

and the unit in Menil. Unfortunately, I think we took the second stories off most of the houses in Marenne and deposited them in the street.

But I came up out of my cellar grinning from ear to ear and very happy to be alive. So were the few men I still had with me, including the mess crew, none of whom had ever been through anything like this. To our sorrow, though, we saw that a German tank had flattened the trailer that held our Christmas meal.

My company was relieved several days later, and we moved to a reserve position, strangely enough in what was left of Verdennes, the town just across the valley, although it took us several days and lots of walking in what seemed to be circles to get there.

Still later, beginning on 3 January 1945 in a driving blizzard, our battalion was committed as part of a large U.S. coun-

terattacking force (the VII Corps) to close the bulge the Germans had driven in our lines. (Three days later, I was lying in a roadside ditch trying to hide from the effects of a German artillery bombardment that was shredding the tops of the trees that bordered the ditch and covered the surrounding hills and valleys. My radio operator, just behind me, tugged on one of my boots. When I turned toward him, he motioned that I had a call on the radio, which was on the battalion command net. I inched back to him, reached for the mike, and gave my call sign. Our battalion S-1 was on the other end. He said he just wanted to let me know that Headquarters First Army had just approved a battlefield promotion to captain for me, effective 4 January. Rather sarcastically, I suppose, I accepted the news, which was the last thing I needed to hear at the time, and asked him to get me a

set of captain's bars for when and if I ever got out of that ditch alive!)

We took part in the rest of the so-called Battle of the Bulge and ended our stint in Belgium in late January in the small town of Beho. (I don't remember when I got my bars.)

In early February, we finally made it to Eyselshoven and those warm, dry billets. And for those of us who were left—there weren't many—it was good to be home.

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Checkpoint/Roadblock Operations

MAJOR MARTIN N. STANTON

Among the most common tactical operations that are conducted in peace enforcement and humanitarian relief operations are checkpoint and roadblock operations—both at the bivouac sites of U.S. Army personnel and at mission critical installations such as headquarters, trains and logistical areas, airfields, or food distribution sites. In the deployment of Somalia, this has been true not only for the U.S. Army elements but for U.N. operations as well.

Checkpoints normally serve the dual purpose of screening the traffic passing through and presenting a barrier to hostile forces. They must be exposed and clearly visible, and the personnel manning them must have access to covered and concealed positions and enough firepower to react to fast-developing situations.

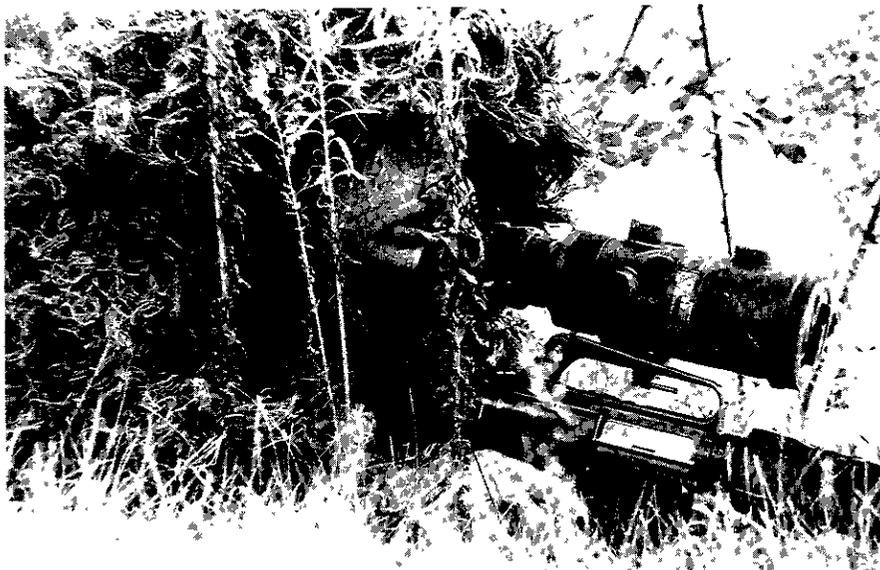
The following are some of the principles developed by the 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry, for these operations, many of which were used during the battalion's deployment to Somalia.

Personnel and Equipment. A checkpoint should not be manned by a unit less than fire-team size (four or five men, including a noncommissioned officer). Although a squad-size unit allows for multiple automatic weapons and the ability to inspect more vehicles and groups of people, the number of checkpoints or missions assigned to a company may preclude the use of a squad.

Each checkpoint should have at least one automatic weapon and one grenade launcher. The checkpoint element should also have AT-4 antiarmor weapons readily accessible for firing on short notice and claymore mines positioned to

cover the roadblock. For communications equipment, the checkpoint should have both wire and FM radio communications with the site command post. The checkpoint should also have zeroed night observation devices for all weapons, including a Dragon night sight, if possible, along with at least one pair of binoculars. If interpreters are available, they should be prepared to come to the roadblock on short notice.

Positioning of Personnel. A checkpoint should be at least 150 to 200 meters from the installation it is guarding. Most of the checkpoint personnel should be at least 50 meters from the position where vehicles and personnel are actually halted, and some should be in a position within 20 meters that allows one of its occupants to move forward and inspect vehicles or groups of people and then



Night observation devices, such as the starlight scope, can be particularly useful on checkpoint and roadblock operations.

remove the roadblock. Most of the firepower and command and control should be about 50 meters away.

Roadblock or Checkpoint Material. Roadblocks should consist of concertina wire and wooden sawhorses that one man can easily move. The 50 to 100 meters leading to the roadblock should have a series of zigzag obstacles that will force drivers to go around them slowly (at about five miles per hour). These obstacles should consist of heavily staked triple concertina fence with surface-laid M-21 mines. Earthen berms, abatis, or ditches cut in the roads also work well.

The advantages of mines and wire are that they do not offer potential cover to enemy forces as the other options do. Their disadvantages are that they may blow up vehicles carrying people who are not hostile but merely bad drivers.

The type of roadblock used depends largely on the threat. A higher threat necessitates a more substantial and lethal roadblock. Regardless of the type used, it should be able to stop a vehicle that is trying to speed or crash through it. All roadblocks must have warning signs at least 100 to 150 meters away from the first zigzag obstacle.

Roadblock or Checkpoint Operation. The soldiers manning a roadblock should maintain full alert so long as any non-U.S. or non-allied personnel or vehicles are near it. The roadblock detail

should at least keep the automatic weapon manned at all times and have one soldier scanning with the binoculars. When any vehicles or dismounted personnel are seen approaching, the roadblock goes to full alert. Those approaching are allowed to reach the sawhorses or the barbed wire on the road (that is, occupy the kill zone of the roadblock's weapons and claymores) before one designated man from the close position moves up to challenge them. This designated soldier inspects the vehicles and personnel. If he must go out of the site, he first calls an additional man forward to cover him. At checkpoints or roadblocks with a large volume of traffic, this task is better handled by a separate fire team. High-use checkpoints should be manned by at least a squad.

The soldiers look for armed personnel or explosives of any type. The detail should have an emergency position dug close to the block for the search personnel. At the first sign of trouble, the personnel jump into this hole, or at least throw themselves flat and low-crawl out of the kill zone. Most of the fire should come from the overwatching position. The detail should have a covert signal such as a codeword that can be said in a normal conversational tone of voice to alert the overwatching element that the search team is about to break for cover. The overwatching element should begin firing as soon as the search team has

thrown itself flat or reaches cover.

The checkpoint should also keep track of the number and type of vehicles and personnel traveling through the checkpoint and also log the time of each. Unless personnel limitations demand that a detail be rotated at night, checkpoint details should trade off in daylight only. The troops on checkpoint detail have little opportunity to rest, and the obvious advantage to placing a squad on checkpoint detail is that it has more people to perform the duties. Troops on checkpoint duty also spend long hours exposed to the weather conditions.

Leaders must make sure actions that may compromise camouflage (such as poncho sunshades) are not allowed to lessen the effectiveness of the overwatch positions. They should also consider uniform requirements. For example, in tropical climates, troops should have plenty of water and sunscreen available and should wear minimum load-bearing equipment when not actually engaged in guard duty or roadblock operations. Soldiers must wear some sort of head cover at all times. All personnel actively involved in the checkpoint operation (search teams and the like) should wear full body armor and helmets.

Finally, the greatest challenge to soldiers in checkpoint operations is staying alert. Checkpoint operations are boring, and the urge to cut corners increases as the weeks turn into months (and maybe years). We need only look back to the disaster at the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut in October 1983 to find an example of what happens when those on the outer perimeter and the checkpoints become lax. The same mind-numbing dullness, day in and day out, becomes the enemy, and the only effective solution is constant checking and double checking to enforce standards.

Since it is likely that operations such as these will be the most likely in the future, our units must train and prepare for checkpoint and roadblock missions.

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