21st Century, the U.S. Army has begun to consider how to modify its organization, doctrine, and tactics to better face future threats. At least one task force has laid the groundwork for restructuring infantry units from the fire team to battalion level. When organizations change, the tactics that they will employ usually change as well.

One such document under scrutiny is the April 1992 edition of Field Manual (FM) 7-8, *Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*. Specifically, many question the validity of Chapter 4, Battle Drills, and one drill in particular: Battle Drill 1, Platoon Attack. By examining the battle drill's definition, we will see that the platoon attack is, in fact, a battle drill. More important, even if it were not a battle drill, it should be kept in FM 7-8 as a guide for platoon leaders training their platoons to maneuver in contact.

As defined in FM 25-101, *Battle Focused Training*, a battle drill is "a collective action rapidly executed without applying a deliberate decision-making pro-

cess." A battle drill has the following characteristics:

- Requires minimal leader orders to accomplish and is standard throughout the Army.
- Requires sequential actions that are vital to success in combat or critical to preserving life.
- Applies to platoon-sized units or smaller.
- Involves trained responses to enemy actions or leaders' orders.
- Represents mental steps followed for offensive and defensive actions in training and combat.

In short, a battle drill allows a platoon or smaller unit to execute collective and individual actions with a minimum of leader decisions and directives.

Although this definition is accepted by all doctrinal manuals, it is not without fault. A troublesome qualifier in this definition is the term "deliberate decision-making process." What exactly characterizes a "deliberate" decision-making process? During any battle drill, the

leader must conduct an estimate of the situation, even if it is abbreviated. For example, when conducting Battle Drill 5, Knock Out Bunkers, a squad leader must answer several questions, including the following:

- How many bunkers are there? What is the enemy's strength?
- Can I properly suppress with my lead fire team? Do I need to move it to a better position?
- Which route should I take with the assault element? Will the terrain cover my movement? Will I mask my support element's fire?
- When I'm done, will I have enough personnel to continue the mission?

These basic questions cover the enemy, terrain, and troops portions of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time). To conduct the drill, the squad leader must develop courses of action, wargame them, compare them, and decide how he will mass his combat power. If we define a "deliberate decision-making process as involving even an abbre-

viated estimate, then *no* battle drill—with the possible exception of Battle Drill 3, React to Contact—can meet the true definition of a battle drill.

If we concede that using the estimate process during a battle drill does not prevent it from being a true drill, then a platoon attack should also be considered a drill, because it meets the requirements of the definition. Platoon attack also clearly fits the characteristics of a drill as listed in FM 25-101:

- It requires minimal leader orders and is standard throughout the Army.
- If conducted correctly, it does have a certain sequence of events. (Attacking without locating the enemy or gaining fire superiority first usually leads to trouble.)
- It applies to both platoons and squads.
- It is a trained response to enemy actions.
- It outlines the mental steps necessary for destroying the enemy.

Putting aside for a moment the question of whether the platoon attack is a drill, we should look at reasons for keeping it in FM 7-8. Without the five-step framework of the platoon attack, the platoon leader has no doctrinal reference to fall back on to reduce his decision-making process if he must attack. Many believe that the platoon attack is nothing more than a hasty attack. That may be so, but there is no manual that outlines the steps for a hasty attack. ARTEP 7-8 MTP, *Mission Training Plan for the Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*, outlines collective tasks that make up a hasty attack, but it does not have an all-inclusive task. If we are striving to reduce the time a platoon leader needs to decide on the best course of action, we need an outline of the bare essential actions for the platoon leader to follow.

As a senior platoon trainer for the Infantry Officer Basic Course (IOBC), I observed that lieutenants usually reduce platoon attack to two steps: *Actions on Contact* and *Attack*. By skipping *Locate the Enemy* and *Suppress the Enemy*, IOBC platoons usually do not place enough fire on the enemy to make maneuvering possible. If they do—by not properly identifying enemy positions—the students either miss enemy positions



or do not use the terrain to their best advantage. FM 7-8 was printed in a pocket-sized format to encourage platoon leaders to use it as a reference in the field. If the platoon attack is removed from FM 7-8, platoon leaders will not have a doctrinal reference that reinforces the idea that all five steps are critical to success.

Many will argue that IOBC platoons are artificial organizations that do not mirror the level of training found in actual line platoons. This is to some extent true, but the lieutenants learn their basics at IOBC, and training them properly through the use of the platoon attack better prepares them to train and maneuver their platoons in the field.

Purists will argue that the platoon attack is simply not a battle drill and should not be included. If that is the case, a possible solution is to call it something else. ARTEP 7-8 Drill, *Battle Drills for the Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*, considers the platoon attack a “combat drill.” A combat drill differs from a battle drill, although ARTEP 7-8-Drill is not clear on

the distinction. By maintaining the platoon attack as a combat drill, we could alleviate the point of contention over its nomenclature.

Looking closely at the definition and characteristics of a battle drill, we can see that platoon attack is, indeed, a battle drill. If the number of leader actions precludes its definition as a battle drill, then we should refer to it as a combat drill.

Whatever we choose to call it, we need to keep the platoon attack as part of FM 7-8. By reinforcing the five steps to a platoon attack, we will be setting our platoon leaders up for success, and training them in a skill that will spell the difference between success and failure in combat.

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