

IN-30 Thesis

The Fire Team



***Why the Four Marine Fire Team
is THE core element of fire and
maneuver combat.***

An Analysis by LGen Scott A. Akers

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The Marine Corps Fire Team, four marines and their weapons unified in purpose and mission. From the World War II of Terran History, to the Dominion War it has been THE core element of SFMC fire and Maneuver combat, but why? Simply put the Mission of Marine Corps Rifle Squad: is to locate, close with, and destroy the enemy through fire and maneuver, and to repel the enemy assault through fire and close combat. In this paper we will discuss why the fire team has a concept and tactic is so important, and how it fits into larger units. We will discuss what a fire team is made of, personal and equipment. And, finally how the fire team is used in combat.

I. Maneuver Elements larger then the Fire Team

To understand the base element of the Marine Corps, the Fire Team, we need to understand the larger elements of the Corps. The Corps itself is the largest ground combat element that belongs to the Federation. It is never deployed as an entire single unit, both because of the vastness of the Federation and the multiple threats it may encounter, and because of the difficult to deploy that many Divisions and the ships to carry them.

When the Corps does deploy a large unit, for planet wide scale combat/invasions/assaults/defense they deploy a Marine Expeditionary Force. This force is made up of a Marine Division, a Marine Aerospace Wing, and all the support units and transport vessels required. This is a MASSIVE element with over 20,000 combat marines, and over 10,000 support personnel. The MEF is capable of independent operations for up to five years at a time.

The Division is both an operational unit and an administrative unit. The nine SFMC Divisions are self contained units with Aerospace Assets assigned from the Aerospace Wings, as well as organic¹ units in Special Operations, Combat Engineering, Medical, and Support branches serving along the Infantry, Armor and Mecha combat units. The divisions are assigned two to each of the four sectors of the Federation with one division assigned to headquarters duty etc for five years tours. Each division for a five-year tour once every forty-five years will fill this duty. These divisions are themselves made up of three brigades again pre-positioned within specific sub-regions of space, with the same organic non-combat assets.

The three levels above are known as the strategic level of combat operations, since they are designed or trained to strike an enemy at the sources of its military, economic, or political power or to prevent it from doing do with the specific regions of the Federation.

Strategic forces are also used as a tool of long term policy of great importance within an integrated whole or to a planned effect of the Federation.

The next level of combat hierarchy is the operational level: with Brigade, Regiment and Battalion sized units. Brigades normally commanded by Brigadiers or Brigadier Generals are independent combined arm maneuvering units with an average of 6000 combat marines with organic armor and artillery battalions and batteries. They will also have attached Hospital Units, Combat Engineers and Special Operations units. The Brigade is normally made up of three line (infantry) regiments and one combined arms multi-purpose regiment. The latter is made up of one Armor Battalion, one Artillery Battalion and one Mecha Battalion. Also included is the Support Regiment; which includes the Headquarters Battalion, Medical Battalion, Engineers, and other various Support Units. The Infantry Regiment is normally organized with four Battalions, three infantry and one armor/artillery and the Headquarters Company. The support, Mecha, and special operations troops are attached from the Brigade as needed on a temporary basis. Regiments are commanded by Colonels and sometimes by senior Lt. Colonels. Finally the Marine Combat Battalion commanded by Lt. Colonels and Majors is made up of three Marine Infantry Companies and one Weapons Company, and the Headquarters Detachment.

The next level of combat hierarchy is the field command level or tactical level, which includes Company, Platoon and Squad sized units. Company level infantry units are the maneuvering elements, the chess pieces of the modern battlefield. Along with armor companies and artillery companies, the Generals and Colonels will instruct the Infantry companies to move here and block enemy forces, or there to support friendly forces. Infantry Companies are made up of three Rifle Platoons and one Weapons Platoon, with a Headquarters Squad attached to the Weapons Platoon, and are commanded by Captains and senior 1st Lieutenants. Rifle Platoons are the elements used by the Company to internally support its movement orders from higher commands. The Rifle Platoon has three Squads one of which carries Heavy Weapons and a Command Team. The platoon is the basic unit for officer level command and is led by 2nd and 1st Lieutenants with support, advice, and mentoring of a senior non-commissioned officer. Finally, there is the squad; which is made up of 3 fire teams and a squad leader, or thirteen marines. The squad is the maneuvering element for the platoon, and is led by a middle grade NCO.

II. The Fire Team Proper

So what is the Fire Team, this core element of all the larger units in the Marine Corps Infantry Force? What are its elemental personal, integral equipment, and how does it maneuver? The Fire Team has four marines, the Team Leader, Automatic Rifleman, Grenadier, and the Rifleman. The Fire Team like any other Marine Combat Unit, has to have one voice, one leader, that the Team Leader. This marine will be in communications with the Squad Leader, and on the Platoon net, and will move his or her team as per the Squad Leader's instructions, or break off as per the Platoon Leader's direction. The Team Leader is a veteran, with hundreds if not thousands of hours of field

training, and familiarity with all of the equipment in the team, and the three marines he leads. The Automatic Rifleman, also a veteran is also an expert shot with all forms of energy and projectile weapons, and carries the heavy phaser rifle with extra power-packs. The Grenadier, again a veteran is expert with projectile and ballistic weapons, and doubles as the team's communicator. The Grenadier will carry some form of grenade launcher, attached to the phaser rifle, or as a stand-alone weapon. Finally, the Rifleman, the junior most member of the Fire Team. While most likely the newest member of the team, this marine is still an expert shot or better with the Phaser Rifle, and ready to step in to support his teammates instantly. Together these four marines makeup the core of the Corps. Replicated thousands of time, the SFMC Fire Team is THE integral unit.

But a marine is no better then his equipment, and the marines of the SFMC Fire Team have the most current and efficient combat arms in the Federation. The basic weapon of the Marine Corps is the M116a2 Phaser Rifle; its description from the Infantry Manual is as follows.

The M-116A2 is the new standard Light Infantry weapon of the SFMC. Introduced in the fall of 2375 as the M-116A1 (which is the same unit as the Type III Mark 2 carried by Starfleet), the A2 version adds luminescent lines on the dorsal side to serve as a low-light waist-aiming device for snap shots, an enhanced illuminated reticule system in the scope, and increased counter-measures against dampening. It is slightly heavier than the rifle it replaces (the M-110/Starfleet Type III), but is also more powerful. More importantly, it has a shoulder stock—the lack of which was the chief complaint about the M-110 (which is still in service as a light carbine). This rifle provides the necessary firepower for common direct-fire infantry situations. It possesses the full standard sixteen power levels of the Starfleet phaser rifle, with the addition of a pulse-burst automatic firing mode that conserves energy over the steady stream that is found on the M-970. It is reloaded from standard WC-2 power clips, of which three are normally carried in battle dress. The M-116A2 can have accessories such as laser-dot sights and beam scramblers fitted to it, in addition to the weapon mount grenade launcher system, discussed later. Like all phasers in the SFMC inventory, its beam can be adjusted from a wide-field cone dispersion pattern to a “needle” pinpoint beam application. (2)

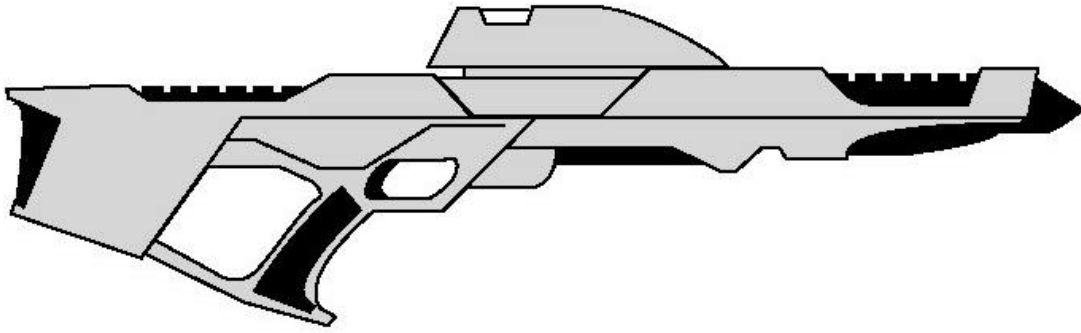


Figure 1

Both the Fire Team Leader, and the Rifleman carry the M-116A2. The Grenadier in addition to the M116-A2 carries the weapon mounted SPW-201a1 Grenade Launcher, which is described as follows.

The WGL is attached to the underside of the emitter tube on both the M-116A2 and M-110A1 phasers. They utilize forty millimeter EM accelerated and armed grenades similar in construction to MAPLIML rounds, although they do not have homing capabilities and their range and destructive power are considerably less. The WGL is loaded with single rounds. A drum-fed variant of this weapon was considered for issue but was rejected as being too bulky, especially when used in conjunction with the M-116A2. A PI suit-mounted version is available with a five-round tube style clip. WGL is intended to be used as a combination direct and indirect fire system, unlike MAPLIML. WGL ammunition, with the exception of HIVAP, is designed to be fired in an arcing trajectory that will enable it to strike targets that might be out of the line of sight or directly shielded. Controls on the WGL allow the operator to select an indirect firing thrust mode per shot or use the default full power thrust setting for direct firing. The WGL feeds power for its electromagnetic drivers from the power magazine of the phaser it is attached to, and consumes a minuscule amount of energy. All of the forty-millimeter G-12 rounds used in this weapon have a minimum arming distance of sixty meters and a maximum effective range of 800 meters in direct fire. WGL's munitions are not, by doctrine, considered useful at ranges over 1000 meters due to atmospheric variances (the HIVAP can travel farther, but is not considered a viable weapon at any but short ranges). All rounds are impact fused. Ammunition types include grenade-variants of the PCP, CDM, HIVAP, HE, Beacon/marker, Incendiary and Fragmentation warheads found in the MAPLIML missiles. (3)

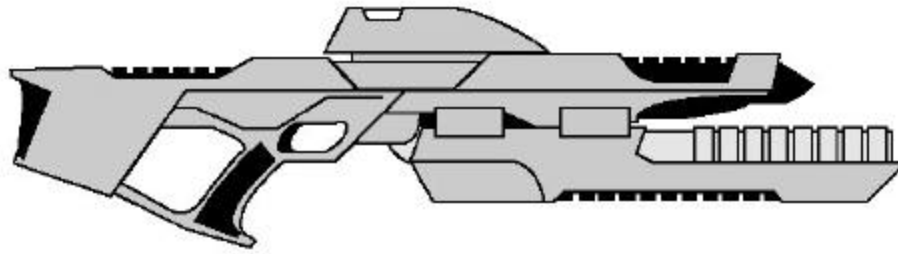


Figure 2

The final member of the Fire Team, the Automatic Rifleman, carries the M-970A1 Compression Phaser Rifle, enabling suppressing fire as well as a bigger punch against power armored and armored vehicle opponents. Again from the Infantry Branch guidebook, the description is as follows.

The 970A1 is a powerful compression phaser rifle capable of establishing a base of fire to support Infantry squad operations. For this reason, it is also known as the Squad Compressed Rectification Phaser Rifle (SCRPR) and its operators are known by Infantrymen as “scrapppers”. A scrapper is usually a Light Infantry fire team’s light weapons specialist. In external appearance the SCRPR looks like the standard Starfleet compression phaser rifle, although it has a different internal arrangement which includes a larger clip housed in the stock as opposed to the grip, and a hardier emitter assembly to handle the higher power settings. The M-970A1 has the sixteen standard power settings of other phasers, with of four additional higher settings. These settings are only for use during limited situations due to their extreme destructive yield and use of power.

(4)



Figure 3

The one piece of gear, all four members will share in common, is Power Armor, either Light or Heavy. For the standard Fire Team this will be PAS-18C Phalanx Powered Infantry Rifleman Suit. It will protect the marine, support his mission, and power his weapons and other equipment. It is described as follows.

The Phalanx is the standard-issue PI suit in the SFMC. All PI troopers are trained first in this suit, even if their eventual MOS requires a different suit. Any PI can climb into a Phalanx and fight it with ruthless efficiency. Weapons loading is widely variable, as is sensor fitting. Fire team and squad leaders typically have an upgraded battlefield surveillance system and better comm (including a dedicated fire support channel). (5)



Figure 4

Now we have four highly skilled and heavily armed marines. What do they do? How do they use their weapons, and their armor, and training to accomplish their mission, support the squad, platoon and company, and win the battle? The answer is simple, the ability to utilize combat maneuvering. By maneuvering, we mean moving through combat environments in such a way to degrade, destroy and defeat the enemy forces, while best supporting defending and protecting friendly forces. The Fire Team moves in a loose and often misshapen Diamond Formation. With the Rifleman leading point, the Team Leader to the left and behind about 15 meters, the Automatic Rifleman to the right and behind about 15 meters, and the Grenadier nearly directly behind about 20-25 meters. This allows the Team Leader to observe the whole team, and link to the team to the left, the Automatic Rifleman to bring fire down on an opposing team's left flank, and the grenadier to launch his rounds in a ballistic arch over the heads of his teammates. The team will advance in the diamond formation until it comes under fire, then it will proceed in a leapfrog manner. The point will place him under cover, and provide suppressing fire

while the Team Leader and Automatic Rifleman will advance. They then will provide cover fire as the Grenadier advances to slightly ahead of the Rifleman, then the three will provide cover as the Rifleman retakes the point. This will continue as long as the team is under fire, or until they receive orders to flank, or retire. In addition the team, may board a mechanized/armored vehicle and be moved into or past combat quickly and in a large degree of protection.

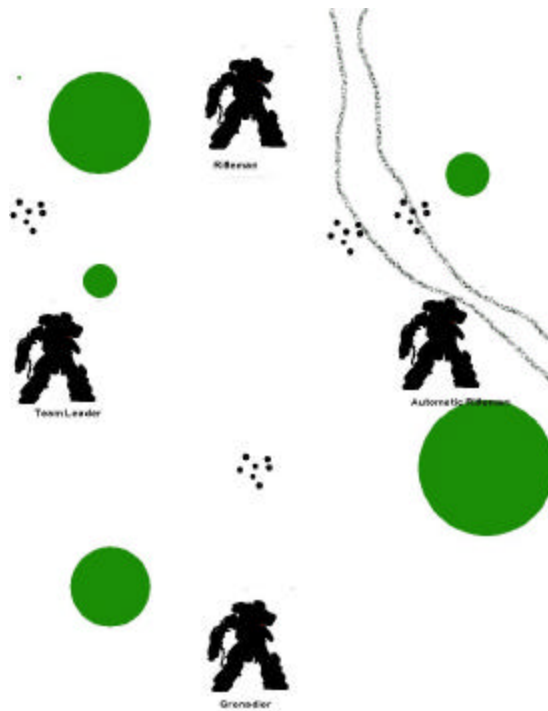


Figure 5

III. Integration of the Fire Team in Combat Maneuver

The Fire Team is integrated in each of the larger combat elements in three different ways. Within the squad, there are three Fire Teams. Each of the teams will have special skills, missions and equipment. Some will carry the P-722A3 Heavy Automatic Projectile Weapon/man-portable mortar, some will carry the M-2A3 Heavy Phaser Rifle, and some will carry the P-622A2 SAW is a rapid-firing EM projectile weapon. Within the squad, the three teams will form as a chevron, with the Squad Leader normally attached to one of the Fire Team diamonds, or more often then not, the Squad Leader will also be one of the Fire Team Leaders. The Squad advances by leapfrog movement, with two teams covering the other as it moves forward. See Figure 6 on the next page.

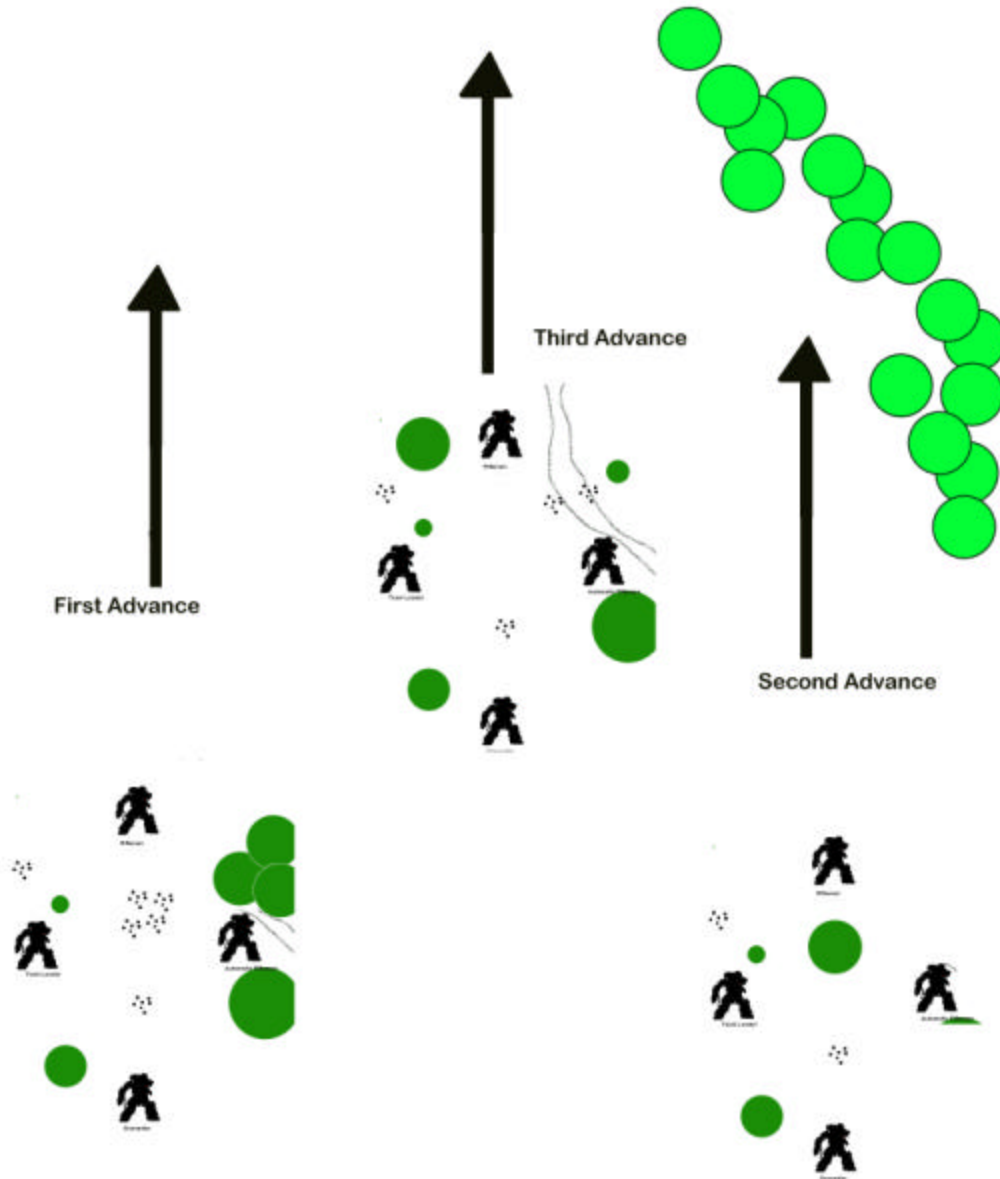


Figure 6

Within the Platoon, there are the three Squads and the HQ Team (consisting of the Platoon Leader – usually a junior officer, the Platoon NCO – usually a mid to senior grade NCO, the Platoon Guide – who acts as the HQ Body Guard, and the Platoon Communicator. Two of the three squads are standard rifle units, but the third will have the heavier weapons, assigned to its teams, usually the Mortar, Heavy Phaser, the SAW, and sometimes a shoulder mounted Missile Launcher. The maneuver formations are similar to the squad level, but with two squads forming the chevron, and the third squad setup in over-watch, and the HQ element moving independently to monitor and control the situation. Once the chevron is formed, one of the lead units will become over-watch and the rear quad will leapfrog ahead to form the next chevron in the advance joining up with the other lead unit. See Figure 7 below.

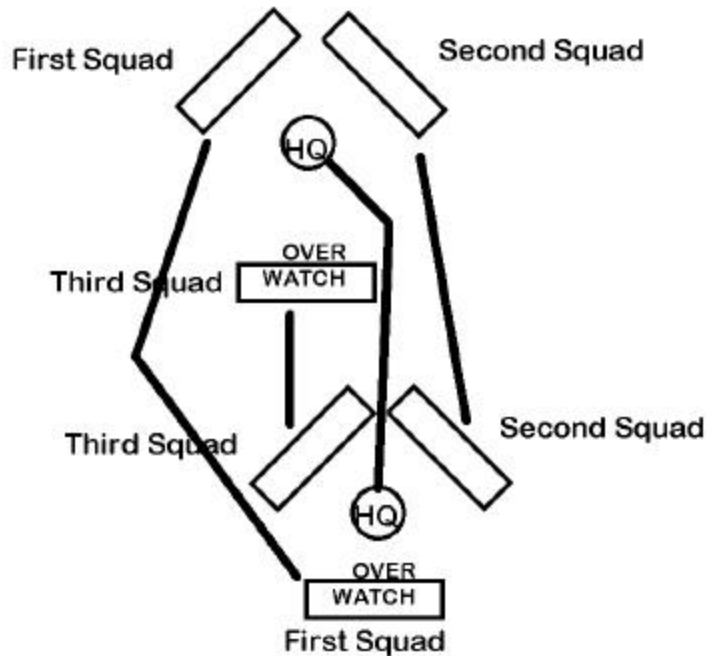


Figure 7

Within the Company, there are the three Rifle Platoons, a Weapons Platoons and the HQ Squad (consisting of the Company Commander, Executive Officer, Company NCO – Security Detail, Communicators and Medics. The Rifle Platoons are standard maneuvering units with their assigned Weapons Squad and HW teams, while the Weapons Platoon, contains the massive firepower that provides support for the Company. The Weapons company is equipped with P-722A3 Heavy Automatic Projectile Weapons, M-387 Man pack Light Infantry Missile Launchers, and M-2A3 Heavy Phaser Rifles. These weapons described in footnote (6) below provide a massive punch to the company,

and enable the platoons to maneuver confident they are protected by their heavy weapons brethren. The company will deploy in a horseshoe formation with a platoon in reserve for unexpected situations. The two rifle platoons will deploy forward on the flanks, the weapons platoon joining them in the rear, with the HQ squad normally deployed with the weapons platoon. The reserve platoon will deploy immediately behind the weapons platoon, providing security, while being ready to reinforce on the defense, or exploit on the offensives. The rifle platoons will rotate out as the reserve platoon to accord some rest and relaxation to the troops. Unlike the smaller units though, the Platoons will advance independently using their own subordinate routes of maneuver to position themselves in the next defensive position for the company, or to prepare themselves for jump off into the assault.

Conclusion

We have shown the importance of the Fire Team, as the essential building block of the Corps maneuver warfare. Each brick in the wall is essential, aligned together correctly the wall stands even against a hurricane, but left in a pile without organization it is useless. And just like that brick whose clay is hardened and formed to perfection, the fire team, its marines, its equipment must be prepared, trained and kept ready to go into combat, otherwise they will be no better than a pile of clay. The Fire Team Leader, is the essential junior non-commissioned officer, it is his or her duty to lead the team into fire, to take out the enemy, and to capture the objective. The General is nothing without the skill, dedication, and lives of the Fire Team Leaders and their teams. Four Marines, they are the core of the Corps. All the Divisions, and Regiments depend on those four marines. Hard as a diamond, whose shape they emulate as they move, for five hundred years the Marines have refused to fight as a mob, but as a Team. From Suribachi to Cardassia the Marine Corps – Forever.

Foot-notes

- (1) The term “organic” refers to a unit that belongs to the higher command, but that is not part of its combat assets, such as a Military Police company, which is carried on the Infantry Division’s Table of Organization & Equipment but is not deployed as a combat unit.
- (2) p. 26: Infantry Branch Guidebook of the STARFLEET Marine Corps (SFMC). 1997 edition.
- (3) pp. 35-36: Infantry Branch Guidebook of the STARFLEET Marine Corps (SFMC). 1997 edition.
- (4) p. 27: Infantry Branch Guidebook of the STARFLEET Marine Corps (SFMC). 1997 edition.
- (5) p. 47: Infantry Branch Guidebook of the STARFLEET Marine Corps (SFMC). 1997 edition.
- (6) p. 28, 31 & 32: Infantry Branch Guidebook of the STARFLEET Marine Corps (SFMC). 1997 edition.

P-722A3 Heavy Automatic Projectile Weapon

This is the 15mm calibre version of the P-622. It is usually carried by a Light Infantry Company’s heavy weapons platoon by a three-man team. One man carries the ammunition and acts as loader during firing operations, one carries the barrel/bipod subassembly, and acts as spotter during firing, and the third carries the loader/body subassembly and is the shooter. P31

M-387 Manpack Light Infantry Missile Launcher

The MAPLIML, sor "Mapper", as it is often called, is considered by many to be the most versatile and useful weapon of the SFMC light infantry. It is usually carried in the heavy weapons squad of a rifle platoon, or the heavy weapons platoon of a rifle company.

The MAPLIML weighs 5 kg empty and 8 kg loaded with a full cannister of six missiles. It consists of a rotary cannister, frame, grips and folding shoulder-stock (it can be fired with or without this extended), and integral sighting system. A variety of 40mm missiles, each with an effective range of 12km, can be carried. Each missile uses differential thrust for maneuvering (tail fins—once so popular for missiles—are absolutely useless on the zero-atmosphere battlefields which the SFMC sometimes fights on). A gas bottle in the rear of the missile shoots the round out cold and at a distance of approximately twenty yards the rocket motor takes over.

One of the unique features of this launcher (and arguably the feature that makes it so popular) is that the operator can "spool through" the canister manually through push-buttons until the round of choice is in position, and rounds can be manually loaded one upon another into the canister as they are expended. Thus, a skilled MAPLIML operator will have a variety of ordnance at hand for any situation that might materialize. P. 32

M-2A3 Heavy Phaser Rifle

Just sitting in the weapons rack it looks heavy, difficult to move, clumsy to operate, and powerful enough to take out a small asteroid... and it is. It is the M-2A3 heavy phaser rifle. A compression phaser rifle with both beam and pulse firing capabilities, the M-2 is nearly the size of most of its operators and must be carried in pieces by a heavy weapons fire team unless anti-gravs can be used (in which case it takes only two to carry).

The M-2A3 is basically the equivalent of a Type 5 shuttle-mounted phaser emitter in portable form (and as an M-2 crew will tell you, "portable" is being used loosely here). It is tripod mounted when carried, or more commonly it is mounted on an APC. For all its drawbacks, however, it packs a punch well worth hauling it around. P.28