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TITLE  
SHOULD SECTION HEADQUARTERS BE PROVIDED FOR THE  
106 MM RIFLE AND 81 MM MORTAR SQUADS OF THE  
WEAPONS PLATOON OF THE RIFLE COMPANY TOE 7-17T?

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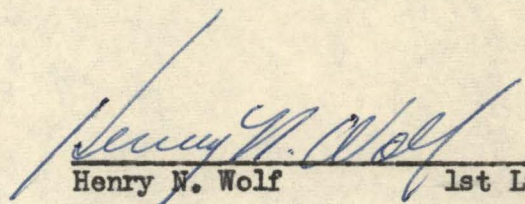
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PREFACE

23 September 1957

With deep gratitude, I wish to thank my wife, Eleanor, for bearing with me throughout the preparation of this monograph, for her encouragement and the typing and re-typing of its pages until completion.

The point of view expressed in this paper is that of the author - not necessarily that of the United States Army Infantry School or the United States Army.

  
Henry N. Wolf 1st Lt

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this monograph is to determine whether a section headquarters should be established for the 106 mm rifle and the 81 mm mortar squads of the weapons platoon of the rifle company TOE 7-17T (ROCID).

Since the beginning of history armies have, and will continue to improve on concepts that will ultimately bring about complete victory. With the advent of new weapons reorganization occurs to cope with the changing situation, however, the basic principles that have applied throughout the years are still adaptable and basically correct.

General S. A. L. Marshall states: "By and large our training system and our standard of battle discipline still adhere to the modes of the 18th century though we are working with the weapons and profess to be working with the advanced military ideas of the 20th." (2:10)

"One of the deterrents to the adoption of new concepts is that company officers and non-coms rarely write of their combat experience." (2:9)

The present concept of tactical employment of the weapons platoon will be discussed in detail. Span of control is the major principle that must be considered for too much control is no more advantageous than too little. In order for the reader to have a thorough understanding of the part that the weapons platoon plays in the accomplishment of the rifle company's mission the mission of the weapons platoon must be discerned and whether a section headquarters would further this accomplishment to the extent that would merit its establishment. The mission of the weapons platoon is to furnish close and continuous fire support and to provide antitank protection for the company. Reference

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will be made throughout the discussion as to control in the accomplishment of this mission.

Reference material on the subject is restricted to Training Text 7-10-2 Rifle Company Infantry Regiment, dated February, 1957, and limited personal experience as a rifle company commander and a weapons platoon leader in Korea.

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## DISCUSSION

As war came into being the desire for survival dictated the methods of the fight. Early man's use of the stone hurled away from his person is the foundation of weapons through the ages designed to inflict injury upon the offender with the least possible damage to the defending individual. As the population increased and more in group formation were involved in conflict the situations demanded more improved tactics. This progressed to consideration of terrain, organization of the enemy, desired objective and means of defense for a given side.

As time and experience have proved, there is a basic principle for every action with improvement and adaptation occurring as the condition exerts itself. This thought is borne out with reference to the introduction and the fact that from an initial beginning there is no way but forward. As human nature dictates, the desire for survival is uppermost in the soldier's mind as he engages in combat. Our civilization recognizes the necessity of conducting such conflict on a specialized basis and broadens the desire of personal survival to include numerous soldiers relegated to the responsibility of an individual. Such an individual is the rifle company commander whose authority encompasses the carrying out of his mission to the best possible conclusion with the universal welfare of the men in his command included. As delegation of responsibility is recognized as a requirement of the successful accomplishment of an objective it is pertinent that it be invested in those whose training and capabilities warrant it. It is imperative that the company commander be cognizant of all developments in a situation and with this knowledge he can then ascertain the degree of responsibility meted to those in his command.

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The need of fire support for the ground soldier was evidenced by the development of weapons and trained personnel. The catapult was the forerunner of today's mortars and this seige engine came into use during the years 200 B.C. to 400 A.D. It enabled the soldiers of that era to project a heavy javelin over a span of distance vulnerable to a foot soldier. When Leonardo de Vinci planned a "secure and covered chariot with guns" the conception of armor had its beginning. (4:135) When this armor became a threat to the ground soldier direct fire weapons were developed to provide protection against or to eliminate this threat.

The present concept of this fire support for the rifle company is the weapons platoon. To carry out its mission it is equipped with three 81 mm mortars and two 106 mm recoilless rifles. These weapons provide the platoon with ample firepower capable of lending full support to various missions the rifle company is assigned; however, this firepower is only as adequate as the capabilities of the personnel, ammunition supplies and flexibility to provide it at the proper place and time. This challenge is greater today with the increased depth and width of the company zone of action over which the rifle platoons will be employed.

For tactical employment of the weapons platoon we shall discuss, first, its employment in the offensive. The platoon is responsible for furnishing close and continuous fire support as well as antitank protection for the rifle company in the attack. Its capabilities are furthered by its flexibility to operate in general support of the entire company or as attached units to the rifle platoons.

For purpose of discussion, the role of general support will be assumed as it is in this role that control presents a greater problem to the leaders than that of an attached unit where the rifle platoon leader assumes command and control is decentralized.

The company commander determines the best means of employment of the weapons platoon to further the accomplishment of the company's mis-





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Each 106 mm rifle squad has a PRC 6 radio with which to maintain radio contact, as an alternate means, wire and messenger are used. It has been the experience of the writer that the PRC 6 radio leaves much to be desired in reliability for radio contact. While on numerous patrols in Korea not over one-half mile from the company Command Post contact was often lost. It is envisioned by the writer that in the greater width and depth of the zone of action that the PRC 6 radio will be ineffective and unreliable. It is also felt that in the attack, a fast moving situation, that the use of alternate means of communication will be precluded. If the company commander's communications fail then the span of control is narrowed to the squad leaders. If the situation is one in which the 106 mm rifles are in close proximity of each other the senior squad leader assumes responsibility of controlling both squads. It is here that thought should be given to the instigating of a section leader. The squad leaders, having received the platoon leader's attack order and general position areas, could effectively continue the mission; however, the numerous unforeseen contingencies that arise would require them to make decisions to cope with the situation.

Training text 7-10-2 reflects - "In the attack, the company commander directs the employment of the antitank squads. The antitank squads are normally employed in general support in order to provide antitank protection to the entire company. The requirements for employing the antitank squads in general support are: Sufficient radio and wire communication with the antitank squads to enable the company commander through his weapons platoon leader to control the squads, terrain that enables movement of the antitank squads to meet an armored threat in any portion of the company. When these requirements for general support cannot be met, the company commander may attach the antitank squads to the rifle platoons. When an antitank squad is attached to a rifle platoon, the squad is under the control of the rifle platoon leader." (3:68)

I think it is well to point out at this time that in the writer's opinion the general concept is to have the squads under the control of

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commissioned personnel if at all possible. This control is flexible in the chain of command in that it starts with the company commander to the platoon leader to the squad leader. If this is not feasible they are placed under direct control of the rifle platoon leader. This span is workable if the original employment is such, but, in the discussion thus far, we assume the original employment of general support, the loss of communication and the squad leader confronted with maintaining control. Like the platoon leader, the proper decision will depend on the squad leader's tactical skill, judgement and leadership ability. If he is weak in these traits due to inexperience he is unable to perform the required part that his weapon is to accomplish in obtaining the company's objective. A section headquarters in a case such as this is a marked advantage. The section leader would possess more experience and is therefore more qualified to effectively utilize the squads as originally intended. This would also allow a continuance of control direct from headquarters and not intentionally force the lesser experienced squad leader to assume that responsibility. It would seem that if the chain of command was unified that the platoon sergeant would be the next most logical controlling factor but his primary duty is one of ammunition supply. There is no doubt as to the necessity of maintaining ammunition resupply if weapons are to continue to operate. Not only is this resupply mandatory but it must be flexible enough to stay abreast of the situation. The importance of ammunition resupply is also evidenced in military history. "After the battle of Shiloh in April, 1862, General Halleck issued these instructions, "When the cartridge boxes of the men are found unfilled the commanding officer of the company will be arrested for neglect of duty." (1:2) Strange as this order seems its necessity was evident. During the attack it is not desirable to stockpile ammunition unless it is mobile. To carry out his primary duty the platoon sergeant uses the one-quarter ton truck and trailer organic to platoon headquarters. The platoon sergeant selects a centrally located position between the 106 mm rifle squads and from this position the guns are resupplied. If the distance between the

[REDACTED]

106 mm rifle squads is too great to utilize this method the platoon sergeant shuttles between the positions. To insure an ample supply of ammunition at all times the platoon sergeant may request the use of the weapons platoon leader's one-quarter ton truck and trailer. This allows him to send a depleted vehicle back to the company's ammunition redistributing point for resupply and yet maintain a mobile load forward for the gun. As necessary as this resupply is it is in the opinion of the writer that this duty could be efficiently carried out by a lesser ranking NCO and free the platoon sergeant to assist the platoon leader in maintaining control of the platoon.

Again reference is made to Training Text 7-10-2 - "General - In the attack the company commander directs the employment of the 81 mm mortar squads. When possible the squads are employed in general support of the company and fire from one centrally located position area with one fire direction center. Communications - Radio is the primary means of communication for the mortar squads during the attack. However, wire should also be used to insure adequate communication throughout the attack." (3:70)

To understand the control of the 81 mm mortar it is necessary to delve into the present organization of the weapons platoon. All personnel connected with the mortars except the squad itself are members of platoon headquarters. There are three sergeant forward observers whose primary duty is that of adjusting the fire of the mortars. To work with the forward observers, thus forming a forward observer party, are three of the four PFC radiotelephone operators, equipped with a PRC 10 radio. The fourth PFC radiotelephone operator remains at the fire direction center to operate the switchboard and PRC 10 radio. This organization allows for one forward observer party for each of the three 81 mm mortars. There are three SP2 fire direction computers whose duties are to receive the fire request from the forward observer party and compute the necessary data. Once this data has been computed the fire commands are sent to the mortars. Each 81 mm mortar squad is composed of one sergeant squad leader, one SP3 gunner, two PFC ammunition bearers and one PFC assistant gunner. Each



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The 106 mm rifles are normally employed in general support along the forward edge of the battle area, covering the most likely avenues of armor approach. If feasible, they should be so located as to afford mutual support. Locations in or near a forward rifle platoon area is favorable for this gives the squads security and the capabilities of additional communications through the rifle platoon. Thought should be given to well dug-in positions if cover and concealment is not sufficient. As many positions as are necessary to cover the sector assigned should be prepared. Wire is usually the principal means of communication in the defense and each 106 mm rifle squad has, in addition to its organic PRC 6 radio, one telephone TA-1/TT. Wire is laid from the fire direction center to the squads giving the platoon leader radio and wire communication with the squads. It is felt that in the defense, in most cases, the platoon leader can effectively control the squads with this communication. A section leader would add coordination of the squads, assist in selection of positions and facilitate the engagement of targets.

Like the 106 mm rifles, the 81 mm mortars are also normally employed in general support. They should be positioned to allow complete coverage of the company's front. This position should be in defilade, have mask and overhead clearance, routes for ammunition resupply and room for dispersion between mortars. Both primary and supplementary positions are prepared. Each mortar squad has a TA-1/TT telephone tied in to the fire direction switchboard but this is an alternate means of communication. The fire direction center is located in close proximity of the mortars and fire commands are given by voice.

In the preparation for the defense the weapons platoon leader has many and varied tasks. He normally is selected by the company commander to recon the area to be defended and make recommendations on employment. He plans barrages and concentrations for the mortars, assists in preparation of the company's fire support plan and, in most cases, prepares the plan. He picks observation posts and assigns the forward observer parties to forward areas. The platoon sergeant assists the platoon leader but his


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primary duty in the defense is ammunition resupply.


In the defense, the platoon leader normally stays in or near the fire direction center. Here, he can supervise the mortar squads and have access to communication with the antitank squads. He maintains contact with the company commander through wire and radio. If a section leader were provided to assume this duty, once again, the platoon leader would be able to remain with the commander. During the defense, there are many problems on coordination of fires and incorporating these fires into the fire plan. The weapons platoon leader usually must solve these problems in conformance with the commander's instructions. There must be close coordination between the commander and the weapons platoon leader and by the same token between the platoon leader and his subordinate leaders. As a weapons platoon leader in Korea I found it most advantageous to remain near the command post to provide the commander with the necessary data on targets, coordinations for providing fire support for patrols and evaluating which targets required priority. Although this was on a limited scale due to the capabilities of the 60 mm mortars, the coordination with the artillery forward observer and knowing the operating procedure of the unit proved to be very beneficial in obtaining desired results. If the weapons platoon leader is to accomplish this he must be provided ample assistance in maintaining control of the weapons platoon. A section headquarters in the defense would provide the control that would be lacking with the 81 mm mortars but it is felt that the weapons platoon leader could still maintain sufficient control over the antitank squads.

The other roles that the weapons platoon may play in accomplishing their mission are attachment to rifle platoons for various missions such as employment on the combat outpost line, platoon size task force operations for security, reconnaissance and holding of critical terrain. However, since this only involves a portion of the weapons platoon, and the rifle platoon leader is in command, it is not pertinent to our problem.

The company commander looks upon his weapons platoon as his personal artillery and considerable thought is given in gaining maximum use of



their fire power. Like all commanders, he needs assistance and advice to arrive at the best possible conclusions. In the new ROCID Division, commanders at each echelon have fire support coordinators to render this needed assistance. The Division commander has the Artillery Division commander, the Battle Group commander has the Mortar Battery commander so why not give the company commander the weapons platoon leader. As a fire support coordinator he must be with the commander where he will be readily available at all times should the need arise. There can be no doubt that fully qualified subordinates would be necessary to insure that the planned support is delivered where it is needed, when it is needed and in the proper volume to do the job. Although we base our tactical plans on principles, skills and judgement we cannot be assured of enemy actions. If we are to be prepared to meet unforeseen contingencies we must, at least, be equipped with the means. It has been said, "Necessity is the Mother of Invention" and through this media progress is gained.

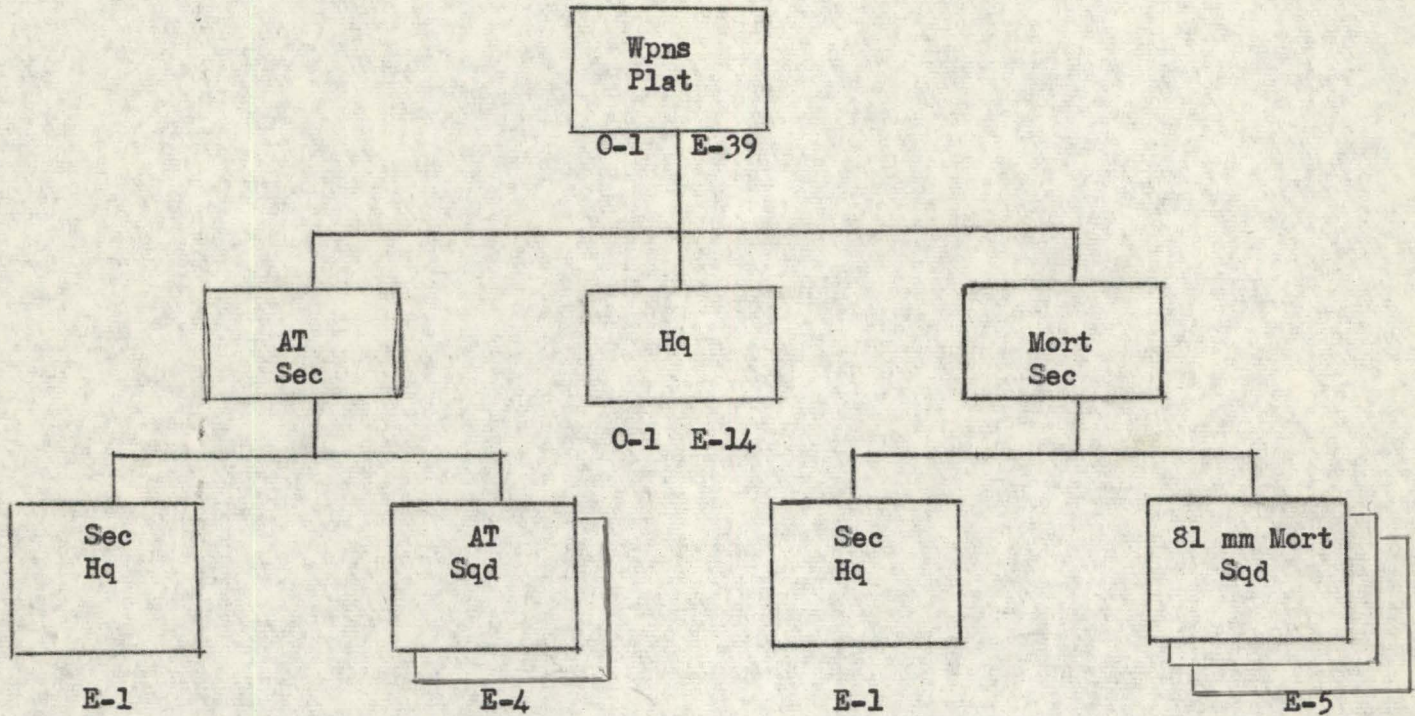


CONCLUSION

The establishment of a section headquarters for the 106 mm rifle and 81 mm mortar squads of the weapons platoon would be highly beneficial in the accomplishment of the weapons platoon's mission. Under the present TOE 7-17T (ROCID) insufficient radio communications are provided the weapons platoon leader and the 106 mm recoilless rifle squads. An ammunition sergeant should be provided, allowing the platoon sergeant to lend full assistance to the weapons platoon leader. The platoon leader's primary mission should be fire support coordination for the company commander.



ANNEX - WEAPONS PLATOON, RIFLE COMPANY (Proposed)



Wpns Plat Hq

Sec Hq AT

Sec Hq Mort

- 1 Lt Plat Ldr (1542) (C)
- 1 M/Sgt Plat Sgt (11280) (R)
- 3 Sgt Fwd Ober (11270) (R)
- 3 Sp2 FD Compt (11220) (R)
- \*2 Pfc Msgr (11200) (R)
- 4 Pfc Rad Tp Op (11200) (R)
- 1 Cbn Cal 30
- 1 GL
- 2 RL
- 13 Rifles US Cal 30
- 1 Tlr Cargo 1/4T2W
- 1 Tlr Cargo 3/4T2W
- 1 Trk 1/4-T 4x4
- 1 Trk 3/4-T 4x4
- 5 Radio Set AN/PRC 10

- 1 SFC Sec Ldr (11170) (R)
- 1 Rifle US Cal .30

- 1 SFC Sec Ldr (11170) (R)
- 1 Rifle US Cal .30

AT Sqd

81mm Mort Sqd

- 1 Sgt Sqd Ldr (11270) (R)
- 1 Sp 3 Gnr (11200) (P)
- 1 Pfc Load (11200) (P)
- 1 Pfc Lt Trk Dvr (11200) (R)
- 2 Pistol Auto Cal .45
- 1 Rifle 106mm on Mount
- 2 Rifle US Cal .30
- 1 Trk Util 1/4-T
- 2 Radio Set AN/PRC 10

- 1 Sgt Sqd Ldr (11270) (R)
- 1 Sp3 Gnr (11210) (P)
- \*2Pfc Ammo Bear (11200) (R)
- 1 Pfc Asst Gnr (11200) (P)
- 2 GL
- 1 Mortar 81mm on Mount
- 2 Pistol Auto Cal .45
- 3 Rifle US Cal .30
- 1 Tlr Cargo 3/4-T 2W
- 1 Trk Cargo 3/4-T 4x4

REMARKS

\*2 EM also Lt Trk Dvr

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