

PART I

INFANTRY ATTACKS AT NTC

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Author’s Note: *They say imitation is the greatest form of flattery. With our apologies and utmost respect to Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, we offer the readers of INFANTRY Magazine some observations gleaned from our experiences coaching, teaching, and training rotational units during the conduct of both force-on-force and live-fire operations in a training area slightly larger than the state of Rhode Island. During seven rotational decisive action battles, we hope to share with you some lessons learned, best practices, doctrinal discussion, and the opportunities offered here at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, CA, — the “crown jewel” of the Army.*

Remarks are appended to the description of each battle in order to extract worthwhile lessons from the particular operation. The rotational notes accumulated by two Infantry officers serving with the Tarantula Light Task Force Training Team (Airborne) will show the essential nature of conducting combined arms operations as the NTC patch symbolizes. The NTC’s complex, high-fidelity training environment boasts the mountain ranges and maneuver corridors that you would expect to encounter in Wardak or Ghazni provinces of Afghanistan, the largest urban operations training facility in the Department of Defense, and the most recent addition — an austere C-17 capable airfield; all of which require infantry forces to clear, seize, or secure either as the decisive operation or in support of mounted forces. The following examples are proof of the tremendous combat power of American Infantrymen and how they are a vital component of the combined arms team, regardless of the terrain or the adversaries consisting of both regular and irregular forces operating on their “home turf.” Finally, we hope this article makes a contribution toward educating the force with a specific focus toward training brigade combat teams (BCTs) for combat in unified land operations in a decisive action training environment (DATE). Enjoy!

Battle for Granite Pass: Engagement Area Development – “Step Zero”

The Granite Pass complex loomed large to the north. With a daunting ridgeline running east to west with canalizing terrain connecting the northern and central mobility corridors, it consisted of the main pass and three other smaller choke points in the Granite Mountains. The Stryker infantry battalion task force was assigned the mission of defending the pass complex in order to protect the northern flank of the brigade and, if the defense was successful, possibly seizing it in the future to support subsequent offensive operations. Due to weather and competing collection priorities across the BCT, the battalion did not have an accurate assessment of the enemy disposition in vicinity of Granite Pass. The



The Granite Pass Complex connects the central and northern corridors as viewed from the south.
(Photo courtesy of the authors)

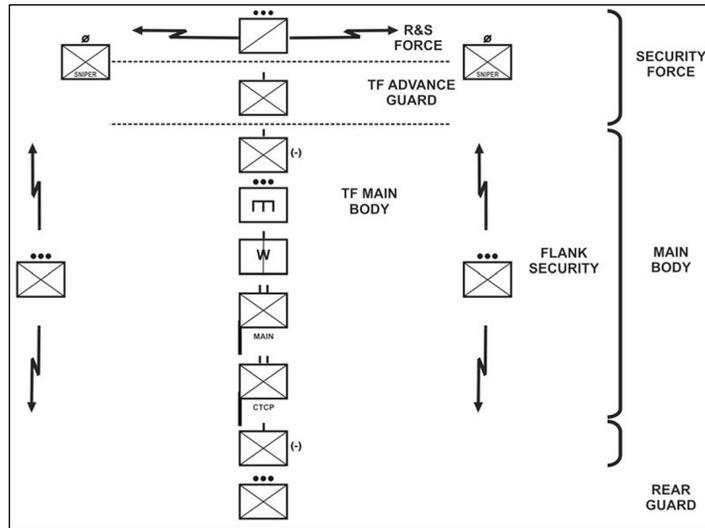


Figure 1 — Battalion Movement to Contact (FM 3-21.20)

commander was concerned that the battalion would not get started with the steps of engagement area development if the enemy owned key terrain in the passes. The battalion treated the operation like a movement to contact. The scout platoon initiated movement at EENT (end of evening nautical twilight). Bravo Company was next in the order of movement using a forward security element-advance guard (FSE-AG) formation. The probable line of deployment (PLD) was drawn up more than four kilometers from the Granite Pass to account for the possibility that the enemy would have AT-5s in vicinity of that key and canalizing terrain. The commander gave guidance to have the Infantrymen dismount from an objective rally point (ORP) shy of the PLD. He believed they would make initial contact and realistically destroy the lead enemy platoon and fix the remainder of a company-sized force. That would help develop the situation in order to figure out how to subsequently maneuver Alpha and Charlie Companies against the remaining enemy forces if necessary. If Bravo didn't make contact, then they would continue to secure the pass while the other two companies transitioned into engagement area development. Particular emphasis was given to ensuring the battalion mortars were third in the order of movement right behind Bravo so they were within range to echelon fires in the likely event that Bravo made contact.

The temperature dropped more than 20 degrees in less than an hour as the sun set that evening. Mountains previously baking in the hot, orange sun now turned purple in the shadows. It was still in the mid-70s, but compared to the mid-90s experienced just an hour prior the men shivered a little bit as they adjusted to the drastic temperature drop while conducting final pre-combat inspections. Shortly after 2000 hours the scouts started their movement using the cover of darkness to conceal themselves as they departed the Iron Triangle, inching their way north along

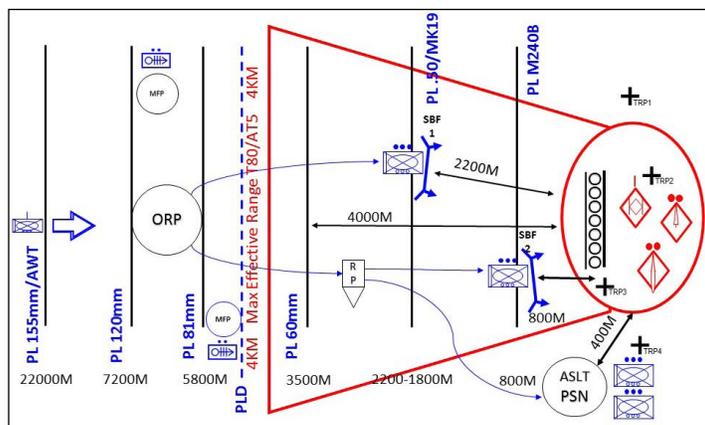


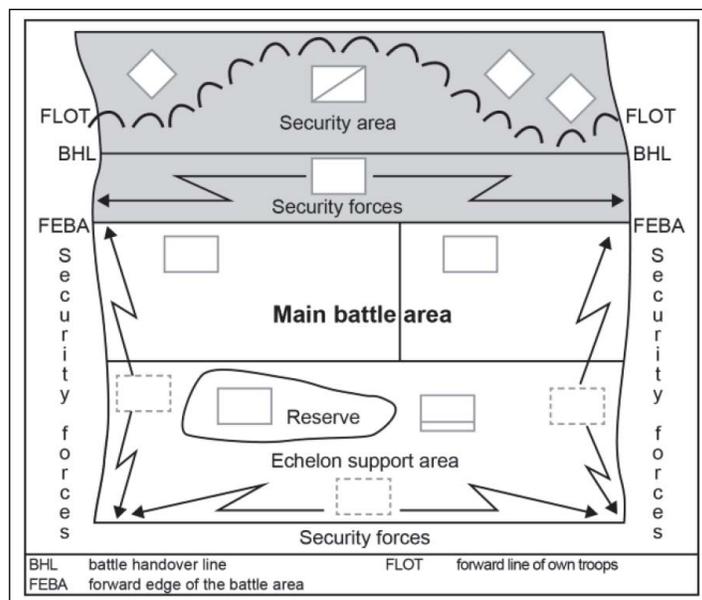
Figure 2 — Maximum Engagement Line (MEL)

A MEL is the linear image of the farthest limit of effective fire for a weapon or unit. This line is determined both by the weapon's or unit's maximum effective range and by the effects of terrain. For example, slope, vegetation, structures, and other features provide cover and concealment that may prevent the weapon from engaging out to the maximum effective range

the 114-wadi (a system of deep wadis that handrail the complex terrain on the south and eastern side of Granite Pass). They weren't able to enjoy the benefits of riding in their Stryker reconnaissance variants (RVs) for very long as they dutifully dismounted at the PLD. Now dismounted on foot, they "pulled" their vehicles along in overwatch. The Strykers would trail approximately 600 meters or one intervisibility line behind their scouts. This facilitated the scouts in finding the enemy first without risking the loss of their RVs to enemy anti-tank systems. It also kept their Stryker-mounted M2 .50 caliber machine guns close enough to provide suppressive fires should they make direct fire contact with enemy infantry. Bravo Company impatiently waited until 2330 hours before initiating its own movement. Start too soon and the scouts wouldn't have a chance to infiltrate ahead of them or provide them with information on any enemy that might be present in the pass. There was an added benefit to giving the scouts a chance to do their job. It allowed the Infantrymen to stay mounted a little bit longer. Fresh legs would be nice if this movement to contact turned into a "fight to daylight."

It was now after midnight, and the scouts were climbing over the boulders separating the main pass and the smaller pass called "Granite West." Less than 200 meters away, the scouts noticed movement to their north. Shots rang out; they were in direct-fire contact. The scouts hunkered down behind some boulders and immediately began calling for fire. The battalion mortars following Bravo Company went into action. The enemy answered back with their own mortars, but it was difficult to pinpoint locations for two scout teams. Bravo Company had stayed mounted following in trail behind the scout RVs, but now they dismounted their Infantrymen once they received reports of the direct-fire contact. There was no point in risking the loss of rifle squads in the backs of their Infantry Carrier Vehicles (ICVs) to an enemy AT system now that they had a better idea of where the threat was located. They were already within the maximum engagement lines of any existing AT-5 or AT-13 systems. Still it would be another 90 minutes before the Infantrymen could close the distance between themselves and the scouts. The scouts had to survive using their radios and supporting 120mm mortars. Bravo Company transitioned to a company wedge formation with the two advance guard platoons trailing the forward security element (FSE) platoon. The scouts talked the FSE onto their position, and a little after 0200 the FSE made direct-fire contact with the enemy infantry. Scouts continued to call for supporting mortar fires while the lead platoon got its M240Bs into action. Effective suppressive fires from the medium machine guns allowed the Bravo Company commander to maneuver his other two platoons to the flank of the enemy which he now determined to be a company-sized force. The battalion mortars were having good effects. Tarantula observer coach/trainers (OC/Ts) clambered across the rocks reporting battle damage assessments (BDA) for both sides. Enemy forces that weren't destroyed by the mortars were forced to reposition. Every time they had to reposition meant a missed opportunity to employ their AT-5s and AT-13s against the Stryker vehicles which were now visible in the moonlight. First came the 120mm mortars, then .50 cal. fires from overwatching Strykers, then the roar of the M240Bs alternating fires by section, and finally the sound of voices... the voices of rifle squads as they bounded between the huge boulders of the pass complex. It was too much, and the enemy infantry force did not have prepared positions. They had been conducting a movement to contact just like the rotational unit. Alpha Company was later committed into the fight in order to maintain the tempo of the attack. The fighting continued into the early morning with the remaining enemy forces breaking contact shortly after BMNT (begin morning nautical twilight). The Stryker task force had two platoons worth of casualties that it had to evacuate as well, but it retained control of the pass complex. The Infantry Soldiers were exhausted after fighting all night, bounding over and around "dinosaur-sized boulders" to close with and destroy the enemy. ICVs came forward to resupply fatigued rifle and weapons squads with the two most important classes of supply (water and ammunition) to keep them in the fight. Later that morning, the battalion commander would gather his company commanders and selected staff members to a point on the ground in the middle of the engagement area and identify it as the location where he wanted to destroy the enemy — step three of engagement area development. However, they wouldn't have gotten to step three if they hadn't first accomplished "Step Zero — Establish the Security Zone."

Observations — *Step three of engagement area development — identifying where you want to destroy the enemy — is arguably the most important step of planning and preparing for defensive operations because it shapes and drives all of the other steps of the development process. Emplacement of key weapons, obstacles, and supporting fires all revolve around step three. Rotational units often become so focused on following the steps of engagement area development that they forget the first and most important priority of work: establish and maintain local area security. During defensive operations, we often refer to this as the non-doctrinal step zero of engagement area development — also known as establishing the security zone. Only after a security zone is established can a unit accomplish the*



**Figure 3 — Organization of Forces for an Area Defense —
Contiguous Area of Operations (FM 3-90-1)**

Notice highlighted security area and security forces. Security proves essential to both offensive and defensive operations.

other steps of engagement area development. In this particular vignette, the rotational unit actually spent nearly 36 hours fighting to clear the Granite Pass complex of enemy infantry forces. Subsequently, the task force commander was able to accomplish the remaining steps of engagement area development; however, the unit would not see the enemy's main attack by their assault or exploitation forces enter into their developed engagement area. Why? Their security zone fight was so effective at stripping the enemy of their reconnaissance assets and infantry forces in vicinity of the pass complex that the opposing force (OPFOR) commander decided to attack elsewhere within the rotational unit brigade's area of operations where he deemed he had a greater probability of success. Not only had the successful security zone fight set conditions for the battalion to conduct engagement area development, but it had also taken away maneuver options for the enemy commander. This rotational unit also correctly identified that its lack of understanding of the enemy's disposition necessitated a movement-to-contact approach. It utilized its organic scouts followed by a platoon-sized forward security element and subsequently a company minus-sized advance guard to make contact with the smallest element possible. This allowed the task force commander to develop the situation, employ supporting 120mm mortar fires to suppress both enemy infantry and AT systems, and then maneuver the remainder of his task force against the enemy. His ability to compartmentalize (or phase) this operation (first conducting a movement to contact, followed by establishment of the security zone, and finally the execution of the remaining steps of engagement area development) allowed him to not only prepare for a defensive operation but also better posture his force to resume offensive operations when the opportunity presented itself later in the fight. Thus, what initially seemed like a defensive operation turned into "Infantry Attacks!" at NTC.

Defense of the Siberian Ridgeline: Seizing the Dominant Terrain through Dismounted Night Infiltration

The sun had just set and it was surprisingly busy for that time of the evening... maybe it just seemed busy. Maybe a better adjective to use would be noisy. The sound of M1 Abrams tanks and M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles (BFVs) in the distance filled the air. A company of dismounted OPFOR Infantrymen completed their last pre-combat inspections and prepared to cross the line of departure (LD). Temperatures were cooling and an early autumn breeze would make tonight's infiltration somewhat pleasant for the grunts carrying combat loads weighing in the neighborhood of 80 pounds. The rotational unit's cavalry squadron had established a security zone along the Siberian Ridgeline to facilitate engagement area development by the maneuver battalions to the south. They were feverishly constructing one-tier, hull-down vehicle fighting positions and emplacing triple-strand concertina wire obstacle belts to defend the reverse slope of the ridgeline. They intended to mass the effects of their direct and indirect fires in an engagement area that stretched from the John Wayne foothills in the west to the Schoolbus Wadi in the east. A supporting effort defended a smaller but separate engagement area in the Red Lake Pass, a narrow mobility corridor canalizing

vehicular traffic to the point where an understrength company could easily defend it provided they covered their obstacles with effective direct and indirect fires. The defensive preparations were indeed formidable which made tonight's infiltration even more critical.

The OPFOR rifle company commander understood the importance of his unit's mission. His Soldiers were to infiltrate high above the John Wayne Pass, destroy enemy forces defending from the western battle position, and create a point of penetration (PoP), setting the conditions for follow-on mechanized forces to exploit the PoP the following morning. The Infantrymen stepped off from the town of Razish shortly after EENT. It was a six-kilometer dismounted movement with little illumination that evening. Illumination is a double-edged sword. Good illumination means faster movement but also increases the risk of being compromised. Poor illumination equates to a slower rate of movement but assists with the Infantrymen's ability to infiltrate stealthily to their assault positions. Moving at a rate of approximately one kilometer per hour, the company moved across the Hidden Valley and started trudging its way up the steep slopes of the north side of Tiefert Mountain. Once the Soldiers reached an elevation high enough to overlook the surrounding ridgelines defining the Hidden Valley, they then turned east and began creeping their way toward the western mouth of John Wayne Pass. It was tough, slow walking. With 80 pounds of water, PKM machine guns, AT-13s, three AT-5s, tripods, 60mm mortar tubes, and ammunition, the Infantrymen walked with the left foot striking the slope below the right foot to prevent them from tumbling down the mountain.

They arrived at their destination two hours before BMNT. The OPFOR rifle company was now high enough to see the John Wayne Pass and nearby foothills below, and most importantly, to observe (and engage) the M1s and M2s tucked into various wadi systems believing they were in a covered position of relative security. The rifle squads silently deployed to the left and right flanks to secure the company's main effort for this mission; their weapons squads manned the machine guns, AT-13s, and three AT-5s capable of reaching out to engage a tank at nearly four kilometers. The company commander reminded his squads to hold their fire until he got confirmation that they were all in position. He wanted the first volley of AT-5s and AT-13s to be fired simultaneously before he permitted subordinate leaders to fire at will. The platoon leaders sequentially reported they were in position. The commander moved from one position to the next designating target arrays for his AT gunners so they could achieve true massing of fires. Two AT rounds on the same M1 or M2 was one too many. He wanted every round to count.

Then, as the horizon began revealing the faint hint of pink indicating BMNT was at hand, the company commander gave the word to unleash hell. In less than 10 minutes, the outcome was academic. A mechanized company team's worth of combat power lay in ruins. The rotational unit's rifle squads — which were fortunate enough to be dismounted during the time of the attack — looked upward from what they previously thought was key terrain on the John Wayne Foothills. Now, it didn't seem that way as they watched the puffs of smoke and grenade simulators indicating signatures from the enemy infantry firing their AT-5s and AT-13s. Their vehicles were destroyed and there was no place to go except up. They must now attack uphill to destroy the immediate and lethal threat that had occupied the true key terrain the night before. As if to reinforce the point, OPFOR mortars began providing incentive to the rotational unit's Infantrymen to get moving. The rifle squads began trudging up the eastern base of Tiefert Mountain. OPFOR AT gunners continued to engage and destroy nearby M1 tanks and M2 BFVs, and now their PKM gunners deployed a wall of steel onto the heads of the approaching Soldiers. It seemed like for every rifleman that



The dark spots of the John Wayne Foothills and the Siberian Ridge beyond the ridgeline in the foreground provide a much clearer perspective of the dominant terrain. While the foothills are key terrain in the direct-fire mounted fight, they cannot be controlled without the dominant terrain above them.

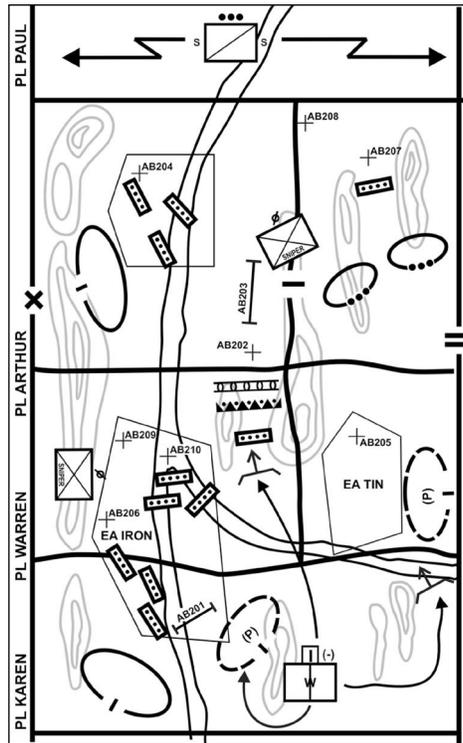


Figure 4 — Defense of an Area of Operations (FM 3-21.20)

This figure clearly shows the tying obstacles to the terrain and planning for the integration of indirect fires.

advanced another two to three fell as casualties. Surprise had been near complete, and they simply couldn't get their own M240Bs in a position to suppress the OPFOR that owned "the high ground." Suppressive fires from their M2 BFVs were not available because they were destroyed during the initial AT volley fires. The OPFOR rifle company commander called his boss; conditions were set for the mechanized force to exploit the newly created point of penetration in vicinity of the John Wayne Foothills. T-80s, BMP-2s, and BRDM-2s began pouring through the Hill 824-781 East gap and down the Siberian Highway. The rotational unit battalion attempted to reposition its M1 Abrams and M2 BFVs from the eastern battle position in vicinity of the Schoolbus Wadi over to the west to block the point of penetration. It was too late. The tanks and BFVs were caught in the open fighting in two different directions. They had to contend with the enemy mechanized force to their north and the OPFOR AT gunners high above on the base of Tiefert Mountain to their west. Another mechanized company team repositioned and was further attrited, contributing to the battalion's sequential defeat in detail. The OPFOR mechanized force continued driving south to subsequent objectives. It was a good morning that made up for a long night.

Observations — Units must identify key terrain that dominates adjacent mobility corridors. In this vignette, the

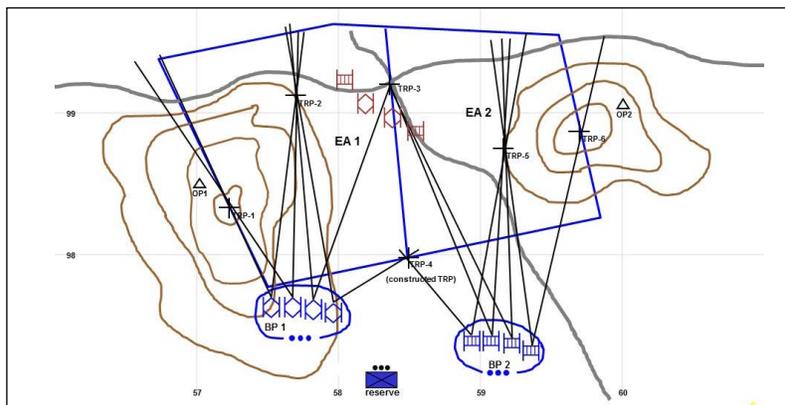


Figure 5 — Engagement Priorities

Engagement priorities entail the sequential ordering of targets to be engaged. They serve one or more of the following critical fire-control functions: prioritize targets, employ best weapon for target, and/or distribute unit's fires. — FM 3-21.10

rotational unit mistakenly identified the low-lying John Wayne Foothills as being key terrain dominating the eastern mouth of the John Wayne Pass as well as the Siberian Highway. These low-lying foothills are certainly significant cover and concealment for mounted vehicular platforms but are relatively insignificant when compared to the key terrain at higher elevation seized by the OPFOR in this vignette. The rotational unit was content to occupy the foothills with Infantrymen and vehicular platforms, but it did not account for the key terrain at higher elevations to its flank. By the time leaders identified the threat above them, it was too late to reposition forces to mitigate the tactical risk presented by the enemy rifle company.

Once key terrain is identified during mission analysis, the unit must then account for that key terrain during the course of action development and course of action analysis (wargaming). In this example, the OPFOR identified the high ground on the eastern base of Tiefert Mountain as being key terrain that dominated the John Wayne Pass, the nearby foothills, and the Siberian Highway high-speed avenue of approach. Infiltrations are hard work, and the OPFOR infantry invested the time and effort during a night infiltration to seize this key and dominating terrain. Infiltrations during hours of limited visibility allow infantry units to compensate for their slower rates of movement and lack of armored protection in comparison to mobile mounted forces. In this case, the rotational unit was initially closer in proximity to this key terrain, but the OPFOR rifle company simply outworked its rotational unit counterparts to get to this key terrain first. The dividends were destruction of nearly two mechanized company teams and creation of a point of penetration exploited by follow-on mechanized forces.

Urban Assault on Razish

Razish is huge. Consisting of more than 500 buildings and compounds, the city can easily consume an entire brigade combat team. To say that clearing the city is a complex endeavor would be an understatement. The Stryker battalion commander wasn't sure where to start. Gaining a foothold in the city would be tough enough. Then there was the question about how to maintain tempo once clearing operations commenced. How would the battalion's actions be synchronized with its adjacent battalion task force that was simultaneously clearing the city from west to east along their northern flank? What if the enemy decided they wanted to fight in depth along the approach march before ever getting to Razish? On the night before the attack, the task force scouts infiltrated in separate sections to key terrain overlooking Razish from both the west and south. They had nearly 24 hours to observe Razish and



Infantry Soldiers secure dominant terrain with their most lethal weapon against a motorized infantry battalion — the Javelin. Due to a chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) threat, the Infantrymen were often required to move wearing protective gear. The Soldiers in this photo are wearing Joint Service Lightweight Integrated Suit Technology (JLIST) gear.



The National Urban Warfare Center, also known as the Atropian city of Razish, is viewed from the south. The prison complex is seen at the bottom left with the rock pile to its immediate north.

report on patterns of life and activity. The good news was that they confirmed little enemy presence along the battalion’s planned avenue of approach through Hidden Valley. That didn’t mean the enemy was absent. It likely meant that enemy scouts were content with remaining undetected in order to trigger enemy indirect fires against the main force on the following night. The bad news was that the enemy had surrounded the city with protective mine and wire obstacles. It was going to be tough to gain a foothold.

On the following night, two platoons of combat power from Charlie Company dismounted their Strykers out of direct-fire contact at an ORP along the southern wall of Hidden Valley. From there they infiltrated to their planned support-by-fire (SBF) position on a ridgeline south of Razish in order to suppress enemy forces to the north. This support element consisted of a single rifle platoon and a platoon of three weapons squads harvested from across Charlie Company; both platoons were under the control of the company executive officer. This gave the element enough combat power to fight for the SBF position as well as performing its primary mission of suppressing enemy forces in support of the battalion’s decisive operation. Furthermore, that left the remaining two understrength rifle platoons under the leadership of the company commander as an additional “maneuver force” that could be utilized in a follow-and-assume role during operations in Razish. It was fortuitous that the support element had the additional rifle platoon because it did indeed make contact with six enemy scouts during the approach to the SBF position. After a short exchange of small arms direct fire, the enemy scouts realized that they were outgunned and broke contact.

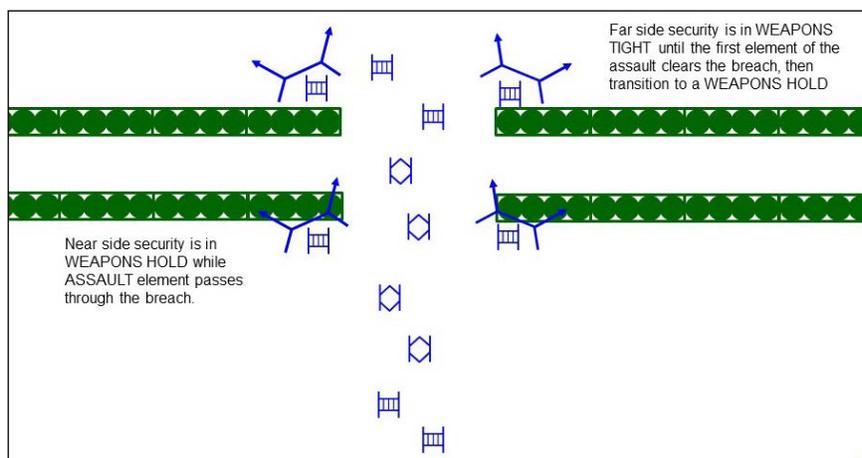


Figure 6 — Weapons Control Status

The three levels of weapons control status (WCS) outline the conditions, based on target identification criteria, under which friendly elements may engage. The commander sets and adjusts the WCS based on friendly and enemy disposition. In general, a more restrictive WCS relates to a higher probability of fratricide. The three levels, in descending order of restriction, are:

- WEAPONS HOLD** (Engage only if engaged or ordered to engage)
- WEAPONS TIGHT** (Engage only targets positively identified as enemy)
- WEAPONS FREE** (Engage any targets not positively identified as friendly)



Assuming the role of a mobile SBF position, a mounted platform sits far back enough the front line trace to maintain survivability but has plenty of range extending beyond it.

Second in the order of movement, Alpha Company dismounted its Strykers out of direct-fire contact at an ORP along the northern wall of Hidden Valley. From there a rifle platoon established an SBF position on the key terrain high above the eastern mouth of the valley that had been cleared by the scouts the night before. With their M240Bs, the Soldiers suppressed enemy forces in the vicinity of a prison compound to facilitate the remainder of the company, which was breaching the protective obstacles. They started with 10 seconds of simultaneous fires at a cyclic rate, and then the gun crews transitioned to alternating fires at a sustained rate for the next six minutes. Once the weapons squad leader observed the absence of enemy figures in the west-facing apertures, he ordered his guns to go into a “watch and shoot” mode suppressing targets of opportunity while also conserving ammunition. The company had been augmented by attachment of an engineer platoon and a section of Mobile Gun System (MGS) Strykers. The MGS platforms blew holes through the obstacles as well as suppressed any west-facing apertures from the prison compound. Meanwhile smoke obscuration delivered by pre-planned field artillery targets on the eastern edge of the prison compound provided attached Sappers with their opportunity. The Sappers utilized the obscuration and suppressive effects from both the SBF position and the MGS platforms to move forward with Bangalore torpedoes to breach any remaining obstacles. They just needed large enough lanes for the introduction of infantry for now. They could further reduce the obstacle for vehicle lanes later. That left Alpha Company with its two remaining rifle platoons to clear the prison compound, establishing a foothold for the introduction of Bravo Company.

Bravo Company was patient. They couldn't afford to create a “traffic jam” with Alpha Company in the foothold although that was what was essentially happening back at the ORP where the two companies had dismounted their ICVs. The enemy scouts who had remained invisible in Hidden Valley for the previous 24 hours now began to trigger enemy indirect fires on “the parking lot” of ICVs. Bravo Company lost a platoon's worth of vehicles. Fortunately, its Infantrymen were already on the ground, but that was four fewer “mobile SBF positions” they would have available for the near term. Alpha 6 relayed to Bravo 6 that the prison compound was clear, but he wasn't sure how long he could hold it because he was being effectively suppressed by enemy forces on top of a rock pile overlooking the compound's northeastern perimeter. The battalion fire support officer (FSO) already had a pre-planned mortar mission for this rock pile because they had identified it as being key terrain for both sides. Furthermore, the task force scouts to the west were in position to observe and adjust fires as required. The 11Cs went into action, and the enemy platoon was soon reduced to a squad by effective 120mm high explosive (HE) fires. Bravo Company poured through the foothold and up toward the peak of the rock pile. The remaining enemy infantry saw the approaching combat power and withdrew into the heart of Razish. Bravo Company quickly established its own SBF position, suppressing enemy forces on the western perimeter of the town. That cued Alpha Company to call its platoon that had established its SBF west of the prison compound forward. Casualties had reduced both companies

down to two effective rifle platoons each, but Charlie Company's SBF on the south wall was having good effects versus the enemy in the city. It was difficult for the OPFOR to reposition forces between Charlie Company's SBF to the south and Bravo Company's SBF to the west on the rock pile. The two SBF positions forced the enemy to fight simultaneously in two different directions, enabling their brother battalion task force to establish its own foothold in the northwest corner of Razish. Now, there were two Stryker Infantry battalions abreast of each other. They would conduct successive bounds from west to east ensuring they could mutually support each other by suppressing west-facing apertures in front of each other. Internally, the battalion bounded Bravo and Alpha Companies in a similar manner. Bravo was on the north flank and also responsible for coordinating with the adjacent battalion to its northern flank. Alpha Company cleared west to east along the south flank of Bravo. Both companies moved in successive bounds, suppressing apertures in front of the other. They were careful to coordinate the lead trace of the adjacent unit's assault elements. They were also correct in their analysis of the enormous size of the city leading to the conclusion that the linear danger areas to be crossed were numerous. They prepared for this eventuality identified during mission analysis by requisitioning for handheld smoke grenades and smoke pots. The smoke was received a few hours prior to SP the previous night and now proved to be a tremendous combat multiplier. Smoke was utilized between every cluster of buildings to facilitate bounding rifle squads. The cargo pockets of nearly every Infantryman bulged and overflowed with previously constructed "wolf-tail" near-recognition signals. They would use every wolf-tail available, and now these markers paid dividends assisting the M240B gunners in Charlie Company's SBF position with shifting their wall of steel 15 degrees in front of the forward line of troops (FLOT).

The Sappers completed reduction of the obstacles west of the prison compound just before BMNT, and now the battalion could introduce Strykers into the fight. As daylight descended on Razish, Alpha Company bounded a platoon of ICVs forward along the southern edge of the town. These vehicles were effective in suppressing west-facing apertures with their M2 .50 cal. machine guns. They were so effective that they started to get greedy. Three ICVs bounded forward of the adjacent rifle squads clearing buildings on their northern flank with the platoon sergeant's vehicle hesitating behind. It's almost as if he seemed to sense what was about to happen. The three ICVs bounded no more than 200 meters forward of the Infantrymen and were all destroyed by enemy RPG-7 fires within five minutes. Alpha Company bounded another platoon of ICVs forward to assume the role of mobile SBF position. These ICVs stayed echeloned slightly behind the bounding rifle squads providing overwatch with their crew-served machine guns. The blinking lights of their brother platoon's ICVs served as a hard lesson learned. Charlie Company's support element, still occupying a SBF position south of the town, reported the approach of enemy vehicles from the east. Fortunately, these Soldiers had infiltrated the night before with their Javelins and were in the perfect position to destroy the lead two vehicles from the enemy armored force. The remainder of the enemy mechanized company decided that was enough and withdrew out of direct fire range. Clearance of Razish would consume the remainder of the morning, but the task force accomplished its mission with two rifle companies plus enablers remaining and still capable of continuing future offensive operations.

Observations — *This unit effectively utilized a backwards planning approach during course of action development. They began by identifying the last covered and concealed position that would serve as an assault position. This allowed the unit to identify where they would create a point of penetration facilitating establishment of a foothold. Identification of the planned assault position, proposed point of penetration, and foothold allowed the unit to subsequently identify the best location for an SBF position which factored in "battlefield geometry." Specifically, the unit attempted to attain as close to a 90-degree angle between the support and assault elements. This "right angle" between support and assault elements facilitated the support element's ability to suppress enemy forces for the maximum time possible. They were able to continuously shift suppressive fires at the "sweet spot" of 15-20 degrees in advance of maneuvering assault forces. Rotational units often place the SBF position at too close of an angle to the assault position, forcing the support element to shift or lift suppressive fires prematurely. This results in the enemy not being suppressed and the assault element incurring increased casualties.*

The unit also effectively identified times of suppression required to facilitate maneuver of the assault elements from their assault positions, execution of the breach, and subsequent maneuver to exploit the point of penetration. These identified required times of suppression allowed the unit to prioritize distribution of ammunition among various support elements, and perform "machine gun math" in determining control and rates of fires. (Read Chapter 6 of Marine Corps Warfighting Publication [MCWP] 3-15.1, Machine Guns and Machine Gun Gunnery, right now!) This in turn prevented the enemy from massing effects versus the assault elements as well as limiting the enemy's

ability to reposition forces as primary fighting positions became untenable. Rotational units often forget to employ MGS vehicles as infantry support platforms. The main guns of these platforms are ideal for blasting holes in enemy protective obstacles as well as suppressing enemy strongpoint positions. ICVs were effectively utilized in this operation as mobile SBF platforms; however, as soon as they advanced forward of their respective rifle squads they became vulnerable to enemy rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) fire. The ICVs that remained echeloned slightly rear right (or left) of their rifle squads were able to best suppress enemy forces with their heavy crew-served weapon systems. Tactical risk from enemy RPG or anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) systems was mitigated by the achieved mutual support of their rifle squads maneuvering forward of their ICVs to destroy or suppress those anti-armor threats. The unit effectively utilized its heavy mortars to suppress enemy infantry on identified key terrain dominating western approaches to the city. Finally, the unit planned for clearance in depth of urban terrain by ordering increased quantities of handheld smoke grenades, smoke pots, and construction of near-recognition signal markers (“wolf-tails”) which were detectable by all types of optics (daylight, IR, and thermal).

Infiltration of Ujen

The Infantrymen from Charlie Company moved forward at a brisk pace. Their destination was Ujen, the second largest city at NTC. It might as well be on an island; it was located at Four Corners surrounded on all sides by flat, wide open terrain. Shortly after EENT the Stryker infantry battalion directed Bravo Company to move to the west of Ujen. It was a feint so they had to move well outside of the four-kilometer range of any defending AT-5 systems but close enough to deceive the enemy forces inside the town into thinking that they were posturing for an attack from the west. Meanwhile, the other two rifle companies moved to their assault positions east of Hill 876, which was more than four kilometers east of Ujen. From this location, Charlie Company dismounted its ICVs. These Infantrymen were now moving across the open desert floor toward Ujen to the west. Limited visibility and scattered creosote bushes were their only forms of concealment. It would take them nearly four hours to cross the terrain from Hill 876 to Ujen. They needed Bravo Company’s feint to fix the OPFOR’s attention for as long as possible. If the OPFOR positioned ATGM and crew-served weapon systems to the western side of town, then establishment of the foothold on the eastern side of town would be relatively easy.

It was now 0330 and Charlie Company’s rifle platoons were less than 500 meters from the eastern edge of Ujen. Their dismounted infiltration across nearly four kilometers was successful so far, but now shots rang out from a rifle in the town, perhaps a recon by fire. Their presence had been detected, but the element of surprise was still in effect. The OPFOR infantry could not reposition its machine guns fast enough. Charlie Company was now stacking up four-man fire teams outside the doorway of the easternmost building. The first couple of buildings were rapidly cleared and a foothold established. The nine buildings along the eastern edge of town were subsequently cleared and seized with little direct-fire contact. The OPFOR was concentrated to the west, and the initiative was now firmly in the hands of the rotational unit. The rotational unit’s possession of the nine buildings on the eastern edge of Ujen now eliminated those structures to include their eastern facing apertures and rooftops as options for the OPFOR to employ their AT-5s and AT-13s. With the AT threat to the east mitigated, the battalion commander now ordered Alpha Company, still mounted on the east side of Hill 876, to move rapidly to the Ujen foothold. From there it would



Ujen provides a challenging tactical problem for closing the distance and seizing a foothold.

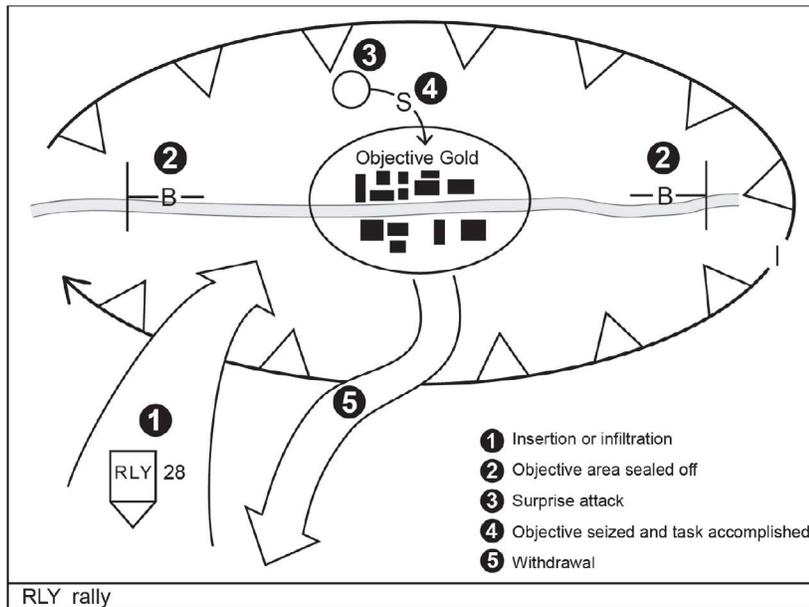


Figure 7 — Five Phases of a Raid (FM 3-90.1)

coordinate a link-up with Charlie Company to complete clearance of Ujen from east to west. Battalion mortars fired a pre-planned smoke target just in case Alpha needed some additional obscuration during its approach march. It was nice but unnecessary. The OPFOR, reeling from its loss of the eastern foothold, now simply tried to delay the inevitable.

Alpha Company arrived at the foothold, dismounted its rifle platoons, and began clearing the northern half of the city from east to west. Charlie Company, relieved to have Alpha Company take off some of the pressure, now focused on clearing its assigned half of the city to the south. The companies cleared from east to west, moving in successive bounds so they could provide mutual support via the suppression of east-facing apertures along the seam between the two companies. Alpha Company began maneuvering a section of ICVs echeloned to the right rear of its assaulting infantry in order to provide additional suppressive fires in support of maneuver. Bravo Company was now directed to follow and support behind Charlie Company which had cleared most of its objective but had sustained the highest number of casualties during its initial fight for the foothold. As the sun rose, remnants of the OPFOR infantry withdrew into a compound on the northwest corner of the city with nowhere else to go. They were still in shock from the turn of events. Limited visibility... a mounted feint... a stealthy, dismounted infiltration... then rapid introduction of mounted forces — it all added up to complete and total surprise. The OPFOR would have to hot wash this one. This was the most effective infiltration the Tarantula OC/Ts had observed in more than six months.

Observations — *It's tough for infantry forces to keep up with fast, armored forces in desert terrain. The great equalizer is their ability to maneuver at times (during limited visibility), locations (complex, canalizing terrain), and with methods (dismounted infiltration) where the advantages of enemy armor (speed and protection) are nullified. Many rotational units have elected to maximize available time for additional planning, waiting until daylight hours to begin their attack on Ujen or other urban objectives. Then they attempt to echelon suppressive fires and obscuration in an attempt to keep their Infantrymen mounted for as long as possible prior to attempting to establish the foothold. Many of these rifle squads are lost in the backs of their Strykers or BFVs as a result of the massed effects of a defending OPFOR that detected them well beyond the maximum effective range of their AT-5 and AT-13 systems.*

This particular unit attacked at a time of its choosing when it believed the OPFOR would be at their lowest level of alertness and less than ideal conditions of visibility. They set conditions for the successful infiltration by conducting a mounted feint knowing that the movement of a large number of Stryker vehicular platforms would command the attention of defending forces. The deception force was careful not to move inside the maximum engagement lines of the AT-5 systems knowing that they needed to survive and remain active in order to sell the feint. Meanwhile, the infantry force dismounted to perform its stealthy infiltration understanding that its ability to avoid compromise was also dependent on its ability to present as small of a signature as possible. Finally, the rotational unit planned for success by having a mounted Infantry force ready to rapidly exploit the foothold once established by the infiltration force. It carefully planned its mounted avenue of approach based on elimination of AT firing apertures from the

nine buildings along the eastern edge of the city. Indeed, infiltration during hours of limited visibility served as the speed and protection for this infantry attack!

Part II

The April-June issue of *INFANTRY* Magazine will feature Part II of “Infantry Attacks at NTC” and includes vignettes on:

- * Forcible Entry: An Airborne Interlude,
- * Ambush at Bravo Pass, and
- * Raid on Puma-1: Planning Backwards from the Objective.

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