

BCT WALK AND SHOOT: TRAINING TACTICAL LEADERS ON SETTING CONDITIONS TO ACHIEVE COMBINED ARMS MANEUVER

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In 1997, then-COL David H. Petraeus and MAJ Robert A. Brennan published an article in *Infantry Magazine* titled “Walk and Shoot Training” that described the development of a training scenario focused on training company commanders, platoon leaders, and their respective fire supporters on planning and executing a movement to contact (approach march) and employing indirect fires in support of the operation. In the article, the authors stated that while there are many cases where Infantrymen should aggressively close with the enemy, maintain contact, and kill him with direct fires, all too often tactical leaders fail to integrate fires into their plans in order to set advantageous conditions prior to closing with and destroying the enemy. The same lessons that led the leaders of 1st Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division to develop a “walk and shoot” tactical exercise without troops (TEWT) in 1997 not only continue to be seen today, but are compounded by the introduction of a host of enablers available to leaders in the current operating environment. Our tactical leaders often transition from platoon live-fire exercises directly into company live-fire exercises without getting valuable repetitions aimed at training them on the integration of all available assets to set advantageous conditions — a leader-intensive task. In February 2016, the 2nd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) executed a redesigned walk and shoot TEWT with the objective of training company and platoon leadership in the art and science of employing both indirect and direct

fires, multiple enablers, and maneuver elements to achieve synchronized combined arms maneuver. Such training is invaluable to our company leaders as they prepare to lead their formations in company combined arms live-fire exercises (CALFEXs) and should be built into the standard training progressions for maneuver leaders and units.

Rather than develop a training exercise that focused strictly on the employment of fires, 2nd BCT’s redesigned “walk and shoot” utilized arguably one of the toughest tactical scenarios — the combined arms breach — to train company-level leaders on setting advantageous conditions in terms of the enemy situation, friendly situation, terrain, and timing. Furthermore, the exercise scenario provided the training audience context on how each echelon’s actions contribute to the platoon, company, and battalion’s successful accomplishment of mission. This challenging problem set forced leaders to visualize their mission and how it fits into the larger scenario. The exercise forced company leadership to plan for and employ all assets to include organic elements and numerous enablers. Additionally, the scenario drove leaders to understand the use of space and time to synchronize effects to set conditions and inevitably overwhelm the enemy at the decisive point in the battle. This exercise provided leaders in squad leader positions and above valuable repetitions on the tasks they must master to truly achieve synchronized combined arms maneuver. The lessons learned during 2nd BCT’s “walk and shoot” will undoubtedly increase participants’

Members of the heavy weapons squad occupy a support-by-fire position as smoke comes in beyond the wire obstacle during the 2nd BCT’s walk and shoot exercise.

Photos courtesy of authors



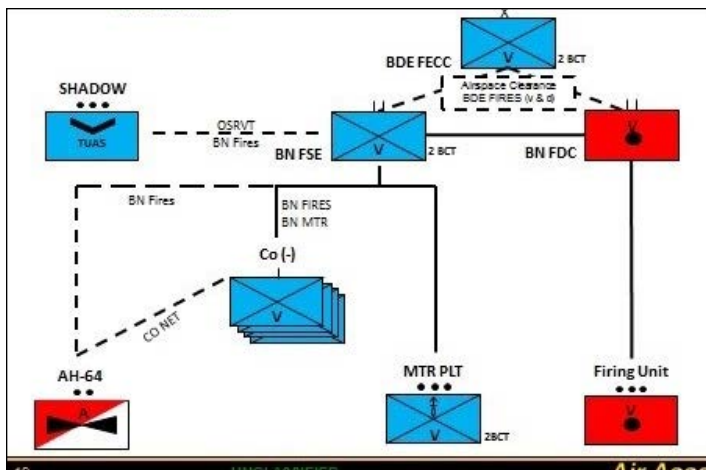


Figure 1 — Walk and Shoot Exercise Communications Architecture and Clearance Process

proficiencies as they progress towards training with their entire formation and leading their Soldiers into combat.

Exercise Design

In general, the exercise centered on a company's mission to breach a linear mine/wire obstacle and set the conditions to allow another company to execute a forward passage of lines through the obstacle and assault a follow-on objective. The company team executing the lane was designated as a shaping operation focused on setting conditions for a subsequent unit to assume the decisive operation. The company team consisted of two rifle platoons, one mounted anti-tank platoon, and an engineer squad. The training audience for each element included company leadership, platoon leadership, a heavy weapons squad, company mortars, and the habitually aligned fire support teams. In addition to the elements task organized under the company, the order also outlined enablers that would be utilized in the operation. These enablers included battalion mortars, 105mm and 155mm howitzers, air weapons teams (AWTs), and the BCT's organic Shadow unmanned aerial vehicle. To add realism to the scenario, these external enablers served in a direct support role to the battalion and BCT and were allocated based on the higher-level unit's priorities. Furthermore, in order to employ these assets, company teams were required to utilize battalion and brigade mission command nodes as opposed to establishing quick fire nets. Not only did this add realism to the scenario, but it also provided a superb training opportunity for battalion and brigade fire support elements (FSEs) and tactical command posts (TACs).

Each company team executed the lane in three phases. For each of these phases, the BCT

resourced both maneuver and fire support observer-controllers (OCs) for the company command team and each of the platoons as well as subject matter experts to observe each of the supporting enablers. The OCs were provided training and evaluation outlines that were used to rate the training element on the individual and collective tasks associated with each event during the exercise. The first phase consisted of executing the lane in a virtual simulation utilizing Virtual Battlespace 3 (VBS3). The virtual environment replicated the same terrain and a similar enemy situation that the units would see on the range. Additionally, the unit replicated the same communications architecture and included supporting teams that replicated the enablers. The second phase consisted of a blank iteration on Observation Point (OP) 13 in the Fort Campbell training area. Prior to the blank iterations, companies conducted a combined arms rehearsal (CAR). All direct fire weapon systems were fired using blank ammunition, and the indirect fire weapons systems used either target practice-tracer (TP-T) rounds or a single high explosive (HE) round. The signature from the indirect fire weapons systems provided the training audience feedback on the effectiveness of their fires while conserving training ammunition. Upon successful completion of the virtual and blank-fire phases, the training unit advanced to the live-fire portion of the exercise.

OP 13 consists of an area approximately 1,000 meters in length and 400 meters in width that extends into the northern impact area. There are approximately 10 clearly identifiable vehicular targets that are located just beyond the OP in the impact area. Additionally, the range has five wooden structures and pop-up direct-fire targets positioned within the cleared area of the range. As you move from east to west in the cleared area of the range, there are three sets of berms. Indirect fire weapons systems from 60mm mortars up to 155mm artillery can effectively engage the targets in the impact area from firing positions to the northeast and south of the range. Units are allowed to employ individual weapons,

Figure 2 — Example Evaluation Checklist Used by OCs

PERFORMANCE MEASURES: Maneuver	GO	NO-GO
1. Unit leaders gained or maintained situational understanding.		
2. Unit leaders adjusted the plan.		
3. Unit executed the attack.		
4. Unit conducted consolidation and reorganization.		
5. Unit reported status to higher headquarters.		
6. Directed unit reaction to the obstacle.		
7. Obtained pertinent obstacle intelligence from unit recon and reports from other units.		
8. Developed the breach plan.		
9. Directed actions of the support force to support by fire.		
10. Ensured the mounted/dismounted elements secure the near side of the obstacle.		
11. Directed the breach force to reduce the obstacle using the method designated in the order.		
12. Established far side security for breaching operation.		
13. Directed actions on the objective.		
14. Reported completion of the breach to the higher unit commander.		

crew-served weapons, M203s, M320s, .50 caliber machine guns, MK-19s, AT4s, Carl Gustavs, and Javelins on the range.

The training scenario focused on validating company-level leaders' ability to plan and execute a combined arms breach. The breach of the obstacle was the decisive point for training units. This drove each element to plan for setting the conditions and executing suppression, obscuration, security, reduction, and the assault (SOSRA). Prior to executing the lane, each company team received updated intelligence on its area of operations (AO), and the higher-level headquarters would set the conditions prior to allowing the training unit to cross the line of departure. All OCs walking the lane carried a list of lane injects that outlined targets that were safe to engage based on minimum safe distances from each berm and target descriptions that coincided with the tactical scenario. This allowed for a significant amount of "free play" by the training unit. After identifying the targets to the training audiences and providing a description of the situation, OCs only injected themselves if there was a gross error in target location that violated the minimum safe distances for the weapons system being utilized. The officer in charge of the range used a script to introduce injects into the scenario and drive the training audience to make decisions.

Lessons Learned

The training audience quickly realized that one does not simply "walk and shoot." Achieving synchronized combined arms maneuver against a thinking enemy while executing a complex mission exacts a heavy toll on leaders. While there were volumes of individual and collective lessons learned by each of the maneuver companies that participated in the training, there were four key lessons learned that would benefit leaders as they progress into company combined arms maneuver live fires:

- * First, leaders must understand the mechanics of employing their forces or enablers.
- * Second, leaders must understand the actions required to achieve their desired effects at the decisive time and place.
- * Third, leaders must implement methods that create a shared understanding and allow for disciplined initiative across their formation.
- * Finally, leaders must have the tools and systems to visualize and continually assess all the factors of the mission, enemy, terrain, troops available, time available, and civilian considerations (METT-TC).

The leaders and organizations that excelled during this training event had some commonalities. All of these similarities became apparent during the rehearsals and manifested themselves during execution of the lane. The first similarity was the unit's ability to understand the mechanics and math associated to maneuver, weapons employment, and enablers. When units understood the time it took to maneuver from one location to the next utilizing a certain movement technique,



During the walk and shoot exercise, a platoon forward observer plots and reports his location as the platoon establishes a support-by-fire position.

they could then quantify what conditions they must achieve and the duration that they needed to achieve these effects on the battlefield. When units understood the different methods of controlling indirect fire weapons systems, they could utilize different methods based on how responsive they needed the fires in any given situation. When units understood the amount of ammunition with each weapons system and the consumption rates based on how these systems are being fired, they could ensure they maintained the required ammunition for the decisive point in the battle. When units understood minimum safe distances for all weapons systems (or risk estimate distances if used in combat), then they could quantify the risk of employing certain systems to achieve the desired effects. When units understood how long it took to emplace the Anti-Personnel Obstacle Breaching System (APOBS), they could account for the weapon systems and ammunition that would be required to suppress or obscure the enemy enough to initiate the breach. In order to be successful, the leadership had to do the battlefield math that was required to develop a feasible plan and continually update their assessments during the exercise as conditions changed. Those who truly understood the calculus executed this effectively and made informed decisions while those who did not merely guessed.

A commander's decision on "where to mass" requires precise calculations across all phases and at the decisive point. Synchronized fires and maneuver will maintain momentum, but massing fires at the decisive point is paramount to concentrating combat power while preventing the enemy to do the same. Effects must be the driving force for the delivery and concentration of combat power at key points in the operation, therefore, providing conditions to keep the desired tempo. In this scenario, the majority of the training units determined that the breach was the decisive point in the battle. Analytical planning and continuously updating statuses ensured the unit had required assets available at the exact point in time and space so they can mass and achieve the desired effects on the enemy. This, coupled with a clear understanding of

the actions required and the time it takes to execute these actions, allowed leaders to achieve true synchronization and overwhelm an enemy at the decisive point in the battle.

The heart of the walk and shoot is shaping the decisive point. How the leadership estimates, employs, and tracks assets is no small task and provides higher with a valid evaluation of the technical and tactical competence of their commanders. The ability to successfully employ all available assets to achieve desired conditions at the decisive point just doesn't happen by chance. If commanders focus too much on organic maneuver capabilities alone, they will lose sight of how to effectively integrate and synchronize everything at their disposal. In effect, it will degrade their ability to maintain the momentum. If they lose sight of the ammunition consumed, they cannot sustain a support-by-fire position during the breach. If they do not truly understand how long it takes to call for, shoot, and build an artillery-delivered obscuration smokescreen, they will not be able to maintain the suppressive fires and set the conditions for the engineers to breach the obstacle. This exercise provided leaders invaluable repetitions on the actions and knowledge required to synchronize their maneuver elements with the host of enablers available in today's operating environment.

The third similarity in successful units was the unit's ability to create a common understanding amongst leaders. This common understanding begins with a company commander's ability to clearly articulate his intent. The expanded purpose, key tasks, and desired end state provide the foundation for all leaders to visualize the operation in a similar manner. Task and purpose alone do not provide enough context to allow subordinate units to understand how their actions contribute to and fit into the larger plan. Successful units developed simple methods in order to maintain a common understanding during the execution of the lane. Units that excelled used execution checklists to articulate and communicate the actions each subordinate unit would take in executing the plan and the conditions required at each step in the process. Detailed planning prior to the exercise and war-gaming potential contingencies allowed units to change required decisions to triggers. The more decision points that could be converted to triggers allowed units to maintain the tempo of the operation. These triggers were outlined in the execution checklist and provided a method for all leaders to understand what was occurring in the operation without clogging up the radio net with unnecessary communications. Companies that created and rehearsed methods to maintain a shared understanding of conditions and triggers were able to decentralize control and maintain momentum. Additionally, when conditions changed in a manner not previously anticipated, the radio net was not jammed with unnecessary traffic, allowing leaders the ability to communicate adjustments to the plan.

Another method that successful units utilized to create a common understanding that enabled synchronized actions and mitigated risk was the use of graphical control measures and weapons control measures. The BCT developed the scenario with injects that forced leaders to understand fire support coordination measures. The placement of the brigade coordinated fire line (CFL) helped leaders understand

how the BCT commander saw each echelon's fight. Prior to crossing the line of departure, the BCT's CFL was the training companies' limit of advance. Engagements against air defense threats beyond the CFL set the conditions for allowing the company to cross its line of departure (LD) with supporting AWTs. As the training company crossed the LD, the BCT's CFL shifted deeper into the impact area. While the company was maneuvering to the objective, the BCT's radars acquired enemy indirect fire systems shooting from a location short of the CFL in the company's AO. The company had to clear the ground before the BCT conducted counter fire. Company teams that utilized the pre-established phase lines to track forward progress were quickly able to clear the ground and get effects on the enemy indirect fire systems. Units that did not have a method of tracking their forward progress lacked the common understanding to quickly clear the ground. Additionally, units that established common direct fire weapon systems control measures were able to efficiently synchronize maneuvering elements with direct fires. In all instances, success was closely tied to the leaders' understanding of time and space and their ability to put simple procedures in place to synchronize their actions across the depth, width, and height of their AO.

The final lesson learned involved the tools and procedures leaders utilized to track the battle. Since all leaders receive and interpret information differently, there was no right answer on how one maintains situational awareness in combat. The bottom line is that leaders must develop a method and create the tools that work for them. Whether it is a certain size map board or tracking charts that outline critical information, leaders must find a method that allows them to translate information into the knowledge they need to make informed decisions. Additionally, since the volume of pertinent information is extensive, they must assign responsibilities to different personnel on the team to track certain types of information. Leaders must rehearse how this information is tracked and how those tracking the information articulate it to

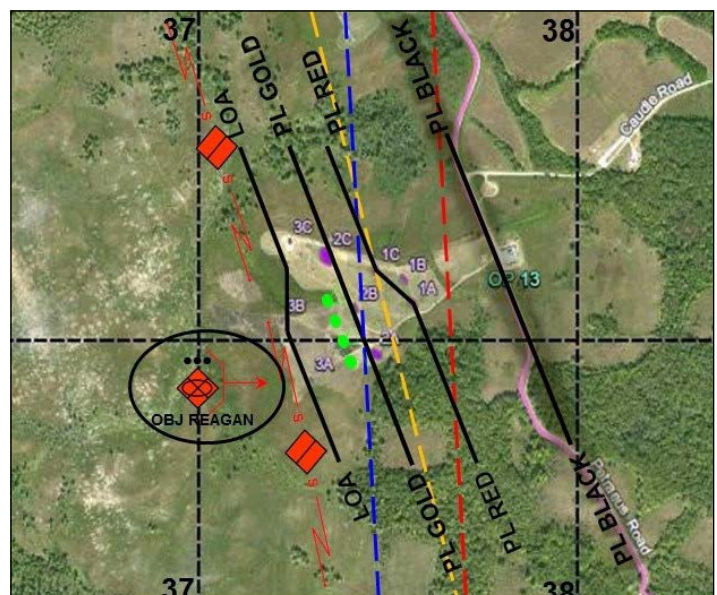


Figure 3 — Example Diagram that Outlines Higher-Level Graphical Control Measures and Basic Enemy Situation

those that need the information. What information does the company fire support officer have to track? How is the company commander utilizing his RTO? Where is the forward observer in relation to the platoon leader? What is the company executive officer or first sergeant tracking and how is this enabling the unit? These types of questions need to be addressed prior to execution. Successful units thought all of this through and rehearsed it in conditions that simulated the event prior to LD.

Conclusion

Exercises similar to the 2nd BCT's walk and shoot TEWT are low-cost, high-yield tools that are invaluable in training and certifying leaders. The 2nd BCT used this exercise to validate its company-level leaders on the actions required to achieve synchronized combined arms maneuver. Each phase of the event provided the training progression essential for units to refine how they operate prior to executing higher-level collective training with their entire formations. Through the use of rehearsals, virtual simulation, and blank and live iterations, the BCT commander was able to evaluate company leaders on their ability to exercise the principles of mission command to achieve a shared understanding, their mastery of setting the conditions to overwhelm the enemy at a time and place of their choosing, and even unit training management. Along every step of the walk and shoot, commanders and subordinates were learning and fine-tuning their plans by getting repetitions in their understanding and application of mission command. Throughout the course of a unit's progression from the virtual simulation to the live-fire exercise, leaders grew exponentially. Leaders refined how they tracked and used critical information requirements to improve their decision making. From start to finish, the company leadership gained the competencies required to lead their organizations and the confidence to exploit opportunities.

Clausewitz stated that decision making is the correct application of knowledge and experience. A combined arms fires and maneuver exercise requires analytic decision making for planning up to and including the combined arms rehearsal. During the execution of the lanes, analytical tracking of assets in time and space is still highly relevant. However, commanders and especially subordinates will rely on intuitive decision making using their assessment of the current enemy situation, their experience, and their ability to recognize key elements and conditions resulting from the current situation. This type of exercise allows observers to see if decisions are either rushed or over thought out. Conversely, it is a test to determine if commanders blend intuitive and analytical decision making to remain objective, or if they are making decisions purely by intuition.



A company commander and his company fire support officer discuss updated unit locations during the 2nd BCT's walk and shoot exercise.

As we continue to add enablers down to the lowest echelons of our formation, we will have even higher expectations of our junior leaders to achieve synchronized combined arms maneuver. There is no substitute for a combined arms maneuver exercise like the 2nd BCT's walk and shoot TEWT to train commanders and subordinates on the skills required to achieve overwhelming effects on the enemy at a time and place of their choosing.

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