

Chapter 5

Leading Others

Lesson 1

Platoon Drill



Key Terms

cover
flank
formations
interval
line
pivot

What You Will Learn to Do

- How to command a platoon

Linked Core Abilities

- Communicate using verbal, nonverbal, visual, and written techniques

Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Describe the correct response to the commands when forming and marching the platoon
- Compare platoon drills and squad drills
- Match drill commands to platoon formations
- Define the key words contained in this chapter

Chapter 5

Introduction

By now you should be familiar with stationary movements, basic steps, marching techniques, and squad drill. The introduction of platoon drill is designed to give you a better understanding of the discipline and coordination that is required of a large group to perform well in drill. Platoons execute certain drills in the same way that squads do. These drills include Inclining Around, Resting, Changing intervals in lines, Dismissing, Marching to the Flanks, Counting Off, and Marching in the Opposite Direction. This lesson describes the platoon movements that are unique to each formation.

Key Note Terms

formation – the arrangement of people or elements of a unit in a prescribed manner

line – a formation in which people or elements are side by side or abreast of each other

flank – the right or left side of any formation as seen by a person (or element) within that formation

Drill Tips

Execute individual drill movements as previously described while performing as a squad member during the conduct of platoon drill.

For the most part, platoon drill merely provides the procedures for executing movements in conjunction with other squads formed in the same formation.

The platoon has two prescribed **formations**: **line** and column; however, your platoon leader may form the platoon in a column of twos from a column.

When a platoon forms in a line, its squads are numbered from front to rear; in a column, from left to right.

When the platoon drills *as a separate unit and is in a line formation*, the platoon leader takes a position six steps in front of and centered on the platoon. The platoon sergeant's position is centered on the platoon and one step to the rear of the last rank.

When it drills *as a separate unit and is in a column formation*, the platoon leader's position is six steps on the left **flank** and centered on the platoon. The platoon sergeant's position is one step behind and centered between the second and third squads.

When the platoon drill is part of a larger unit and is in a line formation, the platoon leader's position is six steps in front of and centered on the platoon. The platoon sergeant's position is one step to the rear and centered on the platoon.

When the platoon drill is part of a larger unit and is in a column formation, the platoon leader's position is one arm's length plus six inches in front of and centered between the second and third squad leaders. The platoon sergeant's position is one step behind and centered between the second and third squads.

The first squad leader serves as the base when the platoon is in a line formation; the fourth squad leader serves as the base when in a column.

Platoon Formations

The platoon has two prescribed formations: line and column; however, the platoon may be formed into a file or a column of twos from a column formation. When in a line formation, the elements (squads) of a platoon are numbered from front to rear; in a column formation, they are numbered from left to right.

For the most part, platoon drill merely provides the procedures for executing drill movements in conjunction with other squads formed in the same formation. Individual drill movements and the manual of arms are executed as previously described while performing as a squad member during the conduct of platoon drill.

When the platoon drills as a separate unit or as part of a larger unit in a line formation, without officers present, the post for the platoon sergeant is three steps in front of and centered on the platoon. When in column formation, the post for the platoon sergeant is three steps to left flank of and centered on the platoon.

The post for the platoon sergeant with the platoon leader present is one step to the rear and centered on the platoon in line or column formation.

When assuming his post in column from a line formation with the platoon leader present, the platoon sergeant faces to the left in marching (on the command of execution “face”) and marches in the most direct route to his post. He then halts and faces to the right. When assuming his post in line from a column formation, he faces to the right in marching (on the command of execution “face”) and marches in the most direct route to his post, halts centered on the platoon, and faces to the left.

When control of the formation is being exchanged between the platoon sergeant and the platoon leader, the platoon sergeant will *always* travel around the right flank (squad leader) of the formation when marching from post to post. The platoon leader will *always* travel around the left flank of the formation when marching post to post.

On the command *open ranks, march; backward, march; right (left) step, march; forward, march* and on commands that cause the platoon to change interval in line, he moves at the same time (with the appropriate step) so as to maintain proper position.

The leader of the first squad serves as the base when the platoon is a line formation. The leader of the fourth squad serves as the base when the platoon is in a column formation.

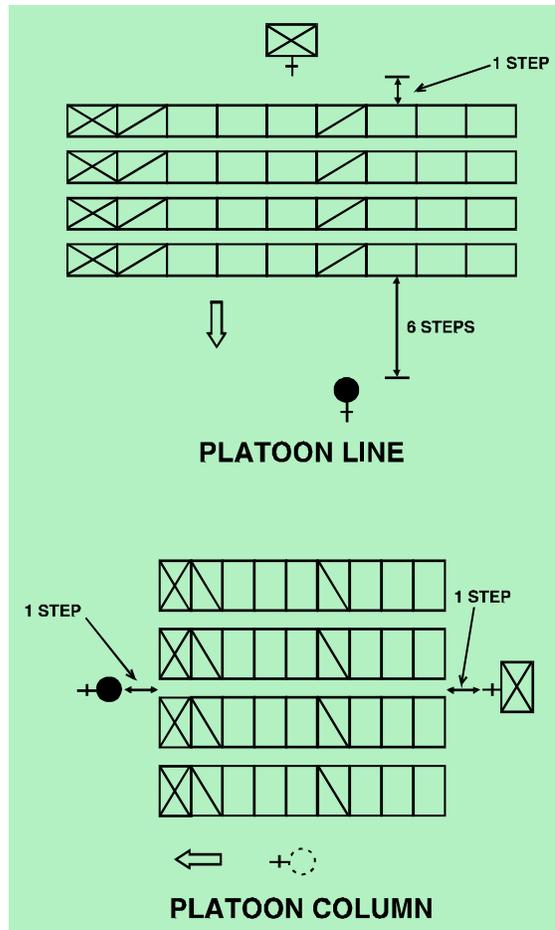
If the platoon is authorized a guidon, the bearer’s post is one step in front of and two 15-inch steps to the right of and facing the person forming the platoon. When the formation is faced to the right for a marching movement, he executes in the same manner as explained in Appendix H, except that his post is three steps in front of and centered on the squad leaders. If the platoon leader is present and at his post, the bearer’s post is one step to the rear and two 15-inch steps to the left of the platoon leader.

When the platoon drills as a separate unit, in a line formation, the post for the platoon leader is six steps in front of and centered on the platoon; when in a column formation, the platoon leader is six steps to the left flank and centered on the platoon. When marching as part of a larger formation, his post is one step in front of and centered on the squad leaders

Figure 5.1.1 shows platoon formations.

Figure 5.1.1: Platoon line and column.

Courtesy of CACI and the US Army.



Forming the Platoon

A platoon forms basically in the same way as a squad. The platoon sergeant assumes the position of attention and commands “fall in.” On that command, the first squad leader and the first squad (when formed) are three steps in front and centered on the platoon sergeant. The other squad leaders then **cover** on the first squad leader at the correct distance, which they obtain by estimation.

Members of the first squad fall in on their squad leader as they would in squad drill; however, members of the other squads fall in on their squad leader, assume the position of attention, and turn their heads and eyes to the right. They obtain correct **interval** by taking short steps forward or backward, align themselves on the cadet to their right, sharply turn their heads and eyes to the front as in the position of attention, and obtain proper interval by taking short steps left or right to cover on the cadet in front of them. Members of these other squads do not raise their left arms unless the cadet to their immediate left has no one on which to cover.

When appropriate, the platoon leader may form the platoon. The procedures are the same as described above except that the first squad forms six steps in front of and centered on the platoon leader. The platoon sergeant forms at his or her position to the rear of the platoon. If the platoon leader is not present for the formation, the

Key Note Terms

cover – the distance between cadets in a column, measured by the cadet raising the left arm to the front and making sure the shoulder of the cadet in front is at the length of the arm plus 4-6 inches

interval – a space between actions; the lateral space between personnel in a formation, measured from right to left with close, double, and normal spacing

platoon sergeant steps forward three steps (making a total of six steps in front of the platoon) and assumes the duties of the platoon leader from that position.

Breaking Ranks

When the situation requires one or more individuals to leave a platoon formation or to obtain specific instructions from the platoon leader, the platoon leader directs “Cadet Private _____, front and center” or “the following personnel front and center: Cadet Private _____, Cadet Private _____, and so on.” If you hear the leader call your name, come to the position of attention, reply “here, sir (sergeant),” take one 15-inch step backward, halt, face to the right (left) in marching, and exit the formation by marching to the nearest flank. After you clear the formation, double time to and halt two steps in front and centered on the platoon leader.

Counting Off

The platoon counts off in the same manner as a squad while in a line or column formation, except that members of all squads in that formation count in unison.

Changing Intervals

The platoon changes interval in a line formation in the same manner as the squad.

To change interval when the platoon is in a column formation at the halt, the right file stands fast and serves as the base. All other cadets execute the movement as previously described. To obtain close interval from normal interval, the third squad takes one step right, the second squad takes two steps right, and the first squad takes three steps right. To obtain normal interval, the procedures are the same except that the squads take the same number of steps to the left.

To change interval when the platoon is marching in a column, the leader gives the preparatory command “close interval” when the right foot strikes the marching surface and the command of execution “march” the next time the right foot strikes the marching surface. On “march,” the base squad (right file) takes one more 30-inch step and then executes a half step.

All other cadets take one more step, simultaneously execute a column half right, and march until they obtain close interval. They execute a column half left and assume the half step when abreast of the corresponding cadet of the base squad. On the command “forward, march,” all cadets resume marching with a 30-inch step. The platoon leader could also give the commands “mark time, march” and “platoon, halt.”

To resume marching at normal interval, the platoon leader gives the preparatory command “normal interval” as the left foot strikes the marching surface and the command of execution “march” the next time the left foot strikes the marching surface. On the command “march,” the platoon members obtain normal interval in the same manner prescribed for close interval except that they each execute column half left and then column half right.

To obtain double interval from normal interval, the procedures are the same as from close interval to normal interval. To obtain normal interval from double interval, the procedures are the same as obtaining close interval from normal interval.

Aligning the Platoon

This process is similar to aligning a squad. The command for alignment is “dress right, dress.” On the command of execution “dress,” the first squad leader stands fast and serves as the base. Other squad leaders estimate correct distance between their units and the squad in front of them. The cadets in the first squad obtain exact interval as they did in squad drill. All other squads execute as the first squad except that each cadet raises the left arm only for uniformity and covers on the cadet in front by glancing out of the corner of the left eye.

To obtain exact alignment, the platoon leader marches (on the command of execution “dress”) by the most direct route to a position on line with the first squad, halts one step from the squad leader, and faces down that line. The platoon leader then verifies the alignment of the first squad and instructs cadets (calling them by name or number) to move forward or back as necessary to form an even line.

After aligning the first squad, the platoon leader faces to the left (right) in marching, takes two (or three) short steps to the second squad, halts, faces down that line, and aligns that squad in the same manner as the first squad. The platoon leader follows this same procedure for the remaining squads. When finished with the last squad, the platoon leader returns to the position centered on the platoon, halts perpendicular to the formation, faces to the left (right), and commands “ready, front.”

Covering and Recovering

To align the platoon in a column formation, the commands are “cover” and “recover.” On the command “cover,” the fourth squad leader stands fast and serves as the base. The squad leaders, with the exception of the left flank squad leader, raise their arms laterally and turn their heads and eyes to the right. The members of the fourth squad raise their arms horizontally (as in squad drill) to the front and cover on the cadet to their front at the correct distance.

Cadets of the third, second, and first squads raise their left arms horizontally to the front (for uniformity only), cover on the person to their front, and, at the same time, glance out of the corner of their right eyes to align on the cadet to their right.

To resume the position of attention, the platoon leader gives the command “recover.” On this command, cadets return sharply to the position of attention.

Opening and Closing Ranks

A platoon opens ranks from a line formation while at the halt. The command is “open ranks, march,” and the platoon may execute it from any of the prescribed intervals.

On the command of execution “march,” the front rank takes two steps forward, the second rank takes one step forward, the third rank stands fast, and the fourth rank takes two steps backward. If additional ranks are present, the fifth rank takes four steps backward, the sixth rank takes six steps backward, and so on. After taking the required number of steps, platoon members do not raise their arms to align themselves. If the platoon leader wants the exact interval or alignment, he or she commands “at close interval (at double interval), dress right, dress” and “ready, front.”

The command to close ranks is “close ranks, march.” On the command of execution “march,” the first rank takes four steps backward, the second rank takes two steps backward, the third rank stands fast, and the fourth rank takes one step forward. Also, on the command of execution “march,” the platoon leader and platoon sergeant take the approximate number of steps to maintain their correct positions.

Resting and Dismissing the Platoon

The platoon rests in the same manner as prescribed for the squad.

The procedures for dismissing the platoon are basically the same as prescribed for the squad. The following differences exist.

When the platoon leader commands “platoon sergeant,” the platoon sergeant faces to the right in marching and inclines around the squad leaders, halts three steps in front of and centered on the platoon, and faces to the right. The platoon leader then commands “take charge of the platoon,” they exchange salutes, and the platoon leader is no longer a part of the formation. The platoon sergeant takes three steps forward, halts, faces about, and carries out the platoon leader’s instructions.

The platoon sergeant may release the squads to the control of the squad leaders by commanding “take charge of your squads.” The platoon sergeant and squad leaders exchange salutes and the platoon sergeant is no longer a part of the formation. Without leaving their positions, the squad leaders then command “fall out.”

Marching the Platoon

The platoon marches in the same manner as prescribed for the squad.

When marching in line, the first squad leader serves as the guide; when marching in column, the fourth squad leader is the guide.

When marching in line, each member maintains alignment on the cadet to the right by glancing out of the corner of the right eye; when marching in column, each member of the first, second, and third squads maintains alignment on the cadet to the right.

Changing Direction

During a march, a platoon will need to change direction at some point. There are several ways to do this, including a 90- or 45-degree turn, marching to the rear or incline, or counter column, march. The following sections help describe how these are done.

90- or 45-Degree Turns

The platoon changes the direction of marching basically the same as the squad. During a column movement, the base element is the squad on the flank in the direction of the turn.

To change direction 90 degrees, the command is “column right (left), march.” On the command of execution “march,” the base squad executes the movement as in squad drill except that the squad leader takes one 30-inch step and then takes up the half step. The squad leader continues marching with the half step until the other squad leaders come abreast. The other squad leaders must maintain correct interval, execute a 45-degree **pivot**, and continue marching in an arc.

Key Note Term

pivot – to turn in place

As these squad leaders come on line with the base squad leader, they take up the half step. When all squad leaders are even, they step off with a 30-inch step without command. All other platoon members march forward on the command of execution and execute the column movement at approximately the same location as their squad leaders and in the same manner.

To change direction 45 degrees, the command is “column half right (half left), march.” On the command “march,” the platoon executes the movement in the same manner as for a 90-degree turn except that everyone makes a 45-degree turn.

Marching to the Rear or Inclining

The platoon marches in the opposite direction (“rear, march”) and inclines around an object (“incline around”) in the same manner as the squad.

Counter Column, March

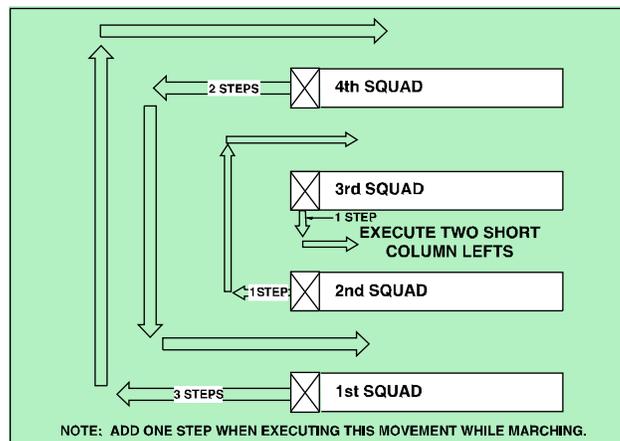
When space is limited and the platoon leader wants to march the platoon in the opposite direction with the squad leaders at the head of their squads, the platoon leader would command “counter column, march.” Figure 5.1.2 shows your way through this procedure.

On the command “march”:

- **The first squad marches forward three steps, executes a column right, marches across the front of the platoon, and executes another column right just beyond the fourth squad.**
- **The second squad steps forward one step, executes a column right, marches forward, and executes another column right between the third and fourth squads.**
- **The third squad executes two short column lefts from the halt and marches between the remainder of the third squad and the second squad.**
- **The fourth squad marches forward two steps, executes a column left, marches across the front of the platoon, and executes another column left between the first and second squads.**
- **As the third squad leader marches past the last cadet in the third squad, the entire squad begins to march at half step. After marching past the last cadet in each file, all other squads incline to the right and left as necessary, obtain normal interval on**

Figure 5.1.2: Counter column, march command.

Courtesy of CACI and the US Army.



the third squad, and begin to march with the half step. When all squads are even with one another, they begin marching with a 30-inch step without command.

During the movement, the platoon leader marches alongside of the first squad, and the platoon sergeant marches one step to the rear and centered between the second and third squads.

When marching, the platoon leader gives the preparatory command “counter column” as the left foot strikes the marching surface. On the command of execution “march,” the platoon executes the movement basically the same as from the halt, except that the squad takes one additional step to ensure that the pivot foot is in the correct place to execute the movement.

Marching to the Flank

The platoon marches to the flank in the same manner as the squad.

Forming a File and Re-Forming

A platoon forms a single file from the left, right, or as designated, and only from the column formation and the halt. The command is “file from the left (right), march” (or “file in sequence 3-2-4-1, march”).

On the preparatory command, the squad leader of the designated (or lead) squad gives the supplementary command “forward.” The other squad leaders command “stand fast.”

On the command of execution “march,” the lead squad marches forward. The stationary squad leader next to the lead squad looks over the shoulder nearest the moving element. When the second from the last cadet in the lead squad is abreast, that stationary squad leader commands “column half left (half right).” When the last cadet in the lead squad is abreast and his or her right foot strikes the marching surface, the stationary squad leader commands “march.”

On the command of execution, the squad leader next to the lead squad executes the column half left (half right), inclines to the right without command, and follows the last cadet of the lead squad at the correct distance. The other squad members march forward and execute the same movements as their squad leader. The remaining squads form the file in the same manner, one after another.

A platoon may also form a file and execute a column movement at the same time from a column formation. The execution is similar to that described previously, except the command is “file from the left (right), column left (right), march.” After the platoon leader’s preparatory command, the lead squad leader commands “column left (right)” instead of “forward.” The other squad leaders also command “column left (right), march” at the appropriate time.

The platoon re-forms to the original column formation only from the halt. The command is “column of fours to the right (left), march.” On the preparatory command, the squad leader of the base squad commands “stand fast.” All other squad leaders command “column half right (half left).”

On the command of execution “march,” the base squad stands fast; all other squads execute the column half right (half left) at the same time. As each of the moving squad leaders reach a point that ensures correct interval on the element to their left (right), they automatically incline to the left (right) and command “mark time, march” and “squad, halt” so that their squad is abreast of the base squad when halted.

Forming/Re-Forming a Column of Twos

A platoon forms a column of twos from the right or left when in a column of fours at the halt. The command is, “column of twos from the left (right), march.” The basic elements of the movement are similar to forming a column of twos in a squad formation.

On the preparatory command, the squad leaders of the two lead squads command “forward.” The other two squad leaders command “stand fast.” On the platoon leader’s command “march,” the two lead squads march forward. The squad leader who is next to the lead element gives the command to start both remaining squads in motion. Looking over the shoulder nearest the moving elements, the squad leader gives the preparatory command “column half left (half right)” when the second from the last cadet is next to him or her and gives the command “march” when the right foot of the last cadet strikes the marching surface.

On the platoon leader’s command of execution, both squad leaders execute the column half left (half right), incline to the right (left) without command, and follow the last cadets of the lead squads at the correct distance. Other members of the remaining squads march forward and execute the same movements as their squad leaders.

The platoon may also form a column of twos and execute a column movement at the same time from a column formation. The command is “column of twos from the left (right), column left (right), march.” The squad leaders of the lead squads command “column left (right)” instead of “forward.” The squad leader of the next squad gives the command “column left (right);” however, that leader then executes a column half left (half right). The remaining two squad leaders stand fast.

On the platoon leader’s command “march,” the lead squads execute the column left (right). The squad leader next to the lead squad gives the command to start the remaining squads in motion. Looking over the shoulder nearest the moving elements, the squad leader gives the preparatory command “column left (right)” when the second from the last cadet is next to him or her, and gives the command of execution “march” as the right foot of the last cadet strikes the marching surface (at the pivot for column left or the first time the last cadet’s right foot strikes the marching surface after the pivot for column right). Although the command is “column left (right),” the outside squads execute a column half left (half right).

To re-form the original column formation, the platoon must be at the halt. The command is “column of fours to the right (left), march.” On the preparatory command, the squad leaders of the lead squads command “stand fast.” The trailing squad leaders command “column half right (half left).”

On the platoon leader’s command “march,” the lead squads stand fast. The trailing squad leaders execute slightly more than the column half right (half left) at the

same time. As the trailing squad leaders reach a point that ensures correct interval on the element to their left (right), they incline to the left (right) without command. The squad leader nearest the stationary lead squads commands “mark time, march” and “squads, halt.”

Conclusion

Your cadet battalion will spend many hours practicing the individual, squad, and platoon drill movements. Being able to execute them correctly will build confidence and teamwork as well as ensure that your unit looks as good as it can in ceremonies. To excel in *Leadership Lab* requires dedication in learning the steps and drills, the proper use of commands and the command voice, and thorough preparation on the part of the drill leader.

In the next lesson, you will learn what responsibilities go along with being a leader.

Lesson Review

1. What drills do platoons execute?
2. What does the platoon do when the sergeant commands “fall in”?
3. When marching in line, which squad leader serves as the guide? When marching in a column, which squad leader serves as a guide?
4. Define the term *pivot*.