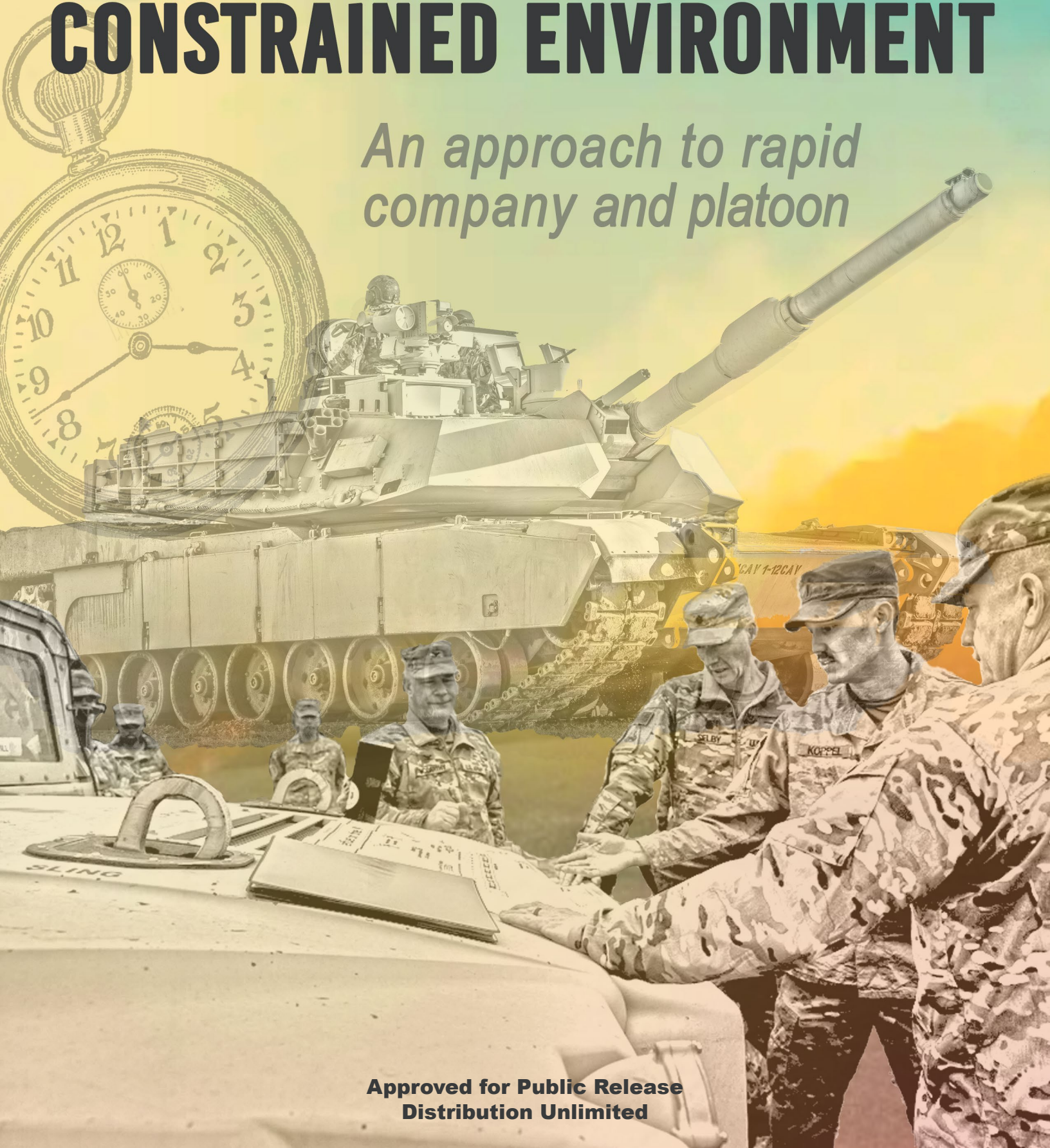


PLANNING IN A TIME CONSTRAINED ENVIRONMENT

*An approach to rapid
company and platoon*



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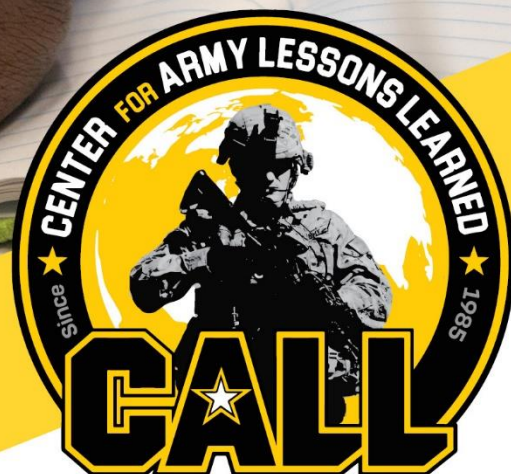
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Foreword

The Army provides leaders at all levels training in deliberate planning during their professional military education (PME) courses. However, rarely do these courses train Lieutenants and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) on how to plan under significant time constraints. Short planning periods during institutional training – between four and eight hours – do not replicate the stresses of planning in one to two hours in response to a higher headquarters fragmentary order (FRAGORD) while sleep deprived and lacking a complete understanding of the enemy situation. This paper provides an approach to the troop leading procedures (TLP) process, both before and during execution, that can guide leaders through a rapid planning process. It is not a replacement for the TLP process, but an approach to its application.

Preparation – Getting Left of the Bang

Planning coherent company and platoon operations quickly is challenging. Units and leaders must prepare for rapid planning by understanding roles and responsibilities. Before operations begin, during individual and collective unit training, units and leaders must establish detailed standard operating procedures (SOPs), conduct thorough intelligence preparation of the operational environment (IPOE), and prepare their personal and organizational products.

Standard Operating Procedures

Effective SOPs are critical. To plan quickly, units must thoroughly understand and train on their SOPs. Company and platoon SOPs must include the information necessary to enable subordinate leaders to support the rapid planning process while leaders engage in planning tasks. SOPs must include the following:

- **Unit specific battle drills or “plays”** Platoons and companies must understand how their organization fights and what their own and their adjacent elements’ actions are during crucial periods of the operation. What does 1st Platoon do if 2nd Platoon makes contact? How does the company control crossing danger areas, intervisibility lines, or canalizing terrain? Understanding these actions streamlines the orders process by reducing the amount of information relayed and allows leaders to direct subordinate rehearsal actions while planning. This allows the platoon leader or commander to simply direct the rehearsal of actions like actions on contact, medical evacuation, and defile drills and trust that all subordinate leaders understand and can execute sufficiently to conduct unsupervised rehearsals. Using simple plays allows companies and platoons to maneuver according to a pre-rehearsed plan, accounting for external factors like terrain and enemy situation. These plays can also outline the necessary rehearsals. For example, upon receiving a FRAGORD, the commander can inform subordinate leaders that the company will be conducting a movement to contact, using their two-up, one-back scheme. This information provides the initial plan for platoon leaders, and because it is in the company tactical SOP (TACSOP), directs three rehearsals for each platoon to execute during preparation.

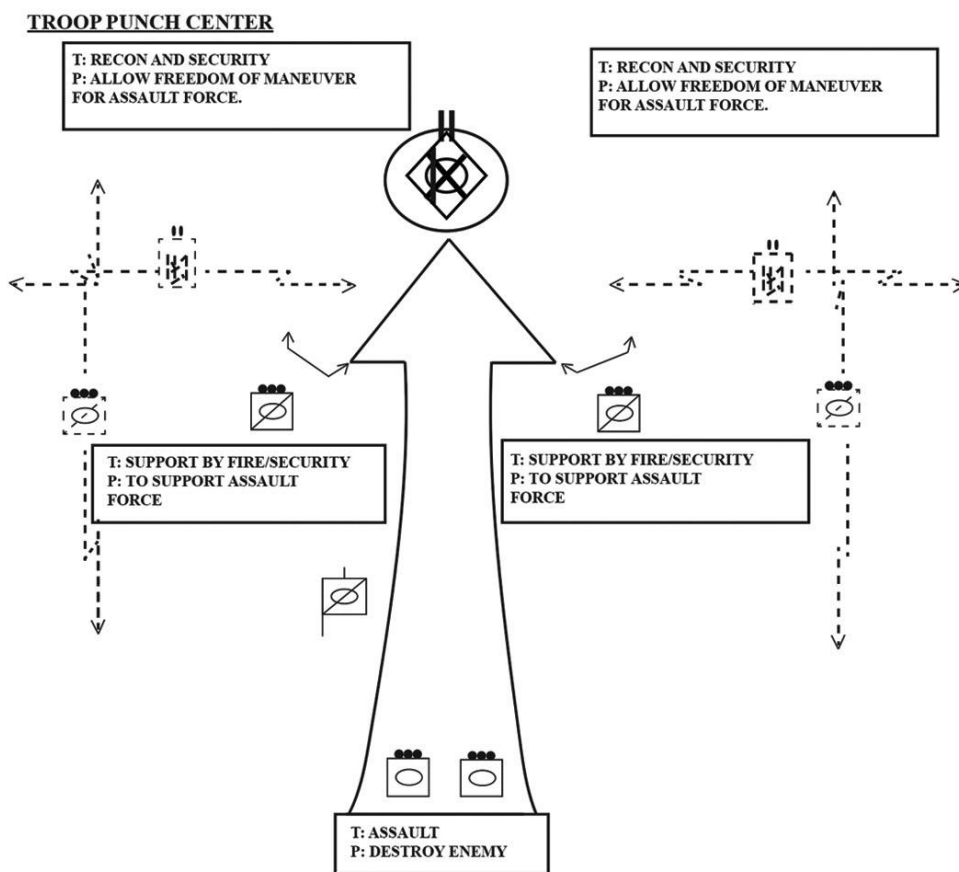


Figure 1. Example Troop React to Contact Drill¹

- **Unit Basic Loads (UBLs)** Soldiers and leaders must know their required unit and individual loads. In a compressed planning timeline, this allows subordinate leaders to quickly understand their current logistics status, identify critical shortages, and address those shortages before they impact the operations timeline. Furthermore, individual Soldiers must understand how the type of operation changes the UBL. What changes does the B-Team Rifleman from 1st Squad make to their load if the mission changes from an ambush to a hasty defense? How does one communicate these requirements to the team and squad leaders? Understanding this information allows subordinates to assist in the planning process by quickly providing updated information which may impact operational planning.
- **Load Plans** SOPs must cover vehicle and Soldier load plans in detail. Detailed load plans assist subordinate leaders in preparing for mission execution in several ways. First, they speed the pre-combat check (PCC) and pre-combat inspection (PCI) process by having a well-defined and clearly understood location for all equipment. Second, this process helps inform updated logistics status report (LOGSTAT) by removing the need to look in multiple places for an item. Finally, following load plans provide more time for

¹ 1st Squadron 4th Cavalry Regiment. *Maneuver Pamphlet*. Fort Riley. July 2020

rehearsals and increase their value by allowing Soldiers to rehearse with all equipment in its proper place.

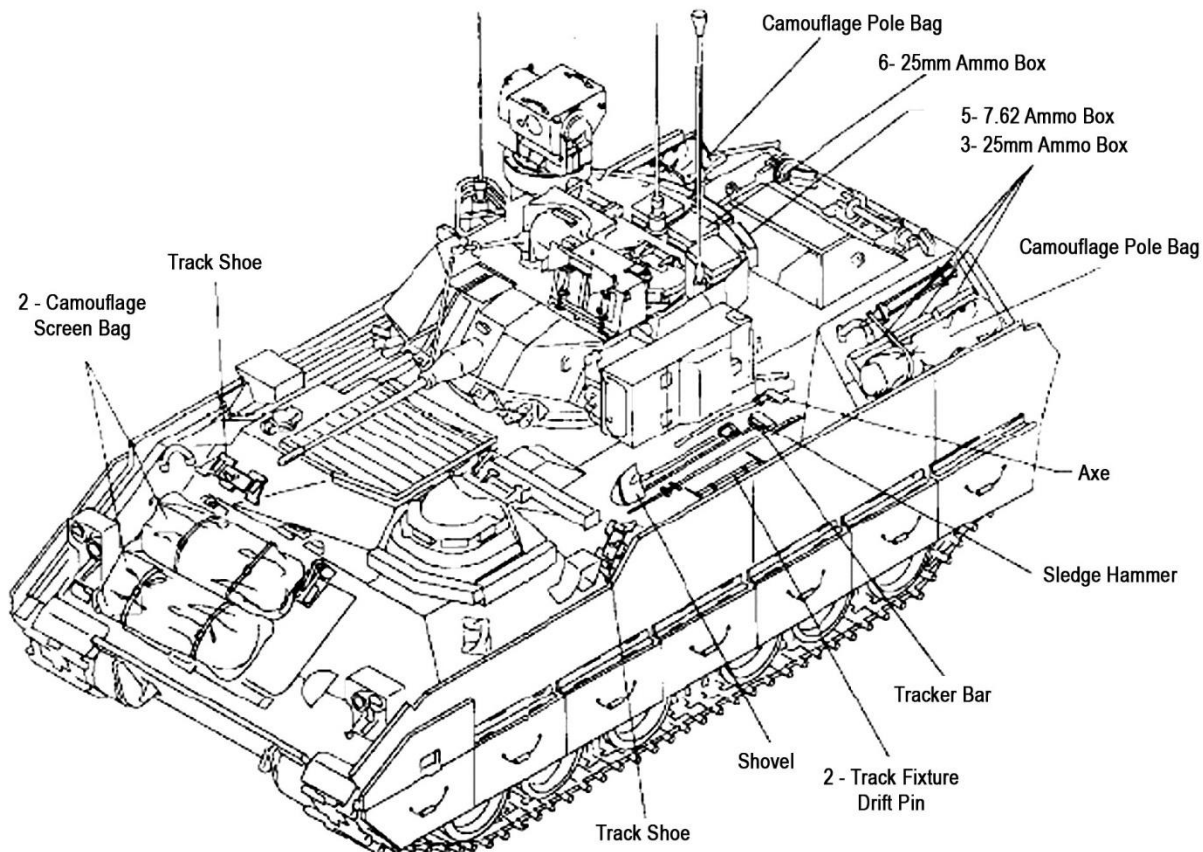


Figure 2. Example M2 Bradley External Load Plan²

Conduct Detailed IPOE

Intelligence preparation for the operational environment (IPOE) is crucial for planning. Units and leaders that take the time to understand the effects of the operational environment on friendly and enemy maneuver will increase their effectiveness and decrease the amount of time necessary for rapid planning. Consider the following:

- **The operational environment is larger than your area of operations.** Many leaders conduct focused IPOE in their area of operations (AO) during their TLP process, however they fail to account for terrain effects or enemy outside of their AO. Failing to account for these effects leads to issues while executing the deliberately planned operation by not accounting for what can impact the friendly unit from outside of their AO.

² 1st Battalion 66th Armor Regiment. *TACSOP*. Fort Carson, CO. AGU 2016.

When conducting rapid planning, understanding the terrain and enemy in the unit's area of interest is critical to rapidly adjusting plans or rapidly planning new operations. Developing an understanding of all terrain and enemy that can impact the unit's maneuver or that the unit may encounter decreases the amount of time required to reassess the IPOE in time constrained environments.

- **Electro-magnetic and Electronic Warfare Systems.** Leaders must understand how electronic warfare (EW) systems and their effect on the electro-magnetic spectrum (EMS) impact their units. By including EW systems and EMS requirements into IPOE, leaders can better understand how those systems will impact their operations. Leaders need to understand areas that have increased risk of adverse enemy effects like FM jamming, GPS denial, or other EW effects. Similarly, understanding areas that are permissive to using communication and other systems on the EMS will allow leaders to better understand where to place critical communications capabilities or conduct necessary communications over digital or FM systems.
- **Plan Reconnaissance.** While conducting IPOE leaders must identify triggers for conducting reconnaissance and reconnaissance objectives, typically named areas of interest (NAI), that will impact their operations. At the company and platoon levels, commanders and leaders do not typically have NAIs, but they can identify areas where they will need to gain increased situational awareness or information during the operation. This can include significant intervisibility lines, masking terrain, areas suspected to be difficult to traverse, and, of course, suspected enemy locations. Planning the areas to reconnoiter, the triggers, and the assets used to gather information saves time during planning and allows leaders to direct unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) operators to conduct this reconnaissance during planning or when triggers are met during operations.

Preparing Personal and Organizational Products

Units and leaders must develop their fighting tools during training. Developing personal products like map boards, reference products, and “cheat sheets” prior to execution enables leaders to test and refine their products. Understanding what you need to assist you in planning and operations, as well as refining their use, removes mental friction while planning quickly. Organizationally, developing products, overlays and other reference and planning tools during training allows leaders to practice and become comfortable using them. Below are some personal products that leaders should consider developing for themselves and their organizations.

Personal Products

- **Map Boards** Developing your personal map board or other navigational aids in training allows leaders to refine their employment and ensure they meet individual operational needs. Considerations like waterproofing, foldability, and eliminating excess noise are key considerations for platoon leaders in light infantry units. Alternately, larger map boards that cover more area and provide surfaces for writing are better for armored formations, but platoon leaders must always make sure their map board will fit through

the Tank Commander's hatch (or have a plan for when it doesn't). Also consider what other information to keep with the map; include essential information like callsigns, radio frequencies, and fire support data.

- Planning Products** Leaders must develop and refine their personal planning products they intend to use in operations. The U.S. Army Armor School publishes an operations order (OPORD) template in their Tank Platoon SOP which provides an easy-to-use format for OPORD development. Leaders must find which products support their preferences and requirements and then must practice using them. It is important to note that personal planning products must be complete, i.e., leave in all parts of an OPORD in your template so that you do not forget to do something. This way, if you omit a part of the planning process, at least it is a deliberate decision.

Command and Signal				
1. Command		2. Signal		
Location of Key Leaders		SOI		
XD		Unit	Callsign	Net
1SG				
FSO				
CO				
3. PACE and Special Signals				
Communications PACE		Special Signals		
P A C E		Signal for:	Signal for:	
		P	P	
		A	A	
		C	C	
		E	E	
		Signal for:	Signal for:	
		P	P	
		A	A	
		C	C	
		E	E	

Figure 3. Example Paragraph 5 OPORD Shell³

- Planning Resources** Leaders must learn through training iterations what information they must have readily available to assist in planning. A leader's position, formation type, equipment and mission requirements will drive what planning resources an individual will most rely on, and leaders can refine this with time and experience. Examples of

³ U.S. Army Armor School. *Tank Platoon SOP*. Fort Benning, August 2020. CAC login required.

resources may include risk estimate distances, artillery planning factors, or fuel planning factors. Having this information readily accessible reduces planning time and keeps leaders from relying on memory when fatigued.

- **Planning Roles** Units must refine individual roles associated with planning in time constrained environments. Individuals must understand their unique responsibilities in hasty planning for it to be effective. Incorporating unit leaders into planning with specific priorities distributes the individual workload, incorporates alternate perspectives, and speeds the planning process.

Example Planning Responsibilities by Position

- Commander
 - Assessment of ENY COA
 - Develop unit COA
 - Final OPORD
- Executive Officer (XO)
 - Develop Paragraph 4 – Sustainment
 - Compile company LOGSTAT
 - Compile company Combat Power (SLANT)
 - Direct distribution of CL I, III, V
 - Prioritize maintenance as required
- Company First Sergeant (1SG)
 - MEDEVAC/CASEVAC Planning with XO
 - Assist with CL I, III, V distribution
 - Develop Resupply Plan ICW PSGs and XO
 - PCC/PCI
- Fire Support Officer (FSO)
 - Update Friendly Fires Planning –Target List Worksheet and Graphics
 - ENY Fires COA
 - Light/Weather updates
 - Assist CO with Planning
- 1st Platoon Leader
 - ENEMY COA 1 (formerly Most Likely COA)
- 2nd Platoon Leader
 - ENEMY COA 2 (formerly Most Dangerous COA)
- 3rd Platoon Leader
 - IPOE Updates

Organizational Products

Units create products to use and distribute to their subordinate elements to assist in planning and provide direction. Commanders codify which documents they produce and the standards for structuring these documents in unit SOPs. Units should consider products that:

- **Provide quick and easy terrain reference.** Doctrine requires that higher headquarters provide operational graphics to their subordinate elements. However, they should also provide a framework for quick terrain association or reference. Using either a Terrain

Index Reference System (TIRS) or a Grid Index Reference System (GIRS) provides all unit members with a quick reference to key terrain or other critical points within the AO. This allows for operations in areas which may not have detailed graphic control measures and, when organized properly, allows users to quickly orient themselves to the referenced location from their label alone. See ATP 3-20.15, Tank Platoon and the Scout Leader's Course SOP for a detailed TIRS discussion.

- **Offer flexibility.** Fighting products should provide necessary information without being overly restrictive.

Example Required Fighting Products:

- Operational Graphics (Ops Graphics)
- Enemy Situation Template
- Fires Overlay and TTLODAC or Target List Worksheet Decision Support Matrix

- **Prioritize simplicity.** Products should be easy to understand and quickly referenced. Effective integration of planning tools and processes hinges on deliberate, recurring training. Simply establishing a TACSOP is insufficient; its value is realized only through consistent application and refinement during realistic training scenarios. Prioritizing familiarization with chosen systems—from individual planning products to unit-level processes—reduces cognitive load during time-critical missions. Ultimately, units do not achieve proficiency in these tools through last-minute implementation, but through sustained practice that allows for iterative improvement and confident execution in both training and operational environments.

Executing Planning in a Time Constrained Environment

This section details the execution of abbreviated TLPs for planning using the techniques discussed above. Leaders should only use these techniques and timelines when necessary and they should not take the place of detailed planning and rehearsals when time is available. To the extent possible, leaders must adhere to the one-third to two-thirds rule to allow subordinate units the maximum amount of time available to prepare and conduct planning, having only a few hours until missing execution is not an excuse. The intent of this method is to maximize planning when there is limited time available.

In this example, we will focus on the actions of CPT Decker, Commander of B Company “Blitz”, a Mechanized Infantry Company. CPT Decker and Blitz company have three hours until SP, thus CPT Decker has one hour to complete his plan.

Situation: CPT Decker received a FRAGORD to execute a movement to contact from PL BLACK to PL GOLD in response to enemy movement across an adjacent unit boundary. B Co has three hours to begin movement.

Receive the Mission, Issue the Warning Order, and Start Necessary Movement (Five Minutes)

CPT Decker completes the receipt of mission and confirms with BN that he understands the FRAGORD. CPT Decker can either assemble platoon and company leadership or, due to time

requirements, issue the WARNORD over secure radio communications. Because CPT Decker's SOP-based training allows for a brief WARNORD, he provides the following over the secure net:

"Blitz company will execute a movement to contact from PL BLACK to PL GOLD. I anticipate using a two up one back formation, 1st and 2nd Platoon up, 3rd Platoon back. BN Main has indicated the presence of one mechanized infantry platoon moving into the AO. Begin crew level rehearsals and submit your LOGSTAT to Blitz 5 in twenty minutes. We will execute company rapid planning and link-up in twenty-five minutes"

Because the Blitz company TACSOP includes two techniques for a movement to contact, platoons now know which company formation they will use, and their locations in it, which give the platoons the information they need to issue their own warning orders and initiate crew- and squad-level rehearsals. Because the movement to contact battle drills include required rehearsals there is no need to direct specific rehearsals or a priority of the rehearsals. With practiced company level hasty planning, each company leader understands their role in the planning process and understands what they owe to the company commander prior to completing the plan.

Make a Tentative Plan and Conduct Reconnaissance (Twenty-Five Minutes)

CPT Decker has issued the WARNORD to the company, now it is time to make a tentative plan. First, CPT Decker must identify what information he needs to plan and what reconnaissance capabilities are available to fill those gaps. Given the time available, IPOE, maps, and potentially small unmanned aircraft system (sUAS) are likely the only available options. CPT Decker must weigh the time and effort of employing sUAS in support of planning against the time available and other preparation requirements prior to employment. To maximize time, CPT Decker can leverage other leaders and sUAS operators for reconnaissance.

With the information requirements identified and the necessary reconnaissance guidance given, CPT Decker can begin making the tentative plan by updating threat information and IPOE. Critical to this step is understanding the enemy situation and identifying likely enemy courses of action, probable lines of contact, and other critical enemy information. A useful technique to best visualize how the enemy will fight is to reverse how you see your map, literally flip it around. This reorientation forces your brain out of the "familiar terrain picture" and helps to avoid cognitive traps which are more likely in high stress environments.

As IPOE continues, CPT Decker identifies information requirements that company assets are unable to fill and submits these as requests for information (RFIs) to his higher headquarters. CPT Decker incorporates this information into his planning and IPOE. Once the threat situation and the general scheme of maneuver meets basic screening criteria, CPT Decker moves on to completing the plan.

Complete the Plan (Twenty Minutes)

After executing the above steps, it is now time for CPT Decker to complete his plan. CPT Decker must gather his other stakeholders and subordinates with critical roles in the planning process. This includes the company leadership, fire support officer, and other enablers attached with the company. Given the guidance received in the WARNORD, these leaders will have conducted initial parallel planning to support completing the plan. Based on the company SOP, subordinates and company leaders will arrive at the huddle with their critical updates.

Company XO will provide a LOGSTAT update, the FSO provides friendly and enemy fires updates, platoon leaders provide IPOE and enemy threat analysis updates based on their

requirements. With this information, CPT Decker can now complete his plan with subordinate buy in. Given the time available, detailed planning will not be possible, so CPT Decker must focus on essential graphic control measures and coordination to minimize risk. Also, because of the limited time available, he limited the addition of graphic control measures to critical control measures. Overusing new graphic control measures increases the risk that others will inaccurately transcribe them onto subordinate maps or miss them completely.

Issue the Order (Ten Minutes)

Now it is time to issue the order. CPT Decker gathers the company leaders and immediately receives an update on their status. CPT Decker receives this information first; if something was unreported or misunderstood that impacts the plan, there is time to adjust prior to issuing the order. After confirming there are no “showstoppers” CPT Decker issues the order to the company and receives confirmation briefs and initiates the mission. Critical during this phase is the distribution of the necessary fighting products to the necessary company leaders.

Graphic control measures, Target List Worksheets⁴, and updated threat graphics are critical to creating shared understanding and providing the formation with the necessary information for subordinate planning and mission accomplishment.

Conclusion

Successful rapid planning requires consistent training and repetition. Leaders must prepare their organizations and themselves in the processes, functions, and equipment they require to execute effective planning. Commanders should incorporate these methods early into individual and collective training, both tactical and administrative, and refine throughout the training progression through after-action reviews and honest discussions about successes and failures. Commanders and leaders at all echelons can incorporate these practices into routine tasks, from maintenance to individual training events.

⁴ DD Form 4655. Target List Worksheet. September 2017.

Recommended Further Reading

Planning and Troop Leading Procedures – CSM Fredrick Heard

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2019/November/Troop-Leading-Procedures/>

Troop leading procedures for the forward support company commander – CPT Russell J. Baker.

https://www.army.mil/article/215305/troop_leading_procedures_for_the_forward_support_company_commander

3x5 Company Orders on 2nd BN 5th Marines

<https://2ndbn5thmar.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/3x5-Company-Orders.pdf>

3x5 Platoon Orders on 2nd BN 5th Marines

<https://2ndbn5thmar.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/3x5-Platoon-Orders.pdf>

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