



Lesson 2: Military Symbols and the Overlay

Reference: FM 101-5

Study assignment: Read FM 101-5, Sections I-II

Why do we use special military symbols?

There is an entire, fairly thick field manual (FM 21-30) devoted to nothing but map symbols, military symbols, and abbreviations. We use them for convenience in presenting the information needed for soldiers to make sense of a plan or order. To understand why, let's look at a recent Field Order used at the Gap exercise:

RESTRICTED SATURDAY

Copy ___ of ___

80 AK-61
Map: ASSENOIS, Belgium, 1:12,500

1. **DISPOSITION.**

- a. **ENEMY:** Elements AD Panzer Lehr Para Bn and attachments from 30 VDD continue advance west south of the AMNEIX.
- b. **ENEMY (IGAS):** Elements of GCP and CCA 4th AD in advance to southern perimeter of ASSOUME, most recently shelled on line HONFLE-SOMER; CDP via TRAINING. ASSOUME perimeter in zone is held by TF 1/327 GIB and attached units.

2. **MISSION.**

- a. **MISSION:** TEAM CHARLIE forward from CDP will advance in the direction of ASSOUME and ASSOUME to effect linkage with elements of 1st ABN on the southern perimeter of ASSOUME. TF 1/327 holds in place until relieved.
- b. **COURSE OF OPERATION:** TM CHARLIE advances as situation dictates to secure crossing at ASSOUME and establish contact with US forces in ASSOUME.

TROOPS

4th AD elements: TM CHARLIE forward from elements of 37 TC BN and 55 INDE INF BN.
TM BECON forward from C Co 5th Cavalry Group.
1st ABN elements: TEAM ABLE from pulled elements of 28th ID; TEAM BAKER elements of 1/327 GIB.

3. **TACTICAL MISSIONS FOR SUBORDINATE UNITS.**

- a. TM CHARLIE advances along general axis of hard surface road, moving to contact with any enemy forces disposed in zone and engaging to secure contact with US forces east of tactical CP of GCP.
- b. TM BECON screens to front and right flank of TM CHARLIE providing early warning and delay of enemy moves to the south.
- c. TF 1/327 defends in place.

4. **ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS.**

- a. **Supply (Class 1/3):** Arriving units draw Class V at assembly areas.
- b. **Personal accountability:** Unit commanders will conduct head counts before boarding transportation before and after exercise.
- c. **Transportation to AA:** (AMNEIX, transportation).

5. **SIGNAL COMMUNICATIONS.**

- a. **Orders for employment of signal communication:** (Units and message/signals).
(1) Prior to departing motor pool, all units carrying radios will complete radio check with their data.
(2) All unit commanders will send position/situation reports every 30 minutes on hour and half hour.
(3) TF Commander will send situation report to the maneuver TOC 15 minutes following team reports.
(4) Designation points shown on overlay may be used to transmit location by airtel (enemy).
(Current position: from EAST AEG left 200, down 500).
- b. **Command posts.**
(1) Exercise TOC located at the GCP.
(2) US Force CP accompanied lead elements of TM CHARLIE.

Metres 1,000 500 0 500 1 km

For convenience, I've combined three critical elements of the field order onto one piece of paper: (1) the reference map (ASSENOIS, Belgium Series, 1:12,500); (2) the written field order

marks, and allow the user to place the overlay in the correct position on the map by lining up the crosses with the 6181 and 6479 grid intersections.

We use standard military symbols because that is the easiest and most accurate way of letting any rained leader understand the situation quickly. Military symbols provide us a professional shorthand for describing operations, and in the process reduce the number of words necessary to produce a complete and understandable field order.

Some basics

Military symbols are icons—images—just like the current symbols used in computer science and interfaces. Most use some kind of intuitive symbolism to give the user a hint as to their meaning. For example, these symbols represent basic combat unit types:













Left to right: Infantry (old-fashioned cross- straps); armor (track); cavalry (cavalryman's bandoleer); artillery (cannonball).

Symbols may also be logically combined:



Left to right: Armored infantry (carried in half tracks; armored cavalry; armored (self-propelled) artillery).

	AIRBORNE INFANTRY		SIGNAL
	ENGINEER		TANK DESTROYER
	MEDICAL		TRANSPORTATION
	MILITARY POLICE		ORDNANCE
	QUARTERMASTER		ANTIAIRCRAFT ARTILLERY

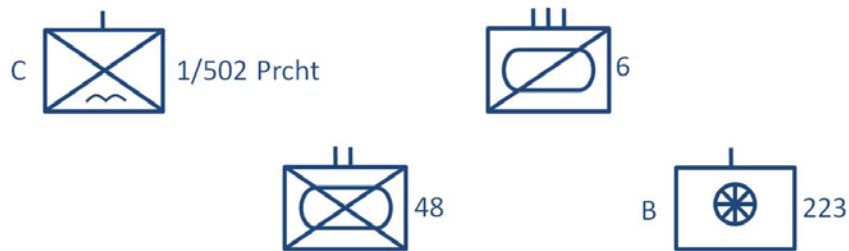
Additional symbol types by branch. NOTE: more recent veterans will note that some of the symbols have changed since WWII. These are the icons used in FM 21-30, October 1943.

Unit size

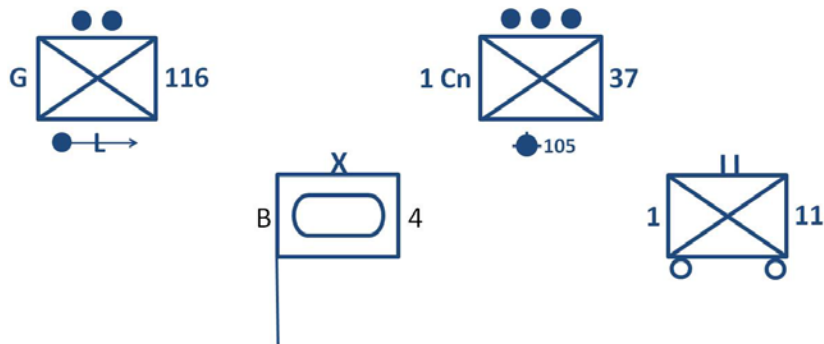
The unit symbols are combined with markers indicating unit size. These are fairly easy to remember:

●	squad		regiment or group
●●	section	X	brigade or combat command
●●●	platoon	XX	division
	Company, troop, or battery	XXX	corps
	Battalion or squadron	XXXX	Army or air force

These are placed at the top of unit symbols to designate the size level of the organization.

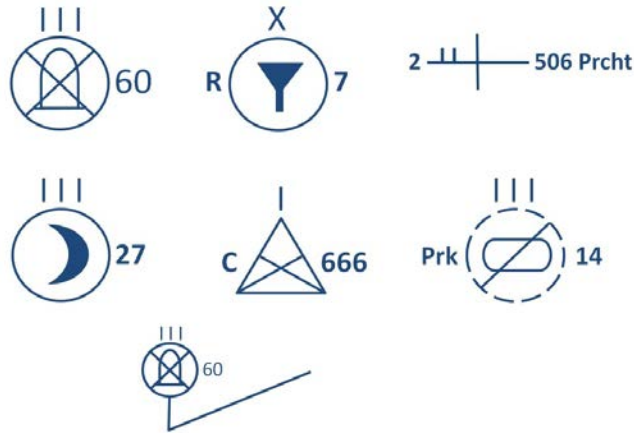


Left to right C Company, 1st Battalion, 502nd parachute infantry; 48th Armored Infantry Battalion (separate); 6th Armored Cavalry Group; B Company, 223rd transportation company (trk).



Some common examples of combinations: l-r, light machine gun section, G Company 116th Infantry; HQ Combat Command B, 4th Armored Division; 1st platoon, Cannon Company, 37th Infantry regiment; battalion trains, 1st Battalion, 11th Infantry.

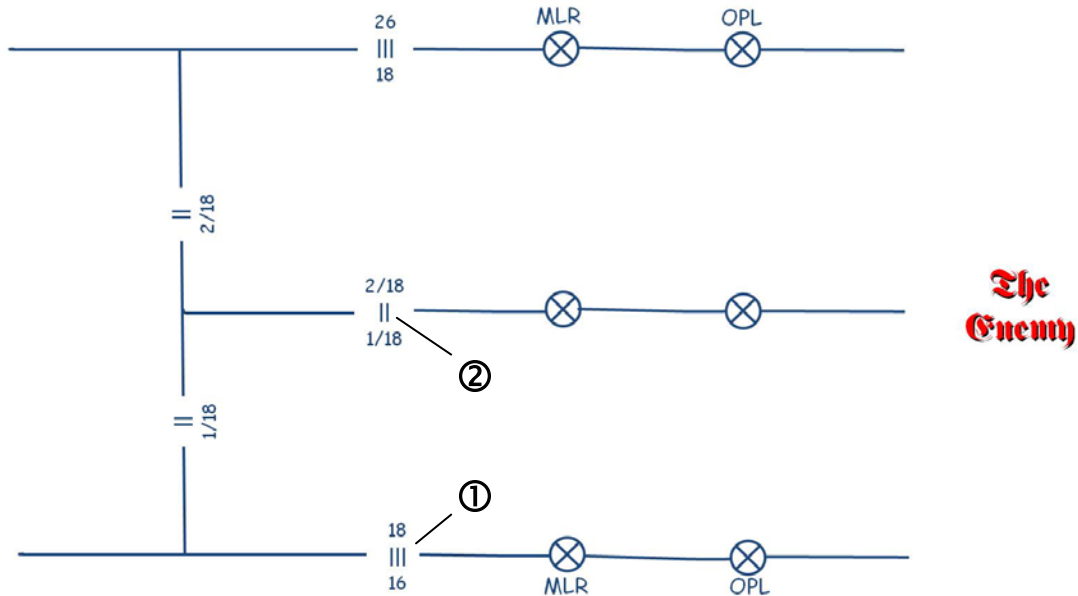
There are quite a few special symbols, most of which will never be seen by reenactors (e.g., Transportation Port of Embarkation), but here is a sample of formats that show special functions:



Top row, l-r: Ammunition supply point, 60th Infantry Regiment (9th Division); fuel point, CCR 7th Armored Division; battalion aid station (medical), 506th PIR. Second row, l-r: Class I (ration) supply point, 27th Infantry (Wolfhounds); observation post, C Company 666th Infantry (Satan's Own); vehicle park (proposed), 14th cavalry group. Bottom: supply points need to have specific locations; this is usually insicated by the "tail", the end of which corresponds to the exact map location.

Control measures

Another set of symbols describes the specific places and limits of position and movement needed to control an operation. This includes boundaries, direction of movement, tactical dispositions, phase lines, and other operational shorthand.

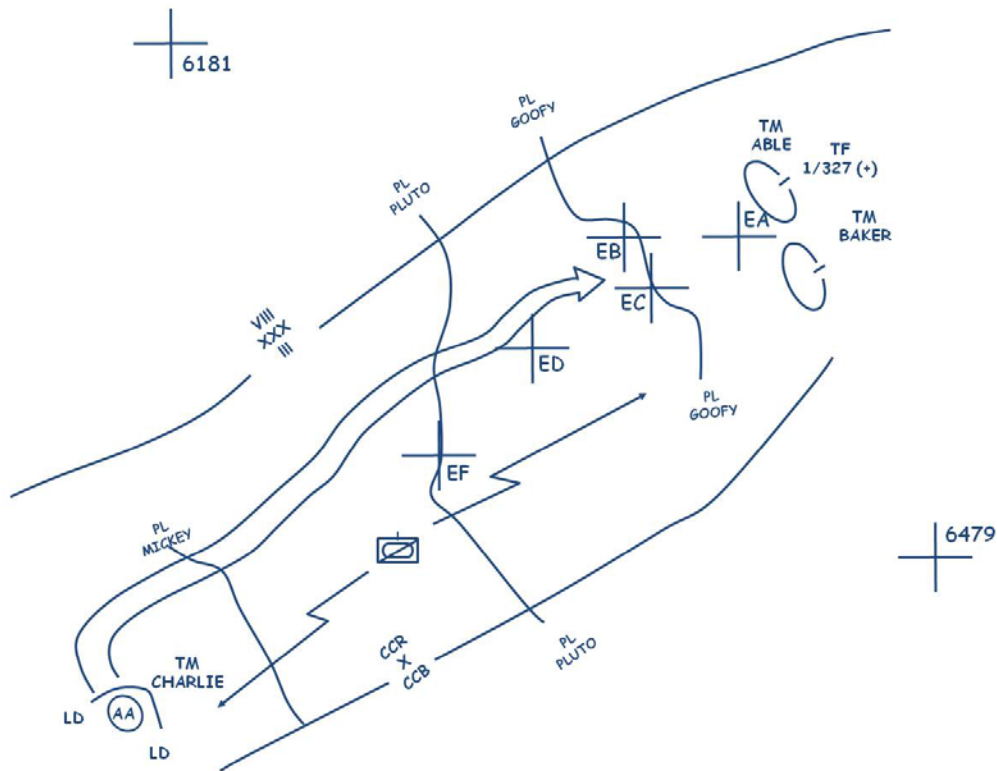


Here is a very simple example of a regimental defensive position (these are never this neat and perpendicular because they must fir the terrain, and other than in the middle of Death Valley you won't find anything this flat and featureless). This shows the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 18th Infantry Regiment, which is defending a sector bounded on the north by the 26th Infantry and on the south by the 16th Infantry (all of the 1st Infantry Division). In this case, 1/18 and 2/18 (this is how we abbreviate) are forward; 3/18 is in reserve somewhere to the rear. The horizontal lines limit the battalion boundaries,

within which they may move without coordination with the other regiments. Note the unit designations that interrupt the boundary lines; the II and III symbols indicate battalion and regimental boundaries, respectively. At the flanks of the regimental front, the III (Ⓛ) symbols show regimental boundaries; within the regimental front, we use the II (Ⓜ) to show battalion boundaries.

The ⊗ symbols show "limiting points", also called "coordinating points." The MLR points show the front line (main line of resistance); forward of the MLR is the OPL, or outpost line. The lines connecting them north to south are implies; the terrain, for example, will dictate the actual trace of the MLR, but exactly where units are placed on the front line is the decision of the battalion commander. Note thst this shows the infantry regiment in the defense; a regiment in the attack doesn't have an MLR (it keeps moving forward, or so we hope).

Here is the overlay for the attack shown on pp 1-2. This was the reenactment of the relief of Bastogne in the 2017 Gap Saturday exercise:



The general situation: CCR of the 4th Armored Division has formed a task force designated TEAM CHARLIE (a commander can name a team of a task force anything he wants) to advance through the southern perimeter of BASTOGNE to make contact with US elements defending in their sector (Task Force (TF) 1/327 GIR), relieving forces in the Bastogne goose-egg. To the left flank of TM CHARLIE is the boundary between III Corps (which includes 4th AD) and VIII Corps; to the right flank is CCB, whose attack stalled out yesterday. The big arrow is the axis of advance of CHARLIE.

The oval on the far left marked AA is CHARLIE's assembly area; as soon as they leave that they cross the line of departue (LD) and move into tactical formation for the approach march; they will advance to contact with any eemy elements in their (CCR) sector. To keep things orderly, three phase lines (PL) are specified: PL MICKEY, PL PLUTO, and PL GOOFY. All units on the net report by radio when they cross a phase line; this

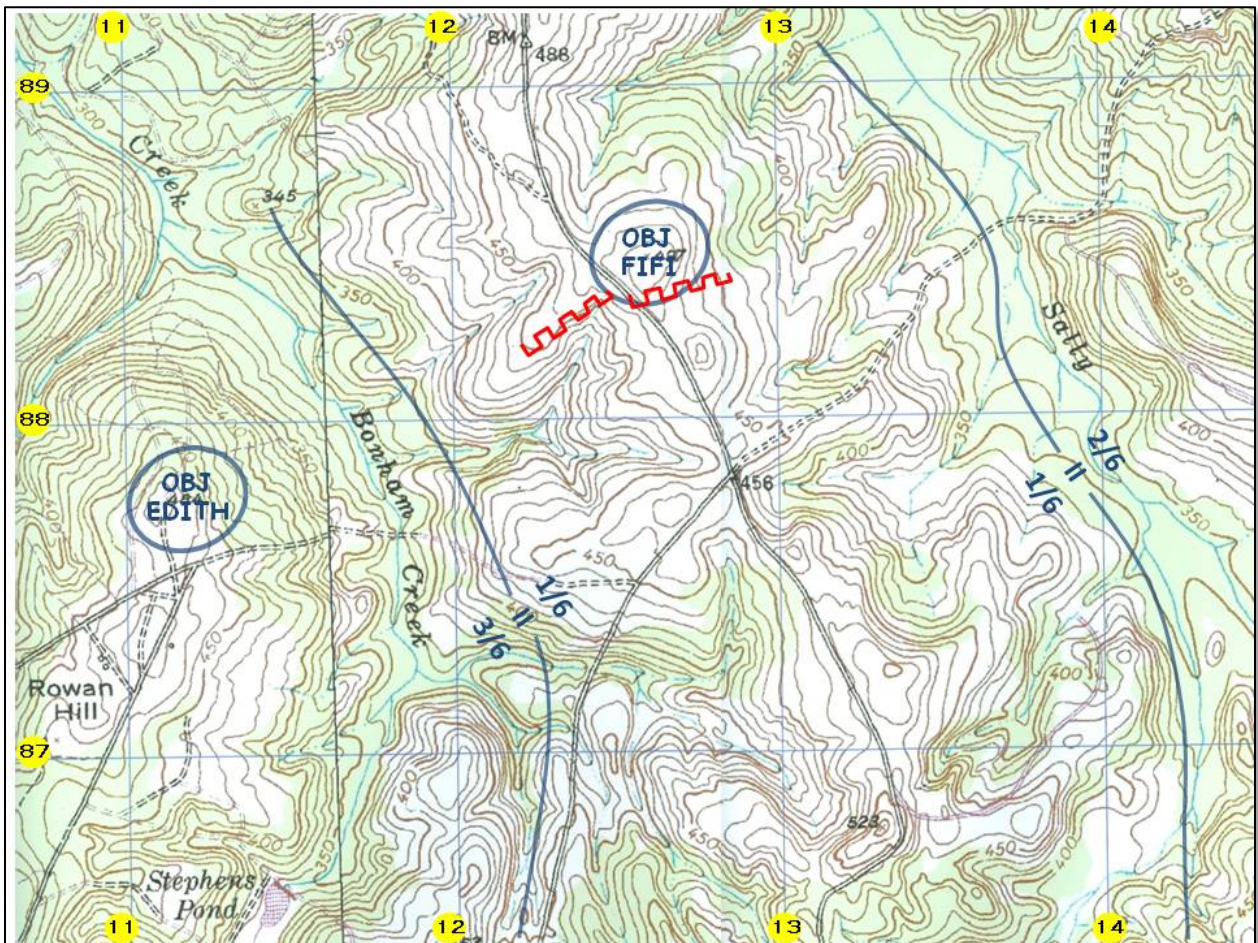
allows the commander (and his commander) to monitor who is where; if elements are advancing side by side and one crosses a PL before the other, the commander can have one pause long enough for the other to catch up so gaps between units don't make the advance vulnerable to enemy maneuvers.

The crosses with two-letter specifications (e.g., EA) are artillery registration points, arranged to make calls for fire quick. (We also use them to encode locations by offset, but that's outside the scope of this lesson.) As noted earlier, the other two crosses (6181, 6479) are map registration points that allow us to place the overlay in exactly the right alignment with the map.

At the end of most attack overlays is an OBJECTIVE—a place you will secure by kicking the enemy off it. In this case, the objective is that point at which we make contact with the 1/327 and save Bastogne. It is by nature a meeting engagement: we fight when we find the enemy, and the enemy, as always, gets a vote on where that is.

Example

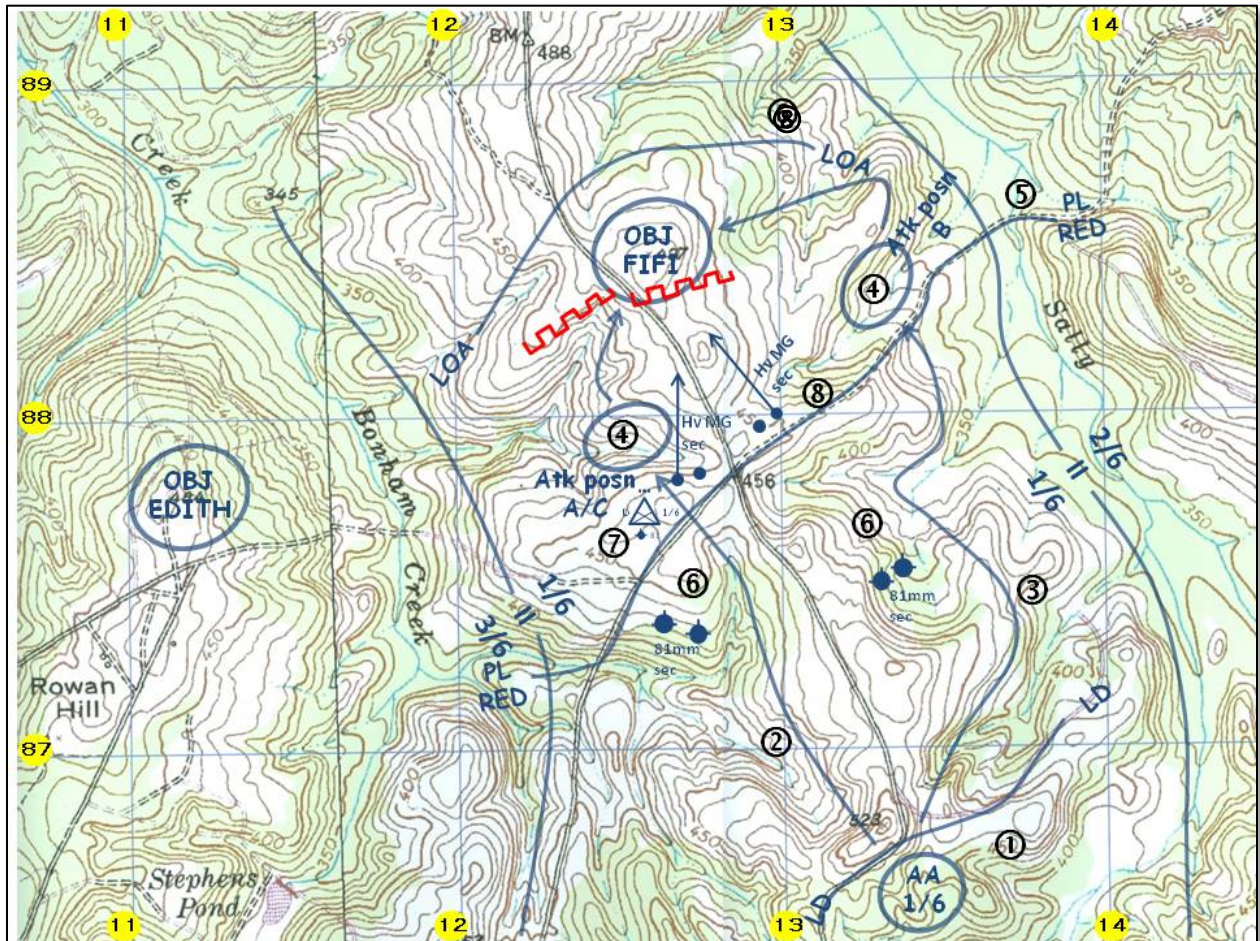
Let's try it out by attacking somebody. Maybe not sound foreign policy, but we have to start somewhere.



You are S-3 of 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment. To your left is your sister battalion, 3/6; to the right 2/6. Your mission is to secure OBJ FIFI; at the same time, 3/6 will attack and secure OBJ EDITH; 2/6 will advance on your right to secure your flank. Your current position is slightly off the southern boundary of the map sheet,

along the north-south hardball (which we will call GROUCHO. The road (hardball on the left and gravel on the right) that crosses GROUCHO at 219879 is designated HARPO.

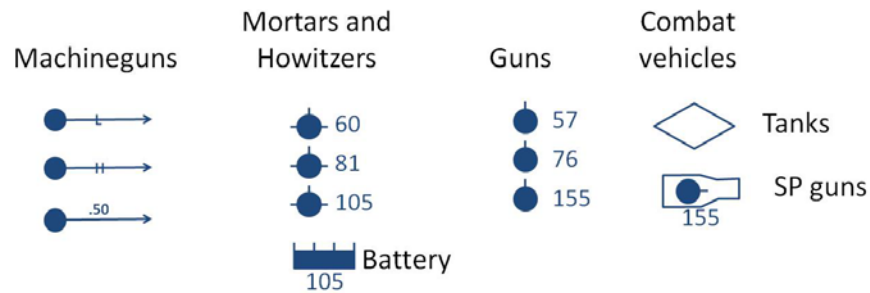
Step 1 is to designate an assembly area and a route to get there. The AA should be in a position with cover and concealment from the enemy's prying eyes and pesky bullets. From inspection, the south side of Hill 528 (133867) looks good. It's right off GROUCHO, on the reverse slope from enemy observation, and in the woods, which makes aerial observation harder. The route march is off the map; let's just assume a movement up GROUCHO for both ground and vehicle elements.



Here is one solution to the attack, and how it is depicted on the overlay. (This is somewhat simplified for the hobby.) The assembly area is at ①, in comfortable defilade. Directly north of the AA is the line of departure (LD), at which the attacking force shifts into approach march (tactical formations). In this case, the battalion commander has decided to attack in two directions (② and ③), with A and C companies to the left and B company to the right, using cover and concealment. The two forces pause briefly at their attack positions (④), having reported passage of PL RED (⑤) by radio. The battalion heavy machine gun sections are positioned at ⑧ to support the ground attack; the 81mm mortar sections are at ⑥, with an observation post at ⑦. Regiment has imposed a limit of advance (⑨).

Weapon symbols

There are also special symbols for weapons types, shown below:



Abbreviations

Some words are used with such frequency in field orders that we commonly abbreviate them. Here are some of the most important:

adv	advance
atch	attach; attached
atk	attack
posn	position
approx	approximate
Bn	battalion
Brig	brigade
com	communication
conc	concentration
cur	current
dtl	detail
D/S	direct support
en	enemy
evac	evacuate; evacuation
fxd	fixed
G/S	general support
h trk	half track
incl	include
IP	initial point
MSR	main supply road or main supply route
mv	move
mvt	movement
OBJ	objective
opcon	operational control
opn	operation
pt	point
rcn	reconnaissance
rd	reduce, reduced
reinf	reinforce; reinforced
repl	replacement
RJ	road junction

set	scout
SP	self-propelled
sig	signal
SOI	signal operations instruction
traf	traffic
TC	training circular

FM 21-30 has a much longer list, but this probably covers 99 percent of any possible reenactor requirement (rqmt).

Next step

By now (if you have finished course 1, map reading, and course 2 the infantry) you have the very basic background to plan an operation. The next thing to master is the sacred and exalted staff estimate. Get ready for the big-time.



LESSON SUMMARY

1. Military symbols provide a graphic description of a battle situation or plan, using simple icons to provide visual reference.
2. A field order has three components: the written order, in a standard format; a reference map; and an overlay showing a graphical description of the plan.
3. The situation map is maintained at a field headquarters by the staff, in particular the S-3 and the S-2 and their assistants.
4. Whenever possible, the symbols represent intuitive ideas linked to the objects and organizations they depict.
5. Symbols are combined to represent specific and unique parts of the battlefield.
6. Symbols are also used to show control measures that allow the battle to proceed in a measured way across space and time.
7. A skilled commander or staff officer must learn the symbols and how they are used to describe and control an operation.

Take the self-assessment quiz for Lesson 2.

LESSON 3 will introduce you to staff estimates and their importance to operations.