
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
THE BASIC SCHOOL
MARINE CORPS TRAINING COMMAND
CAMP BARRETT, VIRGINIA 22134-5019

MOVEMENT TO CONTACT
B3N4638
STUDENT HANDOUT

Movement to Contact

Introduction Up to this point at The Basic School, you have been dealing with a known enemy situation. Someone has maintained contact with the enemy and provided you with detailed information on enemy composition, disposition, and strength. Unfortunately, in the disorder and friction inherent to war, intelligence will never be entirely complete or accurate. Additionally, because the enemy is constantly acting as well, intelligence may become less accurate and relevant because of events that change the situation between the time that the intelligence was collected and developed and the time that we act.

Importance One of the principals of war central to the conduct of maneuver warfare is the pursuit of the offense, even when the enemy situation is uncertain. As practitioners of maneuver warfare, we want to establish a tempo in our operations that degrades the enemy's ability to operate. Maintaining this tempo in an uncertain enemy environment means developing the enemy situation through contact and committing the fewest forces necessary so that the rest of the unit can continue to seek the enemy center of gravity. A properly executed movement to contact is one of the most ruthlessly efficient forms of the offense, as demonstrated by the German Blitzkrieg into France in 1940 and the Coalition invasion of Iraq in 2003.

In This Lesson The purpose of this lesson is to allow you to operate in and understand an uncertain environment through the use of movement to contact. This handout will discuss the tactics and techniques to use in a movement to contact.

This lesson covers the following topics:

Topic	Page
Definition	5
Preparation Phase/Begin Planning	5
Arrange/Make Reconnaissance	12
Complete the Plan	12
Issue the Order/Supervise	16
Conduct Phase/Movement	17
Decisive Engagement	19
Consolidation/Reorganization Phase	19
References	19
Notes	20

Movement to Contact (Continued)

Learning Objectives

Terminal Learning Objectives

- 1 . Given a scheme of maneuver, fire support available, and commander's intent, develop a fire support plan to support the ground scheme of maneuver in accordance with the commander's intent. (0302-FSPT-1300)
- 2 . Given a mission, implement Marine Corps Warfighting concepts to accomplish the mission. (MCCS-OFF-2102)

Enabling Learning Objectives

- 1 . Given known, suspected, and likely enemy positions/avenues of approach/avenues of withdrawal, a scheme of maneuver, fire support available, and commander's intent, plan targets to support the ground scheme of maneuver in accordance with the commander's intent. (0302-FSPT-1300c)
 - 2 . Given a unit, a mission, and a mental estimate of the situation, integrate a support by fire position into the ground scheme of maneuver to accomplish the mission. (0302-OFF-1201e)
 - 3 . Given a unit, a mission, a mental estimate of the situation, supporting indirect fire assets, and a support by fire position, integrate fire and maneuver into the ground scheme of maneuver to accomplish the mission. (0302-OFF-1201f)
 - 4 . Given an attached crew served weapon unit, a mission and a commander's intent, determine support relationships to accomplish the mission and meet the commander's intent. (0302-OFF-1202a)
 - 5 . Given an attached crew served weapon unit, a mission, and a commander's intent, determine target precedence to accomplish the mission and meet the commander's intent. (0302-OFF-1202b)
 - 6 . Given an attached crew served weapon unit, a mission, and a commander's intent, determine target reference points (TRPs) to accomplish the mission and meet the commander's intent. (0302-OFF-1202c)
 - 7 . Given an attached machinegun unit, a mission, and a commander's intent, plan ammunition/rates of fire relative to the attack to accomplish the mission and meet the commander's intent. (0302-OFF-1202d)
 - 8 . Given an attached crew served weapon unit, a mission, and a commander's intent, determine displacement criteria/plan to accomplish the mission and meet the commander's intent. (0302-OFF-1202e)
 - 9 . Given a machinegun unit, a mission and a commander's intent, direct positioning of machinegun units to best observe and support scheme of maneuver. (0302-OFF-1202f)
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- 10 . Given a unit, a mission, scheme of maneuver and a mental estimate of the situation, employ tactical control measures to support the ground scheme of maneuver. (0311-OFF-2002c)
- 11 . Given a mission and commander's intent, develop a mental estimate of the situation using METT-TC to accomplish the mission. (MCCS-OFF-2102l)
- 12 . Given a mission with a commander's intent and a mental estimate of the situation, integrate the principles of war in tactical planning to accomplish the mission. (MCCS-OFF-2102m)
- 13 . Without the aid of reference, describe a movement to contact without omission. (MCCS-OFF-2103l)
- 14 . Given a reinforced rifle platoon, a mission, and a commander's intent, describe task organization for movement to contact to accomplish the mission. (MCCS-OFF-2103m)
- 15 . Without the aid of reference, describe movement to contact formations without omission. (MCCS-OFF-2103n)
- 16 . Without the aid of reference and given enemy contact, describe movement to contact immediate actions without omission. (MCCS-OFF-2103o)
- 17 . Given a unit, a mission with commanders intent, lead a unit in a movement to contact to accomplish the mission. (MCCS-OFF-2103p)

Movement to Contact: Definition

Before we discuss how to conduct a movement to contact, let's first define what movement to contact is. MCDP 1-0 defines a movement to contact as:

- An offensive operation designed to gain or re-gain contact with the enemy and develop the situation. Movement to contact helps the commander to understand the battlespace. It allows him to make initial contact with the enemy with minimum forces, thereby avoiding an extensive engagement or battle before he is prepared for decisive action. When successfully executed, it allows the commander to strike the enemy at the time and place of his choosing.

Preparation Phase

BEGIN PLANNING

Receive the order and analyze your mission. There are a few ways you may determine that a movement to contact is an appropriate form of the offense:

- You are assigned an enemy-, friendly-, or terrain-oriented task as part of a larger movement to contact. Check your commander's scheme of maneuver and tasks to see if this is the case.
- You are assigned a terrain-oriented task in an uncertain enemy situation where time/space is a factor:
 - Alpha Company is conducting offensive operations 6 km to our east along Route Golden, and will need to be resupplied NLT 1800 tonight in anticipation of follow-on operations. Recent resupply operations along Route Golden have been disrupted by squad-sized enemy units that have infiltrated and conducted complex ambushes (to include obstacles).
 - At 1400, 1st Platoon clears Route Golden east to Alpha Company IOT prevent enemy ambushes against the resupply convoy.
- You are assigned an enemy-oriented task in an uncertain enemy situation where time/space is a factor:
 - Alpha Company's attacks have shattered the enemy defenses, and the remainder of the enemy (approximately platoon (-) size) is attempting to withdraw to the east. Elements of the platoon (-) appear to be fortifying Samarah, a small town 10 km to our east that sits at the intersection of several key routes. The remainder of the unit is likely preparing to delay our advance along Route Golden before falling back to Samarah. Enemy reinforcements up to company size are likely within 12 hours, and a deliberate defense in Samarah's urban terrain will be a significant obstacle to our offensive east. Bravo Company is moving east to relieve Alpha Company, but is expected to reach Samarah NET 2200 tonight.
 - At 1200, 1st Platoon destroys the enemy platoon (-) in Samarah IOT prevent the enemy from establishing a deliberate defense in Samarah before Bravo Company's arrival.

In each situation, movement to contact is an appropriate form of the offense. The enemy and friendly situation and the commander's intent dictate that we should use tempo as a weapon to maintain the initiative or to prevent the enemy from gaining the initiative. While reconnaissance

and deliberate attacks may also be able to accomplish the assigned tasks, they would be too time-consuming to accomplish the commander's purpose and intent.

Achieve a Decision.

The collective judgments and tentative plan that the platoon commander makes based off his initial estimate of the situation are what we refer to as "Achieving a Decision."

Develop formations and task organization. The unit commander conducting the movement to contact considers the following criteria when selecting a formation for movement and organizing his unit for the upcoming mission:

- Speed
- Security
- Control
- Deployability

Speed and control are obviously essential to the tempo that the commander wants to create, but the uncertain enemy environment dictates that the commander should also organize a force that can quickly react to contact from any direction. The closer to the decisive fight the unit is, the higher its security posture. The relative trade-off between speed/control and security/deployability will be based on the commander's estimate of the situation (METT-TC). To assist the commander in selecting the best organization of his forces, the Marine Corps breaks expectation of enemy contact into three levels:

- Contact **Remote**
- Contact **Possible**
- Contact **Imminent**

The category in which the commander places his expectation of contact will greatly influence how the unit organizes for movement.

Contact Remote

When the commander feels that the chance of enemy contact is **remote**, he usually uses a **route column**. Generally, a commander judges the chance of enemy contact to be remote when

- A friendly unit is between him and the enemy to provide security (behind friendly lines)
- The greatest threat is from aircraft and long range artillery

The unit commander utilizes the route column to maximize speed and control. Grouping subordinate units administratively also facilitates control. Routes are selected that facilitate speed and reduce friction. This formation, also referred to as an administrative column, is the same one you use on your conditioning hikes. As the unit closes with the enemy and no longer has other units providing security, the commander must update his estimation of the situation. He may update the expectation of enemy contact to *contact possible*.

Contact Possible Also referred to as "contact probable," these two terms are interchangeable. Once the commander has decided that contact is possible, he must change the tactical organization of his unit. He now balances the need for speed and control with his need to develop the enemy situation and provide security/deployability.

Contact Possible (Continued) The commander task organizes the unit to facilitate the adoption of combat formations. The overall formation is the **tactical column**. Units within the formation may be deployed in another tactical formation based upon their mission, i.e., point element in a wedge. The formation usually adopted by subordinate units is also the **tactical column**. The main body travels in the center of the tactical column. The role of the main body is to accomplish the unit's mission, which usually entails destroying the enemy in the decisive fight.

Since a threat from enemy ground activity exists, the commander deploys security elements to protect the main body. These security elements, called guards, are deployed to the front, flank, and rear. A guard is a unit used to protect the main force from attack, direct fire, and ground observation by fighting to gain time while observing and reporting.

A guard should possess sufficient combat power to fix or interdict the enemy while the commander maneuvers the main body to a position from which to assault or bypass the enemy. Additionally, the guard commander must report information about the enemy (SALUTE), guard force location and actions, and relevant terrain information that will allow the unit commander to make an informed decision. Too weak a guard will only cause the unit commander to commit additional forces to protect his ability to maneuver.

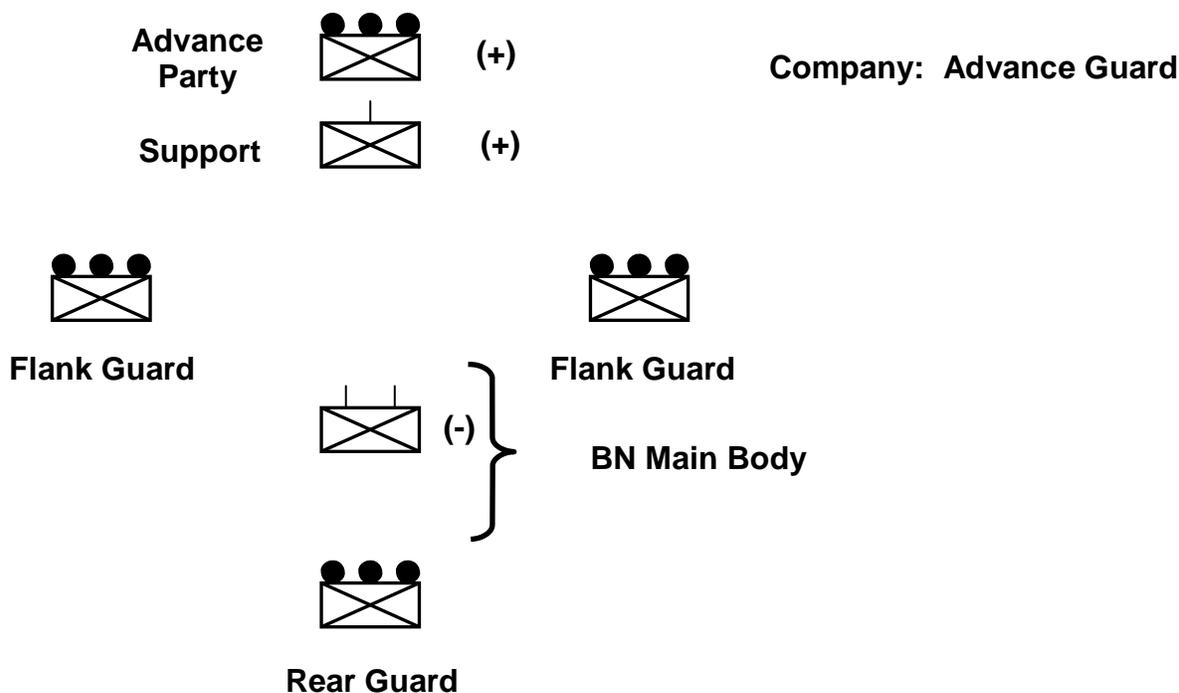


Diagram 1 shows battalion (-) as main body, company as advance guard, platoon as advance party, and squad as point.

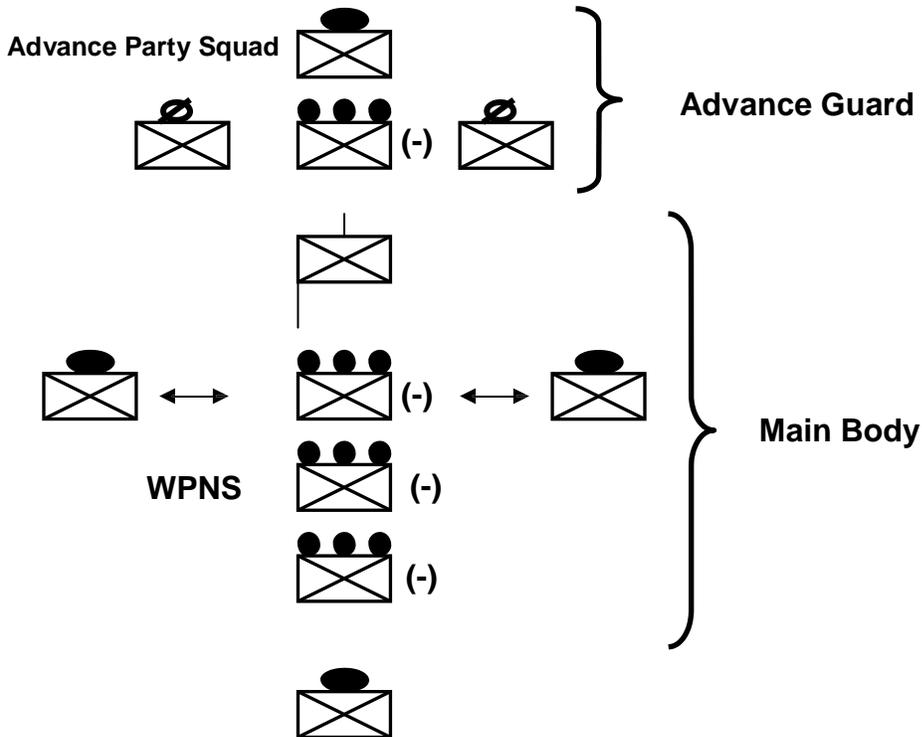


Diagram 2. Shows a rifle company in independent movement to contact; rifle platoon as advance guard, and squad as advance party.

**Contact
Possible
(Continued)**

Advance guard: The guard unit that precedes the main body of a company or higher is called the *advance guard*. The advance guard:

- Develops the situation for the commander by initiating action and reporting the situation
- Maintains tempo by fixing, clearing, or destroying smaller enemy forces, allowing the main body to bypass non-decisive engagements
- Fixes the enemy during decisive engagements, allowing the main body to maneuver and destroy the enemy

The advance guard sends forward a security unit called an *advance party*, which performs the advance guard role for the advance guard commander. The advance party sends forward a security unit called a *point*, which performs the advance guard role for the advance party commander. The advance guard should be located far enough ahead of the main body to effectively develop the situation. The commander should have enough time to make a decision and enough space to adjust the formation based off the reporting from the advance guard. Enemy engaging the advance guard should not also be able to engage the main body since having the main body in contact limits the commander's options. The advance guard should not be located too far ahead to support if decisive contact is made. The distance that the advance guard travels ahead of the main body will depend heavily on terrain (e.g. forest or desert?), enemy (e.g. using small arms or heavy machineguns?), and friendly (e.g. footmobile or mechanized? How large and well-equipped is advance guard relative to enemy forces?).

Task Organization: The advance guard should be task-organized to overcome obstacles and enemy resistance. Engineers or other obstacle clearing capability should travel with the advance guard. Machineguns may also travel with the advance party. Their support relationship will most likely be DS of the main effort or GS of the unit since, in the decisive fight, their suppression will allow the main body to close with the enemy.

- **Machineguns with the advance guard** are in the best position to gain immediate fire superiority and support by fire the main body if the decisive fight comes from the front. If the advance guard makes non-decisive contact with the enemy and the commander decides to bypass the fight with the main body, he must consider a way to link up the machineguns with the new advance guard—the limited ammunition the machineguns have should be saved for the decisive fight, and if they stay with the original advance guard then they will be in the rear of the unit formation when the fight is over, which is a poor position from which to support the unit.
- The commander may also choose to locate the **machineguns with the main body**, which gives him more direct control and more flexibility if the decisive fight comes from the flanks or rear. However, if the decisive fight comes from the front as expected, the advance guard will have a more difficult time achieving fire superiority. Additionally, to be in the best position to support the unit, the machineguns must move forward to link up with the advance guard while under enemy fire. The commander must consider trade-offs such as these when deciding where to locate assets.

Contact Possible (Continued)

Flank guard: is responsible for preventing the enemy from observing or using direct fires on the main body from its flank. Though the flank guard should not become decisively engaged, it must do what is necessary to provide the main body time to prepare for an attack into its flank. As with the advance guard, the flank guard must be task organized with sufficient assets to accomplish its mission (see Diagram 3 below).

Flank guards may also act as connecting groups, maintaining contact with friendly units to the flanks. Flank guards can be provided by the rear unit in the main body, which will preserve the combat power of the main effort, but is very difficult for the rear unit commander to control. The main effort can provide the flank guards, which is easier to control, but means the main effort must link up its forces before committing to the decisive fight. The main effort and the rear unit can each provide a flank guard, which is a mix of the pros and cons of the other methods.

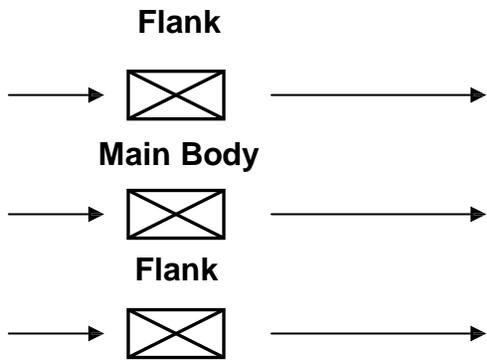


Figure 1: Flank guard traveling constantly

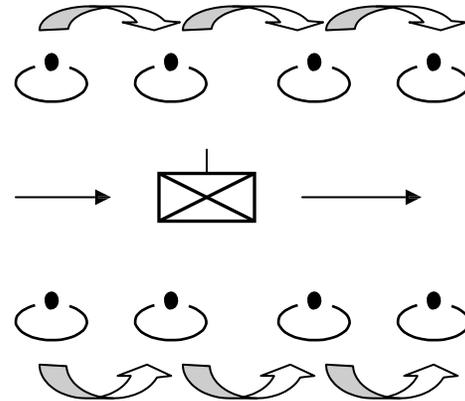


Figure 2: Flank guard moves in successive bounds

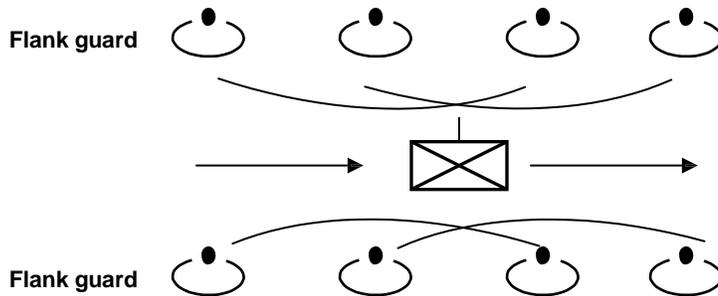


Figure 3: Flank guard moves in alternating bounds

Diagram 3

**Contact Possible
(Continued)**

Flank Guard: The flank guard moves abreast of the main body on a parallel route and may move continuously and at the same pace as the main body (see Diagram 1) or it may bound between successive positions (Diagram 2). These positions should be located on key terrain that can control avenues of approach into the flank. Lastly, the flank guard split into two units on each flank, can travel in alternating bounds between key terrain features (Diagram 3).

No matter which method the unit commander uses, he must keep in mind that the flank guard:

- Will probably be traveling on more difficult terrain than the main body
- May have trouble keeping pace with the main body because of the difficult terrain

Rear Guard: To the rear of the main body is the *rear guard*. Like the advance guard, the rear guard can deploy a point (called a rear point) to provide early warning. Rapid movement forward can, in and of itself, provide a measure of security to the rear. The rear guard may also serve as a connecting group with friendly units to the rear, such as when a platoon is an advance guard in a company movement to contact.

As the unit commander further closes with the enemy, he must once again update his expectation of enemy contact. When the commander determines that he is close to the enemy main body or has other reasons to believe that a significant enemy force represents a threat to his unit, he will update his expectation of contact to **contact imminent**. For example, if the enemy is expected to delay along a route while they attempt to fortify a town, the commander will likely assume contact imminent as he nears the town.

Contact Imminent

At this time, the security units will most likely deploy into their combat formation and the unit as a whole will adopt an **approach march** formation. The commander may partially or fully deploy his main body. Security and deployability take precedence over speed and control. Since tempo is critical to a successful movement to contact, the commander should not deploy into the approach march until decisive contact is imminent. The final picture may have the advance guard deployed in a wedge, while the main body either remains in a column or deploys into one of the more deployable formations (wedge, line, etc). The unit commander makes all last minute details for combat that he deems necessary. Indirect fire weapon systems are positioned to provide quick and accurate support (priority targets). He further evaluates the upcoming terrain to help in making decisions on the deployment and maneuver of the main body upon contact.

Contact Imminent (Continued) In the approach march, the advance guard may now move under the protection of an overwatching unit—an element moves forward while another element positions itself to support-by-fire in case of enemy contact. Upon contact, the supporting element fires upon the enemy in order to assist the supported unit in either assaulting the enemy, bypassing, or falling back to better terrain. If you choose to overwatch your lead elements, do not push them out farther than the supporting unit's weapons can range.

Movement to contact ends when your unit:

- Transitions to the defense
 - Makes decisive contact with the enemy
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ARRANGE/MAKE RECONNAISSANCE

Leader's Recon A physical leader's recon is unlikely due to the time/space considerations of a typical movement to contact. A commander will have to rely on map recon and information given or requested during COC coordination for updated information about the enemy and terrain.

COC Coordination

-
- **Intelligence.** Ground, signal, and human intelligence sources may be able to provide information on the terrain and enemy. Check debriefs from units that may have traveled the route before for information on terrain. UAVs can recon the route and provide real-time information on terrain and enemy. The intelligence officer can better support you if he or she knows what information you need to plan your mission.
 - **Fires.** Aviation can recon the route and provide real-time information on terrain and enemy. Aviation and indirect fires are good economy of force and can maintain tempo if used to destroy or fix non-decisive enemy contact while the unit bypasses.
 - **Logistics.** Pay attention to soldiers' load in a foot-mobile movement to contact. To maintain tempo, Marines will be moving quickly over long distances, fighting as they go. To maintain tempo and preserve combat effectiveness, plan to take only mission-essential gear into the fight. Since Marines will be traveling with minimal supplies, arrange to have a resupply of chow, water, ammunition, batteries, packs, etc., on call for when the movement to contact ends. This will allow a quicker transition into follow-on operations.
 - **Communications.** The unit needs a minimum of three radios to be effective: one with the unit leader, one with the advance guard leader (to develop the situation for the commander), and one with the main effort leader (who will become the new advance guard if the unit rotates). Any additional assets will further facilitate command and control.
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COMPLETE THE PLAN

Scheme of Maneuver

The scheme of maneuver will generally be simple compared to a deliberate attack because of the uncertain enemy situation.

Example: “1st Platoon will conduct a movement to contact east along Route Golden with one rifle squad as the main effort and two rifle squads and a machinegun squad as supporting efforts. From the line of departure to Phase Line Red, enemy contact will be possible. The platoon will travel in tactical column with SE 1/SE 3 as the advance party. Terrain dependent, the ME will travel approximately 400 meters behind, followed by the platoon headquarters and SE 2, which will provide the flank and rear guards. AK 3401 will be our priority target during this phase, and LZ Hawk will be our primary CASEVAC LZ. From Phase Line Red to Phase Line Black, enemy contact is imminent. The platoon will travel in a wedge, with SE 1/SE 3 as the advance party. The ME will be on the left side of the wedge and SE 2 the right side, with the platoon headquarters in the middle. At Phase Line Red, I will shift our priority target from AK 3401 to AK 3402. The primary CASEVAC LZ will shift from LZ Hawk to LZ Falcon. O/S, the platoon will consolidate facing east, with the ME from 10 to 2, SE 2 from 2 to 6, and SE 1 from 6 to 10.

Fire Support Plan

A detailed fire support plan will support the scheme of maneuver. Target areas where the enemy will likely make contact. For example, if the enemy is attempting to delay a unit’s advance along a route, they will likely make contact where the unit has to cross choke points or danger areas and they have good standoff and withdrawal routes.

The advance guard leader is usually in the best position to observe fires, since the advance guard is typically the first unit in contact. The commander will still control the fire support plan overall (e.g. rolling targets or approving the advance guard leader’s use of fires). If the commander approves the advance guard leader’s request for fire support, he may allow the advance guard leader to talk directly to the fire support agency IOT allow faster support.

Tasks

One of the most important aspects of tasking in a movement to contact is ensuring that each element can perform the role of the other elements. In order to maintain tempo, the commander will often bypass non-decisive engagements while the advance guard is still fighting. The main effort will move up and become the advance guard, the rear unit will become the main effort, and the previous advance guard will fall into the rear when the contact is complete. If one of the subordinate units does not understand its new role, it decreases the overall unit’s effectiveness.

Avoid overloading tasking statements with implied tasks (“ensure your radios work before stepping off”) or coordinating instructions (“you will be first in the order of movement”). Ensure that supporting effort tasking statements are worded so that supporting efforts understand how they support the main effort.

In the following examples, the platoon commander has been tasked to

**Tasks
(Continued)**

clear Route Golden east to Alpha Company IOT prevent enemy ambushes against a follow-on resupply convoy. He has task-organized his force with the machineguns traveling with the advance party and the rear squad providing the flank and rear guards.

1st Squad: ME. At 1400, clear the enemy east along Route Golden to Alpha Company IOT prevent enemy ambushes against the resupply convoy. BPT assume the role of SE 1 or SE 2.

- 1st Squad, as the platoon ME, is the commander's bid for success and will ultimately accomplish the platoon mission.

2nd Squad: SE 1. At 1400, fix or clear enemy east along Route Golden IOT prevent enemy interference with the ME mission. BPT assume the roles of the ME or SE 2.

- 2nd Squad, as the advance party, is tasked to FIX (to prevent the enemy from moving any part of his forces, either from a specific location or for a specific period of time, by holding or surrounding them to prevent their withdrawal for use elsewhere) or CLEAR (the removal of enemy forces and elimination of organized resistance in an assigned zone, area, or location by destroying, capturing, or forcing the withdrawal of enemy forces that could interfere with the unit's ability to accomplish its mission) in order to prevent the enemy from interfering with the ME clearing Route Golden. In a non-decisive fight, fixing or clearing the enemy will allow the ME to bypass and continue its mission. In a decisive fight, fixing the enemy will prevent the enemy from effectively firing or reorienting while the ME maneuvers and destroys the enemy, thus clearing Route Golden.

3rd Squad: SE 2. At 1400, guard the flanks and rear of the platoon formation IOT prevent enemy interference with the ME mission. BPT assume the role of the ME or SE 1.

- 3rd Squad, providing the flank and rear guards, is given the friendly-oriented task of GUARD (to protect the main force by fighting to gain time while also observing and reporting information). This will prevent the enemy from conducting an effective surprise attack against the ME, and allow the ME to either bypass the threat or re-orient and clear it. The tasks of PROTECT (to prevent observation, engagement, or interference with a force or location) or INTERDICT (an action to divert, disrupt, delay, or destroy the enemy's surface military potential before it can be used effectively against friendly forces) may also be appropriate in this case.

MG Squad: SE 3. GS of the platoon. O/O, suppress targets of opportunity along the platoon's route of march IOT allow the ME to close with and clear the enemy. Target precedence is C2, fortified positions, and 4 or more enemy. Save 100 rounds per gun for consolidation.

Tasks (Continued)

- In the decisive fight, MG suppression will allow the ME to close with and clear the enemy. Since the commander is not sure exactly where this will be or what it will entail, this tasking statement will be more generic than a typical MG tasking statement. Briefing where the MGs will travel in the formation, what they will do on rotation, how they will link up, etc., will probably be covered in other parts of the order (SOM, Coord Inst) and are not necessary in the tasking statement.

Coordinating Instructions

The uncertain enemy situation creates a scheme of maneuver that lacks detail, at least relative to a deliberate attack. Detailed coordinating instructions are how a commander deals with likely enemy contingencies. You have seen this before in patrolling, and will see it again when you get to convoy operations. Some of the important coordinating instructions unique to movement to contact are:

- IA drills. The commander must have simple battle drills to react to enemy of assumed sizes and capabilities from any direction. Some of these battle drills will be discussed in detail later in the handout.
- Rotation Plan. The ability to smoothly rotate units is vital to maintaining tempo in a movement to contact. The decision to rotate will always lie with the commander or his guidance as laid out in the rotation plan. The rotation plan will detail rotation criteria (“on order”, “if the advance guard loses communication for more than 10 minutes”, etc.), as well as a detailed explanation of what each unit will do on rotation: “As 1st Squad moves to engage the enemy, I will give the order to rotate. They will communicate the location of the machinegun squad, which will set security and remain in place. 2nd Squad will move forward and conduct link-up with the machinegun squad. 2nd Squad will assume the role of SE 1 and move forward as the new advance party. 3rd Squad will assume the role of the ME. 3rd Squad and platoon headquarters will hold in place until 2nd Squad is 400 meters ahead, and then resume movement. 3rd Squad will provide its own flank and rear security until 1st Squad rejoins the formation. When 1st Squad’s contact is complete or on order, 1st Squad will link up with 3rd Squad and assume the role of SE 2.”
- Link-up Plan. A key part of the rotation plan. Marines will naturally be tense in a movement to contact; they are in an uncertain enemy environment and expecting contact at any time. With all the moving parts, there is a high potential for fratricide unless there is a good link-up plan and subordinate units are kept informed of other subordinate units’ locations.
- Responsibilities of each element. This is a chance for the commander to delineate some of the enduring tasks for each element. For example, if the platoon commander wants the platoon’s aid and litter team with the advance party, he can’t include it in 1st Squad’s task because then the aid and litter team will be in the rear if 1st Squad rotates.

Administration and Logistics

Plan multiple CCPs and extract points for casualties and EPWs along the route of movement. Backtracking to a CASEVAC LZ will affect the unit's tempo, and it may be more expedient to move a casualty or EPW forward to the next pickup site—based on the commander's assessment of the proximity of the LZ, the likelihood of enemy contact, and the time it will take the CASEVAC helo to arrive. If the movement to contact is being conducted along a route, ground evacuations can be conducted at any point since the unit has already cleared the route to that point. If the unit is an advance guard in a larger movement to contact, it can link up and hand over casualties and EPWs to the main body following behind for evacuation. In a platoon movement to contact, the advance party will likely have most of the casualties and EPWs. They can also perform the evacuation in non-decisive contacts, since the rest of the platoon will likely bypass them while they are in the fight.

Command and Signal

The signal plan should include signals likely to be used in contact (shift, cease, displace) and signals connected to the link-up and rotation plans. Also consider that the advance guard will usually be out of the main body's line of sight and may need to use signals if their communications are down—most likely to inform the commander that their communications are down and that they are rotating to the rear of the formation to troubleshoot.

ISSUE THE ORDER

When issuing the order, ensure that each subordinate unit leader understands the responsibilities of each element. Walk the dog during IA drills and the rotation plan to ensure that the coordinating instructions and signals are understood.

SUPERVISE

Conduct rehearsals to ensure that the plan is valid and understood by subordinate leaders. When conducting rehearsals, the emphasis is not on individual actions such as fire and movement, or on overly-detailed planning for every possible contingency. The commander should run simple, generic battle drills for the enemy situations that the unit is most likely to encounter. The emphasis should be on good combat reporting from subordinate unit leaders to develop the situation for the commander, and the commander's ability to make a decision and communicate it to subordinates. The commander himself is a key participant in the rehearsal. For example, the commander tells the advance guard leader to rehearse contact with an enemy squad. The advance guard leader makes up the details of the contact (enemy SALUTE, friendly location and actions, and relevant terrain information) in his report, and the commander must make and communicate a decision based on this information.

Conduct Phase

MOVEMENT

A footmobile movement to contact should be conducted at approximately a hike pace. Unlike patrolling, where a unit develops the situation by applying stealth and reconnaissance techniques, movement to contact develops the situation through contact. Tempo is a weapon for the commander that allows maneuver and surprise, ultimately allowing the commander to mass on the enemy before the enemy is prepared for decisive action. The commander controls the scheme of maneuver using tactical control measures. Some of the most useful TCMs in a movement to contact are phase lines and/or checkpoints. This helps the commander track the advance guard/main body dispersion and rates of movement. If the advance guard reports crossing Phase Line Red when the main body is only 150 meters away from Phase Line Red, then the commander may halt the main body until he has more dispersion. If the advance guard is too far away, the commander may momentarily halt them while the main body closes the gap. Phase lines and checkpoints can also be useful references for controlling other aspects of the operation. If briefed in the order, the unit will know that when they reach Phase Line Red the priority target, primary CASEVAC LZ, formation, etc., will shift. If you are the advance guard commander for a larger movement to contact, you have the same responsibilities to your higher commander that your advance party does to you—developing the situation by initiating action and reporting. If your advance party reports crossing Phase Line Red, then that information should be passed to the company commander. If your advance party reports enemy contact, you should make a decision, initiate action, and report the information to the company commander. Good combat reporting is critical to maintaining the tempo of a movement to contact, because it develops the situation for the commander and allows him to make a decision. After initiating action, the advance guard should report:

- Information on the enemy (SALUTE). Example: “There is an enemy fireteam vicinity 874 381 engaging us with small arms.”
- Friendly location and actions. Example: “We are vicinity 873 382 moving southeast to destroy the enemy.”
- Relevant terrain information. Example: “There’s a ridgeline on our north flank; if you stay north of it you should be able to bypass the enemy fireteam without them seeing you.”

Incomplete information may delay the commander’s decision and slow the tempo of the operation while he attempts to pull more information from the subordinate unit or develop the situation on his own.

Immediate Actions

Immediate action drills in the movement phase maintain tempo by using the minimum force necessary to fix, interdict, destroy, or clear enemy in order to allow the main effort to bypass non-decisive engagements. For a platoon, non-decisive engagements are generally defined as fireteam or smaller sized elements, since squad or larger enemy will require deploying the whole platoon. These example immediate action drills assume contact to the front. Contact to the flanks and rear will be handled in the same basic manner—flank guard or rear guard initiates action and reports; platoon commander decides and communicates further action—but may slow the unit more. Remember that these immediate actions are only guidelines for what will happen in most cases, not hard and fast rules. If the advance party is easily clearing an enemy squad, there is no need to deploy the platoon; likewise, if the advance party is getting bogged down by heavy fire from an enemy fireteam, the platoon commander may need to deploy some support. The platoon commander's estimate of the situation is what will ultimately dictate the platoon's actions.

Sniper

Depending on the distance to the sniper, the accuracy of his fire, and the availability of supporting arms, the commander has several options. If the sniper is 800 meters away, it is probably a waste of time and combat power to send a squad to destroy him, especially since he will likely displace before they get there. The platoon commander can obscure and bypass (with smoke grenades or smoke from supporting agencies), fix and bypass (using direct fires from the advance party or indirect fires), destroy with indirect fires or aviation fires, or clear with the advance party. Using indirect fires or aviation fires is the best economy of force, since it does not disrupt the unit's formation or significantly slow the unit. If the sniper is too close to safely employ supporting arms, or supporting arms are not available in a timely manner, then the platoon commander may decide to employ his organic units. If the platoon commander decides not to destroy (obscure and bypass or fix and bypass), then he needs to relay this information to any following units so they are aware of the threat. If the platoon commander decides to clear or destroy the enemy, he will send the advance party while he rotates the squads and bypasses with the main body. Once the platoon commander has made a decision and initiated the platoon's action, he reports the situation to the company commander.

Fire Team

The platoon commander has the same options for an enemy fireteam as for a sniper; however, if the platoon commander is considering bypass he needs to think about how large an enemy force he can bypass and still successfully accomplish the mission. If the platoon has been tasked to clear a route for a convoy, a fireteam may be too large to bypass; if the platoon has been tasked to quickly destroy a withdrawing enemy, the platoon commander may bypass the fireteam to pursue the enemy main body.

DECISIVE ENGAGEMENT

Squad When engaged by an enemy squad, the advance party (and machineguns, if located with the advance party) will perform a support by fire role for the main body. The advance party fixes and suppresses the enemy and reports the situation to the platoon commander (including terrain details such as if it is more advantageous for the platoon to flank from the left or the right). The platoon commander decides, initiates action and reports to the company commander. The platoon performs a hasty flanking attack and destroys or clears the enemy. In a platoon movement to contact, this ends the movement to contact (see Consolidation Phase). In a company or larger movement to contact, the platoon will rotate to the rear of the company.

Platoon or Larger When engaged by an enemy platoon or larger, the advance party will suppress until the rest of the platoon can deploy. The platoon commander will assess the situation, take action, and report to the company commander. The platoon will perform a support by fire role for the company, or suppress until the company arrives to provide a support by fire for the battalion, etc. Contact with an enemy platoon will end a company movement to contact or rotate the company to the rear in a battalion movement to contact, etc.

Consolidation/Reorganization Phase

Movement to contact ends when the unit is decisively engaged or transitions to the defense. If the unit reaches its limit of advance with no enemy contact and transitions to the defense, the movement to contact has ended. If the unit makes decisive contact, the movement to contact has ended—this does not mean that the unit will not quickly continue offensive operations, just that the decisive engagement has either accomplished the mission or developed the enemy situation to the point that the unit can conduct an attack. The unit conducts the same consolidation procedures as it would in an attack. The unit prepares for follow-on offensive, defensive, or retrograde operations. Follow-on offensive operations may include immediately rotating to the rear of the formation in a larger movement to contact.

References

Reference Number	Reference Title
MCDP 1-0	Marine Corps Operations
MCRP 5-12A	Operational Terms and Graphics
MCWP 3-1	Ground Combat Operations
MCWP 3-11.1	Marine Rifle Company / Platoon
FM 3-90	Tactics
FM 7-8	Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad
