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Capt Earl N. Trabue  
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## PREFACE

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Upon entering into a discussion of a subject it is sometimes well to first define the terms that you are going to use in order that others may understand these terms as you do. Therefore, at this time it would be well for us to have a common understanding of the definitions of a perimeter defense, an all-around defense, and, the difference between these two methods of defense.

According to Special Regulations 320-5-1, Dictionary of United States Army Terms, "a perimeter defense is a defense with no exposed flank, characterized by the siting and emplacement of weapons and positions along the outer boundary of any defended area." (16:209) An all-around defense on the other hand is defined as "a defense organized to meet a ground threat from any direction with the greatest strength of the defense normally oriented toward the probable direction of enemy attack." (16:14)

As the above definitions are so similar as to cause some confusion as to their difference, let us examine the definition of the perimeter defense as defined by The Infantry School. "A perimeter defense is a defense in which a unit is initially disposed to meet an attack from all directions simultaneously." (12:1)

The key then to the difference between an all-around defense and a perimeter defense is that the perimeter is organized and occupied to meet an attack from all directions simultaneously. The all-around defense, on the other hand, while organized to defend from any direction, requires that troops be moved to supplemental positions to counteract attacks from a specific flank or area to the rear and is NOT capable of repelling attacks from all directions simultaneously.

The point of view expressed in this paper is that of the author -

not necessarily that of The Infantry School or The Department of the  
Army.

EARL N. TRABUE  
Captain, Inf

## INTRODUCTION

The scope of this monograph is to prove that the present army field manuals FM 7-10 and FM 7-20 do not give sufficient guidance as to when to use a perimeter defense.

The purpose in writing this paper is to provoke thought, discussion, and action in those who read it. Thought, because sound actions cannot be taken without it. Discussion, in order to make full use of the axiom that two heads are better than one. Action, by those in a position to do so, to educate those of us who need to know, to instruct us and to give us better guidance as to when a perimeter defense is indicated.

It is believed that the accomplishment of the purpose of this paper will be of great value to all of us who may someday be on the ground and have to make a sound, timely decision as to what type of defense to use, the so-called normal defense, or, the perimeter defense.

I shall prove my theorem by stating the conditions under which a perimeter defense should be used as outlined in current army field manuals FM 7-10 and FM 7-20, then, by use of historical examples and thoughts of combat experienced officers, show where the field manuals do not go into sufficient detail on when to use the perimeter defense.

In order that this paper might remain unclassified many examples of the Korean War which are still classified are not used in the discussion that follows.

## DISCUSSION

When we go to FM 7-10, Rifle Company Infantry Regiment, to determine what this manual has to say about when the rifle platoon and the rifle company should use a perimeter defense, we find, upon examination of Section V, Chapter 5, The Platoon in the Defense, the subject of the perimeter defense is completely ignored. However, in Chapter 8, Rifle Company, Defensive Combat, par 310a states, "When a rifle company or a smaller unit is on an independent mission or when it is separated from the battalion and the enemy location is not certain, it establishes a perimeter defense." (5:304)

In Chapter 9, The Defense, par 364a of FM 7-20 states, "A perimeter defense is used by isolated units." (6:348)

Interpreting the above statements as to when to use the perimeter defense as saying the same thing, and finding no other guidance in either FM as to when to use the perimeter defense, we come to the conclusion that as far as FMs 7-10 and 7-20 are concerned, unless you are isolated, you will use a normal line defense. We must remember though, that in a normal defensive position a unit must have all-around defense. Par 268d FM 7-10 states, "A unit organizes its position to meet an enemy attack from any direction. The extent of all-around defense depends on the type of operation, the units involved, and the terrain." (5:264)

One of the times that the perimeter defense has been used that is not specified in the FMs quoted above is the use of the perimeter defense to combat infiltration.

"In early September 1950 a platoon of Company K, 7th Cavalry, dug in on the defense between two hills occupied by two other battalions of the regiment, in two nights killed 180 enemy soldiers and wounded an unknown number while suffering casualties of only 6 wounded themselves." (4:15) Captain John R. Flynn, who describes the action and who at one time commanded Company K, tells us, "In Korea we learned to form a perimeter defense against infiltration. Usually platoons organized their own perimeters but sometimes they joined together to make a company perimeter. It all depended upon the mission, terrain and other factors." (4:15)

Is the use of the perimeter as a defense against infiltration new to us, something developed out of the Korean War as Captain Flynn implied

when he stated, "In Korea we learned to use the perimeter defense against infiltration?" No, of course not. The Japanese were masters at the art of infiltration and our units stationed in the Pacific used the perimeter defense extensively. In the 7th Infantry Division's remarks on Japanese infiltration it was noted that, "With the exceptions of two examples all attempts at infiltration were partially or entirely disrupted by tight night perimeters." (1:3) The 43d Infantry Division fought in the Pacific against the Japanese in the New Georgia, Aitape, and Luzon campaigns during World War II. In the 169th Infantry, a regiment of the 43d, "The perimeter defense was the basic disposition for units the size of battalion and under." (8:4) Although the New Georgia and Aitape campaigns were jungle operations the Luzon campaign for the most part was not. I was a member of the 172d Infantry, a sister regiment of the 169th in the 43d during the Aitape and Luzon campaigns. We used the perimeter exclusively during these campaigns. One of our reasons was as defense against infiltration.

Having established the fact that the perimeter defense has been used to combat infiltration, let's see what our field manuals have to say about this subject. Par 289h FM 7-10, speaking of conduct of night defense states, "It can be expected that some of the enemy will infiltrate the position." (5:290) Par 312, Defense in Woods, states that, "The support platoon prepares to counterattack against small infiltration groups which penetrate the position." (5:308) There is no paragraph heading entitled Defense Against Infiltration. In short, FM 7-10 implies that there is no defense to prevent infiltration, but, it does give us guidance on how to get rid of the infiltrators once they have succeeded in penetration into the position.

When we go to FM 7-20, however, we have a little better luck. Par 340, Defense Against Infiltration, states, "Observation and listening posts keep the ground between defense areas under constant surveillance.

Areas which cannot be observed are searched by combat patrols or blocked by small security detachments." (6:325)

We have found, then, our first point where the manuals could offer us advice on the use of the perimeter defense, namely, as a defense against infiltration.

Next we will review the use of the perimeter defense in the jungle. Colonel A. R. Mackechnie, in speaking of a rifle company in the jungle while in the defense, states, "Commanding ground was selected whenever possible, using knobs or "pimples" on the ridge line. An area big enough to accommodate all men was arranged in an all-around perimeter. Open, fern covered, or light jungle was selected whenever possible." (9:20)

As the examples of perimeter defense in the Pacific jungles are legion and the fact that the perimeter was used almost exclusively in the jungle is common knowledge, I will not quote any more combat examples of this type. However, the following facts are known about jungle terrain. Visibility is limited, fields of fire are short and limited at times to narrow lanes that have to be prepared. The terrain is extremely rugged and movement is channalized to existing trails, or, trails must be constructed in order that a unit may have sustained movement. The extreme ruggedness of the terrain, the lack of visibility and the limited fields of fire are all factors that aid infiltrating groups to penetrate your positions. The fact that the movement is so channalized as to leave both flanks exposed much of the time dictates that the unit so involved place great stress on all-around defense. Therefore, due to the great danger of infiltration and the need for a much better than normal all-around defense, the perimeter defense is indicated for use in jungles. Neither FM 7-10 nor FM 7-20 mention the defense in jungle warfare. ✓

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Another place that the perimeter defense was used extensively in Korea was in the combat outposts. Captain Russell A. Gugeler gives us one such action in his description of Outpost Eerie. "Outpost Eerie was



the responsibility of Company K, 179th Infantry during March 1952. Outpost Eerie was an egg shaped area, 40 by 20 yds, circumscribed by a communication trench with 9 bunkers and had 3 separate barbed wire obstacles surrounding it. The outpost was manned by 2 rifle squads reinforced with a machine gun and one 60mm mortar. On the night of 21 March 1952 this small outpost was badly mauled by the enemy. The outpost, out of 26 men, suffered casualties of 8 dead, 4 wounded and 2 missing after being forced to call their supporting artillery directly onto their position before the enemy was forced to withdraw, leaving 31 dead." (7:230-243)

Before citing another example of a perimeter defense being used by a combat outpost I would like to quote, in part, what FM 7-10 has to say about combat outposts. Par 321 states, "The combat outpost is organized as a series of outguards which vary in strength from a half squad to a reinforced rifle platoon. Outguards organize their positions covering a normal frontage. A support echelon ordinarily is not used and final protective fires are not planned to protect the position since the combat outpost withdraws before the attacker comes within assaulting distance." (5:316) Par 323 states, "The decision to withdraw is normally made by the battalion or regimental commander."<sup>(5:318)</sup> As a further guide as to when a combat outpost should be withdrawn, par 322 tells us, "If the attacker continues his advance and approaches within assaulting distance or threatens an envelopment, the combat outpost withdraws." (5:317) FM 7-20 states essentially the same things as FM 7-10. (6:309)

You will note that the manuals have said nothing about the perimeter defense, instead, although the combat outpost might be considered to be isolated, we are told to organize the outpost as a series of outguards with the positions organized to cover a normal frontage. Also note the stress that has been laid on the combat outpost withdrawing before the attacker comes within assaulting distance.

Was the action of Outpost Eerie an isolated instance of an outpost

going into a perimeter defense and staying in position to engage an assaulting enemy in violation of the precepts of the field manuals? No, there are several others. One of these is an example from Company B, 32d Infantry, east of the Hwachon Reservoir in April 1951. Lieutenant Fremont Piercefield who renders the account of the action states, "That due to the mountainous terrain and the great superiority of the enemy the combat outpost must be strong in determination to stay put until the battalion back on the line is set." (13412) In the interest of brevity I have condensed the account of the action. "Lieutenant Piercefield organized a combat outpost 1000 meters in front of the MLR with a rifle platoon reinforced by a 57mm recoilless rifle squad. The total strength of the outpost was 39 men. The outpost was organized around the knob of Hill 770 in a perimeter 50 yd in diameter. The men were well trained, they dug in and cleared their fields of fire leaving enough brush in the way to conceal their positions. With the excess brush they constructed a barricade 25 yd in front of their positions. Artillery and mortars were registered. The outpost then performed the required patrols and waited for the enemy to come. About 0300 on the 23d of April an estimated 150 enemy soldiers hit the outpost. At 0630 they withdrew leaving 18 dead. The outpost suffered one casualty, a slight scratch on the hand of one of the men. The 57 was also damaged and put out of action. The next night the platoon was hit again with what was later identified as a North Korean regimental intelligence and reconnaissance platoon. Results of this action were 3 enemy dead and one bandaid type casualty to the outpost. During this action the assistant machinegunner had to eject one North Korean from his hole with his fists. The next day the combat outpost was withdrawn to the MLR. They had served their purpose well. Later events indicated that the enemy thought they had hit the MLR, because two nights later they hit the vacated positions with approximately two companies from different directions after an artillery

preparation." (13:12-16)

FM 7-10 states in par 320, "The mission of the combat outpost is to delay, disorganize, and deceive the enemy. It aids in securing the battle position, gains timely information of the enemy, and inflicts maximum casualties on the enemy without engaging in close combat." (5:315)

Lieutenant Piercefield accomplished his mission, but, he did not organize his outpost in a series of outguards and he did engage the enemy in close combat. If the lieutenant had organized his position in a series of outguards covering normal position areas instead of going into the perimeter defense, and had "stayed put" until his battalion back on the MLR was ready for him to withdraw, he would have been overrun and defeated in detail.

Before leaving the subject, the perimeter defense on combat outposts, let us again note the phrases "withdraws before the attacker comes within assaulting distance," and "without engaging in close combat." Why did the units in Korea violate these precepts of the manual? Was it because these outposts were what Colonel Frank T. Mildren defines as a patrol base, "An adaptation of our general and combat outpost system tailored to fit the Korean terrain." (11A2) It may be that they were. In the rest of his discussion on patrol bases Colonel Mildren made the following remarks, "They were used in WW II (Italy) but only recently became standard technique."

"We have found that a battalion size patrol base can, by establishing a perimeter defense on terrain dominating avenues of approach, do the job of a general outpost. Patrols can be sent out from such a base without the time consuming effort required in mountain terrain to move from the MLR. Another advantage is that a patrol base is less vulnerable to attack." (11A2) Further remarks by the Colonel indicated that the size of the patrol base should increase as the distance from the MLR increased.

Par 319 FM 7-10 states that the mission of the general outpost is to "aid in securing the front of the battle position and provides warning for the main force and extended surveillance of the area over which the enemy must advance." (5:314) This paragraph also states that if the general outpost "is to be held for a definite period, the company organizes its position as for a regular defense." (5:314) You will note the words regular defense not perimeter defense are used when stating how the company will organize its defense.

Whether the units we have discussed were performing the mission of a combat outpost, a general outpost, or a combination of the two, the manuals do not prepare us for the use of the perimeter defense even though these units are isolated. The perimeter is not a "regular defense" nor is it a "system of outguards."

We shall now examine the use of the perimeter defense on an extended or wide front. S. L. A. Marshal quotes a regimental commander as follows; "I was puzzled through every Korean action in which I participated. The question was whether it was better to defend an assigned sector as a regiment or as three separate battalions. I know that other regimental commanders prescribed that their battalions would defend in relatively small battalion perimeters, thus leaving gaps across the front of the regimental sector. Our policy, on the other hand was to tie in flank to flank which frequently required positioning of six rifle companies of two battalions on the MLR, backing that up with the reserve battalion." (10:131-132)

Captain Bickford E. Sawyer speaking of the 2d Bn 23d Infantry and the use of a battalion defensive perimeter states, "Our normal defensive disposition while on the line at night was almost invariably such a perimeter. In Korea this is a necessity because of the gaps between units and the ability of the Reds to by-pass the front line units and attack the otherwise undefended CP areas." (15:91)

Another person who had experience with the 23d Infantry was Lt Col George H. Russell, who, at the time in August and September of 1950 when the 23d was defending a frontage of 16,000 yds on the Taigu-Pusan perimeter, was the S3 of the 1st Bn of the 23d. A condensed version of Lt Col Russell's thoughts on the defense of an extended front are, "The commander cannot hope to defend his entire sector in strength. He should defend key terrain features that control vital avenues of approach, so placed that the enemy is forced to attack rather than bypass. These key terrain features should be organized as strong points used as bases for heavily supported combat patrols. These strong points on the main battle position should be at a minimum of reinforced company size and preferably of reinforced battalion size. A strong point should usually be organized into a modified perimeter for defense." (14:61-62)

Lt<sup>Col</sup> C. C. DeReus speaking of Korea states, "In the late summer and early fall of 1951 the expert organizers of a perimeter defense became masters of the situation. Wide frontages, terrain, and a scarcity of infantry gave them their opportunity." (3:31)

What do the FMs have to say on the defense of a wide front? FM 7-10 in par 309 states, "When a battalion defends on a wide front emphasis is placed on the organization of key terrain features. Units smaller than a rifle company rarely are assigned a key terrain feature. When assigned the mission of defending a key terrain feature--the front line company (1) Physically occupies a normal frontage. (2) Emphasizes provisions for the defense of the terrain feature against an attack from any direction. (3) Furnishes observation, security, and patrols to cover the gaps." (5:303) FM 7-20 in Section IV Chapter 9 states, in essence, the following: "Emphasis is placed on the organization and occupation of key terrain features throughout the battle position. The extended frontage dictates a compromise between the line concept of defense and widely scattered islands of resistance. It is undesirable to occupy the entire

front with a thin line and also undesirable to try to occupy it in strength and sacrifice depth and flexibility. Key terrain features are organized in strength and the rest of the line is held lightly. Each unit on a key terrain feature must be self-sustaining and able to fight on when by-passed. At times the battalion may occupy a single terrain feature, whether this is done or several key terrain features are occupied, the battalion is the basic unit. Rear positions are organized on key terrain features and additional positions prepared to resist attacks from any direction. The depth of the battalion area increases proportionally as the width increases. Gaps between units will be covered by fire, aggressive patrolling and listening posts." (6:335)

We have then the case of a regimental commander who stretched his battalions on a thin line, the case of the ex-battalion S3 who in general goes along with the manuals on the organization of key terrain but wants a modified perimeter, and the case of two officers who advocate a perimeter defense. FM 7-20 tells us that we should be able to fight on when by-passed, but implies the use of an all-around defense when it states that additional positions are prepared to resist attacks from any direction. If you are by-passed the all-around defense is not going to be enough, you are going to have to be able to defend yourself from all directions at the same time. Therefore, to preclude the sometimes fatal confusion and loss of time that may result if you try to reorganize your defense into a perimeter while under attack, and, as the chances of being by-passed are so very much greater than when defending on normal frontages, the use of the perimeter defense on extended fronts must be indicated.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion I would like to quote a principle of command stressed by General Mathew B. Ridgeway, then Eighth Army Commander, in early 1951, and endorsed by Lt Gen Almond, then X Corps Commander, at a conference in Korea. "Integrity of Positions. Positions must be organized for impenetrable perimeter defense and must never be abandoned without authority from the next higher commander. Lost ground must be regained rapidly by employment of reserves in preplanned counterattacks." (2:1)

You will note that the general did not say some positions or isolated positions, he said positions must be organized for perimeter defense.

Now all units in Korea were not isolated, and it is too much to ask of us to believe that an army commander of the United States Army would direct his subordinates to do anything that is apparently in variance with the tactical doctrine of our field manuals without reason. Therefore, let us examine some factors about the Korean War that are common knowledge. Four of these factors are (1) the communists were very adept at infiltration, (2) the terrain, although not jungle, was extremely rugged, (3) combat outposts were often required to stay in position until the enemy had assaulted them, (4) many times units were required to defend on wide frontages.

I have shown in this article that other reasons for use of the perimeter defense than that mentioned in FM 7-10 and FM 7-20 are (1) as a defense against infiltration, (2) as a defense in extremely rugged terrain such as jungles, (3) as a defense on combat outposts when the delaying mission of the outpost requires that it stay on position until the enemy is close enough to launch an assault, (4) as a defense on an

extended front. General Ridgeway may have had any one or all four of the above reasons in mind when he made the statement that positions must be organized as perimeter defenses.

The validity of reasons for the use of the perimeter defense, other than isolation, have been tested and proven in actual combat. FM 7-10 and FM 7-20 do not offer any of these reasons as factors to be used as guides to the use of a perimeter defense. Therefore, my premise that FM 7-10 and FM 7-20 do not offer us enough guidance as to when to use the perimeter defense, has been proven.



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