

CHAPTER 2

COMMAND AND CONTROL OF MORTAR SECTIONS AND PLATOONS

This chapter discusses the responsibilities of mortar section and platoon leaders and other key personnel, the troop-leading procedures, and SOPs. The mortar leader's primary duty is mission accomplishment. He influences and directs his men to gain their confidence, respect, and cooperation in combat operations. His leadership involves an understanding of human behavior and the employment of mortars and mortar tactics. The mortar section or platoon leader is responsible for the discipline, training, welfare, and morale of his men as well as the maintenance of his equipment. At platoon and squad level, the leader sets the example. He leads from a position where he can control mortar fire, making decisions within his authority and executing command decisions.

2-1. RESPONSIBILITIES OF KEY PERSONNEL

Responsibilities of key personnel vary with the level of supervision. This paragraph discusses those responsibilities that directly affect the performance of mortar sections and platoons.

a. The battalion (or squadron) TF commander is responsible for the tactical employment of his mortar platoon. He cannot delegate this responsibility to any staff officer. The final decision, as well as the final responsibility, for the tactical employment of the mortar platoon rests with this commander. The battalion commander must delegate authority and foster a relationship of mutual trust, cooperation, and communication between him and the mortar platoon leader. Their relationship must be a special one that allows the platoon leader to anticipate requirements, to ask questions, and to provide feedback freely. For his mortar platoon to be effective, the commander must provide a clear idea of what he wants the mortar platoon's fire to do for the battalion. He must have detailed technical knowledge of the capabilities, limitations, and characteristics of mortars. Specific areas of his responsibility concerning the mortar platoon include—

- Tactical employment (missions, priority of fires, general locations, final approval of fire plans).
- Task organization (attachments and detachments, command and support relationships, communications).

- Logistical support (basic loads, types and mix of ammunition, priority of transportation and maintenance support, mess).
- b. The battalion (or squadron) operations officer is the battalion commander's principal staff officer in matters concerning combat operations, plans, organization, and training. The nature of the operations officer's responsibilities requires a high degree of coordination with the mortar platoon leader. The battalion operations officer is responsible for expressing the commander's concept and guidance in both written and oral orders. As a member of the battalion commander's primary staff, the operations officer does not exercise command authority over the mortar platoon. He does, however, exercise a degree of control over the mortar platoon's actions. He has the authority to direct the platoon to accomplish specific missions or tasks within the framework of the battalion commander's intent. He does not exercise administrative or logistical control except as such action affects the platoon's accomplishment of the mission. Specific areas of responsibility concerning the mortar platoon include—
- (1) Preparing, authenticating, and publishing the battalion tactical SOP. The mortar platoon leader provides input to the appropriate sections of the battalion SOP. He then establishes an internal platoon SOP that adheres to the battalion's SOP, while addressing all issues of special concern to the platoon.
 - (2) Preparing, coordinating, authenticating, and publishing operations plans and orders to include tactical movement orders; incorporating the mortar platoon leader's input to these plans and orders while they are being prepared.
 - (3) Recommending priorities for critical resources. This includes establishing mortar ammunition basic loads by type and number of rounds, and the required and controlled mortar ammunition supply rate.
 - (4) Recommending task organization to the commander and assigning specific missions to the mortar platoon.
 - (5) Coordinating all combat support with maneuver; advising the commander and coordinating the fires and displacement of the mortar platoon with the actions of other units.
- c. The battalion FSO is charged with doing whatever planning and coordination is necessary to execute the fire support plan and support the commander's intent. The battalion FSO and the mortar platoon leader have a unique relationship. They must both understand the battalion commander's intent for fires, and they must work closely to see that it is carried out. The battalion FSO must know mortar capabilities, limitations, and technical aspects. The mortar platoon leader must inform the battalion FSO of anything that affects the mortar platoon's ability to execute the commander's fire support plan. The battalion FSO recommends to the operations officer the appropriate unit to fire on each preplanned target. The mortar platoon leader must work closely with the battalion FSO to ensure mortar fires are planned on appropriate targets and delivered at the correct times. The battalion FSO is not in the mortar platoon leader's chain

of command, but he anticipates requirements and passes orders, information, and instructions to the mortar platoon during the battle.

d. The headquarters (or combat support) company commander is a vital link in the chain of command between the battalion commander and the mortar platoon leader. He exercises all aspects of command over the mortar platoon. As a commander, he is responsible for—

(1) The command and control of the mortar platoon, less OPCON during actual combat.

(2) The safety and training, especially individual training, of the mortar platoon.

(3) Health, welfare, morale, order, and discipline.

(4) Administrative and financial actions associated with transfers, promotions, pay and allowances, and commendations.

(5) Maintenance, logistical, and mess support for the mortar platoon.

(6) Personnel and equipment status reporting.

(7) Casualty reporting and handling.

e. The mortar platoon leader is primarily a combat leader. He is also the principal advisor to the battalion commander and battalion FSO on the tactical employment of mortars. He performs the following:

(1) Recommends task organization, employment techniques, and positioning of the mortars to support the scheme of maneuver.

(2) Assists in developing the fire support plan in conjunction with the company or battalion FSO; determines the best type and amount of mortar ammunition to fire, based on the factors of METT-T.

(3) In accordance with the battalion OPORD and plan for fire support, develops his supporting platoon plan and reviews it with the FSO and operations officer. The amount of detail and time spent developing the supporting plan may vary, based on the situation.

(4) Assists the operations officer in determining the RSR. If a CSR has been set, the mortar platoon leader may not exceed it without authorization. The platoon leader may need to recommend changes to the mortar platoon's mission based on the CSR.

(5) Informs the commander, S3, and FSO of all significant range or ammunition limitations.

(6) Designates reconnaissance and advance parties.

(7) Selects and reconnoiters new positions and routes for the platoon; controls the movements of all elements of the platoon not attached or OPCON to other units.

(8) Keeps abreast of the enemy situation and locations of friendly units to ensure the best use of ammunition and the safety of friendly troops.

(9) Assigns missions and issues instructions and orders to subordinate leaders.

(10) Supervises the execution of orders; ensures that priority targets are covered at all times; establishes the amount and type of ammunition set aside for priority targets.

(11) Coordinates the fires and displacement of the mortar platoon with the action of other units; directs mortar section and platoon displacement.

(12) Ensures security measures are enforced to increase the survivability of the platoon against the ground, air, and indirect fire attacks.

(13) Lays mortars for firing, when required; verifies the direction of fire selected by the FDC.

(14) Commands and controls the execution of the mortar platoon portion of the battalion fire support plan and coordinates the fires and displacements of the mortar sections.

(15) Plans the platoon ground defense and maintains security while on the move or halted.

(16) Submits ammunition and platoon status reports to the S3.

(17) Relays intelligence information, SHELREPs, MORTREPs, and SPOTREPs to the S2.

(18) Anticipates needs and ensures timely ammunition resupply, maintenance, and refuel requests are submitted to sustain combat operations.

(19) Is responsible for the welfare of his men.

(20) Is responsible for the training of the platoon to ensure technical and tactical proficiency, and combat lifesaver skills; cross trains personnel within the platoon on key tasks to ensure continuous operations.

(21) Performs map spot and hasty survey operations.

(22) Coordinates through the FSO with supporting artillery units for survey support, when possible.

(23) Performs hasty crater analysis and reports the results.

(24) Coordinates radar registration, when appropriate.

(25) Establishes and maintains communications with supported companies and FISTs.

(26) Becomes familiar and gains at least limited proficiency with field artillery fire support coordination and communications equipment such as the FIST-DMD and G/VLLD.

(27) Enforces platoon safety precautions. He trains his platoon on the proper execution of all firing and misfire reduction procedures to minimize risk.

(28) Keeps abreast of all changes to the enemy countermortar capability.

f. The mortar platoon sergeant is the principal assistant to the platoon leader and assists him in all matters pertaining to training and operation of the platoon. He assumes responsibilities of the platoon leader during his absence. In addition, he performs the following:

(1) Inspects and supervises to ensure the platoon leader's orders are executed.

(2) Leads the reconnaissance party and conducts reconnaissance of routes and positions, when required.

(3) Supervises movements, as required. When the platoon is operating in two sections, he normally directly supervises one.

(4) Supervises the preparation of the platoon ground defense.

(5) Supervises camouflage, field hygiene, and sanitation.

(6) Supervises the platoon's security and sleep plans.

(7) Lays the mortars for firing, when required.

- (8) Ensures that situation maps are maintained in the FDC.
- (9) Ensures available meteorological data is applied to firing data, when appropriate.
- (10) Supervises the test firing and zeroing of weapons and boresighting of mortars.
- (11) Ensures communication nets are established and personnel use proper radiotelephone operating procedures.
- (12) Ensures platoon personnel are trained in their primary job assignments and cross trained to perform key functions within the FDC.
- (13) Ensures the required basic load and platoon equipment are on hand.
- (14) Monitors ammunition expenditures and ensures ammunition records are maintained.
- (15) Submits timely ammunition resupply requests.
- (16) Supervises ammunition prestockage, when used.
- (17) Ensures maintenance is actively supervised by subordinate leaders.
- (18) Coordinates and supervises POL resupply and maintenance support.
- (19) Coordinates and supervises vehicle recovery.
- (20) Requests fortification materials.
- (21) Coordinates resupply needs.
- (22) Adjusts personnel as needed and cross-levels personnel within mortar squads to maintain maximum firepower.
- (23) Conducts hasty crater analysis and submits SHELREPs and MORTREPs.
- (24) Ensures that aiming circles are declinated properly.
- (25) Ensures that all necessary safety, borescope, and pullover gauge inspections are performed and recorded.
- (26) Coordinates casualty evacuation.
- (27) Assists in the preparation of paragraph 4 of the platoon OPORD.
 - g. The section leader assumes the duties of the platoon sergeant during his absence. (See Chapter 8 for special considerations and duties of the light mortar section sergeant.) In addition, he performs the following:
 - (1) Informs the platoon leader and platoon sergeant of ammunition status and of changes in the tactical situation.
 - (2) Advises when displacements should be made because of range limitations.
 - (3) Leads the reconnaissance or advance party, when directed.
 - (4) Assists in vehicle placement.
 - (5) Lays mortars for firing, when directed.
 - (6) Controls FDC personnel. He ensures safe procedures are used in computing firing data and validates the computer safety check before issuing the FDC order.
 - (7) Establishes and maintains situation maps. He marks all restrictive fire control measures on the map and ensures they are entered into the MBC or on the plotting board.

- (8) Relays intelligence information to the battalion FSO and platoon leader.
- (9) Supervises all fire missions. He examines target location relative to friendly units, fire control measures, and reference points. Based on the nature of the target, ammunition available, and command guidance, he decides if the mission should be fired, the number of mortars to fire, and the amount and type of ammunition to expend.
- (10) Issues the FDC order.
- (11) Checks the accuracy of computer operators and FDC records; ensures fires are correctly plotted.
- (12) Maintains ammunition records.
- (13) Reports ammunition status.
- (14) Recommends when re-registration should be conducted.
- (15) Determines and applies meteorological corrections for firing data.
- (16) Assumes control of a section during split-section operations.
- (17) Supervises the laying of communications wire in the mortar position.
- (18) Supervises the FDC sleep plan to ensure 24-hour operation.
- (19) Ensures FDC personnel use proper radiotelephone operating procedures.
- (20) Ensures FDC and gun crew personnel understand their role in defending the platoon position.
- (21) Ensures FDC and section vehicles are properly camouflaged.
- (22) Supervises the maintenance of vehicles and equipment.
- (23) Trains FDC personnel in FDC procedures and assists and trains squad leaders in FDC procedures.
- (24) Consolidates and submits NBC reports.
- (25) Supervises section and FDC NBC protective and decontamination measures.
- (26) Designates the duty mortar crew during continuous operations and ensures they are alert.
 - h. The mortar squad leader performs the following:
 - (1) Controls squad movement.
 - (2) Places the squad into position.
 - (3) Ensures the mortar is properly laid.
 - (4) Checks mask and overhead clearance.
 - (5) Ensures the mortar position is camouflaged.
 - (6) Ensures that proper deflection and elevation are indexed on the mortar sight.
 - (7) Ensures the ammunition is properly prepared for firing and reports any ammunition discrepancies to the FDC.
 - (8) Briefs his squad on the platoon leader's orders.
 - (9) Informs his squad of any changes.
 - (10) Conducts emergency fire missions without an FDC, when required.
 - (11) Plots fires and determines firing data when operating separately from the section.

- (12) Supervises the preparation and manning of squad fighting positions.
- (13) Implements the squad sleep and security plans.
- (14) Ensures communication is maintained with the FDC.
- (15) Ensures the squad uses proper radiotelephone operating procedures.
- (16) Supervises the maintenance of personal weapons and squad equipment.
- (17) Supervises weapons test firing and mortar boresighting.
- (18) Ensures the ammunition and equipment are properly stored.
- (19) Informs FDC of any changes in ammunition status.
- (20) Is responsible for the training, welfare, and safety of squad members.
- (21) Trains squad members in individual and crew-related skills and cross trains to maintain technical proficiency at all times.
- (22) Submits NBC reports.
- (23) Supervises squad NBC protective and decontamination measures.

2-2. TROOP-LEADING PROCEDURES

Troop-leading procedures should be an instinctive familiar way of thinking for all leaders. The sequence of the individual procedures is not rigid. It is modified to meet the mission, situation, and available time. Some steps are done concurrently, while others may go on continuously throughout the operation. The procedures are time savers. The leader uses them in the order that is most efficient.

a. **Receive the Mission.** A mission may be received in the form of either a written or oral warning order, operation order, or fragmentary order. At times, a leader may deduce a change in mission, based on a change in the situation. The mortar platoon leader should attend the battalion OPORD.

(1) Once an upcoming mission is identified, the leader takes action to begin preparing the unit. He conducts an initial METT-T analysis to determine the requirements for his warning order.

(2) With the information available, the leader sets his time schedule by identifying the actions that must be done (time-critical tasks) to prepare for the operation. These preparatory actions are identified by a preliminary consideration of the information on the mission, enemy, terrain, and own troops. An initial reconnaissance (may be a map reconnaissance) is conducted to allow the leader to more fully understand the time requirements for the mission. He then develops his time schedule by starting at "mission time" and working backward to the current time (reverse planning). The mission time is normally the most critical time in the operation.

(3) The leader must ensure that all subordinate echelons have sufficient time for their own planning needs. A general rule of thumb for leaders at all levels is to use no more than one-third of the available time for planning and issuance of the OPORD. This will leave the rest of the available time for subordinate leaders to use for their planning and

preparation. Establish a tentative time schedule, which may require adjustments as the procedures process continues.

b. **Issue a Warning Order.** Do not wait for more information. Issue the best warning order possible with the information at hand and update it as needed with additional warning orders. The warning order lets units prepare for combat as soon as possible after being alerted of an upcoming mission. This normally involves a number of standard actions that should be addressed by SOP. The warning order should address those items not covered in the SOP that must be done to prepare for the mission. The specific contents for each warning order will vary, based upon the unique tactical situation. (Appendix A provides an example warning order.)

c. **Make a Tentative Plan.** Tentative plans are the basis for the OPORD. The leader uses the commander's estimate of the situation to analyze METT-T information, develop and analyze a COA, compare courses of action, and make a decision that produces a tentative plan.

d. **Initiate Movement.** This can be done by having a subordinate leader move the section or platoon to an assembly area or firing position. The instructions for this move can be given in the warning order. The leader must ensure that all movements are coordinated with his headquarters and that security is maintained.

e. **Conduct Reconnaissance.** Reconnaissance is a continuous process during the procedures. The tentative plan should include time for reconnaissance. Plan and conduct reconnaissance to confirm or adjust the tentative plan. A thorough tentative plan helps the reconnaissance because specific guidance can be given to subordinates. In every tactical operation the leader requires additional information, and at the same time, he must deny the enemy information about his section or platoon.

f. **Complete the Plan.** The leader must be prepared to adjust his tentative plan based on the results of the reconnaissance. He may have to change COAs if the situation is not what he expected. In this case, one of the previously analyzed and discarded COAs may be adjusted to quickly finalize his new plan. Coordination continues with all supported agencies, higher headquarters, and adjacent units. This, along with his reconnaissance, gives the leader the information he needs to expand the tentative plan into a five-paragraph OPORD. (See OPORD format, Appendix A.)

g. **Issue the Order.** Preferably issue the order while viewing the avenues of approach/objective area. Make maximum use of visual aids (sketches and terrain models) to enhance the presentation of the order. When the leader issues the tentative plan before the leader's reconnaissance, he issues a FRAGO to finalize the plan before execution (see Appendix A).

h. **Supervise.** The best plan may fail if it is not managed right. Briefbacks, rehearsals, inspections, and continuous coordination of plans must be used to supervise and refine troop-leading procedures. Briefbacks and rehearsals are not the same; briefbacks focus on the planning process, and rehearsals focus on execution.

(1) **Precombat inspections.** During precombat inspections, check—

- Weapons and ammunition.

- Uniforms and equipment.
- Mission-essential equipment.
- Soldiers' knowledge and understanding of the mission and their specific responsibilities.
- Communications.
- Rations and water.
- Camouflage.

(2) **Rehearsals.** Rehearsals are always conducted. They are essential to ensure complete coordination and subordinate understanding. The mortar section or platoon must participate in the maneuver and fire support plan rehearsals held by the battalion. These rehearsals are critical to success. The warning order should provide subordinate leaders sufficient detail for them to schedule and conduct rehearsals of drills/SOPs before receiving the OPORD. Rehearsals conducted after the OPORD can then focus on mission specific tasks. Rehearsals are conducted as any other training exercise except the training area should be as much like the objective area as possible, including the same light and weather conditions. Rehearsals include holding soldier and leader briefbacks of individual tasks and using sand tables or sketches to talk through the execution of the plan. These are followed by walk-through exercises and then full-speed, blank-fire or live-fire rehearsals. The leader should establish the priority for rehearsals based on the available time. The priority of rehearsals, as COA development, flows from the decisive point of the operations. Some important tasks to rehearse are as follows:

- Execution of the battalion or company fire plan by phase or series. This cannot be done alone. The battalion staff and FSOs must participate along with the mortar platoon/section.
- Emergency occupation techniques. (See Appendix F.)
- Visual and audio signals.
- Deliberate occupation of firing positions.
- Conduct of firing missions while in MOPP4.
- Reaction to countermortar fires.

(3) **Final Inspections.** The last requirement before an operation is to conduct an inspection to ensure the men and equipment are ready. This inspection can include (but is not limited to)—

- Rations.
- Water and water purification tablets.
- Vehicle (communications equipment, maintenance, fuel level, load plan, tools).

- Weapons (maintenance).
- Ammunition (amount, type, storage).
- Individual uniform and equipment (weapon, protective mask and nerve-agent antidote, helmet, flack vest, eye protection, bug repellent, earplugs, dog tags).
- Camouflage (personnel and equipment).
- Mission-essential equipment (mortar sights, night lights, extra batteries and bulbs, NBC equipment, aiming circle, compasses, chemical lights).
- Knowledge of the mission and individual responsibilities (displacement plan, fire plan).
- Knowledge of radio nets, frequencies, and call signs.
- Precomputed firing data.
- Knowledge of emergency signals and code words.
- Mortar ballistic computer setup and batteries.

Once the operation begins, the leader follows the plan. He should be ready to change his plan if the situation demands it.

2-3. COMBAT ORDERS AND OVERLAYS

Combat orders are written or oral, and leaders use them to transmit information and instructions to subordinates. The use of combat orders, expressed in standardized formats or containing essential elements, ensures that a leader conveys his instructions clearly, concisely, and completely. The detail of an order varies with the amount of time a leader has to prepare it. SOPs complement combat orders, allowing the leader to refer to them rather than issue the same instructions for tasks and situations that occur often. Three kinds of combat orders are: warning, operation, and fragmentary.

a. **Warning Order.** Leaders use warning orders to alert their sections of an impending mission and to provide initial instructions so that subordinates have a maximum amount of time to prepare for its execution. There is no prescribed format for a warning order, but by following the outline of the five-paragraph field order, leaders can simplify and standardize their orders. This helps when the leader is exhausted or under great stress. The warning order must provide any specific instructions not included in the SOP but which are important to preparation of the mission (such as changes to the composition of the on-board ammunition load). The platoon leader may issue it only to the platoon sergeant if time does not permit the gathering of other personnel. (See Appendix A for an example of a mortar platoon warning order.)

b. **Operation Order.** The OPOD supplies all-important information on WHO, WHAT, WHEN, HOW and most importantly,

WHY. It outlines the commander's intent for fire support. The leader uses the OPORD to tell subordinates how he intends to fight the battle. Leaders use the standard OPORD format to organize their thoughts in a logical sequence. This ensures that the platoon and squad know everything necessary to accomplish the mission. Consistent use of this standard format allows the leader to refine SOPs and to streamline his orders. (See Appendix A for an example of a mortar platoon OPORD.)

c. **Information Source for the OPORD.** The majority of the information needed for the platoon leader's OPORD comes directly from the battalion OPORD. The platoon leader can get additional information from the S2, the battalion FSO, and the S4. Some information he must determine himself during the analysis of his mission.

d. **Fragmentary Order.** The FRAGO is issued to make a change to an existing order. Therefore, FRAGOs address only those items from the OPORD that are changed. Since FRAGOs are normally used during the conduct of an operation, instructions should be brief and specific. Although there is no standard format for a FRAGO, the following mission-essential items are normally included:

(1) Situation (enemy and friendly forces) includes a brief description of the enemy and friendly situations, and it should indicate the reason for the change in instructions.

(2) Changes to the organization can include the attachment or detachment of the platoon, or part of it.

(3) Orders to subordinate units should be issued by element. To avoid confusion, no element should be left out.

(4) Fire support (if applicable) indicates any change in priorities or assets.

(5) Coordinating instructions, as in the OPORD, should include all instructions that apply to one or more elements.

(See Appendix A for an example of a verbal mortar platoon FRAGO.)

e. **Operation Overlay.** An operation overlay is a tracing of the location, size, and scheme of maneuver and fires of friendly forces involved in an operation. Its purpose is to reduce the content and enhance the understanding of the written or oral order. The mortar platoon leader must ensure that information is transferred from the overlay onto the mortar ballistic computer and plotting board to ensure friendly units are not fired on. Normally, squad leaders will not be issued operation overlays. However, in conjunction with higher leader's orders, platoon and squad leaders should transfer the appropriate graphics to their maps. This allows them to plan their actions, based on a map reconnaissance deeper than the terrain may allow them to see. The overlay or transference should be simple, neat, and accurately drawn. It should include all control measures used during the operation and all other information that can be depicted graphically. The section sergeant should keep a copy of the operation overlay in the FDC at all times, updating it as needed.