

PART 4

Information Exchange

The SA 80 Platoon

Beginning in late 1985, the Infantry are to be re-equipped with the SA 80 weapon system, and in due course with LAW 80. Although the infantry platoon will retain its present organization, the introduction of the new weapons will have a significant effect on tactics at platoon and section level.

This article is therefore directed towards platoon and section commanders, and seeks to explain the changing possibilities and considerations introduced by the new weapons. A working knowledge of current tactics is presumed, and consideration will be limited to dismounted infantry operations in a General War setting in North West Europe.

Certain assumptions, which may appear confusing, are made throughout the article:

- a. **LAW 80.** The introduction of LAW 80 to replace the 84 mm MAW Carl Gustav and the 66 mm M72 LAW is anticipated in the discussion. The tactics are equally applicable to the current range of anti-armour weapons; however, LAW 80 will complement the mobility and flexibility offered to the infantry section by SA 80.
- b. **GPMG (SF).** For purposes of discussion, a two-man GPMG(SF) detachment is grouped in platoon HQ under command of the platoon commander. Space prohibits discussion of GPMG(SF) tactics. Therefore only this option is considered, whilst fully acknowledging the alternative option available to commanding officers of 'brigading' all their GPMG(SF) detachments to form a MMG support platoon.

Tactics is not an exact science and further experiment and refinement is, of course, likely as commanders grow more familiar with SA 80.

Section and Platoon Organisations

General. The organization of the section into 2 four-man fire teams is sufficiently well known as to require no further explanation. The issue of 2 LSW per section and the variable issue of LAW 80 gives new flexibility to fire team organization. This section seeks to explain the options available and their related advantages/disadvantages.

The Section

The eight-man section should be considered as four pairs of riflemen (as given below):

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| a. | Section Commander | - Rifle + PRC 349 | |
| | Rifleman | Rifle (+ LAW 80) | |
| b. | Section 2IC | - Rifle + PRC 249 | |
| | LSW gunner | LSW | |
| c. | LSW gunner | - LSW | |
| | Rifleman | Rifle (+ LAW 80) | |
| d. | Rifleman | - Rifle (+ LAW 80) | Currently MAW Team |
| | Rifleman | Rifle (+ LAW 80) | |

(See Fig 1)

Fire teams are made up by combining the pairs in different ways. The advantage of this pairs system is that soldiers always work with the same 'buddy', yet regrouping can be quickly and easily carried out by changing pairs between fire teams.

Fire teams may be identified by letters of the alphabet or by colours. For convenience we will refer to the section commander's fire team as 'Blue Fire Team' and to the 2IC's fire team as 'Green Fire Team'.

Fire Team Grouping (See Fig 2)

Balanced Fire Teams. Two balanced fire teams can be formed by combining pairs A + C, B + D. Each fire team therefore contains an LSW and either team can provide fire support or manoeuvre to the assault, giving flexibility of options to the commander.

Manoeuvre and Support Teams. By combining pairs A + D, B + C a 'blue' manoeuvre team of section commander and three riflemen and a 'green' fire support team of section 2IC, a rifleman and two LSW gunners is formed. In this case the fire teams roles are pre-planned – the green team is to provide the suppressive fire support for the blue team to manoeuvre and close with the enemy.

Changes from one form of grouping to the other can be quickly effected by exchanging pairs between the fire teams. Regrouping in direct contact with the enemy should not be attempted; however, it would be quite possible during a lull in the fight-through, for example, if the whole section was temporarily out of contact in dead ground.

As a general rule in the attack, the section commander's fire team provides the assault force, whilst the fire support role is fulfilled by the section 2IC's fire team.

Rifle and Gun Group. In some operations (e.g., FIBUA) a rifle group of six riflemen and a gun group of the two LSW gunners may be a useful organization. Inclusion of the section 2IC in the rifle group pays the penalty of depriving the gun group of an NCO commander and his radio; the section 2IC might therefore be included in the gun group. It should be noted that this organization splits the established pairs system (Pairs B + C). Adoption of this grouping should therefore be done out of contact. In certain circumstances the section might be reinforced by inclusion of the GPMG detachment operating in the light role. In this case the four-man gun group would provide fire support for two three-man manoeuvre teams, each with an NCO commander and a radio. Ideally a radio (Platoon Sergeant's PRC 350) should be provided for the gun group, to ensure close coordination of fire.

The rifle section, armed with SA 80 and LAW 80, is inherently more flexible than the old organization. Section and platoon commanders will need to appreciate accurately which organization best suits their mission. The section itself should be well practised in regrouping to meet a changing situation.

The Platoon

Platoon organization will remain largely unchanged with the introduction of SA 80. The platoon commander may lay down the grouping he requires within each section, or leave this decision to the section commander.

The platoon commander, unless directed by his company commander, will need to decide on the deployment and grouping of the GPMG(SF) or (Lt), and the 51 mm mortar. The two basic options are:

- a. The GPMG and 51 mm mortar teams form a platoon fire support group operating from platoon HQ or semi-independently.
- b. The 51 mm mortar team is retained within platoon HQ with the GPMG team attached to a rifle section.

For certain operations, particularly patrolling and ambushing, the platoon can be considered not as three rifle sections but as six fire teams. Variations are legion but two useful options are:

- a. A fire support group of 4 LSW for fighting patrols.
- b. Half platoon triangular ambushes.

Fighting Patrols. Two rifle sections can combine under command of the platoon commander or platoon sergeant to form a fighting patrol. The fire support teams of the two sections form a fire support group of 4 LSW, whilst the manoeuvre teams form the assault group. Men to man the Final RV (FRV) can be drawn from the riflemen in the Fire Support Group. (See Fig 3).

Ambushes. Under command of the platoon commander and platoon sergeant respectively, the SA 80 rifle platoon can provide two patrols, each of three balanced fire teams, each capable of forming a triangular ambush. An ambush group of half platoon size provides five weapons (2 LAW, 3 Rifles) to produce automatic fire into a chosen killing area, whilst maintaining all round defence; they should be capable of successfully ambushing and destroying an enemy reconnaissance patrol of 4–6 men. (See Fig 4).

The obvious danger of the flexibility of the grouping options available is that the important skills and loyalties of section teamwork will be lost as soldiers find themselves working with different teams for every operation. The wise platoon commander will select a number of standard groupings and practise these consistently in training, in order to re-establish teamwork and build up the confidence of his men, not only in their own section but also in their regular working partners from other sections.

The Runner. With the issue of a PRC 349 to each fire team commander, there is no longer an establishment for a runner in platoon HQ. Platoon commanders should consider the requirement for a runner (for instance, when radio communications are restricted by imposition of radio silence, ECM or the nature of the ground, as in FIBUA) and who can fulfil the runner's role. The GPMG and 51 mm mortar detachments are vital to the platoon's firepower and should not be denuded to provide the runner. If required, a rifleman from a reserve section might have to carry out this important role.

The discussions above will indicate that, as for the section commander, platoon commanders will need increased flexibility of thought and action. The key to success will be a thorough understanding and application of the appreciation process.

Operations

General. The term 'operations' is used here as a generic term to describe various phases of war and some infantry operations within those phases. This section seeks to apply the lessons and options discussed previously to common infantry tasks.

The Advance. The platoon is likely to organize its sections in balanced fire teams to provide flexibility of deployment. LAW 80 will be carried on a scale of at least one per fire team. The GPMG team might move with platoon HQ, be attached to the point section or operate independently of the platoon, moving bound by bound on dominating ground, with or without a protection party. The 51 mm mortar will move with platoon HQ.

The Quick Attack. In a quick attack the platoon might be forced to attack with balanced fire teams, rather than reorganize in contact. Mechanized platoons are likely to dismount as balanced fire teams, one team operating either side of their APC. LAW 80 will be carried as for the Advance; the point section might be reinforced by the GPMG and the 51 mm mortar. In this case the platoon sergeant would command the fire support group thus formed.

The Deliberate Attack. In a planned deliberate attack, sections are likely to be organized as manoeuvre and fire support teams, since section objectives will be known in outline. Depending on the commander's appreciation, LAW 80 will probably be carried only by reserve sections and platoons. This leaves the assaulting troops free to manoeuvre, with anti-armour defence provided by the reserve elements. GPMG(SF) might be deployed on high ground to add suppressive fire as the platoon closes with the enemy using Fire and Manoeuvre. Alternatively, it may be carried in the light role within Platoon HQ (for instance if no commanding ground is available), ready to deploy to increase the suppressive fire power of the platoon as required. The 51 mm mortar similarly might occupy a 'stand-off' position with the GPMG(SF) or move with platoon HQ. This Fire Support Group will need radio communications and possibly the platoon sergeant as commander in certain circumstances.

Defence. Section organization in defence will probably be into two balanced fire teams; little would be gained by having 2 LSW in one four-man trench. The provision of 2 LSW per section should allow continuous and overlapping fire over the entire platoon frontage, so that at least 3 LSW can engage targets in any direction. LAW 80 will be stockpiled in each trench, so that each trench will now have an LSW and a LAW arc, again providing overlapping fire from at least 3 positions at any potential target. GPMG will almost invariably be used in the SF role, sited so as to engage the SF tasks of other mutually supporting and supported platoons. The requirement to have an FPF across the front or flanks of neighbouring platoons will draw the GPMG(SF) into one of the forward section areas; siting it independently would be administratively awkward and leave the two-man detachment vulnerable to infantry attack. Within a section area, the GPMG(SF) will have the advantage of the section's communications, protection and administration. The section with the GPMG(SF) attached could be split between 3 trenches as follows:

- GPMG(SF) trench with the 2-man detachment, two section riflemen and a radio (the section 2IC's PRC 349). The extra manpower will help with construction, local protection and the continuous manning of the GPMG(SF) – hence the need for at least two men in each section to be GPMG(SF) trained.
- Two 3-man trenches, each of an NCO commander, an LSW gunner and a rifleman.

Alternatively, a six-man trench could be used with a complete fire team and the GPMG(SF) detachment. Though this would simplify command and control, a single direct or indirect fire hit on the trench would neutralize a large proportion of the platoon's firepower. The 51 mm mortar team will be collocated with platoon HQ, under direct control of the platoon commander and assisting in the continuous manning of the radio, etc. The platoon commander and platoon sergeant should occupy separate trenches, thereby providing alternate command facilities. Platoon HQ is therefore likely to split as follows:

- Platoon commander, radio operator, No One 51 mm Mortar.
- Platoon sergeant, No Two 51 mm Mortar.

Bombs for the 51 mm mortar will be stockpiled in the trench, predominantly HE and Illuminating bombs, though some smoke must be held to help screen counter attacks if necessary. Pre-arranged target areas will enable two or even three platoon mortars within the company to engage the enemy simultaneously.

Withdrawal. The organization and conduct of the withdrawal will follow on naturally from the defensive organization outlined above, and requires little elaboration. LAW 80 should be carried in every fire team to allow cohesive anti-armour defence in the event of contact during the withdrawal.

Patrolling. The flexibility of the section grouping and the issue of 2 LSWs per rifle section will simplify the demands on the platoon to provide patrols. The balanced fire team organization effectively provides 6 four-man reconnaissance/OP teams, each with an NCO commander and an LSW. Up to 3 LSW can be out of the firm base on patrol tasks, whilst still leaving 3 LSW to provide protection for the platoon position. In order to maintain established teamwork, fire teams should be deployed on patrols as

entities rather than splitting teams by extracting men 'ad hoc' as required. In defence the fire team that remains in position will therefore split into its constituent pairs to ensure skeleton manning of all trenches.

Triangular Ambush/Harbour. (See Fig 5). The organization of the sections into balanced fire teams will position 3 LSW on each side of the triangle. The automatic facility of the Rifle will be invaluable in the short-range contacts likely in ambushes or harbours; however the LSWs, with their greater ammunition supply and more accurate automatic fire, will still be the corner posts of the defensive framework. In a harbour the central LSWs can be pushed slightly forward to ensure that any enemy attack is met by fire from 3 LSWs – in effect a 'hexagonal' harbour is formed. Drills for occupation of ambushes and harbours remain unchanged.

If attached on operations involving patrol harbours, the GPMG is likely to be carried in the light role. It can either be positioned at 6 o'clock to cover the vulnerable track into the position, or could be held centrally with platoon HQ ready to reinforce one of the sides of the triangle as required.

Anti-Armour Ambushes. The variations in fire team grouping provide an efficient and natural organization for anti-armour ambushes in section or half-platoon strength. (See Fig 6).

a. **Section Ambush.** Division of the section into manoeuvre team and fire support team, provides an anti-armour team with 4 LAW 80 and a support team (2 LSW) to engage dismounting AFV crews. The two riflemen in the support team could carry LAW 80, either as a second anti-armour team or as a reserve to counter the unexpected.

b. **Half-Platoon Ambush.** Three fire teams under command of the platoon commander or platoon sergeant provide:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| (1) A manoeuvre team | – (4 LAW 80) anti-armour |
| (2) A balanced team | – (3 LAW 80) – anti-armour (+ one LSW support) |
| (3) A support team | – (2 LAW 80) – fire support (2 LSW) |

Alternatively three balanced fire teams could be produced, each with anti-armour roles.

The above organization is preferred as it leads to a logical withdrawal plan and because LSW and LAW 80 require differing types of shoots.

The disposable nature of LAW 80 will facilitate speedy and unencumbered withdrawal. At least 2 LAW 80 should be kept in reserve, if necessary by prepositioning extra rockets.

The list of possible infantry operations and minor variations on them is endless. In general the platoon commander will be able to select the best grouping available to meet the situation at hand by a thorough knowledge of the advantages and disadvantages of the grouping options and careful consideration of his Assessment of Tasks in his appreciation.

Conclusions

From the above discussion the main tactical implications of the re-equipment of the Infantry Platoon have been explored. Undoubtedly more considerations will arise as platoon commanders gain more experience of operating as a platoon with the new weapons. In summary, there are three areas on which we should concentrate.

The Weapons. The characteristics and capabilities of the new range of weapons are markedly different from the weapons they replace. The principles of their successful tactical use will be:

- A thorough knowledge of their capabilities and limitations, confirmed by training.
- Sensible use of automatic and semi-automatic fire.
- Sensible conservation of ammunition, including adequate resupply and maintenance of a reserve.

Grouping. The range of possible groupings may seem bewildering. In fact they are all based on the 'building brick' of the four-man fire team, with or without attachments from platoon HQ. The guiding principles should be:

- a. Flexibility and teamwork within the fire team, the section and the platoon.
- b. Thorough and realistic training to foster confidence and then team-work.

Commanders. Section and platoon commanders will need increased skills of command and control to make best use of the increased capabilities of the platoon. The foundation of this will be:

- a. Consistent training to establish SOPs.
- b. Thorough knowledge and application of the appreciation process at all levels.

Finally, a short reminder. Through effective weapon training, range work and much practice the necessary skills will be developed to use the new weapons to the best advantage. There is a correct and an incorrect way of handling weapons, whereas with tactics, the dividing line between right and wrong is much finer, with numerous workable solutions to a particular problem. Sensible experiment will discover which options work best; learn from experience and discard those ideas which are found to be unsuitable. The unsuccessful commander is the one who cannot, or is afraid to, develop to meet the challenge of changing circumstances and capabilities.

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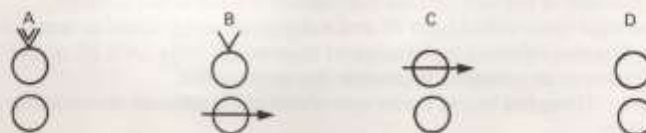
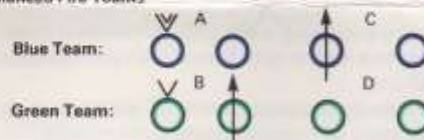
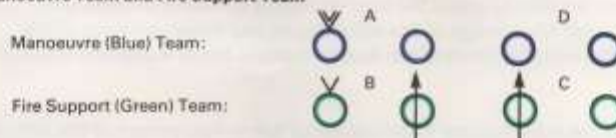


FIG 1. — THE SECTION AS FOUR PAIRS

Balanced Fire Teams



Manoeuvre Team and Fire Support Team



Rifle and Gun Groups (incl GPMG(SF))

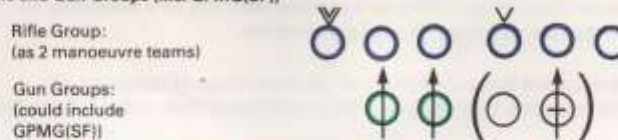


FIG 2. — FIRE TEAM GROUPING WITHIN SECTION
(PAIRS FROM FIG 1 SHOWN BY LETTERS)

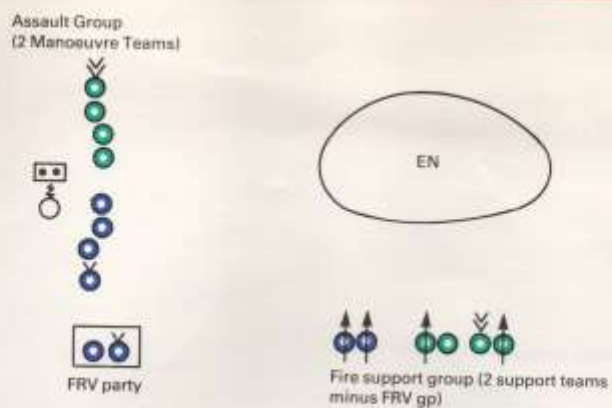


FIG 3. — TWO SECTION FIGHTING PATROL

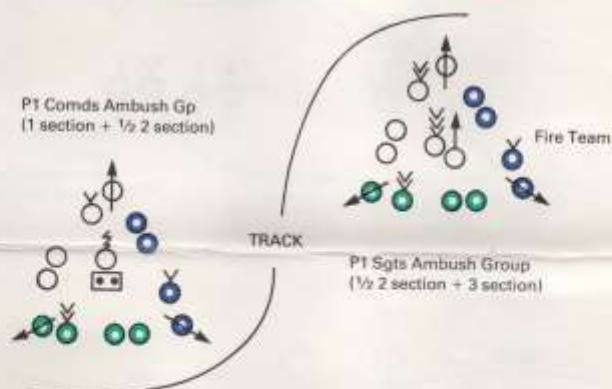


FIG 4. — HALF PLATOON TRIANGULAR AMBUSHES

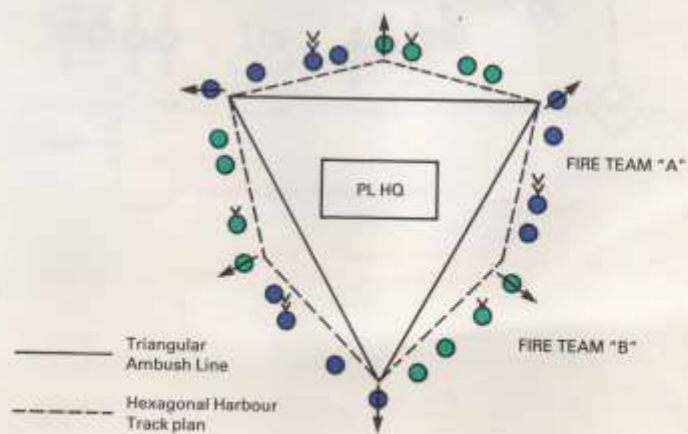


FIG 5. — 'HEXAGONAL' HARBOUR/AMBUSH

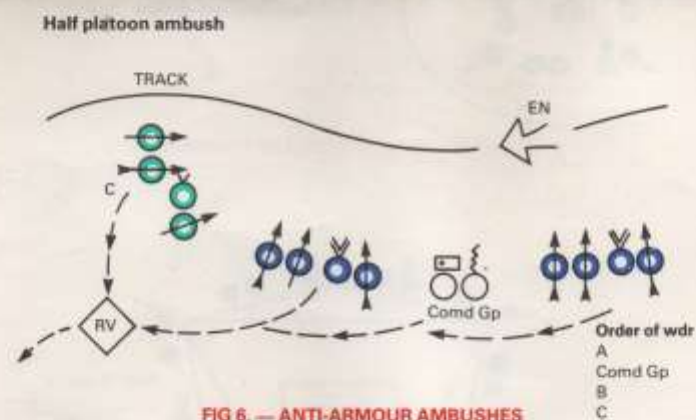
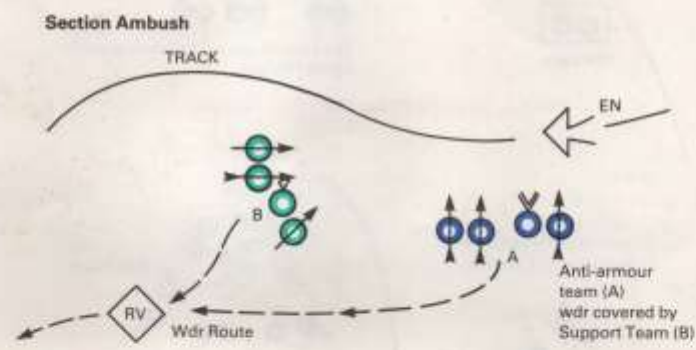


FIG 6. — ANTI-ARMOUR AMBUSHES