

4-91

OPERATION DESERT STORM
BATTLE OF NORFOLK
SCOUT PLATOON
TASK FORCE 5-16, 1ID
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The Battle of Norfolk, Operation Desert Storm, was an extremely successful operation for the Scout Platoon of Task Force 5-16 Infantry.

On the morning of 24 February 1991, the ground war of Operation Desert Storm began for the 1st Infantry Division. Our first mission was to cut and clear lanes through the enemy wire and minefields so the 1st (UK) Division could pass through the next day. The division accomplished this by breaching with two brigades abreast. The breach and subsequent attack missions inside of Phase Line New Jersey were extremely successful. (see map A)

The division had a contingency plan, Oplan Jeremiah II, that was based on exploiting overwhelming success. Jeremiah II called for a rapid movement by the 1st Infantry Division to the north and east into the flanks of the Republican Guards Division. On the morning of 26 February, the division would execute Jeremiah II. Task Force 5-16 IN, 1st Brigade, had been one of the lead units up until this point. Today, it would follow in support Task Force 2-34 Armor and 1-34 Armor, the other two maneuver units of the 1st Brigade. The division's mission was to move approximately sixty kilometers to Phase Line Hartz. (see map A) There it would establish a hasty defense and prepare for future operations.

I was the scout platoon leader for Task Force 5-16. The platoon consisted of six M3 Cavalry Fighting Vehicles and thirty-three enlisted soldiers; to aid in land navigation, the platoon also had three global positioning systems (GPS). The standard movement formations we used were two vehicle sections, three vehicle sections, and six vehicle organization. (see sketch A) On the morning of 26 February, the platoon's mission was to screen the task force front and maintain visual contact with the rear elements of 1st Battalion, 5th Field Artillery. The brigade commander chose to put his field artillery battalion behind 1-34 and 2-34, to keep his indirect fires well forward. To accomplish my mission, I chose to use three section organization. The movement went very well despite severe sandstorms that restricted visibility and made it difficult to maintain visual contact with my other two sections or the artillery battalion. We arrived at Phase Line Hartz around 1500 hours, and the task force closed on us between 1530 and 1600 hours.

The platoon refueled and set up a forward screen, enabling the task force to conduct refueling operations.

At 1645 hours, the task force received a FRAGO from brigade to continue the attack east the following morning. Twenty-five minutes later, it received a second FRAGO for an immediate attack east into elements of the Republican Guard's Tawakalna Division. The task force was still refueling but was near completion. The three brigade elements forward of the task force had already moved out. The division commander had been given the option by Corps of attacking that night or at first light the morning of 27 February. The 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment (VIIth Corps ACR) was in contact with the Tawakalna Division vicinity of Phase Line Lime. (see map A) The 1st Division Commander chose to conduct a night passage of lines and night attack to exploit our superior night vision equipment.

Still screening the task force front, my platoon began movement. Our rate of movement was 25 to 35 kph, unusually fast for a typical night movement but necessary to catch up with the brigade. We closed on the brigade main body an hour-and-a-half prior to the commencement of the attack.

The task force mission was to follow in support of Task Force 2-34 and 1-34 Armor. During the passage of the lines, the task force would follow 2-34, then move south and follow TF 2-34 and 1-34. (see map A) This would enable the task force to take care of any enemy personnel or equipment by-passed or over-looked. The intelligence was vague on the Tawakalna Division. Approaching the passage point, we observed burning vehicles and multiple launched rocket fire but were unsure of the enemy situation.

The platoon mission was to keep the task force oriented during the passage of lines. To accomplish this, I had one two-vehicle section follow 2-34 and one two vehicle section follow 1-34 to their passage points. My section remained center of the sector while the task force conducted its passage. Once 2-34 and 1-34 completed their passage, my two sections returned to my location. This enabled us to pass through the 2nd ACR as a platoon. I coordinated our passage with the 2nd ACR via FM communications. We linked up with the rear of our task force. Our task force was halted, allowing 1-34 and 2-34 to deploy in battle formations. Task Force 5-16 also took this time to arrange in battle formation.

While the task force was completing that, the task force commander instructed me to move my platoon forward to screen the task force front. My mission was to maintain visual contact with the rear elements of 2-34 and 1-34. This would keep the task force in the center sector. The task force maintained weapons hold on tank and Bradley main gun systems, due to the large numbers of friendly forces to our front. 1-34 had already had a friendly fire incident immediately after their passage.

As 1-34 and 2-34 began their movement, they immediately made contact with the enemy. Because of the location of the separating enemy forces, 2-34 moved north and 1-34 moved south. This left the center sector open. (see map A)

Observing this, I informed the task force commander. His instructions were to continue movement with extreme caution. I chose to move in two section organization. (see sketch A) My lead scout section leader was having problems with his night sight, so I moved up to take his position. We began movement and, immediately, my gunner spotted two BMPs fifteen hundred meters forward of our location. They were crossing to our front, exposing their flank. Because of this, I did not think they had spotted my platoon. I immediately halted the platoon. The task force was still on weapons hold, forcing me to contact the task force commander prior to engaging. His instructions were to positively identify them as BMPs. I took a second look, making sure they were BMPs. Upon positive identification, I ordered my gunner and my wingman to open fire. Simultaneously, the two BMPs blew up and began burning. I reported this to the commander; his instructions were to continue the movement.

Although it is unusual for scouts to engage the enemy with direct fire, it was necessary to minimize the possibility of fratricide. Had the task force commander maneuvered an element around my platoon to engage the BMPs, the possibility of fratricide would have been greater.

As we continued our movement, it appeared we were moving through the Iraqi defense. We were bypassing BMPs, MTLB, trucks, and empty fighting positions. These vehicles were barely visible through our thermal sights. It was obvious the vehicles had not been operated recently. We were moving due east, and the Iraqi

defense was oriented south. Apparently, they had not expected us to attack from the west. This was a key element to the success of our attack.

Just as he had moments before, my gunner spotted two enemy vehicles crossing to our front. After observing the vehicles, I identified them as BRDMs. My reaction was the same as before. I halted the platoon, ensuring the four lead vehicles were on-line and ordered them to open fire. The results were identical as before; the vehicles blew up and began burning.

At this point, the task force was halted while 2-34 and 1-34 re-established contact. They were well forward of my platoon. We remained halted for about an hour.

Upon continuing our movement, we began bypassing more abandoned enemy vehicles and dismounted soldiers. Through the thermal sights, we saw that the soldier's hands were empty and raised in the air. They obviously wanted to surrender. My platoon had not been engaged by the enemy up to this point.

We continued to move east towards our limit of advance, Phase Line Milford. (see map A) My platoon reached Phase Line Milford approximately forty-five minutes prior to sunrise. Phase Line Milford was a road which ran north to south. We halted on the west side of the road.

One of my squad leaders spotted two enemy soldiers across the road in a dug-in position. I instructed him to fire to their flanks. This had been standard procedure which gave the enemy an opportunity to surrender. They did not surrender. I instructed my squad leader to fire a M203 grenade into their position. This was necessary because I did not know if at some point they would open fire on my platoon. I observed, through my thermal sight, two rounds explode on their position. I assumed that the rounds had neutralized the enemy. By this time, the task force reached Phase Line Milford. I requested an infantry platoon to move across the road. After crossing the road mounted, the platoon used their vehicles to overwatch. The platoon's dismounted squad moved up to check the position. I observed the squad take approximately twenty enemy soldiers from the position. The enemy soldiers were armed with AK47s and RPGs. The position was a bunker system large enough to afford the enemy soldiers protection against our fire.

It was daylight by now, which marked the end of the Battle of Norfolk for my scout platoon.

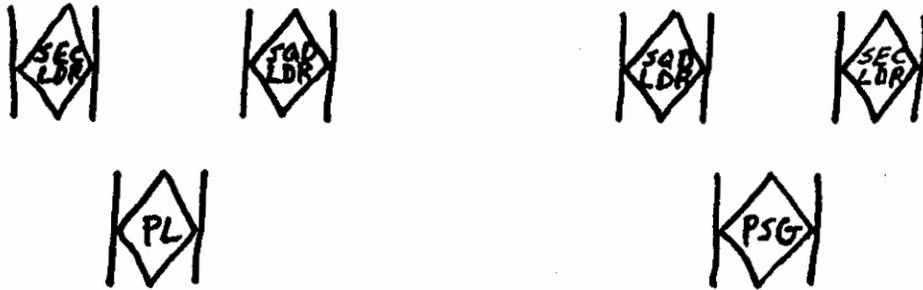
The Battle of Norfolk was a successful operation for my scout platoon and my task force. Although there were many engagements by 1-34 and 2-34, we had a limited number of enemy in our sector willing to stay and fight. The thermal sights on the Bradleys and M1A1 Tanks enabled us to identify the enemy at ranges where he could not identify us. This advantage was a key element in this night attack. The other key elements were effective land navigation and superior weapon systems. The GPS enabled us to move great distances accurately. I believe it would have been extremely difficult to conduct a night attack during limited visibility without the GPS. The first two engagements my platoon were involved in were successful due to the range of the Bradley main gun. We were able to open fire at 1500-2000 meters. At this range, their machine guns and the BMP main gun could not destroy my vehicles.

The last engagement, at Phase Line Milford, could have been a costly one for my platoon. I thought we had neutralized those enemy soldiers. Actually, the bunker system was large enough to protect the twenty enemy soldiers that were taken prisoner. In combat, never assume anything such as I did in this case.

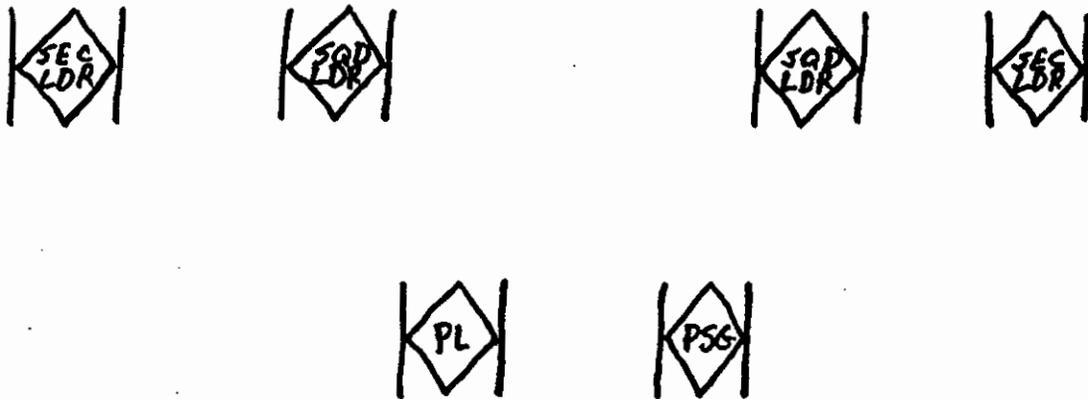
Sketch A



6 vehicle organization



2 section organization



3 section organization

- Distances between vehicles will vary due to METT-T