

“Go Find the Enemy!”

Use of Available Time During Movement to Contact

MAJOR SCOTT W. HEINTZELMAN

The purpose of a *movement-to-contact* is to gain or reestablish contact with the enemy. However, rotational units at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) tend to spend most of their time during this phase conducting force protection tasks.

They remain stationary far too long, thus relinquishing the initiative to the enemy and allowing him to set the terms of battle. Naturally, the enemy attacks only when those terms are favorable, and the vast majority of direct fire contacts end in his favor.

Units must understand that the operative word in movement to contact is *movement*. Stationary units are targets. But there are measures unit leaders can take to avoid that trap as they prepare for future JRTC rotations.

Because rotational units face a dispersed enemy, most choose the *search-and-attack* technique to locate the enemy during the *movement-to-contact* phase. Field Manual (FM) 7-20, *The Infantry Battalion*, states that the purpose of a search and attack is focused on four primary areas: *Destruction of the enemy, area denial, force protection, and information collection.*

When rotational units begin the movement-to-contact phase, OCs track the way each maneuver platoon uses its time in each of these areas. Using FM 7-20 as a guide, senior analysts have further defined the areas in greater detail: We then use this information to facilitate discussion in after-action reviews (AARs).

Destruction of the enemy—killing or capturing the enemy. Actively searching for enemy forces or being in physical contact with them.

Area denial—preventing the enemy from operating unhindered in an area, such as cordons, blocking positions, traffic control points, ambushes, security patrols.

Force protection—protecting key facilities such as the brigade tactical operations center, Q-36 radar, Sentinel air defense radar, forward arming and refueling point, and the reverse osmosis water purification unit. Additionally, time spent in patrol bases, as well as conducting resupply operations and casualty evacuation.

Information collection—observing named areas of interest, reconnaissance patrols, questioning civilians.

OCs routinely coach units to spend most of their available time actively

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searching for the enemy. This gives priority to the areas where the enemy can be fixed and destroyed, area denial, and information collection. Protecting key facilities is a legitimate task, as is the requirement to conduct patrol-base activities so soldiers can sleep, eat, and clean their weapons. In addition, planning and preparing for upcoming operations frequently takes place during patrol base activities, but these activities support only the mission of movement to contact. Spending most of the available time in patrol bases surrenders the

initiative to the enemy. That means rotational units lose freedom of action and consequently can only react to the enemy's initiative. Units should spend more than half of the available time on finding the enemy. That is the purpose of a movement to contact. It will allow rotational units to maintain the initiative and set the tempo of battle.

Unfortunately, data collected at the JRTC shows that units spend most of their time conducting force protection tasks. A study of six rotations (three light infantry, two air assault infantry, and one airborne infantry) revealed that units spend an average of eight percent of their time conducting destruction of the enemy, 27 percent conducting area denial, 60 percent conducting force protection, and five percent collecting information.

Additionally, units spend a significant portion of the force protection time in patrol bases, not guarding key facilities. Thus, units spend more time protecting themselves than they do searching for and attacking the enemy.

Stationary units allow the enemy to gain the initiative, deciding when and where to make contact and under what terms. The enemy initiates an attack only when all the conditions are favorable; in these six rotations, the enemy initiated contact nearly 70 percent of the time. As a result, the rotational units were seldom prepared to use combined arms—indirect fires, attack aviation, armor/mechanized infantry, and close air support—in response. Rotational units—using direct fire plus one other system as the standard for combined arms—employed combined arms in only 23 percent of the contacts. This

lack of combined arms also allowed the escape of almost 75 percent of the enemy encountered. Furthermore, units maneuvered against the enemy only 21 percent of the time, another principal factor in allowing the enemy to escape. Lastly, since most of the contacts at the JRTC are infantry-against-infantry fights, the enemy causes four friendly casualties for every one he sustains. When units remain stationary, the enemy gains a tremendous advantage.

There are two primary reasons that units remain stationary so much of the time: The first is that logistics often drive maneuver. The average rifle company spends much of each day waiting for supplies, especially water. In the summer, water is often critical to continued operations. Unit logisticians fail to anticipate the resupply needs of rifle companies, and the companies seldom send logistical status reports to the logisticians. Units run out of supplies and must cease operations while waiting for emergency resupply. In addition, units often wait far too long for casualty evacuation.

The other reason units spend so much time in patrol bases is that they are waiting for missions from battalion. After the initial insertion, most battalion staffs fail to plan 24 hours ahead. Instead, they wait for the enemy to act, and then react to these events, sending rifle companies all over the battlefield without much planning or preparation. If there are no current enemy events,

companies simply wait in patrol bases for the next mission. Retaining the initiative requires thinking ahead and planning past the initial operation.

To solve the logistics problem, units need to establish a battle rhythm where the staff is able to deliver the next day's mission to the companies approximately 24 hours before execution. This keeps units from waiting for missions, and thus becoming lucrative targets for the enemy. It also allows the company commanders to complete their current operations and still have time to plan for the next day.

A useful technique is to establish a daily rhythm for the battalion commander's delivery of a fragmentary order for the next day's operations during battlefield circulation.

Anticipation and reporting are the two fixes for the supply problem. The battalion S-4 should be able to anticipate what the average rifle company needs each day. By establishing a list of standard daily requirements (water, rations, batteries, ammunition), the battalion S-4 can at least ensure that each company gets enough supplies to continue to operate, whether they have requested those supplies or not. Additionally, a daily battle rhythm of logistical resupply, such as one resupply delivery every morning or evening, would allow company commanders to include this daily resupply when planning their operations.

Even with accurate anticipation of

needs, reporting is still important. Companies must submit daily logistical status reports, with special emphasis on any supplies not included on the daily requirements list. If the S-4 is not receiving timely reports, for whatever reason—such as lack of FM communications—he must go get them in person. The support platoon leader might collect the reports during the daily logistical package deliveries. In addition, the battalion executive officer should track the daily submission of reports as well as the status of supplies for each company. His oversight of the logistics system should enable any company to continue operations.

Rotational units at the JRTC need to spend more time searching for the enemy and less time in patrol bases. Failure to do this gives the enemy a tremendous advantage. To maintain the initiative, units must anticipate and report logistical requirements and plan for operations in advance.

In short, the units that go find the enemy first will succeed.

Major Scott W. Heintzelman is a senior battalion analyst at the Joint Readiness Training Center, where he previously served as a platoon, company, and assistant operations observer-controller. He served as a platoon leader, company executive officer, and battalion and brigade staff officer in the 7th Infantry Division, and as a rifle company commander and battalion and brigade staff officer in the 25th Infantry Division. He is a 1989 graduate of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and holds a master's degree from Louisiana State University.
