

# FIRING BATTERY BROTHERS

## TRAINING SUPPORT PACKAGE

### ISSUE:

Firing batteries often fail to execute rehearsals prior to conducting operations at the National Training Center, or execute rehearsals that do not support the unit's essential field artillery tasks.

### DISCUSSION:

The benefits of conducting thorough, mission-focused rehearsals prior to combat operations cannot be overstated. Rehearsals allow a unit to “proof” their plan, obtain direct feedback from key leaders, and identify contingencies and warstoppers prior to mission execution.

Despite the obvious advantages of rehearsals, many batteries fail to incorporate them into their preparation time for a battle. *Why?* While there are several contributing factors, we have found that the two biggest “rehearsal killers” are #1--seemingly overwhelming timelines and #2--a simple lack of know-how as to how to properly conduct good rehearsals. This article addresses both of these issues. First, we offer some tips for managing a battery timeline, to include an example of a timeline that incorporates all battery and battalion events while preserving time for rehearsals. Second, we provide a step-by-step example of how to develop and execute a mission-focused battery rehearsal plan. An excellent reference for rehearsals is the March 1998 CALL Newsletter Number 98-5.

Let's first review the types of rehearsals a unit may conduct. Rehearsals include a **confirmation brief, backbrief, combined arms rehearsal, support rehearsal, and battle drill or SOP rehearsal**. While all of these could be performed at the platoon level, normally confirmation briefs and battle drill / SOP rehearsals are the rehearsals we see most. A confirmation brief is nothing more than a subordinate leader relating to his superior that he understands the mission and intent, the task and purpose of his platoon or section, and how his element's mission affects the operation as a whole. A good example of such a brief is the two Platoon Leaders of a battery conducting a confirmation brief with the BC following the battery OPORD and restating the battery mission along with the EFATs their platoon will execute. Additionally, this is the ideal time for the Platoon Leaders to ensure they understand the commander's rehearsal plans and priorities.

The battle drill rehearsal ensures all participants understand a technique or procedure. These are key to a successful operation. An operation at its basic level is a collection of routine or SOP-type tasks. Rehearsal of these tasks are prioritized by the battalion and battery leadership based on the mission requirements and an assessment of the unit's training level on the critical tasks identified. An example of this prioritization

is that for a unit conducting a deliberate attack, the Battalion Commander determines that smoke, movement, and reaction to counterfire are critical to success. The Battery Commander assesses his unit's training level at each task and issues guidance for the rehearsals.

Numerous rehearsal techniques are available to units, including **full dress, reduced force, terrain model, sketch map, map, and radio**. Again, all of these methods can be employed at the platoon and battery level. Priorities and time available drive the leadership's decision-making process. At a minimum, the battery should conduct a terrain model or sketch map rehearsal; concurrently, sections and platoons should conduct reduced force or full dress rehearsals on routine tasks. While full dress rehearsals require the most resourcing and preparation, they are by far the most effective. By using a prioritized list, the Battery Commander and Platoon Leaders can ensure the most critical events are rehearsed using the most detailed method possible.

At this point we can address the construction of a battery timeline. As stated earlier, many battery rehearsals are derailed by poor time management. By following the 1/3 – 2/3 rule and using a prioritized rehearsal list, time management becomes easier. Also, delegation of responsibility is crucial. Battery Commanders and Platoon Leaders must issue sound guidance and rely on the platoon and section level leadership to accomplish the tasks.

A sample timeline follows:

TIME	EVENT OR TASK	REMARKS
0600	Battalion FASP	
0730	Battery WARNO	Detailed rehearsals begin, based on the mission and associated EFATs
1000	Battery OPORD	
1100	Battery Rehearsals	
1300	Battalion Rock Drill	
1500	Platoon Orders	
1600	Battery Rock Drill	Serves as a battery-level rehearsal and allows for the commander to get an assessment of PCCs, PCIs, and section/platoon rehearsals conducted to this point
1900	Final PCIs and rehearsals	May include battalion level FA tech and fire support rehearsals
2200	Hot / cold platoon; crew rest	
0600	LD for the Attack	

At NTC, units often cite AARs and visits to the MILES contact team as reasons why rehearsals are not conducted. In actuality, these events only involve a portion of the

battery—everyone else is available for rehearsals. Even if most of the platoon has to report to MILES contact, the Platoon Leader can organize a rehearsal in route to the site. Never waste an opportunity! Additionally, although maintenance and personal hygiene are important to overall mission accomplishment, leaders must establish priorities of work and realistic timelines for these events. Personal hygiene, for example, can be accomplished in about an hour, rather than three.

It is worth mentioning that the battery can begin conducting rehearsals any time after the BCT receives the mission. If all we know is that the brigade is on the attack, then we know such tasks as platoon movement and emergency missions are important. The Battery Commander must provide regular warning orders to refine the battery's efforts and to ensure good information flow from the start.

### **RECOMMENDATION FOR HOME STATION TRAINING:**

Practically any task a battery performs can be rehearsed at some level. If your unit struggles with rehearsals, then start slow and build up to better, more detailed events. The ultimate goal of a battery rehearsal program is to produce a "play book" that provides detailed descriptions and diagrams for recurring events the unit expects to rehearse. Such a play book can serve as a stand-alone document or be added as an annex to an existing battery TACSOP. However the battery leadership decides to incorporate the document, the bottom line is that all leaders and soldiers must be familiar with the document and incorporate it into Troop Leading Procedures.

The best way to approach rehearsals is by using a 'Task, Conditions, Standards, Endstate' format. While the tasks will be fairly routine, the conditions change based on the unit's training level and on the tactical situation. All rehearsals must be conducted to standard, and not shortcut due to poor time management. Finally the Commander or Platoon Leader articulates the endstate for the rehearsal. He bases his criteria on METT-TC analysis.

### ***Sample Rehearsal Scenario for a Paladin Battery...***

Alpha Battery is preparing for the upcoming BCT mission, which is a deliberate attack against the 173<sup>rd</sup> MRR. The commander has conducted his mission analysis. Based on the S-3's determination that the upcoming battle will be highly mobile and the S-2's read that the counterfire threat is high from the enemy DAG, the commander selects movement as a key rehearsal for the platoons to compete. He issues the following guidance to his platoon leaders:

*"I expect both platoons to conduct full dress rehearsals of the movement plan for tomorrow's fight. Movement is the #1 rehearsal priority for the battery; Platoon Leaders, you are responsible for ensuring the rehearsals are conducted to standard. Both platoons must be complete NLT 1700 hours; report to me NLT 1715 with the status of your respective platoon."*

Once the BC has issued good clear guidance, the platoon leaders leap into action. First, they consult with their Platoon Sergeants to determine any platoon-specific weaknesses in the area of movement, as well as any resource deficiencies (for example, a deadlined vehicle that may not be up in time for the rehearsal). This is the **planning** phase of the rehearsal.

Next, the Platoon Leader and Platoon Sergeant move into the **preparation** phase, where they focus on the identification and gathering of resources to support the rehearsal. The Platoon Sergeant works to determine an accurate combat power assessment, and may dispatch the Gunnery Sergeant to conduct land deconfliction with any units adjacent to the rehearsal site. The Platoon Leader simultaneously develops a short brief for all key leaders in the platoon in order to focus their efforts and answer any questions. The brief is presented as follows:

“Task: Conduct platoon movement rehearsals with all available vehicles.

Conditions: Given an M109A6 platoon in open desert terrain during daylight hours, with enemy threats of non-persistent chemical strikes, air strikes, and counterfire.

Standards: Platoon successfully rehearses movement from PAA1 to PAA 2 using a combination of wedge and column formations, while maintaining combat power and firing capability.

Endstate: Platoon is prepared to move during the BCT attack and accomplish all assigned EFATs.”

The Platoon Leader further clarifies the rehearsal plan by using a sketch or terrain model to illustrate his intent. A dry-erase board or butcher block allows the PL to draw different formations and to make changes based on input from his Platoon Sergeant and Section Chiefs. If a battery terrain model was constructed, the Platoon Leader can also use it to illustrate how the rehearsals relate to the mission as a whole.

Once planning and preparation are complete, the platoon focuses on **execution**. Some keys to successful execution of a rehearsal are time management, a focus on standards, and soldier involvement.

The rehearsal must begin on time. Units will normally operate in a time-constrained environment, so every minute counts. Also, leaders cannot fall into the trap of conducting rehearsals based solely on time. Rehearsals are often conducted in a sloppy manner due to a "more is better" mindset. It is far better to conduct one or two rehearsals to standard, based on a prioritized list, than to execute many rehearsals that fail to increase the overall effectiveness of the platoon for the upcoming fight. Finally, rehearsals should involve every available soldier. For the movement scenario, it is particularly important that all drivers and TC's participate in the rehearsal.

Another element of good rehearsals is contingency planning. Assume Murphy's Law will be in effect during your operation and plan for the worst. In this scenario, the Platoon Leader addressed possible contingencies in the 'Conditions' portion of his brief—NBC strikes, air attacks, and counterfire. As the platoon grows more and more

comfortable with conducting rehearsals, which may take several battles, the platoon leadership begins to "increase the pressure". For example, the PL could initiate a chemical strike and practice movement in MOPP 4.

To further increase the effectiveness of the rehearsals, units can embed other routine tasks into a base rehearsal. The platoon could begin movement drills, and at some point conduct an emergency mission. Now we have conducted two rehearsals to standard. At some point, the pressure increases by introducing counterfire contingencies and, at the graduate level, CASEVAC. The potential now exists for an experienced platoon to conduct full dress rehearsals on four critical tasks: movement, emergency missions, reaction to indirect fire, and CASEVAC.

## **CONCLUSION**

Good rehearsals require practice. A way to approach the concept of rehearsals with your unit is to illustrate everyday actions that involve rehearsals. Telephonic recalls are rehearsals for mobilization. A practice swing on the golf course is a rehearsal for the upcoming drive. Dry-fire verification missions are essentially a rehearsal of POC to gun connectivity. Using this mindset, your subordinate leaders will quickly realize that rehearsals are not always labor-intensive exercises that require lots of resources and time. As stated earlier in this article, rehearsals can be conducted on nearly any task and at nearly every level in a battery. Preparation time is too valuable to squander. When in doubt, rehearse SOMETHING!