

# Cordon and Search Operations

MAJOR CHRISTOPHER HUGHES  
MAJOR THOMAS G. ZIEK, JR.

An operations other than war (OOTW) scenario adds new wrinkles to the traditional Army missions, and the cordon and search is no exception. During Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY in Haiti in 1994, we had an opportunity to observe cordon and search missions and talk with some of the participants. That operation illustrated that to succeed in such an environment, infantry commanders at all levels must be able to adapt doctrinal missions to apply to situations that are often ambiguous.

The mission of the 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, in Haiti was to provide a stable and secure environment in which ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide could safely return to the country. In that uncertain situation, this translated into attempting to “de-fang” members of three predominant groups operating as the law: the FRAPH, a political and paramilitary organization designed to enforce the whims of the party in power; the FADH, the military/police force designed to keep the peace in the country; and the Attaches, the true mercenaries of the three groups.

The 1st Brigade Combat Team (BCT)—which operated in a portion of the capital city of Port-au-Prince—consisted of an infantry battalion and an armor battalion (minus), along with attachments of psychological operations (PSYOPs), counterintelligence (CI), military police (MP), engineers, and forward support battalion personnel. The brigade conducted active patrolling and cordon and search operations to keep the senior FRAPH

leaders off balance and to get weapons off the streets.

The environment in Haiti differed vastly from that in Somalia. Although the entry of U.S. military units into Haiti was supposedly peaceful, nobody was sure of the reception they would get. The fact that most Haitians had been supportive of U.S. operations on the ground required certain guidelines that hindered traditional wartime military operations. Because of this ambiguity, the units operated under extremely tight rules of engagement designed to control the use of deadly force. The command instituted policies that forbade the destruction of private property and hindered the search of adjacent areas. In addition, regardless of what the military situation might have dictated, the news media had free rein in the area. The troops therefore had to take a cautious approach to searching, for fear their actions might be misinterpreted.

These constraints made operations more difficult to conduct. The commanders at company, battalion, and brigade levels had to alter their traditional military missions to fit the environment. A case in point was the cordon and search missions assigned to the infantry teams, which were aimed at suspected weapon cache sites and command and control nodes.

On the basis of our observations and discussions with the 1st BCT, along with our collective experience, we want to share the following recommendations to help units conduct cordon and search operations. Although many of these ideas are not new, they may reduce

the need to relearn tactical lessons when attempting new missions.

First, knowing the enemy from a cultural standpoint helps a unit plan its operations. In the case of Haiti, helpful information included the following:

- Most of the people are poor and uneducated.
- Many of them are superstitious and believe in a mix of Voodoo and Christianity.
- It is a male-dominated society.
- The division between rich and poor is extreme, and wealth and power are flaunted by those who have them.
- Haiti has a history of violence and revolution that appears, paradoxically, alongside a naive trust of people. This translates into two seemingly opposite trends—vigilantism and respect for authority.

Knowing such facts as these before setting foot in a country allows a leader to evaluate some of the tools at his disposal. Several items come to mind in planning operations: The people may be susceptible to PSYOPs missions with simple and direct messages. They may be easily awed, and hence controlled, by such things as night leaflet drops or speakers and searchlights mounted on high-flying C-130 or UH-60 aircraft, or on HMMWVs (high-mobility multi-purpose wheeled vehicles). And because of the role of women in many societies, the emphasis in searching and detaining should be placed more upon the men than the women.

Since the United Nations had placed an embargo on Haiti in 1991, much of the country's infrastructure had deteriorated. Much of the threat that

U.S. forces faced would therefore be from unsophisticated weapon systems and command and control assets. In addition, because few people could afford to buy gasoline, those in powerful positions would obtain it through extortion or force. This information could be an area to key upon: Who has a car that operates? Where is it kept? Where does it go?

Finally, developing a rapport with the people when there is no threat can go a long way toward defusing potentially dangerous situations. It is also a way of obtaining human intelligence (HUMINT). In Haiti, 70 percent of the population supported Aristide in the 1990 elections, and since that time, these people had been repressed. Retaining the good will of the people therefore required a measured and careful use of force. This, in turn, allowed U.S. forces to tap into a potential wealth of HUMINT.

Because of the great division between the Haves and the Have Nots, care must be taken in using HUMINT information. The poor might conceivably feed our forces bad intelligence just to "get even," either with their enemies or just with people in a higher socio-economic status.

The cordon and search mission in Haiti was directed against suspected weapon cache sites. Due to the nature of the environment, most of these sites were small and easily moved, and therefore difficult to find. The intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) process was crucial to success. Doctrinally, the identification of suspected cache sites could be either a top-down process or a bottom-up process, and both approaches were used.

Using electronic, signal, and HUMINT assets, the task force targeting cell established target priorities daily and passed the information to the maneuver elements on the ground. The 1st Brigade commander used more of a bottom-up approach. With CI teams and mounted and dismounted patrols, the BCT was able to saturate an area with assets.

This saturation did several things: It allowed for a visible U.S. presence that fostered security; enabled the 1st BCT staff to identify and evaluate a target; and gave the troops on the ground a feel for the neighborhood. At times, the information gathered during this process forced slight adjustments on the target location (a certain house as opposed to another one). In an OOTW environ-

ment, where the rules of search are controlled, this refinement of the target can mean the difference between success and failure.

Once the target had been identified, localized, and verified through different sources, planning for the cordon and search operation began. The brigade's philosophy called for a quick strike using a company team that could bring overwhelming combat power to bear on the target. In this respect, M551 Sheridan tanks from the armor battalion were an integral part of the company team, as were attack helicopters, including AC-130 gunships.

In accordance with doctrine, the companies set up outer and inner cordons. Once these were established, the companies searched the suspected target. If something was found at the site, the owner was detained under Haitian law by U.S. forces. If nothing was found, no one could be detained, unless he or she happened to be on the joint task force's "detain on sight" list.

To ensure success, a company team should be task organized to take maximum advantage of all assets in the theater. In Haiti, Sheridans were a great deterrent force. While tanks are not normally used in a MOU environment, a docile and easily awed population, along with the nature of the mission itself, can make tanks a valuable addition to the team.

An MP squad should also be added; its hard-shelled HMMWV can give the company commander a convoy security asset. In addition, the MPs' training in crowd control makes them invaluable on the outer cordon.

PSYOPs personnel are a must for the team. In many cases, they can explain to gathering crowds what is going on and why, which helps keep them more docile while the operation is in progress.

A CI attachment, along with several interpreters, should also be added to the team. The team is valuable to the company commander, both in helping with the search and in questioning detainees to gather information. Explosive-sniffing dogs from the MPs should be brought along, if they are available. An engineer squad, complete with mine

#### RECOMMENDED TEAM TASK ORGANIZATION AND EQUIPMENT

##### CORDON

Tank platoon  
Interpreter  
PSYOPs team  
Engineer squad  
w/mine detector  
and demo kit  
MP squad  
Field ambulance  
Vehicles/drivers

Engineer tape  
Concertina wire  
Mine detector  
Mirrors for checking  
under vehicles  
Chalk  
Fast cuffs  
TOE equipment  
Saw horses

##### SECURITY

Infantry platoon w/all  
crew-served wpns.  
Medics  
Reserve squad  
Interpreters

Chalk  
Blindfolds  
Fast cuffs  
TOE equipment  
Engineer tape

##### SEARCH

Primary search squad  
Alternate search squad  
CI team  
Interpreters  
Mine team  
Command group  
Dog team

9mm pistols  
Grounded LBV/flak  
vests  
Flashlights  
Chalk  
Mine detector  
Shovels, picks  
Sledge hammer  
Pry bar  
Video camera  
EOD dog  
Plastic bags  
Bolt cutters  
Locks  
Plastic gloves

detectors and an explosives kit can open doors and search both the people and the ground in the target area.

The company itself should be task-organized into three teams: a cordon team, a security team, and a search team. (A recommended team task organization, including equipment, is shown in the accompanying box.)

**Cordon Team.** The mission of the cordon team is to set up the outer cordon along the major avenues of approach around the target area, using checkpoints. These soldiers stop and search all vehicles and personnel entering and leaving the area of operations. Due to the nature of the environment, U.S. forces cannot keep people from moving about in the outer cordon area, but all should be searched and control maintained. The staff judge advocate (SJA) representative should have definitive guidance published beforehand so the ground commander will know his legal limitations. The company executive officer should be with this team, because the vehicles will be positioned in this area, and because this is the area in which the news media will first come into contact with U.S. forces.

**Security Team.** The security team controls the inner cordon around the specific target area and the target itself by providing 360-degree security. This area should be much more tightly controlled, with elements securing as many avenues of approach as possible. This team secures the site itself before the search team begins its search. Any personnel found in the inner security zone, and between the security zone and the outer cordon, should be detained, searched, and questioned before being moved to a holding area, where they are then treated in accordance with standing operating procedures (SOPs) for detainee handling.

The security team is also responsible for controlling access into the target itself. Since this is the area that has the highest potential for action, company medics should be attached to the team. The security team is also responsible for crowd control as people move toward the target. The company first sergeant

should travel with the team to help the platoon leader.

**Search Team.** The search team should be relatively small, should consist only of experienced soldiers whenever possible, and should carry specialized equipment. To avoid confusion, this team should be the only element to enter the target area. The company commander should accompany the team to provide command and control and to make decisions concerning search procedures.

Experience with MPs indicates, by and large, that the docile population



found in this OOTW scenario will abide by the limits defined by engineer tape. The MPs are extremely good with crowd control, and their experience in this area is invaluable in defusing potentially damaging situations.

Because of the permissive environment, care must be taken not to destroy or deface property unnecessarily. Chalk, since it is non-permanent, should be used to mark items already searched, including people. Mine detectors can be used to search people and areas where weapons might be buried. Several Series 200 locks must be brought along, because each lock that is cut off must be replaced to prevent looters from ransacking the area once U.S. forces pull out. (In OOTW, this is a consideration that cannot be ignored.)

The search team should ground—and secure—their load-bearing vests (LBV) and flak vests during the search so it can be conducted quickly and efficiently. This is obviously determined by an analysis of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time). In Haiti, the situation suggested that the benefits of this decision outweighed the risks involved in having soldiers take off their flak vests. No anti-handling devices had been discovered, and troops conducting searches in full battle gear would tire out quickly in the high heat and humidity.

The ideal sequence of events is to conduct detailed rehearsals and a comprehensive pre-combat inspection before an operation. During the actual operation, surveillance units that have been left to watch the target should be attached to either the cordon team or the security team. The sequence of movement to the target should be cordon team first, followed by the headquarters section, the security team, and the search team. Thus, the operation can progress sequentially, and the commander will have the flexibility to alter the planned sequence in response to unexpected events.

The company team is sufficiently large to allow the commander the option of enlarging the search on the basis of new information collected by the interpreters and the CI team during the operation. The person giving the information should be taken along on the search. This allows military intelligence personnel to check future information from this person on the basis of a proven record of reliability. This was SOP in the 1st BCT.

Although most infantry platoons are good at conducting combat operations, most soldiers do not know how to search a room, unless there are combat veterans from Somalia or Vietnam in the company. The following is one technique for searching a room:

Once the sniffer dog has gone through, begin the search. Starting with the bottom floor and working up is a good method. First, move all of the furniture to one side of the room and examine the floor for cracks, dirt,

---

discoloration. Once this is done, move the furniture to the other side of the room and repeat the process. Then check all the walls the same way. Remove pictures, wall hangings, and rugs to check for holes. Look at the ceiling for openings to an attic or crawl space, and check these areas. Look for things that appear out of the ordinary. Once this is done, check the furniture, looking for false bottoms, ripped and re sewn areas in upholstery, and the like. Repeat these steps in each room of the target area. Take care not to dump items all over the place. This pollutes the area and makes it harder to search, and you might miss something or destroy property needlessly.

In some cases, the intimidation of the owner will lead him to "assist" you with the search. The MP dogs are good for this, as is finding the individual's most prized possessions and threatening to handle them roughly. Sometimes this is all it takes for the owner to show soldiers any hidden items.

When questioning individuals, know what you're looking for, and keep repeating the questions. Many Third World economies are based on a barter system in which transactions are conducted through involved conversations, and it should be no different in questioning a suspect. Although none existed in Haiti, sewer systems should not be overlooked in other countries.

Once the search is complete and all suspected individuals have been questioned or detained, U.S. forces should make every effort to return the location to the condition in which they found it. This includes replacing locks that have been cut. Because there is a potential power vacuum in OOTW situations, the interpreters and the PSYOPs team should warn the crowd not to take any action against the site owner's family and property. In these situations, our forces should cultivate as much good will as possible.

In many cases, a company team commander will not have all these assets available and will have to reshuffle the basic task organization to accomplish the mission. If there is only one mine detector, it should stay with the cordon team. If there is only one interpreter, he should remain with the security team, as should the CI team. If the company is lucky enough to have a sniper team attached, that team should be task organized with the security team. METT-T will dictate the best way to make up for any shortage of assets.

There is one other area that must be planned for: the news media. Positive control must be maintained so that their presence does not adversely affect the mission. Guidance from the SJA and the joint task force commander should help the team commander with this issue.

OOTW offers some interesting changes to the traditional cordon and search mission. The information we offer here can be used as a start point for commanders with no experience in this type of operation. Each commander can then modify it on the basis of his own IPB and analysis of METT-T.

In operations other than war, guidance from higher headquarters concerning the political and social situation should also guide the conduct of the operation. In Haiti, the mission was to promote a stable and secure environment, and properly conducted cordon and search missions did just that.

---

**Major Christopher Hughes** was one of the officers from the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), Fort Leavenworth, who observed infantry operations in Haiti. He previously served at the Joint Readiness Training Center in the opposing force unit and as an observer-controller and commanded a company in the 101st Airborne Division. He is a 1983 ROTC graduate of Northwest Missouri State University and holds a master's degree from Webster University.

**Major Thomas G. Ziek Jr.**, a history instructor at the United States Military Academy, was attached to the Joint History Team covering the operations in Haiti. He previously served in the 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry, and commanded a company in the 2d Battalion, 505th Infantry, 82d Airborne Division. He is a 1983 graduate of the Academy and holds a master's degree from Texas A and M University.

---

# Convoy Security

## Using a Light Infantry Antiarmor Platoon

CAPTAIN JAMES SISEMORE

The current emphasis on operations other than war (OOTW) is appropriate. Convoy operations in OOTW has also attracted attention. (See "Convoy Plan-

ning," by Major Jeffrey J. Gudmens, and "Convoy Security Operations," by Major Martin N. Stanton in *INFANTRY*, January-February 1994.) The

need to transport food stuffs, medicines, and basic subsistence items safely has always been important, especially in a light battalion, where the