

TRAINING NOTES



Antitank/Heavy Weapons Platoon Fire Support to Rifle Company Deliberate Attacks

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The support-by-fire mission is one that air assault antitank/heavy weapons (AT/HW) platoons train for in South Korea on a quarterly basis. The mission is listed on the Delta Company's mission essential task list. And whenever the battalion training schedule allows, which is almost quarterly, these platoons execute the SBF mission as part of a rifle company combined arms live-fire exercise.

Unfortunately, Field Manual 7-91, *Employment of Antiarmor Platoons, Companies, and Battalions*, is outdated and does not even discuss the M2 .50-caliber machinegun or the Mk 19 automatic grenade launcher, both of which have been added to the AT/HW modified table of organization and equipment. This means there is no antiarmor doctrine to use as a guideline for training and employment. Fortunately, the field manuals and mission training plans used by rifle platoons and companies do provide ample information for transferring the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) of the support-by-fire to the AT/HW community. Having led an AT/HW platoon in the 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry, in Korea, I want to share

lessons we learned about the employment of this platoon in the SBF role.

The platoon has four M60 machineguns and two M2 .50-caliber machineguns. The M2, a belt-fed, air-cooled heavy machinegun is a devastating weapon that is effective in the SBF role. It can be used mounted or dismounted. The primary mount for the SBF is the M3 tripod. Its maximum effective range is 1,600 meters for area targets, 1,100 meters for vehicle point targets, and 700 meters for human point targets. The M2 fires ball, tracer, armor piercing, and armor piercing incendiary rounds. The tracer burnout for the M2 is 2,200 meters. The sustained rate of fire is 40 rounds per minute and greater than this for the rapid rate.

When using this weapon in a dismounted mode, its weight is the biggest consideration (see Table 1). In fact, the weight of the M2 usually requires that it stay in its vehicle-mounted configuration. But experience and practice have shown that there is a way to break the equipment down to a manageable level for the soldiers to carry.

A full-strength AT/HW platoon is made up of one officer and 15 enlisted

men. The platoon is capable of dismounting six single-channel ground and airborne radio systems (SINCGARS) and can use its organic rucksacks to transport the M2.

The first step is to break down three rucksacks. All that is required is the frame and the shoulder straps. Next the platoon secures the M2 receiver to one of the frames with bungee straps. The M2 receiver is tied down so that the triggers would be down if worn on the back. The M3 tripod is secured to a ruck frame, and then the two barrels (in their cases) are secured to the third frame. If barrel cases are not available, MRE (meals, ready to eat) wrappers can be taped to each end of a barrel as dust covers. Finally, the ammunition is divided into loads of 75 to 100 rounds. Although the ammunition cans allow for easy transportation, they are loud and add weight to the load. One method of overcoming this is to divide the rounds into 25-round belts and put each belt in a sandbag. The bags are quiet and lightweight, and they keep the rounds from getting caught on rucksack straps.

The following is a typical breakdown

COMPONENT	MACHINEGUN	TRIPOD	BARREL 1 or 2	RECEIVER	100 ROUNDS BALL	25 ROUNDS BALL
Weight	84 lbs	44 lbs	(1) 22 lbs (2) 44 lbs	62 lbs	37.5 lbs	9.4 lbs

Table 1. Weight of M2 machinegun components.

that my AT/HW platoon used:

Platoon leader—SINCGARS, 50 rounds, binoculars, AN/PVS-7B night vision goggles.

Platoon sergeant—100 rounds, AN/PVS-7B.

Platoon leader's driver—100 rounds.

Platoon sergeant's driver—100 rounds, E-tool, 8 empty sandbags.

1st Section leader—100 rounds, binoculars, AN/PVS-7B.

Gunner—Receiver, AN/PVS-7B.

Driver—Tripod.

Squad leader—Barrels.

Gunner—75 rounds, M18A1 claymore mine, asbestos gloves, traversing and elevation (T&E) mechanism, headspace and timing tool.

Driver—100 rounds.

2d Section leader—100 rounds, binoculars, AN/PVS-7B.

Gunner—75 rounds, M18A1 claymore mine, asbestos gloves, T&E mechanism, head space and timing tool.

Driver—100 rounds.

Using this configuration, the platoon can bring two M2 machineguns and 900 rounds to the fight, day or night. The platoon has local security, secure communications, enough ammunition to place accurate and sustained fires on the objective for approximately 10 minutes, increased observation, and the ability to engage two targets at the same time.

The greatest limitation of this setup is decreased security during movement. The loads are cumbersome and heavy; it takes a lot of discipline to carry them while also worrying about local security. Executing battle drills (react to contact, break contact) to standard is also more difficult when carrying the loads, and soldiers must practice these drills while carrying their actual machineguns.

Another limitation of this setup is that, although it has proved successful in conditions of limited visibility, the ranges at which the AT/HW platoon can engage the enemy are limited by the capabilities of the unit's night vision sights. Current AT/HW platoons in Korea are authorized TVS-5s but do not have them on hand. For the most part, the effective ranges decreased to 400-500 meters during periods of limited visibility. In Korea, visibility was often so poor that gunners could not differentiate the bunkers from the surrounding

terrain. The final limitation is obvious: Any loss of personnel immediately decreases the number of rounds the platoon can carry.

There are some ways to reduce the effects of these limitations. The SBF AT/HW platoon should be employed along with one or more weapons squads. Using the platoon with a security element increases its survivability and allows for further distribution of ammunition. The addition of the weapons squad also gives the SBF leader greater flexibility. He can employ more weapons against the enemy, in a concerted and synchronized effort, from one or more support positions. The weapons squads also bring AN/PAQ-4 aiming lights to the picture, which greatly improves the accuracy of fires during periods of limited visibility.

Task Organization

The AT/HW SBF platoon breaks down into three elements: command and control, gun teams, and local security. The command and control element consists of the platoon leader, the platoon sergeant, and the platoon leader's driver, who also serves as a radiotelephone operator. The gun teams contain the section leaders, their gunners, and drivers/loaders/assistant gunners. The squad leaders, their gunners, and their drivers serve as the local security elements, which are equipped with M16A2s, M203s, and an M249 light machinegun.

The command and control element is led by the AT/HW platoon leader, who is responsible for directing and controlling all the fires of the SBF element. His usual task is to suppress the enemy for various purposes—such as preventing a counterattack against the breach point, or preventing the enemy from placing effective fires on a particular element. Additionally, he controls the distribution, rate, initiation, shifting, and lifting of fires. The distribution of fires, which is the assignment of targets to weapons, greatly affects the mass of the fires (the number of rounds placed on a single target). When more than one weapon is paired with a single target, the mass of fires on that target is high. Rates of fire affect the mass of

fires and the time needed to suppress a given target. When the rate of fire increases, the number of rounds landing on a target in a given time period also increases, and this affects the number of weapons needed for a target. For instance, it takes two M2 machineguns firing at 50 rounds per minute to match an M60 shooting its sustained rate of 100 rounds per minute. The rate of fire is computed after the SBF leader has conducted a detailed mission analysis. The initiation, shifting, and lifting of fires are executed according to a well-thought-out, well-coordinated, and well-rehearsed plan.

In addition to helping the platoon leader perform his duties, the AT/HW platoon sergeant closely monitors the load carried by each soldier to ensure that he will still be fully mission capable when he reaches the SBF position. The platoon sergeant also concerns himself with accounting for all personnel and equipment throughout the operation and keeps the platoon leader informed of ammunition status and resupply issues. When using multiple SBF positions, the platoon sergeant can provide critical platoon level leadership at one of the other positions.

The platoon leader's driver maintains communication with the ground unit commander, normally the commander of the rifle company to which the AT/HW platoon is attached. He also maintains communication with all the SBF positions. He is an extra observer for the identification of all visual signals and ensures that the AT/HW platoon leader recognizes them.

The gun teams are led by the AT/HW section leaders and by the attached weapons squad leaders. These non-commissioned officers are responsible for the performance and accountability of their gun teams. They help the AT/HW platoon leader analyze the mission and develop the suppression plan.

Each leader keeps the platoon sergeant and platoon leader informed of ammunition status. Using code words to relay this information simplifies communications. For instance, *Red* means the M2 .50 caliber machinegun has 50 rounds left. For the M60 it means 100 rounds are left. *Black* means

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all ammunition has been expended. *Slam* means the weapon does have ammunition, but it is experiencing a malfunction and cannot fire.

The gun team leaders' most important responsibility is directing and controlling the fires of their gun teams. They control the initiation, rate, shifting, and lifting of fires for their respective weapons in accordance with the suppression plan.

The local security elements act as supporting elements and are given the task and purpose of destroying dismounted enemy forces to prevent them from placing effective fires on the gun teams. The AT/HW squad leaders do a detailed analysis of the terrain surrounding the SBF position and identify likely dismounted avenues of approach. Once this is accomplished, they present recommendations to the AT/HW platoon leader and platoon sergeant on how best to defend the position from dismounted attacks.

Movements

The AT/HW platoon conducts its dismounted movements using techniques similar to those used by rifle platoons. The platoon is divided into two sections and each section into two three-man wedges. The platoon leader can position himself immediately behind the first section and the platoon sergeant right behind the second section. The squad leaders are at the point of the lead wedge, and the section leaders at the point of the second wedge. Everyone pulls 360-degree security. The leaders do not carry M249 machineguns, but these weapons are located nearby for quick employment.

Battle drills are the same for the AT/HW platoon as for the rifle platoon, except that all the .50 caliber equipment is immediately grounded after the soldiers seek cover. If M60 weapon squads are attached to the AT/HW platoon, they travel with the platoon leader or sergeant and are employed as in normal rifle platoon battle drills.

Occupation

The SBF element moves from its line of departure to the objective rally point (ORP). Once there, the platoon halts

and pulls local security. From the ORP, the AT/HW platoon leader and his gun team leaders move toward the objective to confirm its location and identify the SBF position. Then the leaders move back to the ORP. An analysis of mission, enemy, terrain, troops available, and time (METT-T) determines what preparation of equipment is done in the ORP. Although the main consideration is noise discipline, the leader must also consider the platoon's ability to move an assembled M2. He must also stress the camouflage of men and equipment.

The platoon stops short of the SBF position and consolidates its M2 components. The distance between the release point and the SBF position depends on METT-T, but it must not be visible from the objective. In the release point, the local security element drops off its ammunition with the gun teams and moves to clear and secure the SBF position. (The security element must have done a visual clearing of the position earlier and then emplaced security along the position's likely dismounted avenues of approach.) The local security leader ensures that claymores are in place and that each soldier has a sector of fire and is behind cover and concealment.

Once local security has been established, the gun teams begin emplacing their weapons, keeping in mind that the release point is within hearing distance of the objective. While the platoon sergeant supervises this, the platoon leader and the gun team leaders crawl into the SBF position and begin identifying gun positions and looking at their targets. The platoon leader divides the objective into the targets he briefed during his order and orients the gun team leaders to the objective. Once he is satisfied with their backbriefs, he orders them to move their weapons into position.

First, the M60 teams crawl forward, one at a time, and put their weapons in tripod mode one at a time. Once the M60s are in position (with ample space allowed for the M2s), the M2 gun teams use a three-man carry technique to drag the weapon into position. During this time, the platoon sergeant's driver fills four sand bags for each M2 to create a firm and stable platform for it.

Once all personnel and weapons are in position, the platoon leader gives the order to load the weapons. The M2 teams load their weapons but—because of the noise—do not charge them, until the enemy is being engaged with direct fire.

The last step is to lay the guns on their respective targets, do a dry fire rehearsal of the shifts and lifts they will perform, and have the platoon leader and platoon sergeant get down behind the guns to verify their orientation. They also look for the metal-to-metal contact between gun and tripod that would prevent it from traversing into the friendly assault positions. Now the platoon leader calls the ground unit commander and notifies him that the SBF element is in position.

If the platoon occupies its position at night, the AN/PAQ-4 infrared aiming lights are invaluable in identifying targets. When the weapons squads are attached, they normally bring one PAQ-4 for each M60 and one for the weapons squad leader. The weapons squad leader paints the target and has his gunners line their lasers up on his mark.

Although the M2s do not have aiming lights, the gunners can see the leader's PAQ-4 through their AN/PVS-7Bs. The squad leader just paints their targets and lets them get close for their sight picture. The problem with the PVS-7B is that its limitations in depth perception force the gunner to focus in at his rear sight, adjust the focus to see the front sight, and then adjust the focus again on the target. One remedy is to find a scratch on the lens of the PVS-7, line it up on the rear sight and then focus forward and see if the spot stays on the front sight and the target.

In general, the M2 gunners can orient their weapons so that the initial rounds land within five to ten meters of their targets. After the initial burst (using three to five tracers at the beginning of the belt), the gun team leaders can quickly adjust the gunners onto their targets so that they can begin neutralizing the bunkers or trench lines with a high volume of fire. In training it is possible to fire a single tracer round to register the guns. Each gunner fires a round at his target and adjusts subse-

TIME (Min:Sec)	WEAPON: M2 Gun 1 Tgt/# rounds	WEAPON: M2 Gun 2 Tgt/# rounds	WEAPON: M60 Gun 3 Tgt/# rounds	WEAPON: M60 Gun 4 Tgt/# rounds	WEAPON: M60 Gun 5 Tgt/# rounds	WEAPON: M60 Gun 6 Tgt/# rounds
00:00	6/10	9/10	3/25	3/25	C/25	2/25
00:15	6/10	9/10	3/25	3/25	C/25	2/25
00:30	6/10	9/10	3/25	3/25	C/25	2/25
00:45	2/10*	10/10*	11/25*	12/25*	C/25*	C/25*
01:00	2/10	10/10	11/25	12/25	C/25	C/25
01:15	2/10	10/10	11/25	12/25	C/25	C/25
.....
.....
.....
.....
14:45	CA/0	CA/0	11/10	11/10	12/10	12/10
15:00	CA/0	CA/0	11/10	11/10	12/10	12/10

*Shift of Fires

Table 2. Sample matrix showing organization of the suppression plan.

quent rounds using feedback from his observers. Registration contributes to force protection during maneuver live fire exercises.

If the AT/HW platoon is to use multiple SBF positions, each one needs FM radio communications, with platoon level leadership at each position. The methods of occupation are similar for each position. A limitation of the weapons squads is that they have PRC-126 radios instead of SINCGARS. There are two possible solutions to this problem: Give the weapons squad one of the AT/HW platoon's radios or set the platoon leader's own radio frequency on his weapon squads' frequency. The former solution is ideal, while the latter involves a lot of switching to plain text single channel to talk.

As soon as the platoon is in position, it needs to begin giving intelligence updates to the ground unit commander. Because the platoon has binoculars and night vision capabilities, its soldiers can identify enemy positions, equipment, and troop locations and numbers before the rifle company arrives. During the fight the AT/HW platoon can also tell the ground unit commander where the enemy is reinforcing his trenchlines, where his counterattack is, and which bunker an enemy soldier may have just entered. This kind of information saves friendly lives and gives the ground commander some flexibility.

Suppression Plan

The suppression plan is the method of execution for the way the AT/HW platoon will support the rifle company with

direct fires. The plan begins during the troop-leading procedures when the AT/HW platoon leader conducts his detailed mission analysis and is updated throughout the execution of the mission.

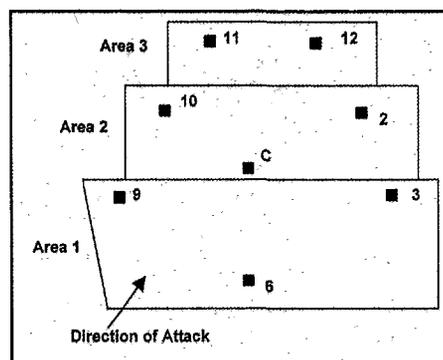
The platoon leader will need to ask the commander for certain information: How much suppression does he want? How long does he want the enemy's head down? Where will the breach be? Which bunkers should be suppressed to facilitate the breach? Which way will the platoons move through the trenches? Where is the likely avenue of approach for a counterattack?

There are other questions the platoon leader will have to answer for himself, on the basis of his METT-T analysis: What weapon will be best able to destroy or suppress the bunkers? At what rate should the weapons fire to meet the time constraints? How many weapons should be hitting each target? In essence, how many bullets does the commander want in each bunker? When should the weapons shift? To what targets? When do they lift? Which weapons should engage which targets during a counterattack? Should the SBF element stay in position or consolidate on

the objective? Which of these choices will make the most of the weapons' standoff capability? When all of these questions are answered, the platoon leader has his suppression plan.

To organize the plan, the SBF leader begins with target identification. One way is the clock method. The 12 o'clock position can be based on the SBF's orientation or the company's direction of attack, but a decision should be made that both elements can understand. Notice on the diagram that each bunker is given a clock number based on its position in relation to the direction of attack. Also, there are groups of bunkers that are divided into areas. For instance, bunkers 3, 6, and 9 are Area 1 targets. This area coincides with the ground commander's scheme of maneuver. On this objective, the commander has a phase line (PL) that stretches from bunker 9 to bunker 3 and a PL from bunker 10 to bunker 2.

Once targets are assigned, the SBF leader decides where, when, and what fires need to be placed on each target. A simple matrix will help organize the plan (see sample in Table 2). This matrix tells the leader that one minute after the initiation of fire, Gun 4, an M60, is firing at target number 12 and that the gunner is to fire 25 rounds during the next 15-second period. That equals 100 rounds per minute, the M60's sustained rate of fire. The matrix also shows that 15 minutes after the initiation of fire, both M2s have stopped firing and Gun 3 is firing only one ten-round burst every 15 seconds. This means that the rifle company almost has the objective secured and the gunner is shooting only at



targets of opportunity. It also means the gun team leader must ensure that the gunner is putting a time lag between bursts.

This matrix is merely a tool that the platoon leader can use to track what ammunition he needs in order to give the commander the amount of time he needs. It also can be used to show a weapon shift, as indicated by the asterisks. Other information can be added as required, such as a symbol representing a change in rate of fire. It is important to remember that this document can be altered as weapons go down, or as the ammunition or target status changes. This means that the platoon leader must have a good grasp of how quickly certain rates of fire affect ammunition levels and how long it takes to fire a five-round burst as opposed to a 10-round burst. Such details help the leader respond quickly to any changes in the plan.

When the target identification and matrix TTPs are put together, the commander has his plan. Here is the way they work together:

- Upon initiation, the SBF positions will fire on Area 1 and 2 targets. Gun 1 fires at 6, Gun 2 fires at 9. Guns 3 and 4 fire at 3, Gun 5 fires at C, Gun 6 fires at 2.

- Once the bangalores go off, all weapons shift to Area 2 and 3 targets. Gun 1 fires at 2, Gun 2 fires at 10, Gun 3 shifts to 11, Gun 4 shifts to 12, Gun 5 continues to fire at C, and Gun 6 shifts to C.

- Once the rifle platoons reach PL 3-9, they will fire a green star cluster and send an FM signal. On the star cluster, or on order, all guns shift to Area 3 targets and beyond. Guns 1 and 2 will lift fire and orient on the likely counterattack avenues of approach. Guns 3 and 4 will fire on 11. Guns 5 and 6 will fire on 12.

- Once the rifle platoons reach PL 2-10, they will fire an M203 parachute flare and send an FM signal. On the flare, or on order, all guns will lift fire and shift to likely counterattack avenues of approach and begin consolidation.

It is critical to mission accomplishment and force protection that all elements of the operation rehearse the sup-

pression plan. One method is to use "rock drills." Here, all the key leaders meet and talk/walk through all their actions and signals. At each phase of the operation, each gun team leader explains the actions his team will be taking. The most important aspects of this rehearsal are backbriefings from the key leaders with respect to fire, movement, and signals. They must incorporate visual, FM, alternate, and back-up signals for every event.

It is also important to rehearse the occupation phase of the SBF operation. Contingency planning should be used for reacting to chance contact that may be made by all units. What does the SBF element do if the maneuver element makes contact before its assault position? What does the SBF element do if it makes contact before, during, or after the occupation phase?

Once the objective is secure, the AT/HW platoon's main concern is destroying any enemy counterattack. The AT/HW platoon leader must identify likely avenues of approach to the objective that the enemy could use for a counterattack. Each gun is assigned responsibility for one of these avenues. At least one M60 is moved to cover the dismounted avenue of approach position that is the most likely route for an enemy attack against the SBF position. Immediately all gun team leaders give the AT/HW platoon leader a report on water, ammunition, casualties, and equipment. The platoon sergeant begins redistributing ammunition and water and treats casualties. Once the enemy counterattack is over, the platoon repeats this consolidation process.

Now the ground unit commander must decide whether he wants the SBF position to consolidate on the objective, stay in position, or move to another location for linkup and further combat operations. The commander has many options, but he and the AT/HW platoon leader must analyze the terrain and the current situation to determine what further suppression the ground unit needs. For instance, if the company is going to set up a medical evacuation pickup zone, the commander may want to move the SBF element to a position that allows it to overwatch the pickup zone

operations. The main thing to remember is that the value of the AT/HW platoon lies in its ability to use its weapons' ranges to stand off from the enemy. When the order to move is given, the M2s are the first to move out of position, while the M60s overwatch. The M2 gun teams use water to cool the barrel and then move the weapon to a covered and concealed position (the ORP). (Although using water is not the preferred method because it can warp the barrel, it has proved to be the quickest. Once in the ORP, the platoon breaks down the M2s and configures them for dismounted movement. When they are ready to move, they pull security while the M60s prepare to move. On order, the M60s go to bipod mode (one gun at a time) and pull back to the ORP and prepare for movement. The AT/HW platoon sergeant inspects the SBF position for personnel or equipment and moves to the ORP for an accountability inspection. Finally, the AT/HW platoon initiates its next movement.

Although this discussion is focused on an air assault platoon using the M2 machinegun, it remains to be seen whether this concept can be applied to airborne operations or operations in which the platoon uses its Mk 19 automatic grenade launchers. The challenge is for other units to try these tactics, techniques, and procedures and get word out to the rest of the infantry community.

The AT/HW platoon plays a critical role in the rifle company deliberate attack. The platoon gives the ground unit commander devastating, timely suppressive fires, consolidated command and control for his SBF elements, and real-time intelligence before his attack. The SBF mission for the AT/HW platoon is difficult, physically and mentally, and is a mission for which the platoon must train diligently.

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