

New Look for 13-Man Squad?

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New Look for 13-Man Squad?

by Capt R. B. Neller

After only a 2-year trial period the 11-man squad is dead. The theory of two teams, each built around the squad automatic weapon (SAW), is finished before even being fully implemented. Strangely enough, the return to the more familiar 13-man, 3-fire-team squad is being praised throughout the Corps without any consideration of what impact this has on the realities caused by the inclusion of the SAW in the fire team. I, for one, am not sad to see the 11-man squad go, but feel that the way the 13-man squad is organized should reflect greater consideration for the weapons and load requirements placed on the squad. This article discusses some of the neglected areas.

A squad with three fire teams is a proven organization when at full strength. However, how often will there be enough people to fill all the billets? We all know that during training having a full squad is an almost "never happen" experience. In most cases the squad leader will have around seven to nine men, giving him the choice of fielding three two- or three-man teams or two three- or four-man teams. I can state with some assurance that a two-man fire team, lacking half of its combat power, is not an effective

organization.

In combat, the same realities of being short-handed in the squad will be there. This time the attrition will not be caused by Fleet Assistance Program (FAP), mess, and guard duty or intramural sports, but by men being killed and wounded and the wait for their replacements. The squad leader once again is faced with the same dilemma of fighting the remnants of his unit and will probably choose to go with two larger, rather than three smaller, subordinate units. The overall point is this—if we train all the time and probably will fight the majority of the time with a bastardized squad organization, why not organize it in the first place with that reality in mind?

The inclusion of the SAW in the fire team creates a unique situation in the squad. In both the 11- and 13-man squads, with 2 and 3 fire teams respectively, only 1 man is responsible for the SAW. The assigned individual is supposed to carry the weapon, the spare barrel bag, and the basic allowance of ammunition of 800 rounds. But this is an almost impossible burden requiring the remainder of the already overloaded fire team to help carry the load. When personnel are lost due to casual-

ties or other reasons, the load becomes prohibitive. For those who have trained with the SAW under live fire conditions another point is readily apparent. The SAW gunner is much more effective if he has someone to act as an assistant to help him service the weapon and spot for and adjust his fire. The effectiveness of the SAW is enhanced significantly by the inclusion of an assistant gunner who also helps alleviate the load problems created by the weapon. Even at full strength the four-man fire team cannot support an assistant SAW gunner. The five-man fire team can, but with any losses, it too would have difficulty.

One way to alleviate the problems brought forth in this discussion and the overall problem of carrying all ammunition within the squad is to return to the 13-man squad but under a 2-team concept. Each team would be built around the SAW and would be of sufficient size that even with some losses it could still function as a unit with minor adjustments. The pure geometry of earlier fire team formations might be lacking, but it would be simple and adaptable to realities faced in training and combat. The fire team would be organized in the following manner:

Rifleman/Scout	M16A2
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SAW Gunner	M249
Assistant SAW Gunner	M16A2
Grenadier	M16A2-M203
Fire Team Leader	M16A2-M203

The use of scouting elements is discussed in *OH 6-6* and has been proven in training to be very effective. The placing of two men forward often enhances fire team and squad security and also quickly adapts the fire team for use as the security element in patrolling where two points are used. Having two riflemen/scouts armed only with M16A2s provides light, maneuverable scouts.

The SAW gunner with an assistant have been adopted for the reasons previously discussed. Now the SAW gunner has someone to help carry his load



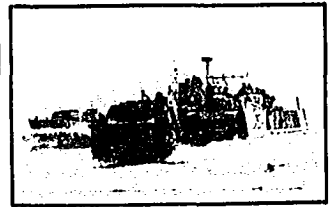
M203 adds necessary firepower.

and spot for his fire. This assistant, of course, will be cross-trained with the weapon and ready to step in should the gunner become a casualty.

I have retained the grenadier recognizing the need for the firepower of the M203 even when it is balanced out against the added weight of its ammunition. The fire team leader will also be armed with the M16A2-M203 combination in order to enhance the control of his fire team. By using the M203 and its great variety of ammunition to mark targets, signal, and personally influence the action with the grenade launcher, the fire team leader has enhanced control over his unit. Based on this principle, a case could even be made for arming the squad leader with an M16A2-M203 to improve his ability to control the fire of his unit.

This organization of the squad is not without disadvantages. The most obvious is the increased number of people each fire team leader has to control. The triangular concept that has predominated throughout Marine Corps

organizations is premised on the leader having an effective span of control over three subordinates. As this fire team is organized, the fire team leader has, at least on paper, five subordinates he must deal with. In reality, however, he has only three. The SAW team moves together, fights together, and works as a single entity. During movement the two riflemen acting as points will also move as a team and make up only one element. This leaves the grenadier as the third subordinate. Let's face reality and not kid ourselves with regard to the triangular concept. On paper it looks beautifully simple with everyone dealing with three subordinates/maneuver elements, but does anyone really deal with just three subordinates? Certainly not the platoon commander, for if he has any attachments, his span of control exceeds three. Nor the company commander who, if he has his full complement of supporting arms representatives, may have to deal with up to seven or eight other subordinates besides his own platoons.



We need the added manpower of the 13-man squad to alleviate the added burden of arms and ammunition that has been placed on the squad. The SAW is really a light machinegun. Its increased rate of fire, range, overall firepower, and weight are factors that must be considered when employing it. We cannot continue to think of the automatic rifleman in the same tactical light as before. We also need a structure that allows us to train as we will fight, whether it be at full or depleted strength. We are going to have to fight the remnants of our units and need to organize so that doing so causes minimum confusion. As we acquire other new weapons the fire team and squad may change again. Let us not become slaves to tradition when technology and reality make it apparent that another solution is at hand.

USMC

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the author's name and address. The author's name should not appear anywhere else on the manuscript. Mail entries to:

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