

What's Your Next Move?

by LTC Ben Ferguson

Following is the author's solution to the tactical vignette published in *ARMOR*'s Fall 2021 edition. The best solutions from the field for that vignette can still be published in a subsequent issue of *ARMOR*.

"What's Your Next Move?" serves as the first in a new series of scenarios focused on large-scale combat operations. *ARMOR* publishes tactical vignettes, or tactical- decision exercises, to generate professional dialogue. Scenarios may seem vague and lack pertinent information to mimic the confusion of battle.

There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the scenarios posed in "What's Your Next Move?" Use your doctrinal knowledge and educated assumptions to determine "What's Your Next Move?"

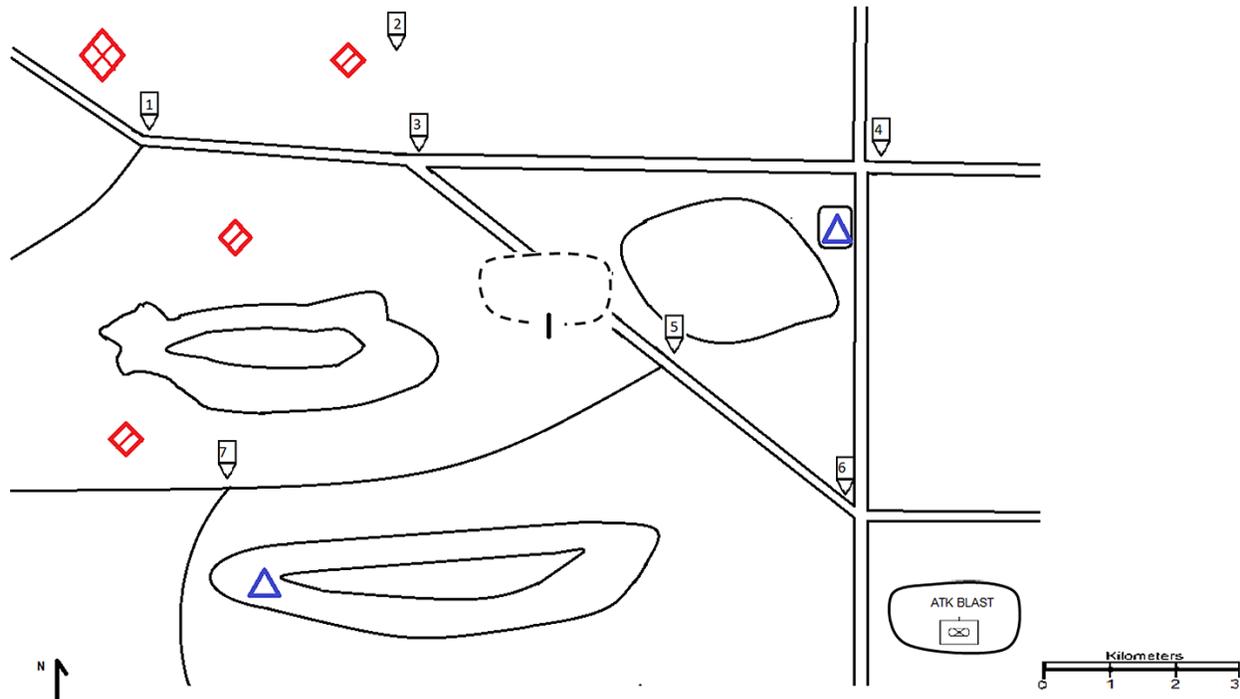
Situation

You are the commander of A Team (tank heavy), Task Force (TF) 3-8. You are the TF's advance guard as it conducts a movement-to-contact. The TF's mission is to fix and then destroy the advance guard of a mechanized-rifle division that is moving east toward the international airport. The TF's movement will allow the rest of the brigade to maneuver and destroy the regimental main body, with enough combat power left to block the remainder of the enemy division.

Scenario

While conducting resupply in Tactical Assembly Area Blast, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance reports large groups of enemy tracked vehicles 15 kilometers away from Command Post (CP) 1. The TF commander has directed you via Joint Capabilities Release (JCR) to occupy Battle Position (BP) 1 and delay the enemy force until the rest of the battalion can arrive.

Your team consists of two M1A2 tank platoons and one mechanized-infantry platoon. Your company has tactical control of the battalion scout-platoon section toward the forward-line-of-own-troops and the mortar platoon follows in support; you have priority of fires, but your fire-support officer has limited contact with the lead firing battery.



The terrain is mostly open, lightly forested prairie with little undulation, with some higher terrain in the center of the zone. As you approach the intersection at CP 6, the easternmost scout-platoon observation (OP) reports visual contact with about 30 vehicles moving east and starting to deploy in the vicinity of CP 1, and movement of a wheeled vehicle just north of CP 7. A moment later, your other mounted scout OP reports they have identified what they assess are threat-vehicle sections north of Hill 560, moving east toward CP 3 and in the vicinity of CP 2.

What's your next move? Decide what to do and issue your fragmentary order (FRAGO) as if you were speaking on the radio or via JCR message. Following your initial FRAGO, clearly define the problem(s) as you see it/them. Submit both your initial FRAGO and discussion of the problem, assumptions and rationale for your solution to **ARMOR**, usarmy.benning.tradoc.mbx.armor-magazine@army.mil, no later than 45 days after this edition is posted on-line.

Author's proposed FRAGO

"Guidons, this is Black 6, FRAGO follows. Add three graphic-control measures: Platoon (PL) Abe as a straight line between CP7 and CP5; PL Ike as a line between CP7 and CP3; and PL Cal between CP1 and CP2.

Situation: The enemy scouts or mounted patrols are moving on east-west avenues of approach; they are deploying a battalion-sized element at CP1 and moving generally east to engage the main body of the task force.

Mission: We will attack-by-fire to fix the lead enemy battalion vicinity CP3 to allow the TF to move to a position of advantage to destroy the enemy regiment.

Intent: The purpose of our mission is to fix the enemy force at CP3 to allow the TF time to move to a position of advantage and destroy the enemy regiment. We will accomplish this by attacking by fire oriented north and west to defeat the enemy battalion at CP3 and PL Ike. At endstate, the company/team will be arrayed in attack-by-fire positions vicinity BP1 in a left echelon, anchored to the hill to the west and oriented to the west and northwest; the lead enemy battalion fixed vicinity CP3; and the TF maneuvering to destroy the enemy regiment.

Tasks to subordinate units: Green (mechanized infantry), move to the intervisibility line vicinity hill west of BP, oriented toward PL Ike. Task: Attack-by-fire, orienting anti-tank (AT) fires to CP1 and dismounted AT at CP7. Purpose: To protect the company/team's flank, denying enemy movement toward the south. Be prepared to cover supplemental avenue of approach from CP7 and move dismounted-infantry squads to block enemy dismounted avenues of approach.

White, move east half of BP, oriented north toward CP2 and CP3. Task: Attack-by-fire, orienting direct fire deep on CP2. Purpose: To prevent the enemy from maneuvering to the north and bypassing. Break.

Blue, move to southwest corner of BP, oriented west to PL Ike. Task: Attack-by-fire, orienting fires from CP4 to Target Reference Point 1. Purpose: To prevent the enemy from maneuvering north. Break.

Mortars, move to Mortar Firing Point 1 south of road and PL Abe. Task: Disrupt the advance guard's main body with high-explosive/smoke between PL Cal and PL Ike. Purpose: Disrupt the enemy's formations, giving us a direct-fire advantage by forcing him to button up and disperse.

Black Fires, move to a position vicinity CP5 to regain communications with the task force and call for fires to fix enemy at PL Ike. You have priority of fires.

Scouts, continue to observe, destroy enemy scouts and engage mounted targets to prevent enemy penetration of CP7 in the south or CP4 in the north. Identification of enemy committal of platoon or larger-sized elements toward CP7 is commander's critical-information requirement.

Black 5, Regain contact with higher, report and determine how long until TF will arrive. Observe location and movement of enemy east of PL Ike and assist in calling for and adjusting fires.

Black 7, move trains to a hide position west of CP6; be prepared to execute medical evacuation. Acknowledge, over."

Rationale

Our mission was to find and fix the lead enemy battalion to enable the brigade, but we now we have to make some assumptions on how long the battalion will take to deploy. The distance and the objective of the enemy must be accounted for (i.e., is he force-oriented or terrain-oriented) to prevent the possibility of bypass to the north.

There is an inherent dilemma as to whether we should attempt to occupy a static position or potentially accomplish the mission farther north or south to ensure the enemy cannot easily bypass our position.

The company/team does not have the time or the combat power to cover all potential enemy avenues of approach. By establishing a position vicinity the planned BP, we should be able to accomplish the mission of fixing the enemy battalion by destroying the leading two companies along PL Ike and forcing the enemy commander to delay further action before he has time to develop the situation and maneuver against the company/team and our follow-on TF.

By moving the mechanized infantry to higher ground, oriented northwest, the intent is to provide greater survivability and range for the mech infantry's tube-launched, optically tracked, wide-guided missiles. Dismounted Javelin and AT engagements will help block enemy identification of CP7 as a less-defended avenue of approach but would clearly be of greatest concern. Identification of enemy movement of a company-sized element through CP7 would require a difficult reallocation of tanks while under contact or a decision to retrograde to supplementary positions farther southeast.

Don't agree? Following your initial FRAGO, clearly define the problem(s) as you see it/them, then submit both your initial FRAGO and discussion of the problem, assumptions and rationale for your solution to **ARMOR**, usarmy.benning.tradoc.mbx.armor-magazine@army.mil no later than 45 days after this edition is posted on-line.

Acronym Quick-Scan

AT – anti-tank

BP – battle position

CP – command post

FRAGO – fragmentary order

JCR – Joint Capabilities Release

OP – observation post

PL – platoon

TF – task force