

---

# A Light Infantry Company's Defense of an Assembly Area

CAPTAIN BRIAN J. REED

During a rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), the 2d Battalion, 27th Infantry, used the characteristics of the defense in planning an assembly area and ultimately defeated the enemy attacks.

As the fifth day of the battalion's search and attack operations was coming to a close, the platoons of Company A returned to the company assembly area to prepare for night operations.

Up until this point, the company's mission had been security oriented: convoy security, route clearance, and ambushes and patrols to provide security for the battalion tactical operations center (TOC), the combat trains, and the main supply route. The mission for this evening was to conduct a night movement to a new assembly area while leaving a platoon to conduct a "stay-behind" ambush.

The TOC, which had been approximately 300 meters west of the company's assembly area, relocated at dusk to its new position 2.5 kilometers to the east. The combat trains, however, were still in their original location 200 meters north of Company A, and the company was not to move until the trains had departed. Throughout the day, the TOC and the trains had been victims of constant enemy reconnaissance patrols and harassing mortar fires.

It soon became obvious that the enemy force had pinpointed the battalion

command and control nodes and was intent on destroying them. What the enemy did not know was that the TOC had moved and a rifle company was firmly entrenched in an assembly area in the immediate vicinity. Over the next two hours, Company A fought two successive battles that repulsed the enemy, preserved the combat trains, and provided invaluable lessons on company assembly area operations.

Field Manual (FM) 7-10, *The Infantry Rifle Company*, states that the company commander plans for an assembly

---

*The mission was to conduct a night movement to a new assembly area while leaving a platoon to conduct a stay-behind ambush.*

---

area as he does for a perimeter defense. It was with this thought in mind that we structured the defense of our company assembly area.

## Preparation

To say the least, the preparation of the assembly area defense was critical. We could not do much preparation initially, because we occupied the position during limited visibility. The next day, however, we immediately conducted reconnaissance and security (R&S) pa-

trols that identified key terrain, likely enemy infiltration routes into our position, and the potential weaknesses of our present position. Simultaneously, the rest of the company completed hasty fighting positions, sector sketches, and range cards.

On the basis of the information gathered by the R&S patrols, we were able to emplace observation posts, which eventually provided early warning and took the element of surprise away from the enemy. In addition, as company commander, I conducted our own intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) analysis, which then allowed me to wargame friendly and enemy options with the platoon leaders and the fire support officer (FSO). This enabled us to plan for various contingencies and synchronize them in case we had to defend the assembly area.

## Disruption

The best way for us to disrupt the attacker's synchronization in this case was through the use of indirect fires. It was in this area that the planning and eventual use of our organic 60mm mortars proved critical. Using these, along with the battalion's 81mm mortars and 105mm artillery, the FSO planned targets on likely enemy avenues of approach. He also planned targets to our flanks, front, and rear and on top of our position to stop any likely

enemy penetrations or counterattacks and to cover our withdrawal, if necessary. We planned a 60mm mortar final protective fire (FPF), because this was the only indirect fire system we had at our disposal during the preparation phase. As it turned out, it was this FPF that helped us restore our perimeter.

We planned for indirect fires using systems for which we did not have priority at the time of occupation. The priority of fires for the 81mm mortars and the 105mm artillery was designated to other companies, but these systems were not in use at the time of the actual fight. Additionally, we registered our 60mm mortars during the preparation phase, which increased the accuracy of these fires. We also confirmed the locations of all indirect fire targets using our global positioning systems, further improving accuracy.

Ultimately—at a time when the enemy was dangerously close to penetrating our position—our indirect fires disrupted his synchronization and caused him to withdraw and consolidate.

### **Concentration**

FM 7-10 says that if the defender is to succeed, he must concentrate combat power at the decisive time and place. For us, this started with the direct fire plan and then incorporated the indirect fire plan. To guarantee success, a commander needs to plan properly for the total synchronization of the combat

---

*We planned for indirect fires using systems for which we did not have priority at the time of occupation.*

---

power provided by both direct and indirect fires. We accomplished this by using the company direct fire plan sketch to devise the indirect fire plan.

After the platoon leaders completed their sector sketches, the executive officer consolidated them into a single sketch, which became the company direct fire plan. This plan increased the effects of the weapons on the enemy

and ensured that all key weapon systems achieved mutual support. The company sketch, combined with the IPB, was used to come up with the indirect fire targets. The targets were placed where they could best complement the direct fire plan and cover dead space. It was a thorough preparation of the defense that made this possible.

The positioning of the M60 machineguns was particularly critical. FM 7-10 goes on to state that combat power focuses on effects, not just the number of soldiers or weapons. It mentions that the defender must economize in some areas, retain a reserve, and maneuver to gain local superiority. Because of our own IPB and wargaming, we knew where we could accept risk in the assembly area and maneuver a force, if necessary, to counterattack or reinforce another platoon. During the preparation phase, I gave one platoon such a mission. The platoon leaders and I had talked about this possibility, but we had not rehearsed it. Fortunately, this mission was well executed, even though we almost missed an opportunity to gain local superiority by failing to rehearse.

### **Flexibility**

If there was any one area I could highlight as the key to our success, it would be flexibility. Four areas contributed to that flexibility:

**Mutual support.** After analyzing the terrain and wargaming enemy and friendly courses of action, we decided the best way to maintain mutual support between the platoons was to tie them in with one another. The platoons were not in separate battle positions or strongpoints. We were able to maintain an interval of 10 to 15 meters between fighting positions and were tied-in for 360 degrees. Maneuvering an element to gain local superiority enabled us to reestablish our defense and repel the enemy counterattack as well.

**Reporting.** Timely and accurate reports enabled us to exercise the various assets at our disposal and to paint an accurate picture of the situation for the battalion commander. As a result, he ultimately allocated the battalion indirect fire assets to us.

**Handheld mortars.** As the situation developed, it became apparent that the 60mm mortars would be more effective in the handheld mode than in their current firing position. At this point, the battle had developed into a close fight, and the mortars quickly displaced to pre-designated positions where they proved effective.

**Junior leader initiative.** As the battle developed, the platoon leaders

---

*Our indirect fires disrupted the enemy's synchronization and caused him to withdraw and consolidate at a time when he was close to penetrating our position.*

---

and sergeants, squad leaders, and team leaders demonstrated outstanding initiative. They shifted weapon systems and personnel as the situation changed. This agility allowed us to counter the enemy's attack and then strike back.

The final piece of the fight was the reorganization of the company after the battle. Numerous tasks had to be done—casualty evacuation, search of enemy casualties, evacuation of enemy prisoners, resupply of ammunition, and reestablishment of the defense. The use of combat lifesavers and well-rehearsed special teams made the process easier. The first sergeant and company executive officer were the key players during this phase of the operation.

This battle taught us some invaluable lessons. By using the characteristics of the defense when planning an assembly area, any company commander will be better prepared to defend his position and remain ready for future operations.

---

**Captain Brian J. Reed** commanded companies in the 2d Battalion, 27th Infantry, and the 4th Battalion, 87th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division. He previously served in the 2d Battalion, 6th Infantry, 3d Infantry Division. He is now a graduate student at the University of Maryland, preparing for an instructor assignment at the United States Military Academy.

---