

Section 7



SQUAD MOVEMENT

Key Points

- 1 Organization of the Rifle Squad
- 2 Combat Power
- 3 Fire Team Formations
- 4 Squad Formations
- 5 Squad Movement Techniques

Although the battlefield may be entered from a differing range of platforms, all types of Infantry must be able to fight on their feet. To perform this role, each type possesses two distinguishing qualities. First, Infantry are able to move almost anywhere under almost any condition. Second, Infantry can generate a high volume of lethal well-aimed small arms fire for a short time in any direction. Neither movement nor fire is exclusively decisive. However, combined fire and movement win engagements.

From Field Manual 3-21.8, The Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad

Introduction

Army units execute missions in preplanned, organized ways, adapting where necessary to the situation on the ground to accomplish their mission.

The four-Soldier rifle fire team is the smallest tactical combat element that can fire and maneuver. The squad leader controls two fire teams; one team provides protective fire to cover the other team as it maneuvers. Squad leaders learn to select formations that afford the best control, security, flexibility, and fire capability when conducting tactical movement.

Combat can be an extremely chaotic, mind-numbing experience. Combat situations demand that officers and NCOs make split-second decisions, as you can see from this story of a patrol in the Korean War.

A Combat Patrol in Korea

Four or five miles straight east of Heartbreak Ridge and near the northwestern rim of a volcano-like crater called the Punchbowl, Noname Ridge was in the area between the friendly front lines and the main defensive position of a North Korean unit. The only prominent feature about it was a little fresh dirt left exposed by enemy soldiers who were constructing new bunkers and trenches there. The dirt was more noticeable because of the snow which, even in early April of 1952, still covered many of the hills, especially in the low and shaded places. Noname Ridge was about a thousand yards from the enemy's main lines, and from positions of the U.S. 35th Infantry (25th Infantry Division). It was within range of friendly patrols.

The regiment planned the patrol action on 28 March, naming Lt. John H. Chandler patrol leader. His mission was to conduct a combat patrol to Noname Ridge to kill or capture any enemy encountered. For the job, he was to take a force consisting of two reinforced rifle squads.

Lieutenant Chandler formed the patrol into two lines facing the enemy's position. The assault squad was disposed with an automatic-rifle man and another man with a carbine on each flank, and the other men quite close together in the center. Chandler and Cpl. Kim Bae were out in front; Sgt. William Schell (assistant patrol leader), Pvt. Johnnie R. Banks (scout), and Cpl. Anthony Darbonne (radio operator), were close behind them. The fire-support squad, with its weapons posted in about the same pattern, stayed about twenty yards behind the assault party.

In this formation the patrol moved stealthily ahead, the men walking upright but ready to start crawling when necessary. When the patrol had covered about twenty-five of the remaining yards to the enemy's position, PFC Van D. Randon, carrying the BAR [Browning automatic rifle] on the right flank of the assault squad, turned to PFC Charles H. Baugher, who was walking behind him.

"There's wire right in front of you," Randon muttered. "Be careful."

Baughner stepped over the wire. There was an explosion that threw him to the ground, tipping him over on his right side. The other men of the patrol were not much later in hitting the ground. It was about 0210.

In the immediate silence that followed, Baughner, who had apparently stepped on a booby-trapped concussion grenade, felt for his foot and found it to be all right although numb. The rest of the patrol lay quietly, waiting for the enemy to come out of the bunkers to see what had tripped the grenade. Nothing happened. The sounds of laughing, talking, and eating continued.

After waiting several minutes to make certain the North Koreans had ignored the noise, Lieutenant Chandler crept forward with his assault squad. As Chandler and his South Korean interpreter (Cpl. Kim Bae) approached the large bunker in the center, they came upon a communication trench that joined at least the five bunkers the patrol members could see. Chandler and Kim Bae jumped into the trench. As they did so a North Korean came out of the big bunker a few feet away to their left. Chandler and Kim Bae climbed back out of the trench.

The North Korean muttered a few words in guttural Korean, apparently a challenge. Kim answered in Korean, but apparently the enemy was still suspicious. When he first spoke he had unslung the burp gun he carried on his shoulder; now he raised it to the ready position and fired. Several men from the assault squad opened fire at the same time. Kim Bae threw a grenade. The North Korean fell after he had fired about three rounds. . . .

Back on the main line of resistance, half a mile away, men of Company C saw the tracers scratch the night, and heard the sudden shouting. The fire fight was on.

Six North Koreans came streaming out of the big bunker. The assault squad killed the first five with carbine and automatic-rifle fire; the sixth ducked back into the bunker. One of Chandler's men threw two grenades into the big bunker and after that no one came out, but for several minutes there was the sound of yelling and screaming from inside.

There were other bunkers, however, two on each side of the large one, and North Koreans from these soon appeared in the communication trench. But the BAR men on the flanks (Private Randon and Cpl. Wilbur Harris) either killed them or drove them back into protected positions. Maintaining a heavy rate of fire, the squad managed to hold the initiative. . . .

Russell A. Gugeler

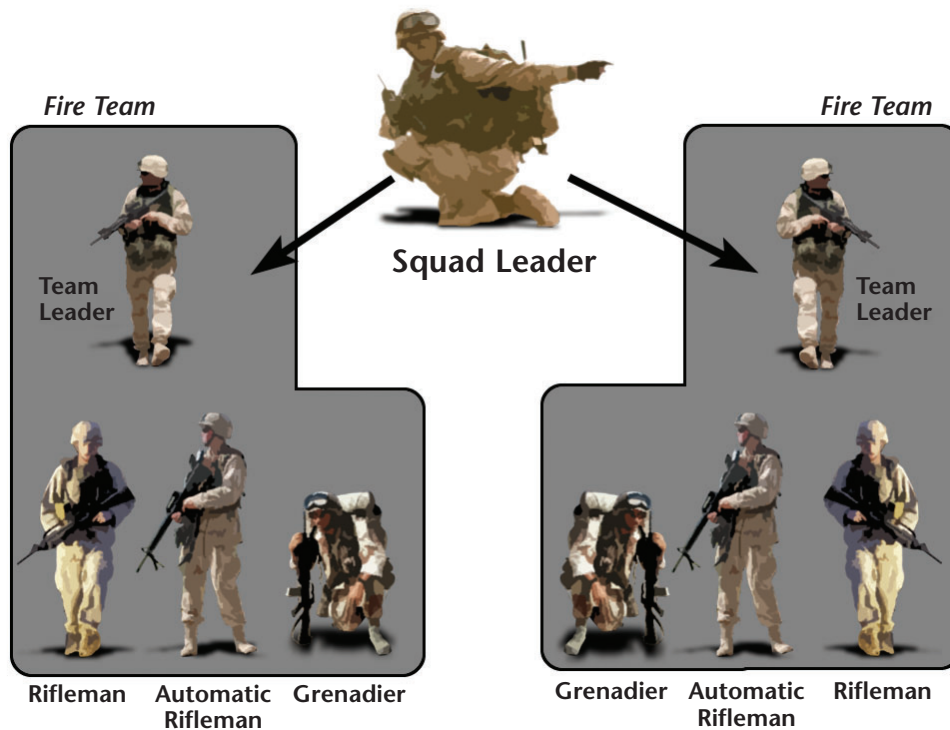


Figure 7.1 Organization of a Rifle Squad

Organization of the Rifle Squad

The infantry rifle squad has nine Soldiers: four in the Alpha team, four in the Bravo team, and the Squad Leader. Each fire team has a team leader, automatic rifleman, grenadier, and rifleman. The squad leader is normally an E-6 staff sergeant, and the fire team leaders are normally E-5 sergeants. Three rifle squads plus a headquarters element make up the typical infantry platoon, which is led by a lieutenant.

Combat Power

Combat power is the Army doctrine that guides your leadership of infantry small-unit forces. Combat power has four basic elements:

- maneuvers
- firepower
- protection
- leadership.

The squad formations and movement techniques you'll read about in this section are your methods for preserving or increasing your combat power.

Maneuvers

Maneuvers are the movement of infantry forces to gain a position of advantage over the enemy and hold that advantage. Your Soldiers will have to know how to maneuver to attack enemy flanks, rear areas, logistics points, and command posts. In the defense, they will have to be able to maneuver to counterattack the enemy's flank. Maneuver, when properly executed and supported by firepower, allows your Soldiers to close with the enemy and win the encounter.

Firepower

firepower

the capacity of a unit to deliver effective fires onto the enemy in order to destroy, suppress, or deny the enemy access to certain terrain

Firepower is your Soldiers' ability to effectively fire on a target. Firepower kills or suppresses the enemy in his position, deceives the enemy, and supports maneuvers. You must learn how to control, mass, and combine firepower with maneuvers. Without effective supporting firepower, your Soldiers won't be able to maneuver.

Before attempting to maneuver, your Soldiers must establish an effective base of fire. The base of fire reduces or eliminates the enemy's ability to interfere with your unit's maneuver. Your Soldiers must learn to identify the most critical targets quickly, direct fire onto them, and ensure that the volume of fire will keep the enemy from returning fire effectively. In addition, the effective, economic use of firepower will actually conserve ammunition. As a platoon leader, you will not be limited to your platoon's **organic** firepower. You will be able to request additional fire support in the form of artillery, close air support from both Army and Air Force aircraft, and in some cases, from Navy gunfire.

organic

assigned to and forming an essential part of a military organization

Protection

protection

the conservation of the fighting potential of a force so that it can be applied at the decisive time and place

Protection means preserving the fighting potential of your unit so that you can deploy it at a decisive time and place. Your Soldiers must take both active and passive measures to protect themselves from surprise, observation, detection, interference, espionage, sabotage, and annoyance. Protection has two basic considerations: *sustainment* (care of your Soldiers and their equipment) and *security* (action to counter enemy combat power).

Sustainment uses techniques necessary to maintain your platoon and squads as an effective fighting force. You train your Soldiers to keep healthy so they can maintain fighting morale through personal hygiene, physical conditioning, and proper rest. You ensure that they keep their equipment in good condition and protect supplies. You instruct them on how to manage their loads so that they carry only essential combat gear.

Security refers to dispersion, cover, camouflage, deception, and suppression of enemy firepower. Ideally, your Soldiers should remain undetected. But once discovered by the enemy, Soldiers are vulnerable to enemy fire. They must either fight to break contact or destroy the enemy. As an infantry leader, you always want to set the time and place of battle, and you train your unit to protect itself, maintain combat power, and retain the element of surprise.

Leadership

leadership

the process of influencing others to accomplish a mission

Military **leadership** is the process through which you influence your Soldiers to accomplish your mission. As you continue your ROTC education and training, you will gain valuable experience and expertise in coordinating the other three elements of combat power. Your leadership gives your Soldiers purpose, direction, and motivation in combat. You must deeply understand your profession, your Soldiers, and the tools of war. Only then can you effectively direct your Soldiers in difficult tasks under stressful conditions. As a platoon leader, your leadership responsibilities far exceed those of most of your counterparts in the civilian world. You must persuade young men and women to follow your orders—orders that could put them in harm's way. Soldiers will willingly obey, even if it means endangering life or limb, if they have faith and trust in your leadership.

Fire Team Formations

Formations are the arrangements of Soldiers and of units in relation to each other. Platoons and squads use formations for *control*, *security*, and *flexibility*.

Control

In formations, maneuver elements (teams, squads, platoons, etc.)—as well as individual Soldiers within those maneuver elements—have standard positions that allow them to observe their leaders and fellow Soldiers to their right, left, front, and rear. Fire team leaders must be able to see their squad leaders and the Soldiers in their fire team. Leaders control their Soldiers and their formations using standard hand and arm signals.

Security

Formations also provide 360-degree security and allow Soldiers and units to give the weight of their firepower to the flanks (sides), front, or rear in anticipation of enemy contact. The speed and tempo that a formation provides also provides you a form of security.

Flexibility

Soldiers and squads need the flexibility to vary their formations to suit the battlefield conditions. Formations allow Soldiers to execute *battle drills*—rehearsed unit actions—more quickly. With standard formations, leaders can rely on Soldiers and units to be in their assigned positions, performing their assigned tasks in a manner that allows the leaders to maintain momentum and flexibility.

Fire teams use two basic formations when maneuvering: the fire team wedge and the fire team file.

Fire Team Wedge

The fire team wedge (Figure 7.2) is the basic and most widely used fire team formation. Use the fire team wedge when terrain and visibility allow your team leaders and fire team members to see each other. The fire team wedge affords the best observation and fields of fire and, therefore, keeps the fire team more secure during movement.

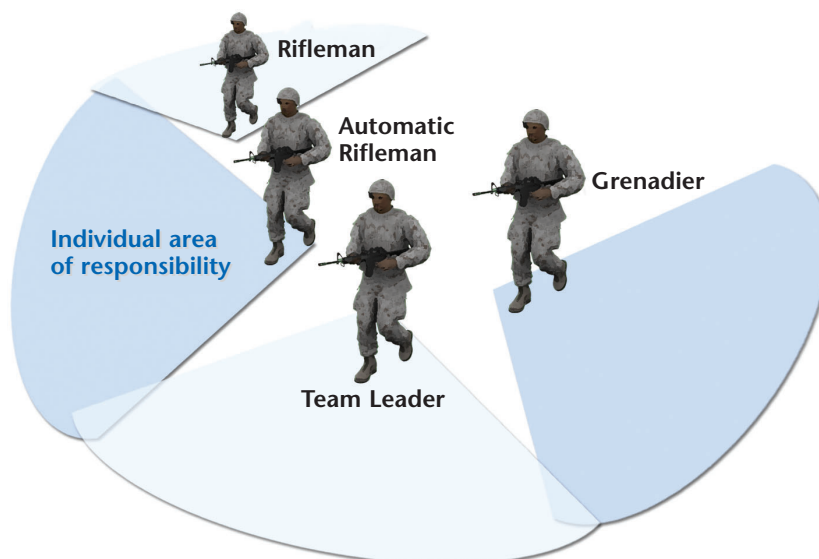


Figure 7.2 Fire Team Wedge

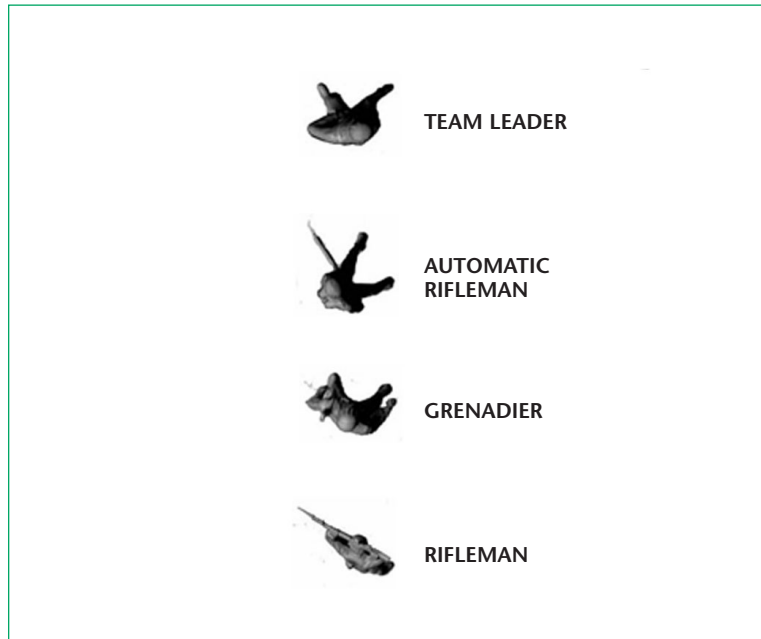


Figure 7.3 Fire Team File

Fire Team File

grazing fire

fire approximately parallel to the ground where the center of the cone of fire does not rise above one meter from the ground

You use the fire team file (Figure 7.3) when terrain or visibility makes it difficult for the team to spread out, such as when traveling through dense vegetation, during night movement, moving through heavy fog, or moving in an urban environment. The fire team file is easier to control than the fire team wedge because you are walking in a slightly dispersed line. It is less flexible, however, because it takes longer to deploy your fire teams from this formation. The fire team file offers less security than the fire team wedge when you consider your Soldiers' dispersion. Soldiers in a file are more susceptible to **grazing fire** when compared with the dispersion that the wedge offers. The file also limits the team's ability to return fire in all directions because the firepower in the file is restricted to the flanks. The file can provide more security in certain situations, however, such as when the goal is to infiltrate a narrow route or passage undetected, or when negotiating a minefield.

TABLE 7.1

A Comparison of the Wedge and File Formations

MOVEMENT FORMATION	WHEN NORMALLY USED	CHARACTERISTICS			
		Control	Flexibility	Fire Capabilities/Restrictions	Security
Fire Team Wedge	Basic fire team formation	Easy	Good	Allows immediate fire in all directions	Good
Fire Team File	Close terrain, dense vegetation, limited visibility conditions	Easiest	Less flexible than the wedge	Allows immediate fire to the flanks, masks fire to the front and rear	Least

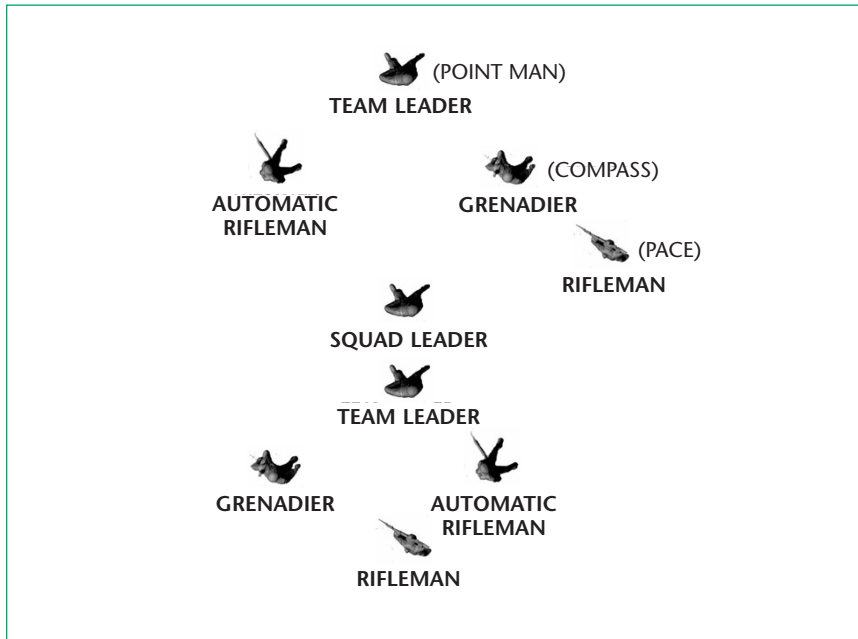


Figure 7.4 Squad Column

Squad Formations

Your squads normally use the squad column (Figure 7.4) as their primary formation. You use the squad line (Figure 7.5) when you need the most firepower possible toward the front when laying down a base of fire. Use the squad file (Figure 7.6) in close terrain, vegetation, or limited visibility, or when infiltrating or moving through a suspected minefield. Leaders must know how to select a formation based on which one best allows control, flexibility, firepower, and security.

Squad Column

The squad column is the most common formation because it allows the fire teams to operate in the wedge formation, providing the best observations, fields of fire, and security. This formation places one dispersed fire team to the front, where enemy contact is most likely to occur, offering better economy of force and conservation of combat power. The squad column also places the squad leader between the two fire teams, permitting better control and flexibility—the squad leader can see both team leaders and both team leaders can see their squad leader.



Figure 7.5 Squad Line

Squad Line

Squad leaders use the squad line when they expect enemy contact to the front, or when the squad needs to lay down a base of fire as part of a larger maneuver. The squad line is harder to control than the squad wedge, but the leaders can maintain control if the team leaders keep eye contact with the squad leader and the squad leader ensures that one team does not get too far forward of the other. The squad line provides excellent security to the front and rear, but poor security to the flanks because of the limited number of Soldiers who can see and place fire to the flanks.

Squad File

Squad leaders use the squad file when moving through severely restricted terrain, infiltrating, or operating during limited visibility. The squad file is the easiest to control, as the trail team follows the lead team. The squad leader assumes a position between the Alpha and Bravo teams to control the two teams' speed and movement. The squad file provides excellent fields of fire and security to the flanks, but provides poor fire and security to the formation's front and rear because each Soldier in the file masks a fellow Soldier's fire to the front and rear.

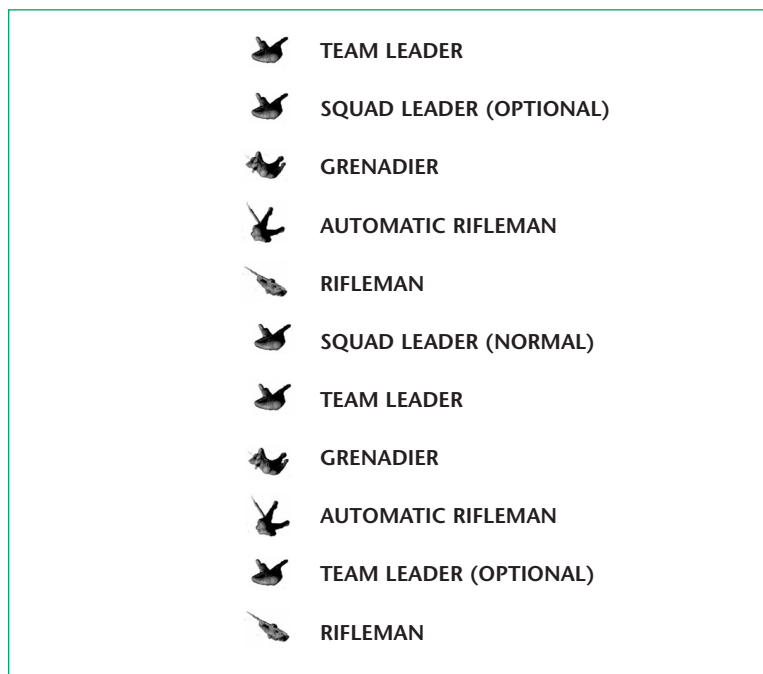


Figure 7.6 Squad File

TABLE 7.2

A Comparison of Squad Formations

MOVEMENT FORMATION	WHEN NORMALLY USED	CHARACTERISTICS			
		Control	Flexibility	Fire Capabilities/ Restrictions	Security
Squad Column	Squad primary formation	Good	Facilitates maneuver, good dispersion laterally and in depth	Allows large volume of fire to the flank—limited volume to the front	All-round
Squad Line	When maximum firepower is required to the front	Not as good as squad column	Limited maneuver capability (both fire teams committed)	Allows maximum immediate fire to the front	Good to the front, little to the flank and rear
Squad File	Close terrain, vegetation, limited visibility conditions	Easiest	Most difficult formation from which to maneuver	Allows maximum immediate fire to the flank, masks most fire to the front and rear	Least

Critical Thinking

How do movement formations relate to the characteristics of the offense? Which movement formation do you think best achieves the characteristics of the offense? (Note: If you're not familiar with the characteristics of the offense, you can find them in Section 9.)

Squad Movement Techniques

Movement refers to how you position or array individuals or units on the battlefield. A movement technique is how you move that formation from one point to another. Together, the movement formation and movement technique allow you to maneuver. The key to moving successfully involves your selecting the best combination of formations and movement techniques for each situation. As a platoon leader, you need to train your squad leaders to consider the mission, the enemy, the time, the terrain, troops available, and civilian considerations (METT-TC) in selecting the best route and the appropriate formation and movement technique. The selection must allow moving squads to maintain cohesion, preserve momentum, provide as much protection as possible, and make contact—with the ability to take offensive or defensive action smoothly.

The term *movement technique* refers to the position of your squads and fire teams in relation to each other while moving. Fire teams and squads use three movement techniques: traveling, traveling overwatch, and bounding overwatch. Like formations, movement techniques provide your teams with varying degrees of control, security, and flexibility.

METT-TC
 Mission
 Enemy
 Terrain
 Troops
 Time
 Civilian considerations.

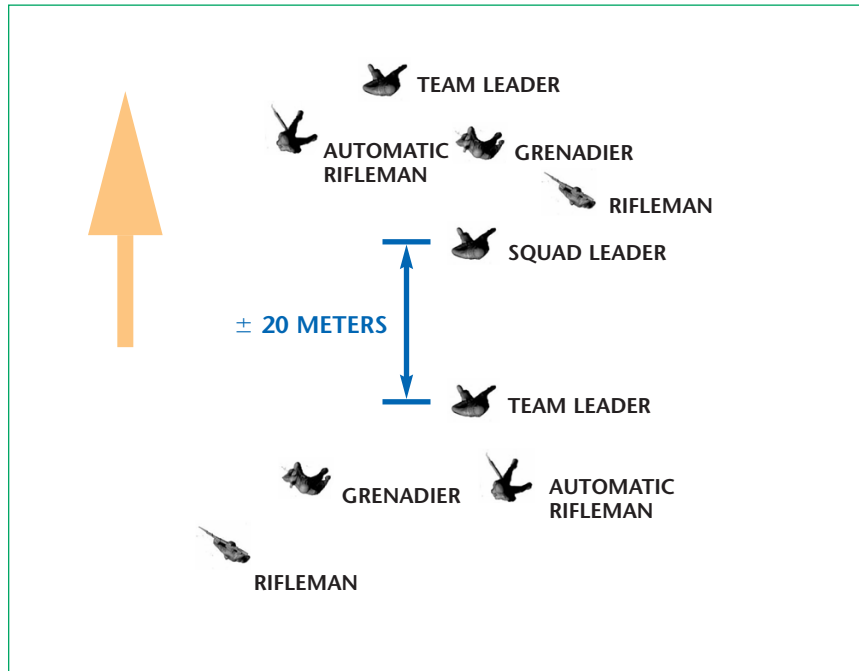


Figure 7.7 Squad Traveling

Formations allow a unit to maneuver over certain terrain while allowing maximum firepower in a desired direction. Movement techniques allow units to maneuver as fast as possible while making contact with the enemy with the smallest tactical element possible. Movement techniques allow one element to immediately establish a base of fire, while the other unit maneuvers to assault the enemy. Movement techniques allow this support and assault relationship without having both units decisively engaged by the enemy and without requiring the maneuver unit to first disengage in order to assault the enemy.

Leaders must balance the need for speed with the need for force protection, based on the likelihood of enemy contact.

Traveling

You use the **travel** technique (Figure 7.7) when enemy contact is not likely. The travel technique offers the best speed and control during maneuver, but offers the least dispersion and security because the trail team follows closely behind the lead fire team. Because teams are closer during movement, the travel technique is easier for the squad leader to control.

Traveling Overwatch

Your squad leaders should use the **traveling overwatch** technique (Figure 7.8) when enemy contact is possible, but the squads must move quickly to accomplish your mission. Because the odds of contact with the enemy are higher compared with when you are using the traveling technique, your lead fire team pushes out farther away from the squad leader and trail squad to better disperse and provide more security. If your lead fire team does make contact with the enemy, the squad leader has preserved combat power by limiting enemy contact to only one of your fire teams. Although more difficult to control during movement, the traveling overwatch technique allows your squad leader flexibility to maneuver the trail fire team around the lead team without the maneuver fire team being engaged by the enemy.

traveling

a movement technique used when enemy contact is unlikely and speed is needed

traveling overwatch

a movement technique used when enemy contact is possible

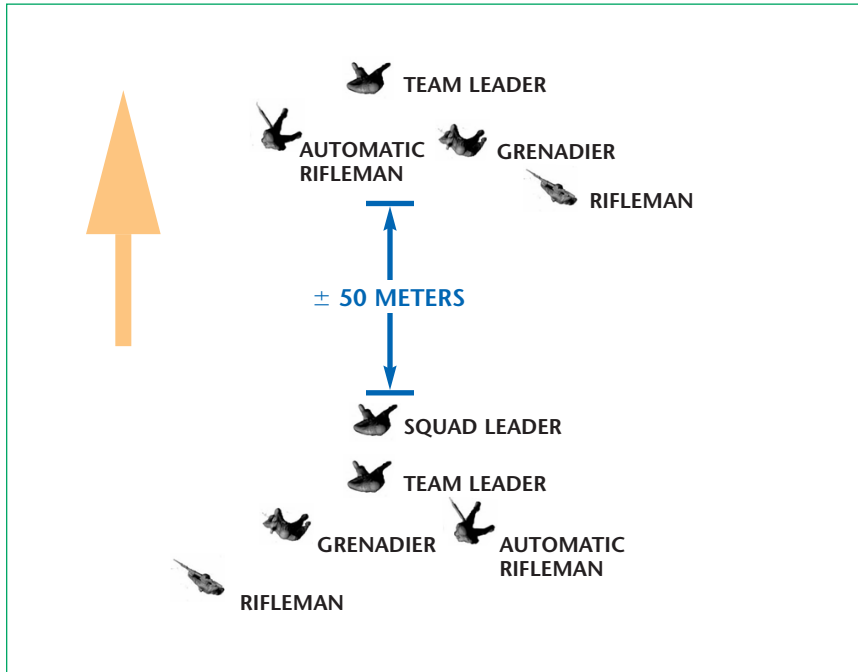


Figure 7.8 Squad Traveling Overwatch

Bounding Overwatch

You will train your squads to use the **bounding overwatch** technique (Figure 7.9) when they expect contact with the enemy. In this movement, one fire team is always in an overwatch position, prepared to lay down a base of fire, while the other fire team maneuvers. Bounding overwatch is the slowest movement technique and also the most difficult to control, but it affords the squad the best dispersion and fire control. In addition, only one fire team makes contact with the enemy, preserving combat power. When contact is made, the fire team in contact becomes the base fire team to destroy or suppress the enemy, and the fire team not in contact maneuvers to destroy the enemy while the base fire team covers the second team's movement. Alternatively, if you wish to disengage from contact, the fire team not in contact quickly occupies a support-by-fire position where it can place covering fire onto the enemy position. This allows the fire team in contact to disengage and fall back to a covered and concealed position behind the covering fire of the base fire team. This process continues until the squad successfully breaks contact with the enemy.

There are two options when using the bounding overwatch technique: successive bound and alternate bound (Figure 7.10). In the *successive* bound, fire teams can “leapfrog” forward. One fire team overwatches, and the other fire team bounds forward to a covered and concealed position. When the bounding fire team is ready to overwatch the other team, they radio or signal back and the previous overwatch team bounds forward to a position generally parallel to the other fire team. In the *alternate* bound, the bounding fire team does not stop parallel with the overwatch fire team, but moves beyond the overwatch fire team. Your squad leaders must consider METT-TC to determine whether to use the bounding overwatch movement technique.

bounding overwatch

a squad movement technique you use when you expect contact with the enemy or when you must cross a large open danger area—one fire team bounds in anticipation of contact with the enemy while another team provides overwatch

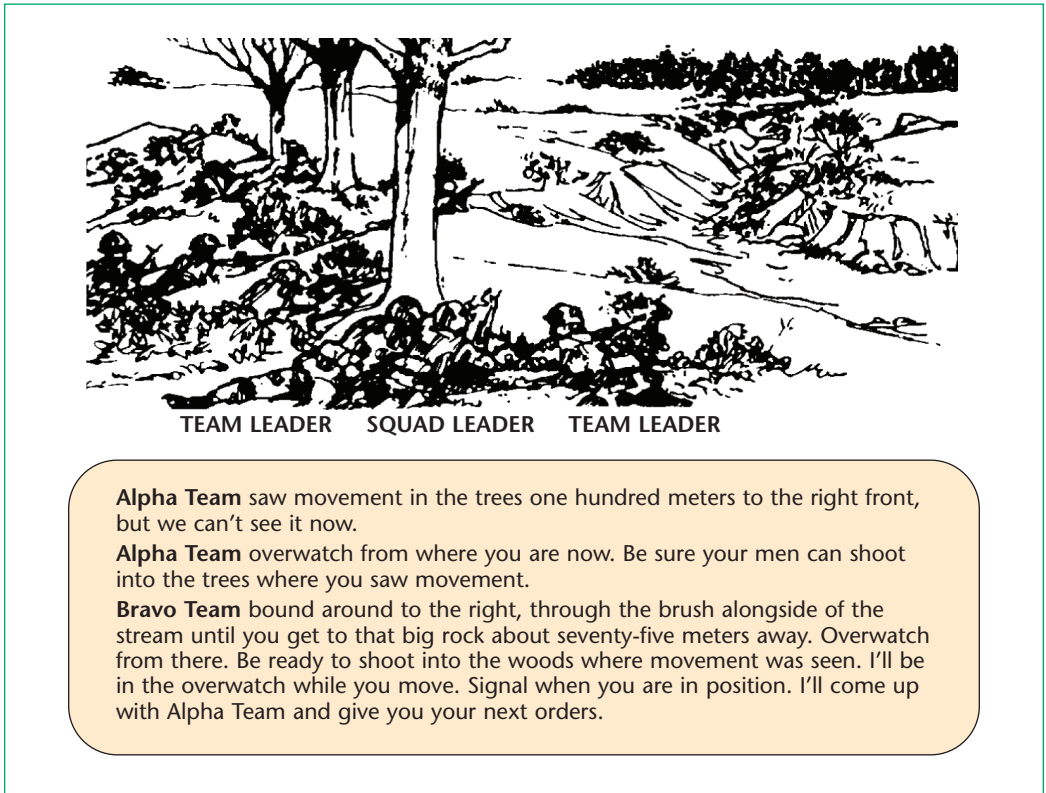


Figure 7.9 Example of a Squad Leader's Order to Bound

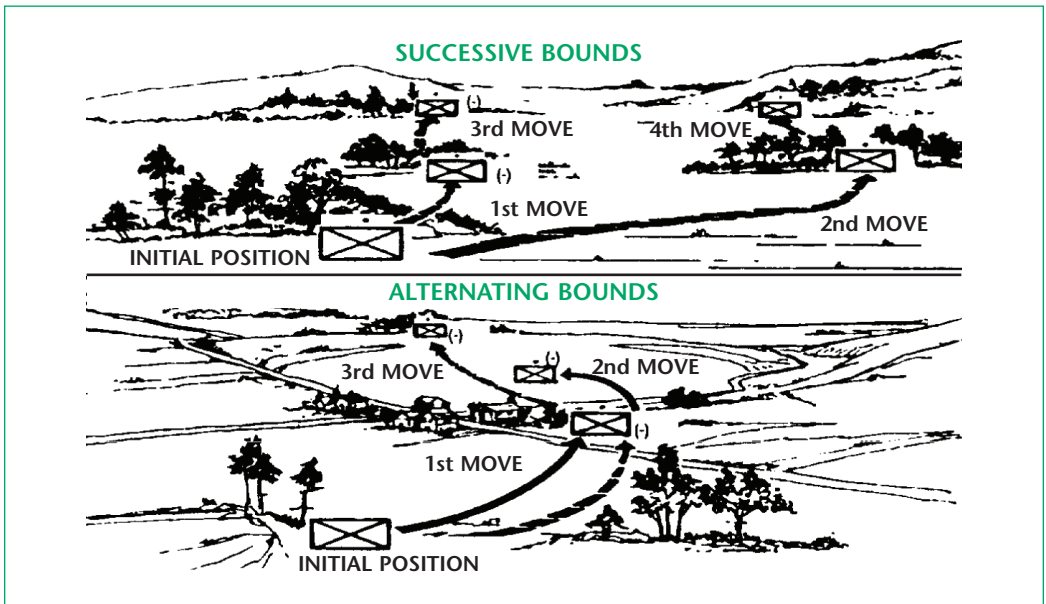


Figure 7.10 Squad Successive and Alternate Bounds

TABLE 7.3

Movement Techniques and Characteristics

MOVEMENT FORMATION	WHEN NORMALLY USED	CHARACTERISTICS			
		Control	Dispersion	Speed	Security
Traveling	Contact not likely	More	Less	Fastest	Least
Traveling Overwatch	Contact possible	Less	More	Slower	More
Bounding Overwatch	Contact expected	Most	Most	Slowest	Most

THE PLATOON LEADER CONSIDERS THE METT-TC AND THE ABOVE CHARACTERISTICS THEN DIRECTS WHICH MOVEMENT TECHNIQUE THE SQUAD WILL USE

Critical Thinking

Describe examples of METT-TC that would prompt you to place your grenadier on a particular side of your movement formation. Describe similar examples that would prompt you to place your automatic rifleman on a particular side of your movement formation.

Further Tactical Considerations

In planning tactical movement, leaders should also consider the requirements for:

- Reconnaissance
- Dispersion
- Security
- Cover and concealment
- Speed
- Observation and fields of fire
- Maneuver space
- Command and control.

Critical Thinking

In the opening vignette, which formations would you have used in LT Chandler's place?



CONCLUSION

Leading small units in combat is a highly complex role with awesome responsibilities. Knowing how, when, and where to maneuver your small tactical unit is key to success in that role.

Remember that the goal is always to preserve your units' combat power—their maneuver, firepower, protection, and leadership. Keeping this in mind and constantly assessing the situation through METT-TC, you can ensure that your troops arrive where they need to, when they need to, and therefore gain the victory.

Key Words

firepower

organic

protection

leadership

grazing fire

traveling

traveling overwatch

bounding overwatch

Learning Assessment

1. Which factors might force a squad leader to deploy fire teams in a bounding overwatch?
2. Describe the fire team file, wedge, and column formations. Give examples of combat circumstances in which each of these configurations would work best.
3. When contact with the enemy is possible, but the squad needs to move rapidly, which is the recommended movement technique?

References

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