



FM 3-21.8
(FM 7-8)

The Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad

MARCH 2007

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The Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad

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Preface

This field manual provides a doctrinal framework on how Infantry rifle platoons and squads fight. It also addresses rifle platoon and squad non-combat operations across the spectrum of conflict. Content discussions include principles, tactics, techniques, procedures, terms, and symbols that apply to small unit operations in the current operational environment (COE). FM 3-21.8 supersedes FM 7-8, *Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*, dated 22 April 1992 (with change 1, dated 1 March 2001). It is not intended to be a stand-alone publication. To fully understand operations of the rifle platoon and squad, leaders must have an understanding of FM 3-21.10, *The Infantry Rifle Company*, and FM 3-21.20 (FM 7-20), *The Infantry Battalion*.

The primary audiences for this manual are Infantry rifle platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and squad and fire team leaders. Secondary audiences include, instructors in U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) schools, writers of Infantry training literature, other Infantry leaders and staff officers, and Reserve Officer Training Candidate (ROTC) and military academy instructors.

Infantry leaders must understand this manual before they can train their companies using ARTEP 7-8 *MTP*, and ARTEP 7-8 *Drill*. They should use this manual as a set along with the publications listed in the references.

The Summary of Changes list major changes from the previous edition by chapter and appendix. Although these changes include lessons learned from training and U.S. Army operations all over the world, they are not specific to any particular theater of war. They are intended to apply across the entire spectrum of conflict.

This publication applies to the Active Army, the Army National Guard (ARNG)/Army National Guard of the United States (ARNGUS), and the United States Army Reserve (USAR) unless otherwise stated.

The proponent for this publication is TRADOC. The preparing agency is the U.S. Army Infantry School (USAIS). You may send comments and recommendations for improvement of this manual by U.S. mail, e-mail, fax, or telephone. It is best to use DA Form 2028, *Recommended Changes to Publications and Blank Forms*, but any format is acceptable as long as we can clearly identify and understand your comments. Point of contact information follows:

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Unless otherwise stated, whenever the masculine gender is used, both men and women are implied.

SUMMARY OF CHANGE

FM 7-8, *Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*, has been updated and renumbered as FM 3-21.8, *The Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*. Following is an overview of the significant changes and updates in this new manual:

- Introduces the concept of the Contemporary Operational Environment (COE).
- Introduces the concept of the Warrior Ethos.
- Introduces the concept of Every Soldier is a Sensor (ES2).
- Updates the discussion of platoon command and control and troop-leading procedures.
- Adds an updated chapter on direct fire control and distribution.
- Updates the fundamentals of tactical operations in the COE.
- Updates the discussion of the construction of fighting positions.
- Adds a section on urban operations.
- Adds a section on convoy and route security operations, check points, and road blocks.
- Adds a chapter on sustainment.
- Updates the Patrolling chapter (now Patrols and Patrolling) by adding definitions and discussions on point reconnaissance, security, tracking, presence patrols, and pre- and post-patrol activities.
- Adds a chapter addressing risk management and fratricide avoidance.
- Updates the examples of platoon and squad warning orders (WARNOs) and operation orders (OPORDs).
- Replaces the term “Combat Service Support (CSS)” with “Sustainment”.
- Updates the room-clearing drill. The platoon attack drill has been eliminated.
- Updates the discussion of range cards and sector sketches.
- Adds an appendix on AT section employment.
- Updates the discussion of armored vehicle employment with Infantry, tanks, and BFVs.
- Updates the discussion on hazards of unexploded ordnance (UXO), improvised explosive devices (IEDs), mines, and suicide bombers.
- Updates the discussion of CBRN defense operations.
- Updates the content on obstacle reduction.
- Adds an appendix on security.
- Adds an appendix on helicopter employment.
- Updates information on fire planning.
- Removes all Infantry Battle Drills.

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Chapter 1

Fundamentals of Tactics

The mission of the Infantry is to close with the enemy by means of fire and maneuver in order to destroy or capture him, or to repel his assault with fire, close combat, and counterattack. The Infantry will engage the enemy with combined arms in all operational environments to bring about his defeat. The close combat fight is not unique to the Infantry.

SECTION I — FUNDAMENTALS OF INFANTRY PLATOON AND SQUAD OPERATIONS

1-1. The Infantry's primary role is close combat, which may occur in any type of mission, in any theater, or environment. Characterized by extreme violence and physiological shock, close combat is callous and unforgiving. Its dimensions are measured in minutes and meters, and its consequences are final. Close combat stresses every aspect of the physical, mental, and spiritual features of the human dimension. To this end, Infantrymen are specially selected, trained, and led.

INFANTRY

1-2. Of all branches in the U.S. Army, the Infantry is unique because its core competency is founded on the individual Soldier—the Infantry rifleman. While other branches tend to focus on weapon systems and platforms to accomplish their mission, the Infantry alone relies almost exclusively on the human dimension of the individual rifleman to close with and destroy the enemy. This Soldier-centric approach fosters an environment that places the highest value on individual discipline, personal initiative, and performance-oriented leadership. The Infantry ethos is encapsulated by its motto: Follow Me!

1-3. Although the battlefield may be entered from a differing range of platforms, all types of Infantry must be able to fight on their feet. To perform this role, each type possesses two distinguishing qualities. First, Infantry are able to move almost anywhere under almost any condition. Second, Infantry can generate a high volume of lethal well-aimed small arms fire for a short time in any direction. Neither movement nor fire are exclusively decisive. However, combined fire and movement win engagements. These two strengths reveal three distinct vulnerabilities to Infantry. First, once committed it is difficult to adjust the Infantry's line of advance due to its limited tactical mobility. Second, determining the Infantryman's load required to accomplish the mission is always in conflict with preserving his physical ability to fight the enemy. Third, Infantry are particularly susceptible to the harsh conditions of combat, the effects of direct and indirect fire, the physical environment, and moral factors.

OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE COMBAT

1-4. Infantry platoons and squads have a distinct position on the battlefield—the point of decision. Their actions take place at the point where all of the plans from higher headquarters meet the enemy in close combat. This role requires leaders at all levels to quickly understand the situation, make decisions, and fight the enemy to accomplish the mission. Offensive close combat has the objective of seizing terrain and destroying the adversary. Defensive close combat denies an area to the adversary and protects friendly forces for future operations. Both types constitute the most difficult and costly sorts of combat operations.

BASIC ACTIONS

1-5. Whether operating on its own or as part of a larger force, the goal of Infantry platoons and squads remains constant: defeat and destroy enemy forces, and seize ground. To achieve this end state, Infantry platoons and squads rely on two truths.

- (1) In combat, Infantrymen who are moving are attacking.
- (2) Infantrymen who are not attacking are preparing to attack.

1-6. These two truths highlight another truth—offensive action and defensive action are reciprocal opposites that are found in all actions.

1-7. At the platoon and squad level it is necessary to make a clear distinction between these two basic actions of attacking and defending, and larger scale offensive and defensive operations. The difference is one of degree, not type. Offensive and defensive operations are types of full spectrum operations that are undertaken by higher-level units.

TACTICAL PRINCIPLES

1-8. To achieve the basic truths of offense or defense, Infantrymen rely on fundamental principles. From these they derive their basic tactics, techniques, and procedures used to conduct operations. The information in Table 1-1 is introductory and forms the basis for the remainder of this chapter.

Table 1-1. Tactical principles.

PRINCIPLE
Tactical Maneuver: Fire without movement is indecisive. Exposed movement without fire is disastrous. There must be effective fire combined with skillful movement. A detailed explanation of the supporting concepts is in Chapter 2.
Advantage: Seek every opportunity to exploit your strengths while preventing the enemy from exploiting his own strengths.
Combinations: The power of combination creates dilemmas that fix the enemy, overwhelming his ability to react while protecting your own internal weaknesses.
Tactical Decisionmaking: Close combat demands flexible tactics, quick decisions, and swift maneuvers to create a tempo that overwhelms the enemy.
Individual Leadership: Resolute action by a few determined men is often decisive.
Combat Power: The ability of a unit to fight.
Situation: Every military situation is unique and must be solved on its own merits.

Tactical Maneuver

1-9. Tactical maneuver is the way in which Infantry platoons and squads apply combat power. Its most basic definition is fire plus movement, and is the Infantry’s primary tactic when in close combat. Fire without movement is indecisive. Exposed movement without fire is potentially disastrous. Inherent in tactical maneuver is the concept of protection. The principle of tactical maneuver is more fully explained in Chapter 3, and is further integrated in other sections of this manual.

Advantage

1-10. Leaders and Soldiers must look for every opportunity to gain and maintain an advantage over the enemy. In close combat there is no such thing as a fair fight. As much as possible, leaders must set the conditions of an engagement, confronting the enemy on his terms, while forcing the enemy into unsolvable dilemmas to defeat or destroy him. Important supporting concepts are doctrine and training, individual Infantry skills, and the organization of the Infantry platoon and its squads.

1-11. Surprise means taking the enemy when the enemy is unprepared. Leaders continuously employ security measures to prevent the enemy from surprising them. Infantry platoons and squads should be