

Section 14



PATROL BASE OPERATIONS

Key Points

- 1 The Purpose of a Patrol Base
- 2 Planning Considerations
- 3 Patrol Base Occupation
- 4 Patrol Base Activities

The people who do the actual advancing to close with the enemy are the rifle platoons. . . . These are the men who do the scouting, the patrolling, the flank protection, the front-line work. The battles progress no faster than they do.

From U.S. Army, Center of Military History, *St-Lo (7 July–19 July 1944)*

Introduction

In the previous sections, you learned the purpose of patrolling, the types of patrols, and the ways to organize a patrol. In this section, you'll learn how to organize a patrol base. You set up a patrol base whenever the patrol halts for an extended period—but only after you have planned carefully and considered a range of security, tactical, and logistical factors.

Because of such careful planning, a joint patrol of Iraqi and US Soldiers was ready in August 2005 when its patrol base came under attack.

Attack on Patrol Base: Insurgents Captured

WASHINGTON, Aug. 15, 2005—[O]n Aug. 11, Iraqi and US Soldiers squelched a terrorist attack on a combined patrol base in southwest Baghdad by capturing six of the attackers and taking their weapons. The attack began just after 7:50 p.m., when terrorists fired five rocket-propelled-grenade rounds at the patrol base. The attackers then fired rifles sporadically at the base for about 10 minutes.

The Iraqi and US Soldiers organized a patrol and set out toward the origin of the attack. Within minutes, the combined patrol came upon a group of people gathered around three vehicles a short distance from where the attack began. When the Soldiers investigated, they discovered the cars' engines were warm. They also found two RPGs and three rifles with ammunition hidden nearby. The combined patrol took six people at the site into custody.

"We have been making a definite impact in our area of operations," said Army Lt. Col. Steve McCorkle, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry, 48th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division. . . .

American Forces Press Service

The Purpose of a Patrol Base

patrol base

a security perimeter set up when a squad or platoon conducting a patrol halts for an extended period

When you occupy a **patrol base** it should be for no longer than 24 hours, except in an emergency. Your platoon or squad should never use the same patrol base twice.

Platoons and squads use patrol bases to:

- stop all movement and avoid detection
- hide during a long, detailed reconnaissance of an objective area
- eat, clean weapons and equipment, and rest
- plan and issue orders
- reorganize after infiltrating an enemy area
- have a base from which to conduct several consecutive or concurrent operations such as ambush, raid, reconnaissance, or security.

As the patrol leader, you will select the tentative site from a map or by aerial reconnaissance. You will need to confirm the site's suitability and secure it before occupation. You must also select an alternate patrol base site, which your patrol will use if the first site is unsuitable or if the patrol must unexpectedly evacuate the first patrol base.

Planning Considerations

lines of drift

natural or man-made features that tend to channel people and animals in a certain direction

When you plan for a patrol base, you must locate it in a way that allows the unit to accomplish its mission. You must also consider passive and active security measures. When doing so, you should select the following kind of terrain:

- terrain that the enemy would probably consider of little tactical value
- terrain that is off the main **lines of drift**
- difficult terrain that would make foot movement difficult, such as an area of dense vegetation, preferably bushes and trees that spread close to the ground
- terrain near a source of water
- terrain that can be defended for a short period and that offers good cover and concealment.

observation post (OP)

a position from which military observations are made, or fire directed and adjusted, and that possesses appropriate communications

In addition to choosing the right terrain, you should also plan for:

- **observation posts (OP)**
- communication with your observation posts
- defense of the patrol base
- withdrawal from the patrol base, to include withdrawal routes and a rally point or rendezvous point or alternate patrol base
- a security system to make sure that specific Soldiers are awake at all times
- enforcement of camouflage, noise, and light discipline
- the conduct of required activities with minimum movement and noise.

What you avoid is as important as what you choose in your planning. Be sure to avoid known or suspected enemy positions; built-up areas; ridges and hilltops (except as needed for maintaining communications); roads and trails; and small valleys.

Critical Thinking

Why is a small valley a poor location for a patrol base? Why is a ridge or hilltop a poor location?

Patrol Base Occupation

When you establish a patrol base for a platoon-size element, use the following steps:

1. Reconnoiter the patrol base and establish it in the same way as an objective rally point (ORP), except that your platoon will enter at a 90-degree turn (Figure 14.1). This action depends on your METT-TC analysis. If there is nothing to gain by doing this step—for example, if your unit is operating in flat desert terrain—then you need not do it.
2. Leave a two-man OP at the turn. The platoon sergeant and the last fire team should get rid of any tracks from the turn into the patrol base.
3. Move the platoon into the patrol base as shown in Figure 14.1. Squads generally occupy a cigar-shaped perimeter. Platoon-sized patrols generally occupy a triangle-shaped perimeter.
4. Make sure all squad leaders move to the left flank of their squad sector.

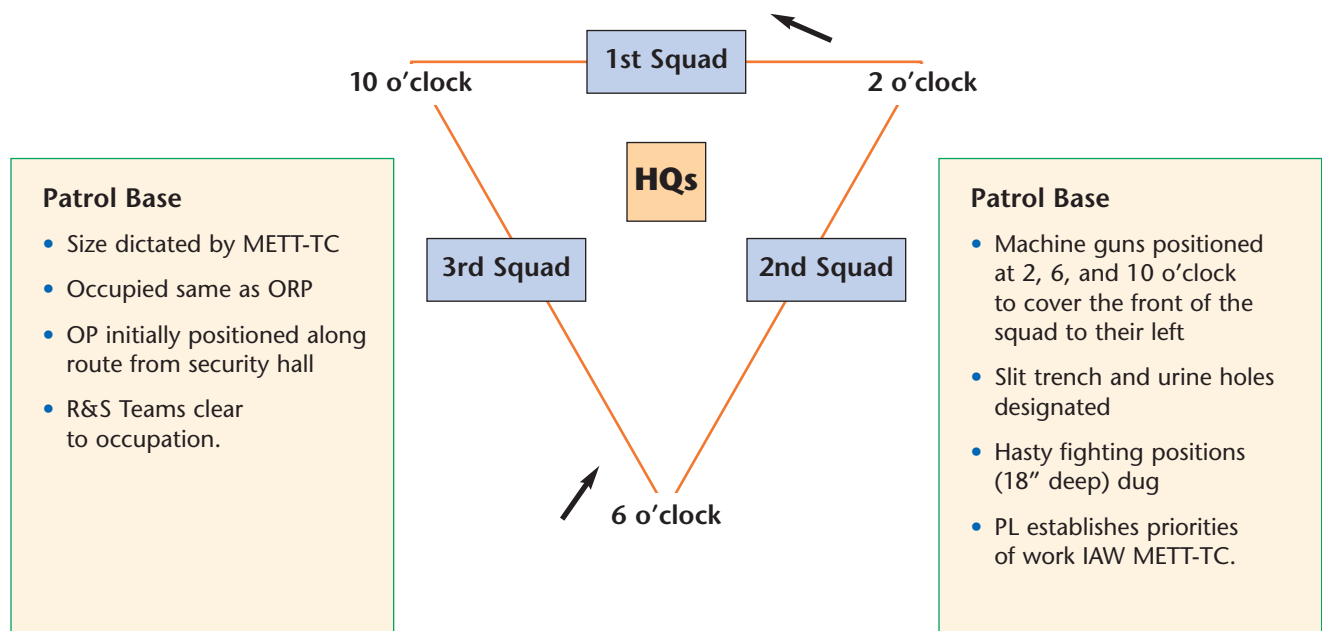


Figure 14.1 Patrol Base

command post (CP)

a unit's or subunit's headquarters where the commander and the staff perform their activities

5. You and the support element or weapons squad leader start at 6 o'clock and move in a clockwise manner, inspecting and adjusting the perimeter. You meet each squad leader at that squad's left flank. If you and the support element leader find a better location for one of the machine guns, reposition it.
6. After you have checked each squad's sector, each squad leader sends a two-man reconnaissance and security (R&S) team to report to you at the **command post (CP)**.
7. You issue the three reconnaissance and security (R&S) teams a contingency plan and reconnaissance instructions. Remind them that they are looking for the enemy, water, built-up areas or human habitat, roads and trails, and any possible rally points.
8. Each R&S team departs from the left flank of its squad's sector and moves out a given distance and direction. It reenters at the right flank of its own squad. (Squads occupying a patrol base on their own do not send out R&S teams at night.) The R&S team should prepare a sketch of the squad's front and report to you at the CP. The patrol remains at 100 percent alert during this reconnaissance. The distance the R&S team moves away from the squad's sector will vary, depending on the terrain and vegetation (anywhere from 200 to 400 meters).
9. If you feel that the platoon may have been tracked or followed, you may elect to wait in silence at 100 percent alert before sending out the R&S teams.
10. Once all squad leaders from the R&S teams have completed their reconnaissance, they report back to you at the CP.
11. You then gather the information from your three R&S teams and determine if the platoon will be able to use the location as a patrol base.

Patrol Base Activities

If you determine that you can use the area for a patrol base, you must establish or modify defensive work priorities to set up the patrol base's defense. You will also need to pass along other information, such as the daily challenge and password, frequencies, and call signs. After receiving instructions, squad leaders return to their squads, give out the information, and begin the work priorities.

These priorities of work may include the following tasks:

1. Security

- Prepare to use all passive and active measures to cover 100 percent of the perimeter 100 percent of the time, regardless of the percentage of weapons used to cover that 100 percent of the terrain
- Readjust after R&S teams return, or based on the current work priority (such as weapons maintenance)
- Employ all weapons, elements, and personnel to meet the conditions of the terrain, enemy, or situation
- Assign sectors of fire to all personnel and weapons—develop squad sector sketches and a platoon fire plan
- Confirm the location of fighting positions for cover, concealment, observation, and fields of fire
- Use only one point of entry and exit. Maintain noise and light discipline at all times—squad leaders supervise the placement of aiming stakes and ensure Claymores are set out
- Each squad establishes an OP and may quietly dig hasty fighting positions.

Work priorities are not a "laundry list" of tasks. Rather, they consist of a task, a given time, and a measurable performance standard. For each work priority, issue a clear standard to guide the successful accomplishment of each task. Designate whether the work will be controlled in a centralized or decentralized manner.

2. *Withdrawal Plan*

Designate which signal to use if contact is made (for example, colored star cluster), the order of withdrawal if forced out (for example, squads not in contact will move first), and the rendezvous point for the platoon (if the platoon is not to link up at an alternate patrol base).

3. *Communications*

You must continuously maintain communications with higher headquarters, OPs, and within the unit. You may rotate duties among the patrol's radio telephone operators (RTOs) to allow continuous radio monitoring, radio maintenance, to act as runners for you, or to conduct other priorities of work.

4. *Mission Preparation and Planning*

As the patrol leader, you will use the patrol base to plan, issue orders, rehearse, inspect, and prepare for future missions.

5. *Maintenance Plan*

Ensure that machine guns, other weapon systems, communication equipment, and night vision devices (NVDs) are not all broken down at the same time for maintenance. (Don't break down more than 25 percent at any time.) Redistribute ammunition. (Soldiers should not disassemble their weapons at night.)

6. *Sanitation and Personal Hygiene Plan*

The platoon sergeant ensures the platoon slit trench is dug and marked at night with a chemical light inside the trench. Squad leaders designate squad urine areas. Soldiers should do the following daily: shave; brush teeth; wash face, hands, armpits, groin, and feet; change socks; and darken (polish) boots. Soldiers ensure that the platoon leaves no trash behind.

Critical Thinking

What information could an enemy glean from you platoon's trash?

7. *Mess Plan*

No more than half of the platoon should eat at one time, and Soldiers will typically eat one to three meters behind their fighting positions.

8. *Rest/Sleep Plan*

Make sure your Soldiers rest as necessary to prepare for future operations.

9. *Water Resupply*

The platoon sergeant organizes a watering party. The party carries canteens in an empty rucksack.

10. *Sterilization*

Sterilize the patrol base when the patrol leaves it.

Note that squads have the same requirements with their squad patrol base as do platoons.



Critical Thinking

Why is it important that work priorities be more than a “laundry list” of tasks?



CONCLUSION

Organizing a patrol base is a complex task, but it's critical to successful patrolling. Many things go into choosing the proper location, from identifying favorable and unfavorable terrain to noting factors that will make defense and communication easier. Occupying the patrol base requires step-by-step actions. Once the base is established, setting and conducting work priorities also demand care. As with all your work, paying attention to details is essential. It will keep you and your Soldiers safe and ensure that your platoon can accomplish your mission.

Key Words

patrol base

lines of drift

observation post (OP)

command post (CP)

Learning Assessment

1. Explain what a patrol base is used for.
2. List the planning considerations in using a patrol base.
3. Explain the steps in occupying a patrol base.
4. Describe patrol base activities.

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