CONTINUOUS OPERATIONS

US forces execute continuous operations to maintain constant pressure on the enemy without regard to visibility, terrain, and weather conditions. The ability to effectively sustain this pressure is often a key to success on the battlefield. It is also the most difficult challenge that Army units face, placing enormous stress on soldiers, vehicles, and equipment alike. Continuous operations demand that units conduct planning, preparation, and execution activities around the clock, at the same time maintaining OPSEC.

Numerous factors, which will vary with each situation, influence the actions and requirements of friendly forces during continuous operations. The tempo will range from slow to fast. Some units may remain in constant enemy contact, or under the threat of contact, for several days. Other units will operate in low-threat areas with only a remote possibility of contact. Throughout the area of operations, enemy forces will, at any given moment, be attempting to acquire intelligence information and gain the tactical advantage.

Tank platoon leaders must understand the demands of continuous operations under all possible conditions. They then must provide their soldiers with the training and leadership they will need to meet the challenges of the battlefield.

CONTENTS

SECTION I. Planning and Preparation
SECTION II. Operations Security
SECTION III. Limited Visibility Operations

Section I. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Time management is the key to success in continuous operations. During the planning and preparation phases of an operation, the commander dictates priorities of work, rest, and security (OPSEC is discussed in Section II of this chapter). These priorities, in conjunction with REDCON levels, enable the platoon leader to develop his internal platoon timeline. He then uses troop-leading procedures (discussed in Chapter 2) to outline time requirements and disseminate them to the platoon.

REDCON levels allow quick responses to changing situations and ensure completion of necessary work and rest plans. The commander uses the REDCON status as a standardized way to adjust the unit's readiness to move and fight (see Figure C-1).
REDCON-1. Full alert; unit ready to move and fight.

- NBC alarms and hot loop equipment stowed; OPs pulled in.
- All personnel alert and mounted on vehicles; weapons manned.
- Engines started.
- Platoon is ready to move immediately.

NOTE: A variant of REDCON-1 is REDCON-1(-); the same conditions apply except that the vehicles are not started in REDCON-1(-).

REDCON-2. Full alert; unit ready to fight.

- Equipment stowed (except hot loop and NBC alarms).
- Precombat checks complete.
- All personnel alert and mounted in vehicles; weapons manned.

(NOTE: Depending on the tactical situation and orders from the commander, dismounted OPs may remain in place.)

- All (100 percent) digital and FM communications links operational.
- Status reports submitted in accordance with company SOP.
- Platoon is ready to move within 15 minutes of notification.

REDCON-3. Reduced alert.

- Fifty percent of the platoon executes work and rest plans.
- Remainder of the platoon executes security plan. Based on the commander's guidance and the enemy situation, some personnel executing the security plan may execute portions of the work plan.
  - Platoon is ready to move within 30 minutes of notification.


- radio and man turret weapons.
  - Digital and FM links with company and other platoons maintained.
  - Platoon is ready to move within one hour of notification.

Figure C-1. REDCON levels.

Work Plan

The work plan enables TCs and crewmen to focus their efforts in preparing vehicles, equipment, and themselves for operations. Activities designated in the timeline include, but are not limited to, the following:
• Reconnaissance, as required and within capabilities.
• Orders at crew and platoon level.
• Crew- and platoon-level training and rehearsals.
• Vehicle maintenance.
• Vehicle preparation (camouflage, stowage, boresighting, communications checks).
• Individual soldier preparation (training, orders, rehearsals).
• Resupply (Classes I, III, and V).
• Preparation of fighting positions.
• Obstacle emplacement.
• Crew- and platoon-level PCIs.

Rest Plan

The rest plan allows some soldiers to sleep while other crewmen conduct priorities of work and maintain security. To be effective in sustained combat, a soldier should get a minimum of 4 to 6 hours of uninterrupted sleep every 24 hours. Less than 4 hours of sleep can significantly degrade combat performance.

Planning and decision-making are among the skills that suffer most dramatically when soldiers cannot get enough sleep. The platoon SOP must provide for an adequate division of duties to allow leaders to get sleep. This may require the platoon leader, PSG, and one or both of the other TCs to share duties. When soldiers are tired, confirmation briefings (back-briefs) become critical whenever orders are issued, even for the most simple task.

Whenever possible, the tank platoon leader should coordinate with the commander to use infantrymen to assist with security. This coordination may enable the platoon leader to rest more soldiers for longer periods of time as the infantry mans OPs and conducts dismounted patrols to augment the security of the platoon. Because of the reduced capability of crews of AGS-equipped platoons to sustain continuous operations, it is critical that these platoons augment their security plans with infantry support.

Section II. OPERATIONS SECURITY

OPSEC entails all measures taken to deny the enemy information about the actions and intentions of friendly forces. OPSEC measures consist of countersurveillance, information security, signal security, and physical security.
Countersurveillance

The following considerations and procedures will assist the tank platoon in executing countersurveillance operations:

- Enforce noise and light discipline. Follow these procedures:
  - Turn off the circuit breaker for the brake lights.
  - Dim or cover all sources of light in the turret. Use a passive night observation device (NOD) to check vehicles for light leaks before operations begin.
  - Move only when necessary.
  - Use headsets or the combat vehicle crewman (CVC) helmet to monitor the radio; do not use the radio’s external speakers.
  - Do not slam hatches.
  - Use short-count procedures to start engines simultaneously.
  - Use terrain to mask resupply and maintenance areas.
  - Use hand-and-arm signals and digital communications whenever possible.
  - Do not allow smoking outdoors at night.
  - Use camouflage to best advantage. Follow these procedures:
    - "profile."
    - Drape camouflage nets over gun tubes and turrets.
    - Cover all headlights and optics whenever possible.
    - Minimize track, tire, and foot trails that could be detected from the air or from enemy positions.
  - In heavily used areas such as CPs and trains, ensure vehicles travel on existing tracks or roadways.

- Maintain effective concealment. Follow these procedures:
  - Disperse vehicles and personnel under foliage or inside structures whenever possible.
  - Conceal vehicles and personnel behind objects that block the thermal "line of sight" of enemy devices.
  - Ensure vehicles in hide positions protect against aerial observation by
minimizing or eliminating their thermal signatures.

- Use challenge and password.

**Information Security**

Information security is the protection of all materials, both classified and unclassified, that may be of intelligence value to the enemy. These procedures will assist the platoon in maintaining information security:

- Commander's name; and information on combat losses or morale.
- Before leaving an area, police it to make sure items of intelligence value are not left behind.

**Signal security**

The discussion of communications in Chapter 2 outlines considerations and procedures for establishing and maintaining signal security.

**Physical security**

Physical security is the protection of materiel and equipment. The following considerations and procedures can help the platoon maintain physical security:

- When stationary, employ antiintrusion devices, such as the platoon early warning system (PEWS), trip flares, and concertina wire.
- Maintain the prescribed REDCON status. The platoon should assume REDCON-2 each morning and evening to ensure that all crewmen are ready for action and to allow them to adjust to the changing light conditions. As a minimum, the platoon goes to REDCON-2 from 30 minutes before BMNT until 30 minutes after BMNT and again for a similar period at EENT.
- Do not allow foreign nationals and unauthorized observers in or near the unit's area or positions during operations. Establish procedures (in accordance with ROE and the company commander's intent) for handling civilian intruders.
- Employ OPs to maintain surveillance on avenues of approach into the platoon's battle space.
Observation Posts

OPs are especially important in maintaining the platoon's OPSEC and enhancing its battle space. They help to protect the platoon when long-range observation from current positions is not possible; this can occur when the platoon is in a hide position or when close terrain offers concealed avenues of approach to the platoon's position. OPs can be employed either mounted or dismounted.

Selection of the OP Site

Before deploying an OP, the platoon leader analyzes the terrain in his sector; he also coordinates with adjacent platoons to discover ways to enhance his own battle space and eliminate gaps in battle space between units. Next, he decides on the type of OP necessary to observe the avenue of approach based on requirements for early warning and platoon security. The platoon leader must consider the platoon's reaction time based on the REDCON status. An OP should have the following characteristics:

- Clear observation of the assigned area or sector. Ideally, the fields of observation of adjacent OPs and/or units will overlap to ensure full coverage of the sector.
- Effective cover and concealment. Positions with natural cover and concealment help to reduce the OPs' vulnerability to enemy observation and attack.
- Covered and concealed routes to and from the OP. Soldiers must be able to enter and leave their OPs without being seen by the enemy.
- A location that will not attract enemy attention. OPs should not be in sites that would logically be the target of enemy observation or that would serve as artillery TRPs.
- A location that does not skyline observers. Avoid hilltops. Position OPs farther down the slope of the hill.
- A location that is within range of platoon small arms fire. This enables the platoon to cover the OP if withdrawal becomes necessary.

Mounted OPs

Mounted OPs are used when the platoon has access to hull-down or turret-down positions that afford unobstructed surveillance of mounted avenues of approach in the platoon sector. They allow the platoon leader to take advantage of his vehicles' capabilities: magnified thermal and daylight optics, sophisticated communications, lethal weapon systems, and
survivability. The CITV on the M1A2 is especially valuable in the mounted OP. The M1A2 can occupy a turret-down position and use the CITV to scan the designated sector without moving its turret. All other types of vehicles must occupy turret-down or hull-down positions that allow them to move their turrets when scanning the sector.

A common mounted OP technique is to position one vehicle to observe an engagement area or obstacle while the remainder of the platoon occupies hide positions. Even when the mounted OP has clear fields of observation, it is advisable to dismount one or two members of the crew to provide close-in local security for the vehicle. The dismounted crewmen occupy positions far enough away that sounds from the vehicle do not prevent them from hearing an approaching enemy. Local security can also be enhanced by coordinating with infantry elements, which can conduct patrols and occupy dismounted OPs in accordance with the company commander's OPSEC plan.

Dismounted OPs

Dismounted OPs provide local security along dismounted avenues of approach whenever the platoon must halt and occupy vehicle positions from which the terrain impedes observation or early warning of enemy activities. They also augment or replace mounted OPs based on the commander's OPSEC plan. The tank platoon uses the following steps to occupy, man, and improve a dismounted OP:

- The platoon leader or PSG determines the need for the OP and identifies the location based on the physical characteristics outlined previously in this section.
- The platoon leader or PSG assembles OP personnel at his vehicle. OP personnel are designated in the unit SOP, but are normally the loaders from wingman tanks. They must be trained in reporting procedures and individual camouflage techniques. In two-man OPs, one crewman observes the sector while the other provides local security. Some short-duration OPs may consist of one crewman providing local security for individual vehicles in close terrain. OP personnel should have the following equipment (plus any additional items designated in the unit SOP):
  - Individual weapons and M16A1 rifle.
  - Communications equipment (wire, flag set, flashlight, radio).
  - Seasonal uniform with load-bearing equipment (LBE) and appropriate MOPP gear.
  - Binoculars and NODs.
  - Paper and pen/pencil for making a sector sketch.
• The platoon leader or PSG leads OP personnel to the OP site and briefs them on the following information:
  • When and how to report;
  • When and how to withdraw. The withdrawal criteria should be specific; examples include withdrawal when an NBC attack is detected, when an enemy tank section crosses a phase line, or when enemy dismounted infantrymen approach to within 300 meters of the OP.
  • Challenge and password.
  • When they will be replaced. OP personnel should be replaced every 2 hours. During cold weather, this rotation may be done more frequently.
• Once in place, OP personnel take these steps to improve the position:
  • Establish communications.
  • Camouflage the position and egress routes.
  • Prepare a sector sketch based on the platoon fire plan (see Chapter 4).
  • Dig in to provide protection from indirect and direct fires. A good rule of thumb is to dig when dismounted infantry dig. If possible, emplace hasty obstacles for additional protection.

Section III. LIMITED VISIBILITY OPERATIONS

Darkness obviously limits visibility on the battlefield, but there are other conditions that restrict visibility: dust, smoke, and other obscuration factors caused by weapon firing and movement of soldiers and equipment, as well as rain, snow, fog, sandstorms, and other weather conditions. If it is to use its superior technology and basic combat skills to sustain continuous operations and destroy the enemy, the tank platoon must train to fight effectively in all types of visibility conditions. The platoon must first master the execution of tasks under optimum visibility conditions and then continue its training in progressively more difficult situations.

Equipment

The tank platoon is equipped with the following types of equipment for use under limited visibility conditions:

• Driver’s night vision viewer. This sight is either passive (the VVS-2) or thermal (the DTV). It enhances the driver’s ability to move the tank and enables him to assist in target acquisition and to observe rounds in darkness or other limited visibility conditions.
• PVS-7. This passive vision device enables the TC to observe from his opened hatch to control movement and provide close-in security. There are normally two PVS-7s per tank.

• Gunner’s primary sight and commander’s extension. This integrated thermal sight gives the gunner and TC the capability to see and engage targets under almost any visibility condition.

• CITV. This is a fully integrated, full-target engagement sight on the M1A2. It provides the TC with a redundant target acquisition and surveillance capability equivalent to that of the gunner’s primary sight and the thermal imaging system (TIS). The CITV extends the TC’s field of view, giving him 360-degree observation capability independent of the gunner’s primary sight.

Figure C-2 lists the comparative characteristics, capabilities, and limitations of passive and thermal sights.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PASSIVE SIGHTS</th>
<th>THERMAL SIGHTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Limited by the amount of available light.</td>
<td>1. Not affected by light conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Can be “washed out” by bright flashes of light.</td>
<td>2. Not affected by flashes of light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Narrow field of view.</td>
<td>3. Choice of narrow or wide field of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Poor depth perception.</td>
<td>4. Poor depth perception.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Excellent capability for identifying sources of light (including IR).</td>
<td>5. Unable to detect sources of light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Adverse weather conditions (heavy rain, dense fog, sandstorms, snow) limit the range of the sight and may render it useless.</td>
<td>6. Adverse weather conditions limit the range of the sight. On the other hand, the target acquisition capability of the sight may exceed the capability of the LRF to receive a return and compute an automatic ballistic solution.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure C-2. Comparison of passive and thermal sights.

Navigation

The platoon leader uses the GPS and/or POSNAV (if available), terrain association, and the compass and odometer method to navigate in limited visibility conditions. When they are fired to create a ground-burst effect, artillery or mortar illumination rounds can be helpful in confirming locations. Refer to Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of navigation techniques.
Vehicle Identification

The problem of vehicle identification is compounded in limited visibility conditions. TCs must be able to distinguish vehicles of their platoon and company/troop and of other friendly elements from those of the enemy. Most unit SOPs cover vehicle marking and identification procedures. In addition, the platoon can use the following techniques to enhance command and control and to help prevent fratricide:

- Attach color-coded lights or chemical lights to the rear of the turret or the hull.
- Replace the brake light cover with color-coded plastic. Cover the headlights.
- Use luminous or thermal tape to “outline” vehicles or to make battle boards.
- Use radio and digital systems (if available) to provide the platoon with frequent updates of friendly unit locations.

Tactical Movement and Attacks

The fundamentals for executing tactical movement and attacks discussed elsewhere in this manual are applicable during periods of limited visibility. The following paragraphs cover additional considerations for the planning, preparation, and execution of these operations when visibility is restricted.

During the planning phase, the platoon leader must pay particular attention to routes, formations, and navigational aids. He must conduct a thorough route reconnaissance to identify locations where the platoon could become misoriented. The route reconnaissance must also focus on finding rough or restrictive terrain that will be even more difficult to negotiate with limited visibility. Such terrain may require a change in formation or movement technique or employment of dismounted ground guides.

In the preparation phase, the platoon leader conducts rehearsals in as many types of adverse conditions as possible to prepare the platoon for potential command and control problems. He must stress light discipline. During the PCI, the platoon leader or PSG views each tank using a passive sight to ensure that sources of light have been dimmed or covered so they are not visible to the enemy. During confirmation briefings and rehearsals, the platoon leader must ensure that all personnel understand the platoon’s projected actions during each phase of the operation. One technique is to designate waypoints or phase lines as trigger points for platoon actions.
During the execution phase, TCs use the PVS-7 and the CITV (if available) to assist their drivers with navigation and to enhance situational awareness. The platoon leader must assume that the enemy possesses the same limited visibility observation capabilities as friendly units. Use of terrain to mask movement and deployment remains critical since limited visibility may create a false sense of protection from observation. During movement, the distance between platoon vehicles is reduced to allow vehicles to observe each other and to decrease the time necessary to react to enemy contact.

When the platoon encounters enemy elements, an effective technique is to have the vehicle that makes contact fire a steady burst of machine gun fire in the direction of the enemy to orient the rest of the platoon. The platoon must adhere strictly to applicable control measures, especially those covering the employment of direct fires.

**Limited Visibility Defense**

The defensive fundamentals covered previously are applicable in limited visibility situations; additional considerations for planning, preparation, and execution of the defense in limited visibility are covered in the following paragraphs.

During the planning phase, the commander, the platoon leader, and the TCs conduct a thorough reconnaissance, usually during daylight hours, to mark positions and routes. They must keep in mind that obscurants that limit visibility may also degrade the effectiveness of their thermal sights and laser range finders. This may force them to designate engagement areas that are closer than anticipated to the unit's BPs. In marking their positions, they use materials that will facilitate occupation either in daylight or under limited visibility conditions.

During the preparation phase, the platoon leader ensures that decision points, TRPs, and artillery targets are "thermalized" to allow for positive identification during limited visibility. Used with a sector sketch during direct fire engagements, thermalized TRPs also help TCs to more accurately estimate the range to their targets when smoke or other factors inhibit the use of the laser range finder. Ideally, rehearsals of occupation and displacement are conducted in limited visibility conditions; the same applies to preparation and occupation of fighting positions and to any necessary repositioning.

OPSEC is strictly enforced during all phases of defensive preparation. OPs are critical in providing security and early warning of enemy activities. The platoon leader emplaces mounted OPs to take advantage of the
capabilities of his vehicles' thermal sights in scanning the engagement area and the platoon's assigned sector. Dismounted OPs provide local security and augment mounted OPs with shorter-range observation and the ability to listen for approaching enemy elements.

As the platoon enters the execution phase, the platoon leader must ensure that all crewmen thoroughly understand the occupation and displacement criteria and that TCs strictly enforce all fire control measures. TCs use sketch cards and the CITV (if available) to estimate target range when visibility factors prevent use of the laser range finder.