Training
For the Company Deliberate Night Attack

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The deliberate night attack is one of the most critical missions for a light infantry company. It challenges the company commander with extensive planning, rigorous troop-leading procedures, and violent execution—all done safely to a high standard. He wants to train his unit as it will fight in combat, but running a tactically sound range is made more difficult by efforts to conduct realistic training under peacetime safety restrictions.

This article will offer ideas on the tactical employment of a light infantry company in the attack, as well as on the construction of a live-fire range that will support the training objectives that will prepare the unit for such a mission.

Executing an attack range requires substantial effort on the part of a company. The assets and preparation to execute this range to standard require battalion staff involvement, with the S-3 shop operating the range. The staff provides logistical and observer-controller (O-C) support. The O-Cs give the company necessary feedback on execution and help the company ensure that the range operates safely. The S-3 must conduct a reconnaissance of the range with the battalion commander to receive guidance. He then plans and coordinates the range with the aid of an assistant S-3. The assistant S-3, usually a captain awaiting a command assignment, uses this training opportunity to learn the tactical employment of a light company, the interaction of members of the combined arms team, and the creation of surface danger zones required by Army Regulation 385-63, *Policies and Procedures for Firing Ammunition for Training, Target Practice and Combat.*

A two-day block works well for a company attack range cycle. After preparations at squad and platoon level in the training cycle, the first day focuses on the issue of an operations order (OPORD) by the staff to squad leaders and above. The OPORD and commander's confirmation backbrief are followed by a tactical exercise without troops (TEWT) on the range. During the TEWT, key leaders see the actual range and get the necessary safety briefings. The company then conducts troop-leading procedures for the rest of the first day. The units rehearse day and night with blank ammunition on the actual range or similar terrain, depending on the training level of the company.

The second day begins with a daytime blank-fire rehearsal on the range in which the O-C team and battalion commander certify that the company is ready to execute a safe live fire. A daytime live-fire iteration is followed by training to a real-time standard to correct any deficiencies before going into the night phase. The night phase again requires a successful blank-fire run followed by a live-fire iteration. The repetition and after-action reviews (AARs) from the day and night cycles help correct problems and improve the company's ability to train to the standard.

Planning the training requires numerous trips to the range control office and the range site. The range officer can help find the best terrain on which to conduct a company attack. He is the expert on surface danger zones and can help get the largest range fans that will yield wide right and left limits for the company. All safety issues must be resolved before the range is constructed so the training can be done as planned.

The range should appear as realistic as possible, and at the same time safety restrictions should be obvious to the troops. The terrain must also be chosen to justify the tactical emplacement of the positions. Unrealistic and nontactical positions lead to complaints of "canned" live-fire. As the range develops, the scenario divides roughly into five stages: movement to the objective, the support-by-fire (SBF) position, the breach site, the assault, and clearing to the limit of advance.

Movement to the Objective. The exercise can begin with any tactical situation that requires a deliberate attack. The troops will need to be held in an assembly area (AA) with the timing controlled so that administrative functions can be accomplished apart from the company. The troops leave the AA with issued ammunition in pouches, move to an attack position, and then lock and load at the line of departure. The company commander uses an analysis of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time available) to establish the movement technique and order of movement to the objective. On the basis of his planned actions at the SBF release point, the support element should generally lead, followed by the breach element, and then the assault element. The commander should task organize these elements, maintaining squad and platoon integrity as much as possible. He should move behind the lead element and remain forward where he can best control the fight throughout the attack.

As the unit approaches the objective, the company fire support officer (FSO) should execute continuous suppression of the objective to prevent the enemy from repositioning or effectively engaging the company. The fire plan supports the scheme of maneuver through continuous fires on the objective until

effective direct fires can be brought to bear by the SBF position. The minimum safe distances (MSDs) for indirect fire assets—which include the 155mm and 105mm howitzers and the 120mm, 81mm, and 60mm mortars—are important planning factors. MSDs are computed from a target on the objective to the gun position using an overhead or a flanking formula. Once the MSDs are known, the commander should select phase lines that closely align with them so he can adjust his fires before the lead element enters the zone of an MSD (Figure 1). Although range requirements demand that MSDs restrict troop presence in possible shrapnel areas, they are every bit as important in combat as well, for the same reason. The proximity of impacting rounds serves as the ultimate reminder of the importance of MSDs.

The FSO should adjust artillery and mortars to facilitate the company's continuous movement. As he approaches a phase line, he should start the new indirect fire system and turn off the system in use to ensure uninterrupted indirect fire suppression. If the transition between weapon systems is correct, the lead platoon should not have to stop moving at any phase line.

An additional fires consideration is rate of fire. The rate is based on the number of rounds available to suppress the objective until the SBF element can initiate fires. The timing of fires requires knowledge of the exact round count. If few rounds are available, rapid movement is necessary. Troops also may have to carry additional mortar rounds with them to sustain fires. U.S. Air Force aircraft and attack aviation can also be used during movement, but the restricted air windows tend to limit the flexibility in the range.

Peacetime training considerations limit the feasibility of having rounds impact on the objective. First, the rounds will destroy the objective, preventing subsequent iterations on the range by different companies. Danger-close restrictions, generally within 600 meters for artillery, also may cause larger safety distances and control measures than might actually be used in combat. The artillery for the resulting combined arms live fire exercise may require still another layer of safety measures. Fires may need to be offset from the objective to compensate for these increased safety distances. Forward observers accomplish this realistically by shifting to new targets to seal off the objective area or suppress new targets. Finally, the possibility of dud rounds will restrict subsequent maneuver by a dismounted force on the objective. This fact alone limits any use of live indirect fires on the objective.

As the company reaches the SBF release point, the various forces diverge as necessary. The SBF element generally moves first to its position while the breach and assault elements proceed to the assault position. Although movement to the objective continues, it now focuses on different elements in their positions.

Support-by-Fire Position. The SBF element is the most critical in the company attack. If its fires do not continuously suppress the enemy, the breach may fail and the assault never occur. The company commander should therefore consider personally positioning the SBF element instead of leaving the decision to a less experienced platoon leader or the executive officer. Although METT-T may prevent the commander's placement of the SBF element, it should be considered before accepting an alternative.

On a range, the SBF position is the most difficult to determine. Its placement requires a 15-degree shift with positive stops for machineguns as troops maneuver within at least 30 meters of the round impact (Figure 2). To train the SBF element, there should be at least one shift during the assault instead of a lifting of fires. This shift requires an additional 15 degrees, and such a shift at 400 to 600 meters requires a large piece of land. The ideal field manual distances may conflict with safety restrictions. The 15 degrees can be achieved more easily for a given range by moving the SBF position closer to the objective. Although the full range of crew-served weapons is limited, this move may be necessary to conform to range regulations. When designing the range, the range officer-in-charge (OIC) may sometimes have to use an M2 aiming circle instead of a lensatic compass to make sure he is using every mil of available firing fan (15 degrees equals 267 mils). Precision also pays off in building an objective in which bunker targets are sited so as to themselves mark exact shifts, maintaining the required safety distances.

Occupying the SBF position at night is difficult, and the task is made more challenging by the emplacement of trip

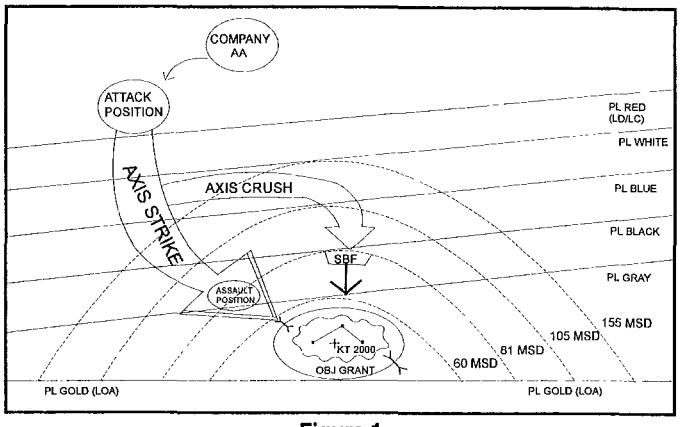

Figure 1

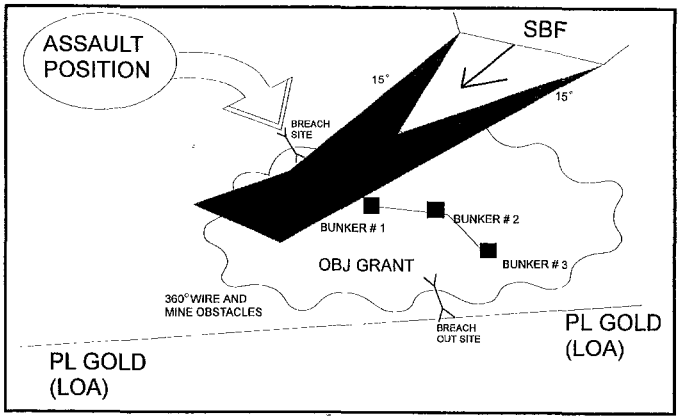

Figure 2

flares or smoke pots. Trip flares are effective countermeasures for the enemy, and can hamper nonilluminated attacks. The flares blind the AN/PVS-7s, requiring soldiers to remove the goggles quickly and then put them back down using the helmet harnesses once the flares burn out.

The commander or SBF leader conducts a leader's reconnaissance with key personnel. He uses the ground commander's pointer (GCP-1A) to delineate limits on the objective and sectors of fire. As the squad leaders come forward, they use the AN/PAQ-4C infrared aiming light, on or off their weapons, to mark bunkers for gunners to engage. The gunners use their PVS-7s to put their own PAQ-4C beams on the target. Infrared sources must be used sparingly to avoid detection if the enemy has his own night observation devices (NODs).

Ideally, the range should require no chemical lights or markers of right and left limits. Troops engage only bunkers, fixed targets, or pop-up targets. They never shoot beyond the confines of the objective as briefed by their chain-of-command. Chemical lights are used as range limits to mark bunkers only if the level of unit training with NODs requires them. Although O-Cs can double-check the spot where the company fires hit, the responsibility for safe firing belongs to the company chain-of-command.

To be effective, the support by fire must train the basics. The volume and rate of fire are critical. As weapons malfunction, leaders redistribute rounds to maintain fires. Squad leaders use their PAQ-4Cs to correct the aim of gunners if they deviate from the targets. Leaders can also fire tracer rounds to direct fires as a back-up means, but they control their people instead of focusing on firing their own weapons.

By the time they direct the fires of the crew-served weapons and the SBF position as a whole, the assault element has probably moved through the breach onto the objective. To shift fires, the SBF must then react to clear signals. Since ground signals near the objective are often obscured by smoke, a shifting or lifting signal is a star cluster or a parachute flare with backup on FM communications. As the SBF element sees the signal and shifts fires, it can fire a star cluster to confirm the shift. In short, NCOs who control their soldiers' crew drill and combat marksmanship are crucial to the success of the SBF position. An SBF element can develop only through extensive live-fire training; fire control cannot be replicated any other way.

The Breach. The breach site should offer easy access to the trench line and maximum protection to the attackers. At night, the breach leader can mark this site with a GCP before any troops approach it. The breach element will suppress, obscure, secure, and reduce the obstacle. It will provide local security as the attached engineer squad moves forward with grappling hooks, creating a lane through any mines, wire, and booby-traps. Again, the site must be selected so the breach element's fires are within the approved range fan and so the company SBF can continue to suppress the objective during the breach.

The breach element needs to use as many smoke pots and grenades as possible to conceal its efforts. Although this same smoke can create a problem with the SBF element's fields of fire, training sharpens the element's reaction to contact and effectiveness. Lane marking procedures vary from one unit to another, but a lane can be marked up to the bangalore torpedo site. A unit can cut wire manually, but a bangalore is the preferred method for breaching. After the bangalore has exploded, the engineer squad returns from cover to completely mark the lane through the wire. The lane is marked with directional chemical lights or Phoenix beacons. The breach element secures the lane so the assault element can begin its mission.

Bangalores limit the construction of the range. Engineer field manuals, Army Regulation 385-63, *Policies and Procedures for Firing Ammunition for Training, Target Practice and Combat,* and post range regulations vary on safe distances. Since the bangalore is designed to blow a lane, it is safer to be straight behind it than to its sides. The OIC must coordinate with his post range control officer to create the exact surface danger zone. The bangalore blast could cause the OIC to place the SBF, breach, or assault element in dug-in protection. He or the range safety officer must construct the breach site in order to allow local security to fire and the bangalore surface danger zone to reduce the risk to ground forces. A shallow pit will minimize the impact of the blast.

The full bangalore kit can be broken down into smaller section charges to allow numerous iterations with less of an explosion. Two sections will cut a triple-strand concertina fence and provide the necessary training effect for the engineer. When bangalores cannot be used on the range, the engineers can use a demolition effect simulator with a quarter-pound charge of C4. With a demolition pit, C4 explosives can be used on almost any range.

Assault on the Objective. The assault element should move through the wire right after the breach element secures the breach, throwing out more smoke grenades to provide continued concealment. As the lead assault squad pushes through the lane in the wire, the squad conducts individual movement techniques by team, directing fires at Bunker #1. When the squad reaches the bunker, it executes the *knock out a bunker* battle drill and then begins clearing the trench line.

An ideal range allows the SBF element to continue firing at the objective when the breach element is emplacing the bangalore. This continuous fire requires 15 degrees between the closest target and the breach site. Once the bangalore explodes, the SBF shifts from Bunker #1 to the remaining targets. The SBF and assault elements must maintain continuous suppression of all bunkers and targets on the objective. As the SBF element shifts from bunkers, the assault element must continue suppressing them as it clears the trench

The design of the bunker system is crucial. The bunkers should be located within the range fan so the lead squad can fire as it moves forward. The ob-

jective can be a conventional trench line or above-ground targets such as sheds, mock-ups, or tents. If a trench, it should be oriented by azimuth within the range fan to allow continuous fires by the assault element as it clears. V-shapes oriented within the range fan keep high fires within the appropriate fan. Selectively emplaced concertina wire can force maneuver squads to stay within the range fan when using above-ground targets.

The lead assault element in the trench can use a "Moses Stick"—a rod with a flag or chemical light or Phoenix beacon, depending on the time of attack—to signal forces outside a trench so the SBF can see where it is advancing. In combat, the squad leaders can "creep" fires forward of the stick to maintain the necessary safety margin, especially if the bunkers are more than 15 degrees apart. The trench teams using PVS-7Bs quickly clear enemy troops in the trench line.

Live grenades add realism to the range. A soldier prepares the grenade under NCO supervision and then throws it into an approved bunker. Grenades require flak vests. Even if no grenades are used, flak vests improve soldier safety in the trench and should be worn if the risk assessment warrants it.

Clearing to the Limit of Advance. As the troops finish clearing the trench line, they exit the trench and use a bangalore to breach out of the objective's surrounding mines and wire. They consolidate captured weapons from the trench line and can blow them with a bangalore or in a separate charge if the tactical situation requires their destruction.

The commander moves elements beyond the wire to clear to the limit of advance (LOA). Pop-up or single E-silhouette targets can be placed out for the soldiers to engage in the counterattack when they are moving to the wire or clearing to the LOA. Squad leaders continue to gather reports on the status of ammunition, casualties, and equipment and pass them up to higher leaders, while leaders report and disseminate information gathered from the objective. Old stuffed BDUs can be placed on the objective to replicate enemy bodies containing intelligence for search teams, and rubber weapons spread throughout the objective for collection.

Observer-controllers designate casualties during the attack, and these casualties are evacuated to casualty collection points. Once the breach is complete, the breach element is ideal for evacuating casualties. The soldiers can use sleds or poleless litters to evacuate wounded by ground to an established pickup zone. This training can be improved with a UH60 medical evacuation landing to remove notional casualties. If aviation assets are not available, a front-line ambulance can be used to back-haul wounded.

Once firing on the range is complete, other creative ideas can augment training. As the company tactically withdraws from the objective, its chain-of-command clears weapons. The company moves to a turn-in point and conducts its own brass and ammunition checks. The O-Cs begin platoon AARs after live iterations. A final company after-action report for each live day and night iteration will bring out still more learning points.

The effort in building the range is negated if the AAR plan is neglected. An AAR site should be built into the plan, including a well-lit tent for late-night AARs. The deliberate night attack will challenge a company and develop a better sense of employing infantry weapons in combat. Training Circular 7-9, *Infantry Live-Fire Training,* contains excellent principles and techniques for range training. The difficult task is to mass the resources—including terrain, time, and ammunition—to conduct an effective range. The effort expended in training the attack will yield great dividends in the soldiers' confidence and the unit's combat readiness.

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