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RESEARCH MEMORANDUM


PLATTRAIN
PREMISES AND TRAINING IMPLICATIONS
RELATED TO IMPROVING THE TACTICAL PRO-
FICIENCY OF RIFLE PLATOONS

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PLATTRAIN
PREMISES AND TRAINING IMPLICATIONS RELATED TO
IMPROVING THE TACTICAL PROFICIENCY OF RIFLE PLATOONS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of Task PLATTRAIN was to develop procedures and methods to improve the tactical proficiency of the rifle platoon.

Beginning in January 1957 the PLATTRAIN staff undertook background research oriented toward the development of premises and training implications to serve as a base upon which subsequent programs of training research could be built. In short, the premises and training implications were intended to serve as guidelines for the development of training.

In the development of these premises, three relevant sources of background information which were studied were tactical doctrine, combat literature, and the literature of previous research.

This paper presents the premises and training implications which were developed.

Tactical Doctrine

The study of tactical doctrine provided an overview of the activities required to accomplish the various tactical missions of the rifle platoon. The study of doctrine determined the current thinking regarding the tactical employment of the rifle platoon as envisioned by the ROCID concept.

The doctrine for each general class of mission (i. e., attack, defense, and retrograde) was translated into diagrams which set forth the specific events and their space-time relations required for the phase-by-phase accomplishment of each mission. These diagrams indicated the time-space-event relationships of each phase for each kind of mission. For example, a particular section of the diagram depicting one phase of the platoon in a daylight attack indicated that at a specific time in the attack sequence the platoon is moving from the attack position to the line of departure in certain prescribed formations, under certain prescribed conditions of support.

The time-space-event relationships were reduced to listings of the specific tasks required of the platoon personnel for each particular phase to occur successfully. Using one phase of a daylight attack again as an example, the specific tasks were listed showing what is required of the platoon leader, the squad leaders, and the platoon members as the platoon moves from the attack position to the line of departure.

The diagrammatic analyses were made for the following general missions of the rifle platoon:

- (1) Preparation for and conduct of attack, including daylight, night, supported, unsupported, illuminated, and non-illuminated missions.
- (2) Preparation for and conduct of defense, including day defense and relief of a defense (present doctrine does not consider night defense separately from day defense).
- (3) Preparation for and conduct of retrograde movements including day and night withdrawals and delaying actions.

Missions which are special cases of the above general missions (platoon on combat patrol, platoon on combat outpost, etc.) were not treated separately.

A detailed and systematic summary of current tactical doctrine for the rifle platoon was written.

Combat Literature

Review of the literature of infantry small-unit combat experiences of World War II and Korea included reading and abstracting (1) military periodicals (Army, Combat Forces Journal, Infantry Journal, Marine Corps Gazette, etc.), (2) military books (Pork Chop Hill, Men Against Fire, War As I Knew It, The Rommel Papers, etc.), (3) student officer monographs written for

the Advanced Infantry Officers Class at USAIS, and (4) various other publications including both classified and unclassified combat reports. Of primary interest was the determination of those factors in American battlefield techniques which contributed to both successful and unsuccessful small-unit actions. This literature survey pointed out how a number of factors relevant to effective small-unit tactical operations have been implemented in past combat. Comparison of a number of successful operations with those which failed resulted in the crystallization of certain factors which were common to success and to failure in small-unit actions.

A summary of the literature and a selected bibliography are to be published as a research memorandum.

Research Literature

The research literature was reviewed for findings of prior military, industrial, and academic research in the areas of small-group functioning and small-group leadership. The general problems of group functioning and leadership, in many situations and with many types of personnel, were studied to determine what variables have been ascertained to be related to effective small-group functioning and small-group leadership. The goal was to uncover the outstanding variable or variables which research in this field has uncovered.

The literature was summarized and a selected bibliography was prepared.¹

PREMISE STATEMENTS

These premise statements, derived from the study of doctrine, combat literature, and prior research, summarize the critical areas which must be considered in the development of new training if difficulties experienced in past combat are to be overcome and the requirements imposed by new doctrine are to be implemented successfully. In short, these statements summarize those factors which have complicated smooth rifle platoon functioning in the past and probably will complicate smooth functioning in the future.

Discussed first are those factors internal to the rifle platoon which have complicated tactical operations of platoons. Included here are (1) control and communication and (2) techniques of operation. Training emphasis oriented toward these areas would aim to eliminate them as difficulties in future platoon tactical operations.

Also, discussed are those factors external to the rifle platoon which have been found to, or may in future operations, complicate smooth functioning. These factors represent the combat conditions under which platoons operate and over which they have little or no control. Two categories discussed here are (1) conditions experienced in past combat and (2) conditions anticipated to be emphasized by future combat. Training emphasis oriented toward these areas would aim to prepare platoons to anticipate, and to operate under, these conditions.

In presenting these statements, an attempt has been made to avoid the use of relative qualifiers such as frequently, often, etc. For example, rather than "Subordinates often were not able to assume control," the statement reads "Subordinates were not. . . ." This omission of such qualifiers should not be construed as an implication that these factors have operated or will operate 100% of the time as stated.

Past Difficulties of Rifle Platoons in Tactical Operations

1. Control and Communication

a. A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CONDUCT OF PLATOON TACTICAL OPERATIONS HAS BEEN THE PROGRESSIVE DETERIORATION (OVER TIME) OF CONTROL.

- (1) Casualties among leaders were extremely high.
- (2) Subordinates were not able to assume control.
- (3) Provisions for communication progressively failed.

¹ To be published as a Research Memorandum, USAIHRU.

b. INFORMATION FLOW BEFORE AND DURING THE CONDUCT OF PLATOON TACTICAL OPERATIONS HAS BEEN INADEQUATE.

(1) Troops were not given sufficient information and orientation to understand the mission.

(2) Troops failed to promptly and accurately report information vital to accomplishment of the mission.

(3) Platoons lost contact with adjacent units and thus had to fight as though isolated.

c. THE UNIT COHESIVENESS REQUIRED FOR EFFECTIVE PLATOON FUNCTIONING HAS BEEN INADEQUATE EXCEPTING UNITS WHICH HAD BEEN SPECIALLY TRAINED OR SEASONED BY EXPERIENCE.

(1) A sense of interdependence and mutual responsibility among platoon members was absent.

(2) Troops did not maintain individual-to-individual contact and thus fought as isolated individuals.

2. Techniques of Operation

a. DURING PLATOON TACTICAL OPERATIONS, PROVISIONS FOR ESTABLISHING SECURITY HAVE BEEN LAX.

(1) Unit security measures, e. g., establishing flank or local security, were not rigorously employed.

(2) Troops were careless in the employment of individual security measures, particularly camouflage, light, and noise discipline.

b. CARELESS PLATOON TACTICAL UTILIZATION OF TERRAIN, PARTICULARLY IN THE OFFENSE, HAS BEEN COMMON.

(1) In attacks, units followed the most convenient or easiest line of advance to the objective rather than varying their approach to make the best use of terrain, e. g., draw vs. ridge, wooded vs. open.

(2) Troops did not practice dispersion as dictated by the tactical requirements of terrain, vegetation, and enemy fire.

c. DETAIL OF PLATOON PERSONNEL AND PLATOON WEAPONS FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF SPECIFIC TACTICAL MISSIONS HAS BEEN FAULTY.

(1) Groups of improper size met difficulty in attempting to accomplish their missions, e. g., night patrols consisting of three squads could not maintain the secrecy required to gather information; single squads could not successfully attack platoon objectives.

(2) Troops did not appropriately vary the employment of their individual weapons to meet the requirements of different situations.

d. GREEN PERSONNEL HAVE NOT ANTICIPATED THE HARSH CONDITIONS OF THE BATTLEFIELD.

(1) Troops could not cope with the mental stress imposed by combat.

(2) Troops were not prepared to overcome the degenerative effects of fear.

(3) Troops were unable to withstand extreme physical privation and exertion.

(4) Troops were not prepared to respond effectively to the sights and sounds encountered, e. g., fleeting visual indications, the sounds of friendly vs. enemy fire.

Combat Conditions Under Which Rifle Platoons Operate

1. Conditions Experienced in Past Combat

a. TIME PRESSURES AT THE PLATOON LEVEL HAVE DILUTED THE EFFICIENCY OF PLANNING FOR TACTICAL OPERATIONS, PARTICULARLY IN THE OFFENSE.

(1) Time was not available for complete troop leading procedures.¹

(2) Time was not available for adequate individual preparation.

b. A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CONDUCT OF PLATOON OPERATIONS HAS BEEN PROGRESSIVE ATTRITION (OVER TIME) IN PLATOON STRENGTH.

(1) Platoons were required to fight sustained actions which resulted in severe attrition of personnel and equipment.

¹ Planning and troop orientation prior to conduct of an operation.

(2) Platoons did not anticipate, and plan for, losses of key personnel and equipment.
c. PLATOONS HAVE HAD TO CONDUCT TACTICAL OPERATIONS ALONE IN THAT SUPPORTING FIRES HAVE NOT ALWAYS BEEN AVAILABLE.

(1) Considerations of weather and of higher priorities denied air support to platoons.
(2) Considerations of higher priorities, ammunition shortages, and absence of communications required platoons to fight without artillery support.

2. Conditions Anticipated To Be Emphasized By Future Combat

a. PLATOONS MUST BE PREPARED TO OPERATE AROUND THE CLOCK UNDER ALL CONDITIONS OF VISIBILITY.

(1) Platoons will be required to fight at night under varying levels of both natural and artificial illumination.

(2) Platoons will be required to fight under conditions that limit daytime visibility, e. g., smoke, fog.

b. PLATOONS MUST BE PREPARED TO OPERATE AS PART OF COMBINED-ARMS TASK FORCES.

(1) Platoons will be required to fight in close coordination with, and also against, armor.

(2) Platoons will be required to fight in close coordination with, and also against, mass destruction weapons.

c. PLATOONS MUST BE PREPARED TO OPERATE UNDER THE CONCEPTS OF MOBILITY AND DISPERSION.

(1) Dispersion on the battlefield will require platoons to fight from isolated strong points as part of larger forces, or singly.

(2) Isolation for sustained periods will require platoons to get along with a minimum of resupply.

(3) Platoons will be required to move distances of many miles in relatively short time intervals as part of larger forces, or singly. Retrograde movements will be an integral part of offensive operations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING

The premise statements summarize the work basic to the development of subsequent areas of training research. Given the conditions outlined by the premises, it remained to spell out the training indicated as being required if the tactical proficiency of rifle platoons is to be improved. The derived implications for training are presented according to (1) individual training indicated for the rifle platoon member, (2) individual training indicated for the platoon leader and squad leaders, and (3) tactical training indicated for rifle platoons as units.

Implications for Training the Individual Rifle Platoon Member

Individuals need to be trained to

- (1) Function effectively in squad and platoon formations.
- (2) Function in the various positions within the platoon.
- (3) React promptly and effectively to orders.
- (4) Be prepared to assume command of their immediate unit.
- (5) Operate as a member of the various types of patrols.
- (6) Be skilled in the techniques of individual-to-individual communications.
- (7) Develop a sense of individual-to-individual interdependency and mutual reliability.
- (8) Operate and perform user maintenance on all company communications equipment.
- (9) Observe and report accurately and promptly.
- (10) Be tactically and technically proficient with all rifle platoon weapons.
- (11) Adjust and utilize supporting fires.
- (12) Know the capabilities and limitations of supporting fires, both friendly and enemy.

(13) Know the capabilities and limitations of other arms and branches of service, particularly air, armor, artillery, and engineer.

(14) Utilize available cover and concealment.

(15) Properly employ individual security measures.

(16) Utilize field fortifications, both hasty and prepared.

(17) Administer first aid to themselves as well as to others.

(18) Practice personal hygiene and field sanitation.

(19) Maintain clothing and equipment.

(20) Be mentally and physically conditioned to accept the harsh conditions of the battlefield.

(21) Anticipate the physically exhausting effects of intense fear.

(22) Anticipate the isolation commonly experienced on the battlefield.

(23) Be prepared for activity on a moment's notice.

(24) Be prepared to move long distances, with or without transportation.

(25) Function effectively under the conditions of ABC warfare.

(26) Perform tasks under all types of visibility conditions.

Implications for the Training of Rifle Platoon and Squad Leaders

Leaders need to be trained to

(1) Function in the next higher command position.

(2) Operate and perform user maintenance on all communication equipment with which they will be working.

(3) Recognize the importance of, and to plan for, alternate means of communication.

(4) Recognize the importance of, and to encourage, individual-to-individual communications.

(5) Observe and report accurately and promptly.

(6) Provide for platoon security measures.

(7) Make maximum utilization of available time, thereby insuring dissemination of "need to know" information.

(8) Know squad and platoon tactics.

(9) Evaluate and utilize terrain.

(10) Land navigate on foot and by transport.

(11) Be familiar with all infantry weapons.

(12) Anticipate and plan for personnel losses.

(13) Know fire planning procedures and the need for fire coordination.

(14) Know how to call for, adjust, and utilize supporting fires.

(15) Utilize various conditions of visibility to the advantage of their unit.

(16) Know the capabilities and limitations of other arms and branches with which their unit will be working.

(17) Plan for proper employment of small task forces.

(18) Be familiar with all individual skills within their unit.

(19) Supervise group operations.

(20) Administer a platoon and provide for platoon supply.

Implications for Training Rifle Platoons as Units

Platoons need to engage in tactical exercises which train them to

(1) Operate by using preplanned "plays."

(2) Utilize alternate means of communication.

(3) Operate effectively on short notice.

(4) Utilize surprise and security measures.

(5) Operate under the harsh conditions imposed by adverse weather and difficult terrain.

(6) Operate while sustaining personnel and equipment losses.

- (7) Operate as an isolated unit or a part of an isolated unit.
- (8) Operate over prolonged periods of time.
- (9) Operate under various conditions of visibility and chemical, biological, and radiological warfare.
- (10) Operate in and against combined-arms operations.
- (11) Operate as a part of a larger force.
- (12) Operate with or without supporting fires.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Tactical doctrine, combat literature, and the literature of previous research were studied to develop premises and training implications to serve as a base upon which subsequent programs of training research relevant to the rifle platoon could be built.

A set of premise statements was presented summarizing those factors which have complicated smooth rifle platoon functioning in the past and probably will complicate smooth functioning in the future. Separate sets of statements outlining the implications of these premises for training the individual platoon member, the platoon and squad leaders, and platoons as units were written.

It is the conclusion of this paper that the foregoing premise statements and their implications for training must be given priority consideration in the development of future training programs involving the rifle platoon, its leaders, and individual members. Analysis of past combat, ROCID doctrine, and pertinent research indicate that the areas pinpointed here are critical ones. This paper does not intend to convey the impression that these areas are the only ones to which training time should be devoted. There are a number of other areas, as well as these, in which platoon members, leaders, and platoons as units need to be trained. The areas discussed here are the critical ones to be given every possible training emphasis if we are to profit from the lessons of past experience and the opportunity to anticipate and plan for future combat problems.

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