

IDEAS and ISSUES

Candid professionally oriented comments on matters of interest to Marines. Particularly invited are new ideas that enhance the mission and esprit of the Marine Corps. Length: 500-1,500 words.

COMMENTS WANTED

Have you written Col J.J. Stewart yet your views on his precepts for the long-range period (see MCG, Dec84, p.10)? He wants to know if other Marines believe his forecast for the next decade or two is reasonably accurate, a near-miss, or dead wrong. Write him in care of the editor, Marine Corps GAZETTE, Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134.



TRAINING

Combat Training the Infantry Battalion

by LtCol C.C. Krulak

This article is about training the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines. Nothing in it is truly new or innovative. What it provides is a quick reference to what one battalion tried and found successful.

Initially let's talk about the realities that drove the conduct of training within the battalion and then look at the philosophy that was the heart and soul of the training effort.

The battalion knew it had approximately six months to train before deploying again as the ground combat element of the 31st Marine Amphibious Unit. Our last deployment saw the battalion off the coast of Lebanon and that experience, reinforced by the successful employment of a brother battalion landing team (BLT) in Grenada, drove home the need to train as if we might go to war tomorrow. First and foremost, we decided that our training must be as realistic as possible and that it would be conducted in an atmosphere that allowed leaders throughout the chain of command to use their initiative and to make mistakes in an environment where mistakes wouldn't cost lives. The "zero defect" philosophy was securely placed in the trash can never to reappear. If a company conducting a night attack failed to secure its objective by the designated time (which happened on occasion), the commander knew he would not "read about it later" and, therefore, could use the mission failure as his own teaching tool. Critiques were held immediately after each portion of a training evolution with both positive and negative points being discussed. Most importantly, these points were shared throughout the battalion. No pride of ownership got in the way of disseminating good ideas and no bruised egos got in the way of sharing the ideas and actions that turned sour. The "zero

defect" philosophy was out, and the leaders in the battalion flourished because it was. In order to allow Marines the freedom to fail, support must exist at all echelons of command. Because the battalion had that support from senior commands, this healthy approach to training was a reality, not just words.

Secondly, all training was to be as meaningful, challenging, and realistic as possible. This meant many long hours developing training packages and scenarios that would challenge our Marines and not bore them. It meant developing safety measures that would allow the use of overhead fire with machineguns and mortars during live fire maneuver exercises. It meant company commanders working hand in hand with the battalion staff to develop training packages that supported the company's needs as well as those of the battalion. It meant training exercises at all levels that stressed innovation and flexibility so that our Marines would be prepared to deal with the "fog of war" that seems to blanket all battlefields. And finally, it meant placing a heavy emphasis on getting live ammunition into the hands of Marines and developing within them a true appreciation of the supporting arms available to a Marine unit in combat.

The following paragraphs provide an overview of some of the training conducted. It is by no means all-encompassing and is offered as food for thought for commands with equivalent training requirements.

Short Notice Raids

The objective of these exercises was to require the company commanders to exercise their planning responsibilities, to include liaison with combat support (CS) and combat service support (CSS)

units, and then carry out their plans—all within a 24-hour period. Each company commander was unexpectedly called to the battalion commander's office at 1800 on what would turn out to be D-1. There he was presented with an envelope containing a scenario, a frag order directing the operation, and basic intelligence information to include photos of the objective area and maps for all leaders down to the squad level. Also included in the package were coordinating instructions that provided the commander information on the CS and CSS units that would be supporting his operation. H-hour was normally set for 1900 thus ensuring the training evolution would be conducted during the hours of darkness. Prior coordination between the battalion and the supporting helicopter squadron (in this case HMH-463) ensured that when the company commander contacted the squadron he would have a counterpart to plan with. During the 24 hours between the receipt of the frag order and the execution of the helicopterborne assault, training benefits were found in many areas. Examples were:

- Forced rapid planning by all echelons of command and staff from the fire team through the battalion and squadron level.

- Close coordination between all members of the air-ground team to include formulation of plans, logistic requirements, emergency procedures and other details that resulted in complete zippo briefs for all concerned.

- The benefits derived from having to plan, rehearse, and supervise a challenging operation in a very compressed timeframe.

Beyond the benefits accrued during the planning phase, the not-so-obvious benefits that resulted from the execution

phase were equally, if not more, valuable. Each company got a firsthand look at the little unexpected problems that plague all battlefields and, depending on how they are handled, often spell the difference between success and failure. Difficulties that the commanders had to face included:

- Fluctuating helicopter availability that required an almost instantaneous decision regarding implementation of alternate plans. In one case, a company commander found himself on a "down bird" with his command flying toward the objective.

- Communications problems ranging from equipment failure to poor communication planning prior to the onset of the operation.

- Schemes of maneuver overly complicated or inadequately rehearsed that fell apart under enemy pressure.

- The realization that fighting at night over unfamiliar terrain is far easier said than done.

Again, it should be noted that the responsibility for the planning, coordination and execution of the entire operation was at the company level. Although it became obvious, at times, with each company that a portion of the planning cycle was overlooked or an essential element of information was not evaluated or that the plan was too ambitious, the battalion kept "hands off" the evolution so that the results would truly belong to the company. The degree of mission success was always secondary to the learning derived by the members of each company. After all the companies of the battalion had participated in the exercise, a free exchange critique was conducted where both the good and the bad points were discussed and the lessons learned from each others mistakes were widely disseminated.

Operation Executive Officer (XO)

This exercise was a week in duration and took place in the largest training area on the island of Oahu. It was a BLT-sized exercise and, as the name implies, it was planned and executed by the battalion executive officer assisted by the "Alphas" of the battalion staff and the executive officers of each company. Again, this is not a new or revolutionary idea, but it remains a superb way of ensuring that XOs and staff assistants are trained to assume the duties of their "bosses" should those officers become

casualties. All too often during a Marine Corps combat readiness evaluation (MCCRE) or similar evolution exercise the control group makes a principal a casualty to determine his XO's ability to assume command. Unfortunately, this only evaluates the XO or staff assistant over a short duration and normally only during the execution phase of the operation. This training package was designed to allow those individuals the opportunity to plan, rehearse, and supervise the conduct of an operation under the same guidelines that apply to their seniors—freedom to use their initiative, freedom to be innovative, and freedom to sometimes fail.

"MCCRE in the Round"

The use of MCCREs tailored toward company level operations, *not* for evaluation purposes but rather as a barometer of training effectiveness, was implemented approximately half way through the battalion training cycle. In order to carry out a MCCRE for each company, while at the same time minimizing training area, logistics, aggressor, and evaluator requirements, a "MCCRE in the Round" was established. Employing the same principle as the musical "round," a scenario was created that allowed each company to enter the training package with exactly one day's separation. The initial company entered the problem with a helicopterborne assault, made a daylight attack, and established a defensive position. The company was then tasked to conduct a night attack (objective to be secured by 0400) thus ensuring its movement out of the first day's objective area so that the next company could conduct its

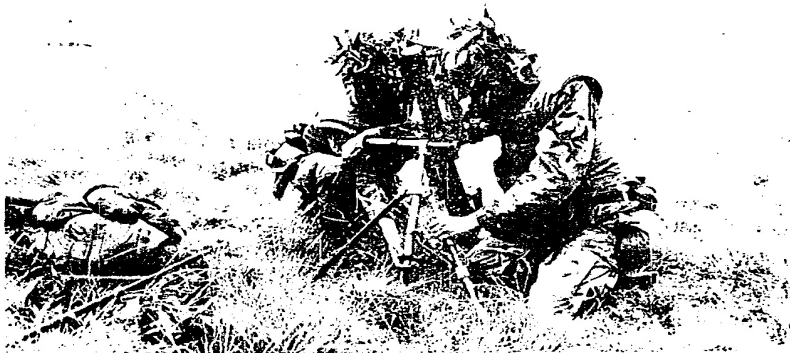


helicopterborne assault in the same location as the initial company. The entire MCCRE followed basically the same pattern—one company leading the way through the events followed by the remaining companies with a day's separation between them.

The basic combat evolutions conducted over a three-day timeframe consisted of a helicopterborne assault, daylight attack, night attack, movement to contact, company in the defense, and retrograde. Aggressors remained at specific locations and were not required to displace thus easing personnel and logistical requirements. In addition, these Marines provided an additional critique input as they eventually operated against each company in the same event. Following the basic philosophy of learning from mistakes, a daily critique was held to ensure that no company continued to "practice bad habits." Additionally, enough time was allotted for each evolution so that, if a major mistake was made, the company commander could regroup and execute the evolution over again. In the short period of five days, each company in the battalion received the benefit of an excellent training exercise plus the added benefit of an honest appraisal of the state of their training and what specific areas they needed to concentrate on improving.

Small Unit Live Fire Exercises

These exercises were conducted throughout the six-month training





period and were designed to place the individual Marine into a situation that, within safety constraints, was as close to actual combat as possible. During these exercises each company was assigned a mission that would require the company to move from an assembly area to platoon and squad release points, to a probable line of deployment, and finally into the assault. By moving through platoon and squad release points, we were able to ensure that the small unit leader and his men would receive maximum benefit from the training. In each case, the Marines would move under cover of darkness, across open terrain, negotiate a series of barbed wire obstacles, knock out an enemy bunker, and pass through a tank trap prior to conducting their final assault on the objective. During the entire evolution they would have M60 machinegun fire passing directly over their heads as well as 60mm mortar prep fires provided to their direct front. In order to give the individual Marine a feeling that "hits count" and that well-aimed, accurate fire is critical in war, helium-filled balloons were used as targets throughout the exercise. The reward for well-aimed fire was immediate and visible. It should be noted that each company commander was given the latitude to develop his own scheme of maneuver and his own fire support plan and to conduct as many rehearsals as he desired.

The benefits of these small unit live fire exercises were many. Some that stood out were:

- The individual Marine gained a healthy respect for live fire but also learned not to fear it.
- The individual Marine learned to move under live fire and up against his own supporting fires.
- The small unit leader gained an appreciation of the difficulties inherent in controlling his men in a combat environment. For most this was their first experience with the noise, reduced visibility, and confusion associated with live fire at night—to include live overhead fire.
- Most importantly, the individual Marine experienced for the first time the real "feel" of combat—the smell of

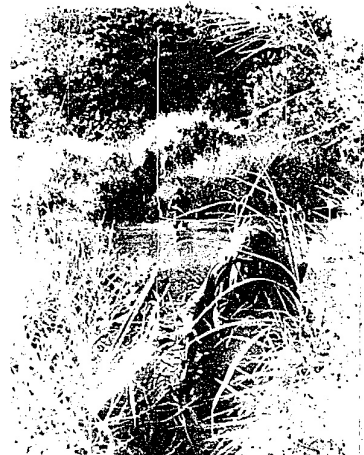


cordite, the crack of a round as it passes overhead, the thump of mortar fire to their direct front, and the strict requirement to follow the orders of their leaders.

Again, it should be noted that these exercises were planned and supervised at the company level and executed at the platoon and squad level. Obviously troop safety was stressed in all planning, but the many and varied "solutions" used by platoon commanders and squad leaders to accomplish their missions demonstrated the opportunity of the small unit leader to take initiative and make decisions.

Combined Arms Exercise

Approximately four months in the battalion training cycle, we deployed to the Pohakaloa Training Area (PTA) on the island of Hawaii. For 1st Marine Brigade units, PTA provides the terrain and opportunity to conduct large scale fire and maneuver exercises utilizing all types of fire support means. Armed with the knowledge that a 105mm and 155mm battery from 1st Battalion, 12th Marines would be deploying to PTA with us and that HMM-165, VMFA-212, and VMFA-232 would be deploying aircraft to the area, it was decided to conduct a major combined arms exercise. The fact that the exercise was successful is worthy of note but is not the major point. What is important is that the exercise took place at all. Imagine squadron and battalion commanders being given the freedom to plan and



conduct, without excessive direction from higher headquarters, a major combined arms exercise! The only communications from higher headquarters were offers of assistance and the positive reinforcement of planning efforts.

The result of all the planning was a 3-day free play scenario that saw over 40 sorties flown by fixed-wing aircraft dropping over 8,000 pounds of ordnance, over 2,000 105mm and 600 155mm rounds fired, over 1,300 81mm mortar rounds and over 900 60mm mortar rounds expended. It may have been the largest Marine live fire exercise ever held in Hawaii. And the clincher was that subordinate units were allowed to plan and execute the whole thing.

As noted earlier in this article, nothing I've said is either new or innovative. Rather it has reported on a few training evolutions that might be worth trying by other like units and, more importantly, to put forth a training philosophy that is worth implementing Marine Corps-wide. We must allow leaders, particularly junior leaders, the opportunity to exercise initiative, to advance independent thoughts and innovative ideas, to experiment, without fear of being "hurt" if things don't work out perfectly. What better time is there for our young leaders to develop command techniques? If we really want our leaders to soar like the eagles, we must allow them the freedom to stretch their wings. 3d Battalion, 3d Marines was given that freedom and benefited immensely from it.

USMC