TRAINING NOTES

Search and Attack Considerations

Using Reconnaissance to Retain the Initiative

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Infantrymen continue to struggle with the *search and attack* technique. When unit leaders are unable to plan and control this aspect of the infantry fight, the results are often frustration and high casualties. Too often, units fail to gain the initiative, even when they have more men and resources than the enemy. Many units in our Army can attest to this fact on the basis of lessons they have learned during rotations at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC).

The leaders who succeed at the JRTC are generally those who effectively communicate their plans and control their units. They apply a systematic planning process that puts their units in a positional advantage over the enemy.

The search and attack reveals the biggest training deficiency for infantrymen—the ability to apply tactics in the tactical decision making process. Battalion commanders, operations officers, and company commanders face a situation in which they must make decisions on the basis of many assumptions and few facts. To succeed, they have to develop the situation aggressively and then react quickly. When units are unable to do this, they become combat ineffective after one or two contacts.

The significant problem at the JRTC is that commanders and staffs develop plans in which their combat power is not positioned to influence decisive action in the search and attack. As a result, units conduct these missions on terms better suited to the enemy. They fail to mass sufficient combat power, and frequently disperse in zone at squad level to find and fight enemy forces of team and squad size; this enables the enemy to fight on his own terms, using terrain and marksmanship to his advantage. Battalions frequently become bogged down in reacting to small-unit contacts and lose the initiative.

Most units conduct a deliberate planning process in the intermediate staging base, and the initial plan often develops an operation that is complex and difficult to control. The result is that units are not positioned to accomplish the mission. Successful positioning in the search and attack means that most of the combat power is positioned in mutually supporting locations. Typically, a unit tries to find and destroy enemy squad-size elements. The best way to do this is with rifle platoons—one platoon in position to block the enemy's escape and another to close with and destroy him. But maneuvering platoons into these mutually supporting positions requires information on terrain and enemy activities, and collecting this information requires reconnaissance.

Commanders often tend to develop search and attack plans that are complex and difficult to control, beginning with the initial analysis of mission, enemy, terrain, troops available, and time (METT-T). But too few commanders use the products that should result from mission analysis, which only makes their planning process more difficult. They communicate ambiguous mission terms, undeveloped enemy situations, and a lack of understanding for the limitations of soldiers in the search and attack. What they need to make the search and attack less complex is a detailed understanding of the task and purpose, the use of mission analysis products, intelligence-driven operations, and an understanding of unit limitations.

The products of mission analysis do several things:

- Facilitate planning for the search and attack.
- Simplify task analysis and allow the use of concise terms to reduce misunderstanding.
- Outline the use of *purpose* to fa-

cilitate the relationship between the main and supporting efforts.

• Show that the detailed development of the enemy situation will cause commanders to emphasize reconnaissance in the search and attack.

• Review movement to contact considerations and limitations so that commanders can reduce the risks to their soldiers.

Mission Analysis

Most leaders understand that mission analysis results in the development of a restated mission, along with several other products that support planning for the search and attack. Company commanders rarely use the staff products of proper mission analysis to facilitate their own planning. Staff mission analysis as part of the estimate process results in the identification of the enemy's most probable course of action (COA), a modified combined obstacle overlay, and a time line, among other things.

The identification of the enemy's most probable COA and the use of the overlay are excellent in planning for the company search and attack. Company commanders can refine these products and conduct detailed planning. But they must also be able to visualize the meaning of the tasks in the mission statements. Understanding the subtle differences between tasks results in specific missions that are easier to achieve.

Understanding Tasks

Many units use the term "search and attack" as the *task* in their mission statements. But this use of the term typically does not mean "gather information so the company can develop an attack plan." Instead, it often results in units making numerous contacts and suffering high casualties while the enemy dispositions and intentions are unknown and he is still very effective.

Tasks are specific actions used to achieve measurable results, but commanders rarely use them in giving units their missions, and rarely use them for mission analysis or COA development. Executing each task requires resources, and some tasks may need to be augmented with engineers and combat service support assets.

The resources infantry units use are time, manpower, weapons, and supplies—variables that leaders must consider before employing units in any operation. In the search and attack, these resources are measured against the ability to cover ground and fight the enemy. If time is short and the task is difficult, the unit should request additional personnel. When this is not possible, the commander must review the unit's mission in order to stay within its ability to accomplish that mission reasonably. Leaders must understand the resource requirements for each task, based on the situation, so that they can recommend and request what is needed to execute the mission.

An examination of the term "search" is useful in understanding its application. The best use of the term is in cordon and search operations, which can be visualized as soldiers physically entering buildings to look for contraband and personnel. In search and attack missions, it is best described as soldiers entering a suspected enemy area and looking for signs of personnel, equipment, and supplies. The latter implies that reconnaissance must gather information to focus the search efforts. Understanding the tasks and terms in the search and attack will make it easier for the unit to analyze the requirements of the operation.

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Although soldiers in infantry rifle companies can perform certain tasks well in search and attack missions, their abilities diminish when fatigued and operating at night. For example, a soldier can effectively observe a sector at night for only about 30 minutes before his attention and alertness decrease. A team in an observation post (OP) can be effective for several hours if it rotates observers but cannot do this indefinitely. At some point it will need to rest. The requirement to observe or conduct reconnaissance translates into short and long duration operations. A good analogy is the comparison of sprinters to marathon runners. Sprinters in a 100-meter race know that they can expend all of their effort to reach the finish line and have time to recover before the next heat. But if marathon runners expend too much effort in the beginning, they won't be able to finish. Rifle platoons have the same problems as marathon runners when they start a mission at the sprinter's pace. Halfway into it, they are forced to fall out. Or they lose situational awareness and walk into an enemy ambush.

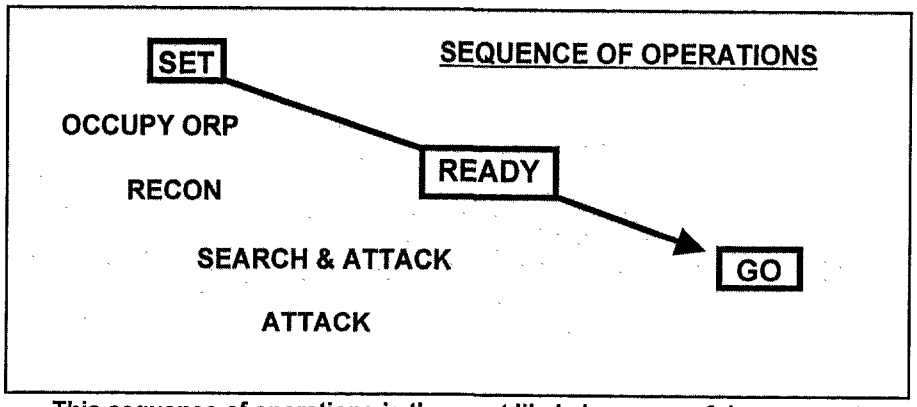
Long duration operations are usually more than 24 hours, requiring platoons to conduct sustainment actions. For shorter operations, a unit may be able to forego resupply until the mission is complete. Short operations are for those which a unit is required to execute for a specific, limited time (typically four to eight hours). An example is a platoon in a search and attack focusing on named areas of interest (NAIs). The focus on one NAI for a platoon allows it to provide a mutually supporting reconnaissance effort or OPs. This allows for a third squad to rotate from the objective release point (ORP) so that squads can conduct priorities of work and provide security. A platoon can typically observe one NAI for one long-duration operation or three NAIs for short periods. This applies to both OP and reconnaissance operations.

A dedicated security element is required for reconnaissance or observation operations; this is usually necessary for platoons, but it limits the number of squads looking for the enemy. Security usually consists of a squad that secures the flank of the reconnaissance and OP elements. Given the requirement to sustain, control, and provide security, a leader should understand that the use of ORPs is an important consideration in continuous operations. A leader reconnaissance and the ORP facilitate control, flexibility, and the dissemination of information. If these functions are properly performed, they will affect the amount of time and resources available

for reconnaissance and observation operations within the search and attack mission.

Given the terrain at the JRTC, these resource limitations force companies and platoons to operate in relatively small areas. An example is a task in which a platoon observes guerrilla infiltrations into the village. The platoon leader determines that he will use an OP operation. Considering the terrain and the most probable avenues of approach, the platoon will be able to set up only two OPs about 200 meters apart to observe one NAI. The platoon leader conducts a leader's reconnaissance to confirm or modify his plan. In the ORP he disseminates information from the leader's reconnaissance and then deploys his platoon.

The company commander can task the platoon to focus on the NAI where he expects the infiltration to occur. If the platoon leader is given more than one NAI, he needs to ask which has priority and to state any concerns he may have. More NAIs require him to cover an area with fewer observers. This may mean only 100 to 200 meters for each NAI, and this smaller sector increases the risk that the enemy will be able to infiltrate without being detected. A platoon should be assigned within its capabilities, to focus adequately on an approach. At company level, three platoons make it easier to cover more NAIs, but the commander is still limited to a small area in which to conduct reconnaissance operations. To avoid allowing the enemy the initiative to harass and disrupt his movement and static positions, the commander must commit a platoon to protecting the ORP or patrol base for operations of long duration. Otherwise, he will lose combat power relative to that of the enemy.



This sequence of operations is the most likely in successful movement

Analysis of the Enemy

The difference between techniques and operations in search and attack missions depends upon the quality and timeliness of intelligence. Intelligence is the reason leaders struggle with the search and attack technique in movement to contact operations. Many commanders have problems with situation development in the planning process. More specifically, they seem to lack understanding of the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) as part of the decision making process. This understanding is more than knowing what the battalion S-2 should produce. Detailed terrain analysis products—weather data summaries, detailed studies of the enemy's equipment and doctrine, and a logical set of enemy COA models depicting two or three possible enemy COAs—are useful in laying the foundation for the operation. These products identify the facts and assumptions about the battlefield and the enemy that lead to effective planning.

The IPB focuses on identifying the information needed to make decisions. In the search and attack, the S-2's situation template usually does not give the commander enough information to commit his company to a movement to contact operation, much less a search and attack. The S-2 may even provide the priority information requirements (PIRs) and key indicators for leaders to use in developing orders. Without hard facts about the enemy, units cannot clearly focus their combat power. The commander must take actions that will provide some concrete information relative to the situation.

The S-2's situation template is like a puzzle with none of the pieces in place. Search and attack missions are akin to putting the puzzle together with only the picture on the box to show what it will look like. Only when some pieces are joined and the picture starts to take shape can a commander gauge how long it will take to complete. Observations and information provide the pieces needed for the commander to decide on a course of action; for example, observations of enemy soldiers carrying heavy rucksacks in an isolated area, followed by reports of soldiers coming back with empty rucks or none, indicate patrol base or cache activities. This type of information, with other reports of helicopter or vehicle traffic, lends credence to specific enemy activities that indicate supply operations. Along with a knowledge of the surrounding terrain, this information helps a commander make an informed decision to conduct a movement to contact. With even more specific information, the commander could be in a situation where an approach march technique would better accomplish the mission.

A company commander needs to identify a decisive point to focus his platoon leaders' efforts. Initially, the decisive point may be the identification of the enemy's movement routes or patrol bases until a pattern can be developed. Companies need to collect evidence of indicators that will either confirm or deny enemy activity.

In the search and attack, many units conduct an operation on the basis of a decision that is not grounded in facts, or even in good assumptions. A unit may execute a search and attack mission because a higher level headquarters has directed it, or because it just seems like the right thing to do. The typical result is an operation that beats the bushes until contact occurs.

The commander always has to locate the enemy before he can determine how best to engage him. The recurring problem with units going into a search and attack is that they cannot effectively

develop an intelligence picture to focus combat power. Vague intelligence situations require operations that are designed to gather and develop information. The enemy situation, if not fully developed, should lead units to focus on reconnaissance to collect that information. One key to developing the enemy situation is to identify enemy weaknesses.

A review of the enemy's limitations may show that he has extended supply routes and relatively slow command and control systems, both of which are vital to his support. In contrast, his strengths may include familiarity with the terrain, small-unit capabilities, and an understanding of the culture. Typically, a U.S. force focuses on destroying small team-size elements that fight on our terms; however, units that attempt to fix and destroy squad-size forces by conducting a search and attack tend to fight the enemy on his own terms. They make contact with small elements on his ground where he has the initiative. This fight will result in high casualties for U.S. forces, and will probably fail to reduce the enemy's strength.

Units should focus on the enemy's weakness. For the brigade, this may mean cutting off his ability to support himself or denying him access to support from the local population. The brigade's decisive point may be a focus on the battalion or company supply point that will force the enemy to react. An enemy cut off from his support is forced to take risks to obtain supplies, and this forces him to fight on our terms. Forcing the enemy to expose himself enables us to predict his actions and plan accordingly. The point of main effort may be appropriate for battalion and brigade level operations, but at the rifle company level the enemy forces themselves are invariably the point of main effort.

The decisive point at the company level usually focuses on three things that the company commander identifies—terrain that puts the enemy at a disadvantage, an enemy weakness that can be exploited, or a time when the enemy's combat potential is degraded. At the JRTC, given the capabilities and experience of the opposing force, it is difficult to identify only terrain or time as a decisive point. Under such circumstances, the best objective point is the enemy soldiers themselves.

The commander usually selects the point of main effort on the basis of the enemy weakness where he can best focus combat power to accomplish his mission. To do this, the commander must understand how the enemy is likely to fight under given circumstances. The enemy usually operates in team-size elements, avoiding contact with rifle companies and does not initiate a fight unless it is on his own terms. The key is to attack these team-size elements as they move into or out of zone where a unit can mass superior combat power to prevent the enemy's escape while engaging him. This requires the company to observe enemy movement and to establish a pattern of that movement without being detected.

Focusing reconnaissance efforts to collect information on the enemy will enable the commander to set the conditions for success. Use of the IPB with collection efforts for indicators will translate into effective reconnaissance operations within the search and attack. This, in turn, will lead to focused combat operations to destroy what is vital to the enemy. The result will be a reactive enemy who will be forced to fight—and lose—on our terms.

Movement to Contact

In the search and attack, many company commanders do not demonstrate a fundamental understanding of movement to contact operations when developing courses of action, and they overlook the considerations of such operations. The search and attack, when applied appropriately, is a technique of movement to contact that is very effective against an elusive enemy.

Doctrine describes both the search and attack technique and the approach march technique as movement to contact operations that end when contact is made; then a hasty attack, deliberate attack, or other appropriate offensive action is launched to destroy the enemy. Commanders at the JRTC frequently overlook the use of reconnaissance in finding the enemy and delivering a decisive blow in the search and attack.

The movement to contact is one offensive operation used to gain and maintain contact with the enemy. Frequently, company commanders fail to maintain the initiative in the offense, and poorly developed plans in the search and attack usually cause units to lose the initiative. Maintaining the initiative consists of first locating the enemy without being detected, and this rarely occurs at the JRTC. Most contacts are meeting engagements in which the enemy usually wins. Initiative also results from fixing the enemy in position and suppressing his fires to allow movement of the friendly force. This enhances the unit's ability to identify, or create, a weakness to exploit. The final aspect of maintaining the initiative is delivering the violent and decisive blow. Without initiative, the unit's actions are just *re*actions to the enemy's own actions. Initiative in movement to contact operations is much more than individual effort. It is the result of developed plans that have positioned the company to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative.

Field Manual 7-10, *The Infantry Rifle Company*, shows that the search and attack technique of movement to contact operations, is normally used when the enemy's situation is vague and there is not enough time for extensive reconnaissance to find him. Because the enemy situation is unclear, the company moves in a way that provides security and still supports a rapid build-up of combat power against an enemy unit once it is located. One of the most important things that company commanders overlook is the ability of the company to retain freedom of maneuver.

The key to the search and attack is *making contact without first being detected.* This gives the commander three options: Destroy the enemy with the immediately available combat potential, maneuver the rest of the company to destroy the enemy, or follow the enemy force back to its base camp and destroy it there. To do this, however, the commander should already have addressed these contingencies in his plan and his decision making process.

A critical look at the way units use

the search and attack technique will show that *search* and attack is a misunderstood term. After all, units do not use the term *approach march* and attack. Most often, an approach march positions the unit for the hasty attack. This creates two sequential operations in which the unit does not execute the hasty attack until the approach march has been planned and executed. In the same light, the search and attack is fundamentally several different operations that units frequently try to accomplish at the same time and find they cannot do any of them effectively. A more appropriate term for what units attempt at the JRTC would be *reconnaissance operations* that position the unit for offensive operations in the search and attack.

Commanders need to emphasize that the search and attack does not equal three separate and distinct platoon-level tasks, but is a sequence of coordinated events. This technique of movement to contact operations does not involve the entire company until reconnaissance has set the conditions. Platoons should develop and execute reconnaissance, blocking, and assault operations to position combat power for the company operations. The company commander plans to position platoons in a sequence where reconnaissance is done first. When information is collected to confirm his decision, then a search and attack, in the classic sense, is conducted involving all platoons. This is how the find, fix, and finish concept of search and attack is accomplished.

A closer look at the reconnaissance techniques shows that proper use of the fundamentals will meet the requirements of what units try to accomplish in movement to contact operations. In the absence of an adequate intelligence picture for the search and attack or movement to contact, a reconnaissance operation is appropriate to develop the necessary information for search and attack missions and to position units for successful operations.

One of the problems company commanders have with the search and attack is understanding the role of reconnaissance. Frequently, commanders at all levels think reconnaissance simply means to find the enemy and then initiate a hasty attack to destroy him; if they can't destroy him, they either break contact or try to fix him for another element to destroy. This often results in squads and platoons finding the enemy but suffering high casualties because the engagement was on the enemy's terms. This misunderstanding is a fundamental problem at the JRTC. Units do not task organize, plan, and prepare to insert into the zone, and then execute a patient and deliberate information-gathering plan without being detected. It is much less costly to see the enemy, pinpoint his weaknesses, and then deliver a violent strike than it is to blunder into contacts with small units.

Typically, movement to contact operations are enemy oriented and require a moving force to gain and maintain contact with the enemy. For light infantry companies, this implies that they gain contact with rifle platoons and squads. These units operate in formations that provide security to the flank and front with very little emphasis on reconnaissance.

A review of the purposes of search and attack show that there are four: destruction of the enemy, area denial, force protection, and information collection. Of these four, information collection must be done first in order to execute the others effectively. Without a good information collection plan, units cannot focus combat power to accomplish the other purposes.

Company commanders and platoon leaders need guidance to focus planning efforts for movement to contact and reconnaissance operations. This guidance must be in the form of a clear task and purpose that does not dictate the operation the units will execute. Early in the search and attack, elements must focus on reconnaissance to gain information with the purpose of developing attack plans in the absence of a firm intelligence picture. Mission statements must clearly show the company's task and purpose. The execution paragraph should outline the concept of operations and tasks to platoons.

The following is an example of a mission statement and an execution paragraph:

MISSION: *Company A destroys enemy squads NET 230600 August in AO Foxtrot One to allow Team Clearance to clear MSR Blue to Jetertown.*

Commander's Intent: *Avoid detection until the company is positioned to attack.*

EXECUTION:

Concept of the operation. *The main effort will be enemy squads infiltrating into the area of operation to mine and conduct ambushes along the MSR (main supply route) This is a three-phased operation that will position the company for a hasty attack in the vicinity of the enemy's patrol bases. In Phase 1, I intend to use one platoon to identify routes and observe the movement of the enemy. Phases 1 ends when we have confirmed enemy sightings and a tentative area for their patrol base. In Phase II, I intend to maintain observation and move a platoon into blocking positions. Once this platoon is in position, we will begin with Phase III, in which we will use a search and attack technique of movement to contact to find the enemy. The main effort platoon will begin movement on order to make contact and transition to a hasty attack.*

Tasks to platoons:

1st Platoon. *Locate enemy forces in AO Foxtrot One to allow main effort to position for attack. On order, observe enemy movement to provide updated changes in situation to the main effort. Be prepared to assume 2d Platoon's mission to secure the ORP if no contact on day one.*

2d Platoon. *Secure the company ORP to allow the main effort to rehearse and conduct pre-combat inspections for the attack. On order, block enemy forces from escaping the main effort attack. Be prepared to assume 1st Platoon's mission if no contact on day one.*

3d Platoon. *Main effort. On order, destroy enemy forces in AO Foxtrot One to allow Team Clearance to clear MSR Blue to Jetertown.*

This sample from a company order shows clear tasks and purposes for the company and its platoons. The main effort platoon clearly has the mission of accomplishing the company's task and purpose. The other two platoons have

supporting efforts. It is important to understand that in this example the commander articulates *what* has to be done and not *how*. He allows the platoon leaders to refine their analyses of the situation and develop appropriate courses of action. He has also considered his limitations and outlined an end state in case no contact is made by the end of the day. These are mission tactics with clear use of language to facilitate understanding and allow initiative.

Movement to contact search and attack operations are appropriate when the commander has enough information to pinpoint the enemy in a relatively small area but not enough to commit to an approach-march technique. This situation may include reports from observation posts or reconnaissance operations observing enemy foot and vehicle movement into an isolated area. Additional reports may provide information that enemy helicopters have been landing in the same vicinity. The S-2 may validate this information with his terrain analysis that water sources and vegetation in the area could support a patrol base.

Given the nature of the enemy's ability to move a supply or patrol base in a short time, the commander might be risking too much if he conducted further reconnaissance trying to pinpoint the suspected enemy fixed site. This provides the right situation in which to conduct a movement to contact *operation* using the search and attack *technique*.

In the initial phases of the search and attack when the situation is vague, it may be feasible for only one company to conduct it. Within the company, one platoon may be tasked to locate or observe enemy activity in a *reconnaissance* operation, while the other platoons are protecting the ORP or preparing for *assault* operations. The company's focus is on reconnaissance to collect information for the targeting process. Once the commander has enough information to confirm a decision, the company conducts the search and attack technique of the movement to contact operation.

This is where the find, fix, and finish concept is especially applicable. The company has an objective narrowed down to a manageable area. At the JRTC, this may be an area no larger than several hundred meters across. Each of the rifle platoons is task organized to support the company operation. The main effort platoon is tasked to destroy the enemy, which may translate into an assault element. Supporting efforts include one platoon tasked to block the enemy's escape or isolate the area, which may translate into several squad-size ambush operations. Another platoon, as a supporting effort, may be the search element in the company's search and attack. As the lead element in the movement to contact, this is the unit that will deliberately "search" the ground with squad size units until contact is made.

This search is not a reconnaissance to avoid detection. It is a deliberate movement to make contact with the enemy. Once contact is made, the company moves into position to destroy the enemy. It also positions itself to retain the initiative by fixing the enemy, establishing suppressive fires, creating or locating a weakness, and delivering a decisive blow with the main effort assault platoon. In his decision making process, the commander assigns control measures to synchronize his platoons. As a minimum, these measures include an objective, a limit of advance, and link-up points. This will facilitate actions in the event the situation changes and the commander must redirect his company.

The problems company commanders and platoon leaders have with the search and attack can be reduced if commanders start with the understanding that the movement to contact positions the company where freedom of maneuver will allow it to retain the initiative. The company commander needs to establish a point of main effort with the emphasis on seeing the enemy without being detected prematurely. The unit does not fight the enemy until the commander has established the conditions under which he wants to fight, and he establishes these terms by developing the situation through reconnaissance. To do this at his own level, each leader should know the fundamentals of reconnaissance and be able to assess and decide. He must know the estimate process, understand the meaning of stated and implied tasks, and know which IPB products the S-2 can provide.

The understanding of the resources to apply against mission requirements provides the information to develop the appropriate course of action through good mission analysis and situation development. This also arms a leader with the information he needs to ask questions and outline risks. He should use enemy situation templates to identify areas on the battlefield where and when he expects significant events to occur or targets to appear. He continues to use the situation template during the mission to piece together the picture on his map, and then to focus the effort. Leaders can also use this updated template to debrief at the end of the operation. This is especially valuable for the search and attack because any enemy movement later reported will add further information to be considered. Leaders should emphasize that squads do not at first have to engage the enemy to accomplish the mission. Contact without the enemy's knowledge will allow the commander to make a decision for future decisive action. Orders should include tasks such as *observe* to further develop the situation and position the company for success. If leaders update their situation templates, they can better determine where the enemy will focus and then concentrate their efforts in that area.

The use of specific tasks and initial reconnaissance operations will save many hours of analysis by pinpointing specific areas on which to focus the effort. This will ensure that platoons are not sent on missions before they are positioned for success.

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