

TRAINING NOTES



Mobile Obstacle Detachment

MAJOR ROGER J. SOMERVILLE

The Soviets' doctrine on the employment of their antitank and engineer mobile obstacle detachment (MOD) brings to mind some ways in which a similar detachment could be employed in the United States Army.

The Soviet MOD (POZ in Russian) is composed mostly of combat engineers who have the primary mission of protecting a unit's flanks and repelling enemy counterattacks. They pay particular attention to avenues of approach that are most suitable for tanks. (See the article on Soviet landmine operations in this issue for a more complete discussion of MODs.)

I have observed combat engineers on the engagement simulation exercise battlefields at both the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin and the Hohenfels Training Area in Germany. These engineers always work hard on the day and night before a big defensive mission. Then, by early morning daylight, they are usually pulled off the front lines in anticipation of the enemy's attack and placed in the rear of the task force to rest or to guard the task force's tactical operations center. Around the battlefield, I have found abandoned engineer ammunition supply points containing mines that had not been placed because of a lack of coordination or time. Thus, a valuable

combat multiplier had been underutilized and the materials lost or forgotten.

These engineers could be used to form an obstacle placement team or a mobile obstacle detachment that could be loaded with antitank mines, and ready and waiting for a mission to place a minefield obstacle in a key location.

PLATOON

This MOD could consist of a combat engineer platoon mounted in M113 armored personnel carriers. This would allow excellent command and control, and the vehicles would protect the soldiers from artillery and small arms fires in the battlefield area. The M113s would be loaded with uncrated mines that could be emplaced out the backs of the vehicles. The platoon would be placed in a position on the battlefield from which it could move quickly to a predetermined critical choke point. This would give a task force commander an additional combat force he could employ once he had determined where the enemy would conduct his main assault.

If positioned correctly, the MOD could be at an obstacle site within minutes and in a 20-minute period

place a surface-laid antitank minefield. Such a minefield obstacle can be emplaced with three rows of mines extending over 500 meters with a 50 percent density.

The 16th Engineer Battalion, 1st Armored Division, has developed and perfected a drill that involves laying antitank mines out the back of a squad M113 while it is moving along a designated route. (This drill is described in detail in "The One-Hour Minefield," by Captain Philip L. Reed, *ENGINEER* Magazine, Number 1, 1987, pages 22-24. A similar drill used by the 1st Engineer Battalion is described in "Revising the Standard Pattern Minefield," by Captain Wayne Whaley, *ENGINEER*, Volume 17, PB 5-87-2. There are other similar drills that will work, depending upon the equipment and imagination of a unit's leaders.)

With this engineer MOD available in the defense, a task force commander could quickly close wide avenues in the main or reserve battle areas without having to divert his artillery to fire a FASCAM minefield. To be effective, of course, the obstacle would have to be covered with direct antitank fires. In fact, the OPFOR successes at the NTC in the defense can almost always be credited to the unit's excellent job of

covering its obstacles with direct fires.

This MOD minefield would help give the commander obstacles in depth in his sector and could allow him the time to reposition other tank-killing forces to close a penetration and destroy the enemy forces. It would be advantageous for him to use his antitank reserves in close coordination with the MOD while it is placing the minefields. These antitank reserves would then be in a good position to place effective fires on enemy armored vehicles as they

were slowed by the obstacles. The anti-tank weapon systems could come from the repositioned systems in the screening force and combat outpost units.

Engineers, as part of the maneuver team, have a unique combat power that other combat arms do not have available to them in large quantities—mines that can kill Soviet tanks. Both Engineer and maneuver commanders must plan for and use Engineers as a combat multiplier. The MOD is one example of a way to do this, and others

can be developed by these commanders if they work as an integrated team and coordinate their efforts. With well trained forces, this will guarantee success.

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Platoon Live Fire Ambush

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During its division's FTX Golden Eagle 87 at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, Company C, 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) was tasked with developing a platoon live fire ambush range. Although numerous field manuals and circulars adequately describe ambush techniques, the results we found down-range on our live fire ambush targets not only taught us some valuable lessons, they also brought to light some interesting trends.

The ambush target we used consisted of two ranks of E-type plastic silhouettes located along the military crest of a ridge. We placed seven silhouettes in the front rank and six in the rear, and kept a four-foot space between the silhouettes in each rank. We placed the two ranks of targets 15 meters apart and staggered them both in width and in depth to simulate a squad moving in a modified wedge formation. We also attached a four-inch red balloon to the center of mass of each silhouette to provide a distinct aiming point, to create

shooter interest, and to allow the evaluation of each platoon's marksmanship performance.

We located our ambush position 85 meters from the ambush target on a parallel ridge. The ambush target was connected by cables that led to a road outside the safety fan. There, a soldier pulled on the cables to create a moving ambush target, and walked backward to move the target in a slow, hesitating manner. We intended from the beginning to create a realistic range bounded only by prudent safety constraints.

POSITION

In addition to the marksmanship involved, we evaluated each platoon on its reconnaissance and occupation of the ambush position. To avoid a "range mentality" as much as we could, we began a platoon's evaluation when it entered the objective rally point (ORP) and ended it with the cease fire. The evaluators fully camouflaged

themselves and acted at all times in a quiet, tactical manner.

Leaving the company assembly area, a rifle platoon crossed the line of departure at a specified time and linked up with the safety officer, who acted as a scout at the ORP. There the scout updated the platoon's key leaders on the enemy situation and conducted a thorough safety briefing.

While the scout guided the leaders' reconnaissance element forward to the ambush position, the platoon sergeant issued ammunition to the members of the patrol—10 rounds of 5.56mm ball to each rifleman, 50 rounds of 5.56mm NATO linked to each automatic rifleman, and 50 rounds of 7.62mm to each M60 gunner. He also issued two M18A1 claymores with which to initiate the ambush.

The scout stopped the leaders' reconnaissance party 50 to 75 meters short of the ambush position and pointed out the range limits to the platoon leader. Each platoon then emplaced its flank security and established communica-