

TRAINING NOTES



Desert Driving Tips

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Many of the soldiers who participated in Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM were unprepared for the terrain and the driving conditions they encountered. Generally, only those who had trained at the National Training Center (NTC)—or who had served previously in a desert area—had ever practiced desert driving in wheeled vehicles.

Among the soldiers who have served in a desert area are those assigned to the Observer Group Egypt (OGE) of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). The OGE, which always has about a dozen officers of the U.S. armed forces assigned to it, mans outposts and conducts numerous one-man, one-vehicle patrols of the western four-fifths of the Sinai Peninsula and one location west of the Suez Canal.

The following desert driving tips, distilled from the experiences of the observer group, may be useful to units that expect to encounter desert conditions and terrain in the future.

Off-road desert driving is a unique experience. Desert terrain, especially in the Sinai, consists of much more than just large, drifting sand dunes. It also includes mountains, cliffs, and deep valleys. In addition, the soil texture varies from soft, fine-grained sand to hard-packed sand, pebbles, gravel, and

rocks up to boulder size, and—in many places—a combination of all of these. (See also "Environmental Influences on Desert Operations," by Colonel Robert H. Clegg, in *INFANTRY*, May-June 1992, pages 28-34.)

Wheeled vehicle drivers and other soldiers assigned in or deployed to the Middle East need to learn about desert terrain and develop a confident attitude about driving in it. To do this, they must be given the correct equipment and realistic and demanding training.

VEHICLE EQUIPMENT

In most situations, driving is done in convoys or other groups of vehicles; rarely does a vehicle travel alone. When one does, however, the vehicle commander must have, in addition to his prescribed uniform and equipment, appropriate maps and sketches, a compass, binoculars, and sunglasses. The driver also should have sunglasses, of course. To insure survival in an emergency, each soldier in the vehicle should have flashlight, watch, water, food, matches or lighter, and knife.

The OGE has also compiled the following list of vehicle equipment (some of which is in addition to organic vehicle equipment). This equipment has proved adequate for any contingency or

situation a crew may encounter while driving in the desert:

- Tool kit.
- First Aid kit.
- Battery jumper cables.
- Jack-stand and pad.
- Towing cable with shackles on each end.
- One five-gallon jerry can of water.
- Two five-gallon jerry cans of fuel.
- Spout for fuel can.
- D-handled shovel.
- Air pump.
- Sandbags.
- Two three-foot sections of PSP (pierced steel planking).
- Second spare tire.

Although the equipment on this list is not authorized by a unit's Table of Organization and Equipment (TOE), it can be procured through supply Class IV and local-purchase requests and through local self service supply centers (SSSCs). At least one vehicle in each convoy should carry these items.

Realistic and demanding driver training needs to be conducted in a large sandy area. If no such area is available, beaches, lake or sea shores, and dry or shallow riverbeds should be considered.

Prospective desert drivers must first be proficient at operating and properly maintaining vehicles with standard transmissions. The first step of their training should be riding with an expe-

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rienced driver, preferably a noncommissioned officer, over soft sand while he explains to them the conditions under which they should accelerate and shift gears. Each soldier should then be given an opportunity to drive on representative desert terrain.

As part of this training, the soldiers should learn and practice the proper methods of extricating a vehicle that is stuck in the sand. If a vehicle is not stuck in sand accidentally, this situation can be created. The stuck vehicle should be jacked up as high as is safely possible (using the vehicle's additional jack stand to provide a platform), and the sand should be dug out from under and around each tire. One section of steel planking should be placed under one of the front tires and the other under the rear tire on the opposite side. Rocks, wood, sandbags, or other hard materials should be placed under the other two tires. All four tires may need to be deflated slightly for better traction. The driver should put the vehicle in Gear Four Low and accelerate according to the existing conditions.

Each driver should be allowed to practice desert driving and vehicle extrication repeatedly until he is competent and confident enough to know that he and his vehicle can overcome all desert terrain, obstacles, and other conditions.

The following key points (as modified from the guidance given to military observers of OGE, UNTSO) can be made about desert driving:

- Sand conditions change rapidly. Learn to read sand colors like a map.

- The "feel of the sand" is never the same, whether in the same vehicle or another vehicle. Experience is the only teacher.

- Getting stuck is normal. Accept it with patience.

- Cross a rippled sand area (if you cannot avoid it) parallel to the ripples and very slowly.

- Low fourth gear in four-wheel drive vehicles is the best overall gear to drive in.

- In soft sand, start the vehicle, accelerate, and (once moving) speed shift to second gear.

- Once you are committed to driving in sand, do not hesitate, slow down, or stop, but continue driving.

- Make all stops slowly and gradually. Plan stops. Never stop on an uphill grade.

- Never back into a position from which you cannot move forward.

- Plan your route from one terrain feature to the next.

- Know your exact location at all times.

- Accept backtracking; sometimes it is necessary.

- Never drive to the top of a dune—or get to a point where you are committed to do so—without first checking to see what is on the other side.

- Before cresting a dune, clear the sand from the vehicle's undercarriage. After cresting, use the low gear to go

straight down. Do not use the brakes.

- Never drive down into a depression among dunes where the sides are too steep to climb out.

- Communicate from high ground if possible.

- When patrolling in pairs, be mutually supporting.

- Vehicle recovery in a dune area is dangerous; repair on site if possible.

- Avoid mined areas, destroyed war equipment, and dunes that terminate in an oasis.

- Take a 15-minute "eye" break when sand blindness occurs.

- Reduce strain and fatigue by changing drivers and taking rest or meal breaks often. Start early and finish early.

- Never leave your vehicle unattended.

- Never attempt to walk out of the desert.

The thought of driving in the desert may intimidate some soldiers. With the proper equipment, realistic training, and opportunities to practice, they will develop a confident attitude and be prepared to accomplish their mission under all desert driving conditions.

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Advice for A Light Infantry Platoon Leader

CAPTAIN JOHN S. ZACHAU

New infantry platoon leaders are energetic and want to excel, but their energies are often unfocused. The

Infantry Officer Basic Course and the Ranger Course are excellent starting places, but they don't really provide

second lieutenants with all of the specific information they will need as platoon leaders.