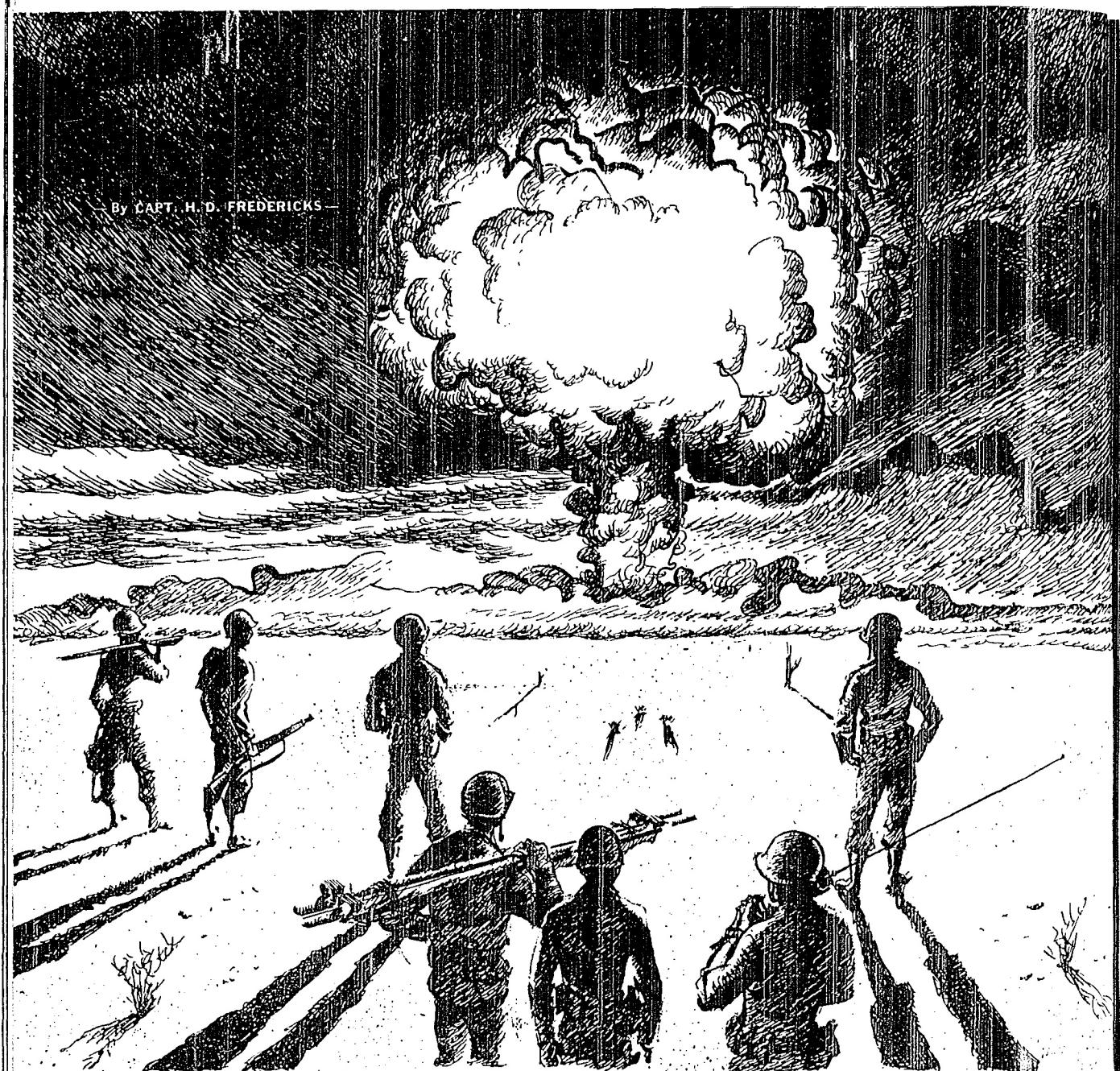


THE COMPANY AND THE ATOM

By CAPT. H. D. FREDERICKS



MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN AND much more has been said about warfare in the nuclear age—more commonly known as the “new” or “present concept.” However, most of what has been said and most of what has been written has dealt with the “big picture.” Generalities about principles have been posed, and almost everyone has become imbued with the ideas of dispersion and

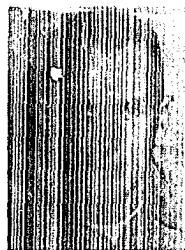
rapidity of movement. Little has been said and little has been written, however, about the small unit—the company, the platoon, the squad and the fire team—in the age of the atom. Many months ago SSgt Fortner made this inference in his prize winning essay, *The Little Picture*. He struck a responsive chord with many Marines everywhere who have the responsibility

of training small units. How are these units to operate under the present concept?

We are taught in the schools at Quantico that the present concept is founded upon sound tactical principles—principles which basically have not changed over the years. Granted that there have been modifications which were evolved because of the development of new

weapons, but these modifications do not alter the principles. We are now on the threshold of adopting other modifications which have been necessitated by the development of atomic weapons. We have been taught that since the radial effects of atomic weapons are so much greater than the effects of the so-called conventional weapons we must compensate for this difference by dispersion, thereby reducing the lethal effect of one atomic explosion. Moreover, we are taught that once we disperse we risk losing the ability to concentrate our firepower and strength, i.e., mass. Therefore, we had to develop "something" which would allow us to maintain this ability to mass. This something was the helicopter since it could move troops rapidly and could, therefore, converge them on one area within a short period of time, let them deliver their preponderance of firepower and shock, and finally carry them back to remote points to effect, once again, dispersion. These were the general principles and upon these were founded techniques—calculated distances between various sized units to achieve optimum dispersion, the employment of air, naval gunfire, artillery and mortars, the role of the tank and LVT, and the control of nuclear weapons. Landing exercises, conducted all over the world, experimented with these techniques, but always the "big picture" was accentuated.

Down at the company level, the company commander and the platoon leaders went on teaching, "Two up and one back and feed the troops C-rations" under the present concept. This is not to say that their teaching has been erroneous. On the contrary, the basic tactical principles are the same and will be employed whenever the company actually comes to grips with the enemy; but, nevertheless, company commanders have had many problems adapting themselves and their men to the present concept. The purpose of this article is to discuss some of the problems noticed by one company commander. I could never presume to cover all the difficulties that have been unearthed, but I do hope that this article will serve as a springboard for other small unit commanders and that they will voice their comments and observations on



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the problems presented by the present concept. Thereby, may we all profit from the experience of many.

Probably the first problem the company commander must overcome is a psychological one—the inherent resistance to change evident in most of us. Basic School teaches such principles of tactics as "two up and one back" and "the fire team is the smallest maneuver element." As a result of thorough teaching we have produced a group of fine lieutenants well versed in basic tactical principles. Upon reporting to the FMF they are ready to test these principles and impart their knowledge to their platoons. To augment the lieutenant's knowledge we have a core of seasoned NCOs who have a wealth of practical experience which was gained in battles and skirmishes in World War II and the Korean conflict. However, this experience is also based upon such principles as "two up and one back" and "the fire team is the smallest maneuver element." And so, when both of these individuals, the seasoned NCO and the learned lieutenant, start to apply their knowledge in battalion and regimental field problems, they find themselves in a tactical situation, the likes of which they have seldom seen or even heard of before. Once the initial landing has been made from helicopters (and helicopters are not too different from landing craft) and the terrain has been seized in a manner not unlike that with which they are familiar, they find themselves, instead of pursuing the attack, with the companies attacking abreast, ordered to set up in a defensive position called a "combat base." Furthermore, platoons and squads find themselves conducting extensive patrols over vast areas of terrain with the mis-

sion of finding the enemy and destroying him. However, they are told that if the enemy is gathered together in too large a force to be destroyed, fix him in position so that atomic weapons can be brought to bear against him. This is new, and the average lieutenant and even more so, the average NCO, questions the wisdom of this new type of tactics. It is this psychological block which the small unit commander must first overcome. In other words, he must "sell" the present concept.

How this selling can be accomplished will vary with the command, for as any good salesman knows—the "pitch" varies with the customer. No matter what the approach, it must be thorough and detailed. The small unit leaders and the men they command must be made to understand that what they are doing now is probably not very different than what was done in the years immediately following 1933. We are experimenting with and developing the present concept, probably, much in the same manner as those who preceded us experimented with and developed the doctrine of amphibious warfare which we followed in WW II and Korea. We must convince those in our command that just as answers were uncovered for the formulation of our amphibious doctrine, so will the answers be found for the formulation of the doctrine for our present concept. But most of all we must encourage them to think about our problems and to make recommendations, for their ideas may contain some of the very solutions we are seeking.

In almost every field problem we have run under the present concept, members of my company have posed questions and difficulties



which they have encountered. Some of these problems were inherent to the company and we are now in the process of experimenting to find the answers. Other problems arose from our relations within the BLT and recommendations and suggestions were submitted to battalion headquarters. The men in the small units are only too happy to co-operate with this experimentation as long as they realize that they are experimenting; and they will realize it if we explain to them in detail what we are trying to do.

Let us look for a few minutes at some of the problems we have encountered, some of the solutions with which we have experimented, and some of the recommendations we have made to higher echelons. Let us, in this examination, omit the helicopter-borne portion of the operation and look at the company once it has seized its objective and is situated in a combat base. It is prepared to protect itself, the battalion CP, and the attached units from small groups of enemy while it conducts extensive patrolling in order to find the enemy and destroy him or fix him in position.

It is in the very statement of this mission that the first difficulty arises, for we have a dual mission:

protect the combat base on the one hand, and patrol to destroy the enemy on the other. Let us examine a little more closely a situation in which the enemy—who is operating in small units—is, nevertheless, strong, aggressive and extremely active. Suppose we send out a platoon-size combat patrol with sufficient FOs and other accouterments necessary to fight the enemy and win. What is going to fill the gap in the perimeter defense left by this wandering patrol? To find the answer to this question has been one of the biggest problems faced by companies attempting to carry out this dual mission.

Various solutions are proposed, but which is best, only time and experience will determine. A couple of men from each squad can be left behind by the patrolling platoon. In the daytime they can act as observation posts. At night, although platoon-size patrols are rare, they occasionally do occur and these men who are left behind can act as listening posts. As a solution, however, this is sadly lacking in many respects. First, it weakens the patrolling platoon by taking 6 men from it when it may need every bit of firepower and manpower it can muster. Second, although the 2 men in

each squad position are adequate during daylight hours, especially if they are advantageously placed so as to get good observation, they were found to be inadequate at night. The enemy can easily slip between them, make his way into the company positions and cause intolerable confusion and damage, not only within the company area, but also in the battalion CP and attached unit positions.

Another solution to this problem was to take men from other platoon areas and put them in to fill the gap. Although this had the advantage of not weakening the patrolling platoon, it did weaken other positions in the company and still did not provide adequate coverage at night. However, it was found to be the better solution during daylight hours.

It is strongly felt by many companies who participate in these problems that there is little difficulty during daylight hours, for even with an entire platoon on patrol, personnel can be shifted around to afford good observation and to meet any enemy threat. However, the critical period is at night, especially if we reason properly that the enemy, forced to operate in small groups and engaged in guer-

illa-type warfare, will be most active at night. Therefore, there has been growing sentiment for either a fourth company in an infantry battalion or a fourth rifle platoon in an infantry company. The determination of which would be better can only be made by extensive experimentation. The advantages of having these extra units should be obvious. They could be held in a reserve position and used for patrols, thereby not weakening the perimeter at all and still allowing us to patrol actively.

But the difficulty of accomplishing the dual mission is not the only problem company commanders have encountered. Perhaps the biggest trouble maker of all is communications, and we are not now speaking of communication difficulties between battalion and the companies, but communications failures within the company itself.

There is no problem of control within the company as long as the company sits still on the combat base. For communications is the same here as it is for a normal defensive situation. Wire is strung from the company CP to the various platoons and outposts, and messengers are used when the sound powered phones fail to function.

However, troubles begin to multiply once the company starts extensive patrolling. The AN/PRC-6 becomes a useless piece of equipment. Although the company commander may be able to receive reports for the first few hundred yards of his patrol's progress, very soon all is silent. It then becomes a case of anxious waiting until the patrol returns to a position close enough for the erratic "6" to function properly.

What is our answer to this difficulty? We have a couple, but only one of them is considered ideal. First, we usually try to send out with the patrol one of the many FOs attached to the company—either artillery, 81 or 4.2. The FO's radio serves as an alternate means of communication for the patrol leader, for through this radio he can have calls relayed to the battalion and thence to the company. A complicated procedure, but at least we have contact.

Our second solution and the one we consider to be ideal is this—form a company tactical net consisting

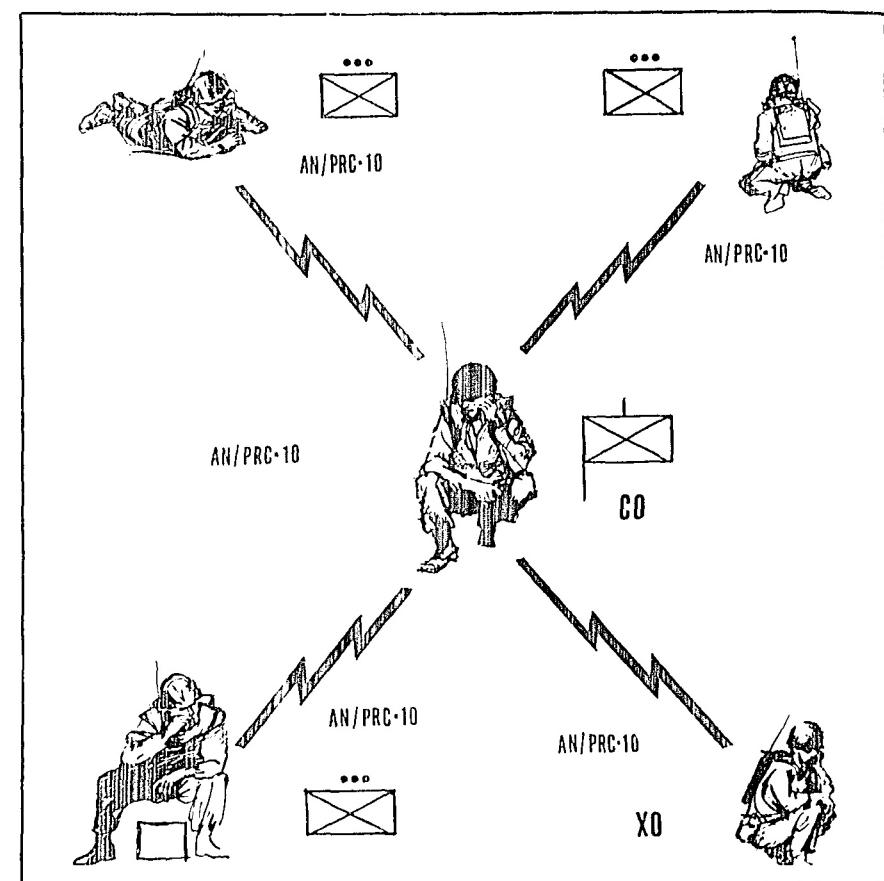
of AN/PRC-10 radios. These radios would be allocated as follows:

- 1—AN/PRC-10 — company commander. (This is in addition to the one he has for the Battalion Tactical Net)
- 1—AN/PRC-10 — company executive officer.
- 3—AN/PRC-10—one to each rifle platoon.

Now such a net may at first seem impossible, or at least not very feasible, but examine it a little more closely. Prior to the present concept, such a company net was not practicable because companies, battalions and regiments fought in close proximity to each other. Each battalion had a tactical net employing first the SCR 300 and then the AN/PRC-10. There just were not enough channels to allow the companies to establish their own nets without causing mutual interference. Thus, the companies struggled along with the SCR 536 and then the AN/PRC-6. These radios were neither satisfactory under the old concept, nor are they satisfactory now when platoons go farther and faster without their parent company. But now we have the possibility of having a tactical net for

each company and a tactical net for each battalion, all using AN/PRC-10 radios and all operating on different channels. Since battalions are so widely dispersed, the chances of interference are slim. At least let us recommend that this system be tried by appropriate Marine Corps test units. Granted, it would mean that in addition to the various FO's radios, the company commander would be followed by two AN/PRC-10s, one for the battalion tactical net and one for the company tactical net—but better two swaying antennae and contact with the platoons than only one and exasperating silence.

Extensive patrolling showed us that we not only had to develop our communications, but that we also had to instill in our platoon and squad leaders the realization that they are more on their own now than platoon and squad leaders ever have been before. They are apt to go out thousands of yards from the company position and stand a good chance of engaging with the enemy. The mission—destroy the enemy! How the patrol leader does it is his business. There is no one out there with him who can see the



situation any better than he, and so he will have to make all the decisions—scheme of maneuver, plan of attack and employment of supporting arms. Consequently, the initiative rests with the small unit leader. Upon him may well depend the success of an entire BLT. He must realize his responsibility, be prepared to accept it, and take appropriate action without further word from higher authority.

Not only do we call for more initiative on the part of our small unit leaders, but we require greater professional knowledge—knowledge that he must have at his fingertips, ready to use, and not stored away in notes or a reference book. Nor is this knowledge restricted to what we formerly termed infantry subjects. A patrol leader in the present concept may have the task of not only destroying the enemy, but he may also be required to do such things as clear mine fields and test trafficability of roads and bridges for tanks, LVTs and wheeled vehicles. He should have a sound knowledge of demolitions because

the bridge whose trafficability he tested yesterday may have to be destroyed today. Those tasks were formerly assigned to attached or supporting engineers, but engineers are not able to accompany every patrol and so the infantry leader must develop engineer skills.

The knowledge required of patrol leaders today embraces more than just the infantry and engineer fields. He now, more than ever before, must have a working knowledge of his supporting arms—air, artillery, mortars, naval gunfire and special weapons. He must know forward observer procedure, forward air control procedure and naval gunfire spotting procedure. Although it is desirable to send some sort of forward observer with a patrol, it is not always possible to do so and the patrol leader should be able to fend for himself. Not only must he know the method of calling for help from these supporting arms, but he must realize their capabilities and limitations so that he can call upon the weapon which can best do the job.

Finally, the patrol leader must

master the basic principles of communications. He must have in his mind a picture of the battalion communications net superimposed upon the supporting arms communications systems. Thus, if a radio fails, he can employ an alternate means of communications and be able to give adequate instructions for relaying his messages.

All of these things he must learn and when he does, he will be ready to operate in the present concept.

Now we see some of the situations and problems we have encountered while employing our companies under the present concept. By no means is this an exhaustive dissertation. Other company commanders and other platoon leaders have probably encountered other problems—and perhaps they have found better answers to the ones I have proposed here. At any rate, it is time for the small unit commanders to pool their knowledge and voice their opinions and ideas, for the problems are many and complex and will need many minds working in concert to find adequate solutions.

USMC



Yes! No?

THE LEGENDARY MAJ LOUIS CUKELA proved the bane of any instructor's existence when he was a student at Marine Corps School.

One tactics instructor had painstakingly set up a classroom problem the solution to which was obviously to establish a temporary defense. He called on several students for their solutions. All presented variations of the defense that was the school solution. Then the instructor called on Cukela.

Cukela, in his characteristic broken English, gave his solution: "I attack."

The instructor went over the whole problem again, certain that he had made it clear that an attack was out of the question. When the instructor paused, still on his feet, interrupted with, "I still attack."

The overwrought instructor explained that it was impossible to attack in this situation.

Cukela smiled. Tapping his broad chest just over his two Medal of Honor ribbons, he said, "I know it is not possible. But I attack. How you t'ink I got dese?"

Maj D. D. Nicholson

Yes Sir!

BEFORE WORLD WAR II, I clerked for a battalion commander whose habit it was to personally inspect and assign all men on incoming recruit drafts.

The colonel had another habit—that of slapping his gloves in his hand as he walked through the ranks. As a result, his lower blouse pocket was often unbuttoned.

One day as the colonel was assigning Boots to various companies in the battalion—I was trailing along writing down their assignments—we came upon the most fouled-up Marine I ever saw. His uniform was rumpled, his barracks cap askew, his "fair leather" belt off-center about 6 inches and his general demeanor sad.

As the colonel came to a bristling halt in front of this lad, the recruit fumbled his '03 to inspection arms and looked the colonel squarely in the eye. The temperature in the area rose about 40 degrees as the irate colonel and the shaken Boot viewed each other from a 4-inch distance.

"Well," demanded the colonel, "do you see anything wrong?" "Yes, sir, I do," answered the recruit. "Don't just stand there looking at me, you blockhead," roared the colonel, "fix it!"

With that, the lad solemnly ordered his Springfield—leaned over and buttoned the colonel's blouse pocket—and came back to attention!

Capt F. E. Copeland

(*The GAZETTE will pay \$10.00 for each anecdote published. Submissions should be short and pointed.*)