

OPERATION CAESAR RETURNS: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DISMOUNTED INFANTRY

CAPTAIN ERIC G. EVANS

I was the platoon leader of 3rd Platoon, Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), when my unit deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom IV. We were stationed at a forward operating base (FOB) in the vicinity of Hawija, Iraq, and operated there for 12 months.

Once we arrived at the FOB, we drew new equipment from the unit we replaced. My platoon drew up-armored HMMWWs (M1114), M-2 .50 caliber machine guns, Mk-19 40mm grenade launchers, and 240B machine guns. This greatly increased the mobility and firepower of my platoon. It also introduced new tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) which we would continue to develop throughout our deployment. We task organized into two sections. Alpha section — led by me when we split sections — consisted of three trucks. Alpha section had an Mk-19, M-2, and M240B for mounted weapons. Bravo section, under my platoon sergeant, consisted of three trucks. Another significant change to our task organization was the addition of the duty of section sergeant. The section sergeants would remain mounted at all times and control the fires of their sections. The dismounts of each section were led by the dismounted squad leaders. My platoon could dismount 12 infantrymen, one medic, and one interpreter. I led the dismounts and my platoon sergeant took control of the mounted elements when we dismounted.

The enemy in our area of operation was adept at the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) which he employed frequently along the one route into and out of our FOB, as well as other routes. The enemy also employed snipers concentrated in complex urban terrain. Enemy forces also had a substantial number of rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), PKC machine guns, and hand grenades. The enemy could mass his forces for squad plus sized ambushes usually consisting of eight to 12 men. These men would be armed with PKC machine guns and RPGs and operated mostly in the rural areas at night.

A common enemy tactic was the emplacing of IEDs along the routes, especially in culverts that

ran underneath the road. In town the enemy would use hand grenades as convoys passed by targeting the trail vehicle of the convoy. We could not move through town with our gunners up because of the amount of sniper fire we encountered. It was common to receive small arms fire exiting town due to the inability of my platoon to react quickly enough to kill or capture the insurgents. The shooters would simply blend back into the populace. The enemy had roving patrols consisting of one sedan style car with two to three individuals inside. They would be armed with an RPG and Dragunov sniper rifle. If an American platoon halted, these patrols would attempt to maneuver on that platoon and engage with whichever weapon was most appropriate for their target.

The city of Hawija itself was about three kilometers square. A canal divided the city into eastern and western halves. The eastern half of the city was the industrial district and contained the market area. Residences on this half of the city were on the extreme northern and southern ends. The Joint Command Center (JCC) and Iraqi Police (IP) station as well as the gas station were also located on this side. The western side of the city was primarily the residential side. The high school and two mosques were located on that side of the city. The roads were generally more narrow



Journalist 1st Class Jeremy L. Wood, USN

Captain Eric G. Evans (right) and another Soldier with the 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment examine a small-caliber revolver during a mission on the outskirts of Hawija, Iraq.

here except for Market Street which became broad as you left town. A concrete factory and grainery were located at the southern end of the city. Hawija had traffic control points (TCPs) located on the four routes leading into and out of the city. The eastern half of the village was from the Obeide tribe while the western half was from the Jabori tribe. Both of these tribes were of the Sunni sect. The city was 99-percent Sunni with very few Shias and Kurds.

American forces were repeatedly attacked at checkpoints and even inside the JCC. The police never reported finding any weapons at the traffic control points and very seldom conducted patrols. Anytime the police with American help would try to establish some legitimacy they would be targeted heavily. Our battalion's concept for operating within our battlespace was saturation. We would launch every platoon in the battalion for at least six to eight hours a day conducting presence patrols, gathering information, and conducting raids when intelligence would support it. We continued to be targeted by IEDs and sniper fire during the day and ambushes at night. My platoon was ambushed on October 29. The enemy ambush consisted of three to four RPG launchers and three PKC machine guns. The ambush was actually the type of contact most conducive to success for us. It allowed us to attempt to fix and maneuver on the enemy in the relatively simple rural terrain. The enemy's effective use of terrain made fixing and closing with him very difficult. My platoon was again ambushed on February 20. This ambush consisted of three to four RPG teams as well as four PKC machine guns. My platoon was traveling overwatch along the route, conducting a movement to contact to engage such ambush cells. The enemy initiated the ambush on Alpha section with RPGs. Then PKCs opened up on the entire patrol as Bravo section closed. I attempted to flank the enemy position with Bravo section, which was not yet decisively engaged. Seeing a section of my trucks moving on their eastern flank, the enemy broke contact over the inter-visibility line they were using as cover and escaped. Although no vehicles were destroyed, we could not pin the enemy down. The fact that he was achieving effective direct fire at night at a distance of 400 meters leads me to believe they were night vision capable.



Tech Sergeant Andy Dunaway, USAF

Soldiers with A Company, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, question local Iraqi men during a traffic control point mission October 31, 2005.

The vast majority of the contact we made, however, was not conducive to success. Mostly, we were engaged by IEDs along the routes in the rural environment. They would be remotely detonated making it nearly impossible to catch the triggerman. Inside town we were engaged with sniper fire, hand grenades, and RPGs. Effective sniper fire restricted our ability to move with our gunners up in the turrets to engage the grenadiers. Dismounting or halting in the city for any length of time was especially dangerous. The roving teams maneuvered on and attacked the halted patrol from behind some form of obstacle and escaped by vehicle before the patrol could react effectively.

The responses to the threat in Hawija were Operation Spartacus and Operation Caesar Returns. Operation Spartacus consisted of obstacle emplacement within the city of Hawija to attempt to limit the mobility of the anti-Iraqi forces (AIF). We emplaced many fixing obstacles as well as blocking obstacles consisting of Jersey barriers throughout the city. The obstacles could not all be over-watched by American forces so responsibility for the obstacles fell to the Iraqis. The culmination of Operation Spartacus was the emplacement of two concrete towers; one tower was located at the south bridge intersection and one was located at the north bridge intersection. The obstacles we emplaced were removed completely within a week. Operation Caesar Returns was launched in response

to this action.

Operation Caesar Returns started with the occupation of Battle Position 1 (BP1) and the co-location of the Military Police and Mortar Platoons within the JCC. The purpose of Operation Caesar Returns was to provide constant presence in Hawija. This operation would last the remaining four months of our deployment. Operation Caesar Returns embedded us with our Iraqi Army (IA) and IP brethren and forced cooperation and mutual support. The IA's fate was now intertwined with our own as we manned the same battle positions, and it was impossible to tell who was who. Throughout the operation we would construct three more battle positions and move an Iraqi Army battalion from the 5th Iraqi Army Brigade into Hawija. The influx of personnel created a surge at a level we were able to maintain. The introduction of an IA battalion from outside the immediate area also paid significant dividends as it forced the local Iraqi Army to improve their own performance. No outside Iraqi Police were brought in, however, the constant oversight by American forces combined with training and support paid its own dividends as well.

BP1 was located on the southern axis of the city. It was a large house that was still under construction, but about 90 percent complete. The house originally belonged to an AIF financier. We occupied this house on May 17 and immediately started improving our defensive positions. BP 1

was two stories with a large porch on the second floor. Each of the side rooms looked down a route. The eastern room looked down the eastern bypass and the western room looked down the southern bypass. We positioned M240Bs in each of these rooms and built platforms with tripods away from the windows. Each of these rooms also had a platform for an M249 in bipod mode covering an alternate avenue of approach. One room also had a loophole for the M24 sniper rifle which our qualified, school trained, and very experienced sniper carried.

The enemy began to attack us daily once we established BP1, repeatedly engaging us from the same areas. We developed his pattern and established target reference points (TRPs) at these locations. TRP1 was at the corner of the concrete factory approximately 200 meters from BP1. The enemy primarily engaged us with RPGs from there, then fled north along a route back into the city. One truck was responsible for this TRP as well as the shooters on the rooftop. TRP2 was approximately 500 meters away from the eastern room. The enemy engaged the eastern room as well as this truck with small arms and sniper fire from this TRP. The position in the eastern room as well as the truck was again responsible for this TRP. TRP 3 was approximately 400 meters to the north of the western room. The enemy attempted to engage us with small arms fire and, occasionally, with an RPG from this TRP. The western room and another truck with its weapons were responsible for this TRP. TRP4 was exactly 680 meters from the western room. The enemy engaged us from there often due to its standoff range. The enemy would engage us from a car with a sniper rifle as well as with RPGs. TRP5 was in the field to the east of BP 1. This is where we believe the 57mm fire came from that destroyed the truck earlier. The truck with the Mk-19 was responsible for this TRP because that weapon was best suited to engaging targets in the open terrain. Two other trucks were responsible for the rear security and provided the immediate CASEVAC platform. The gun on one truck was dismantled and brought inside and that weapon replaced with a machine gun. When contact was made, I took a preselected group of Soldiers and attempted to maneuver on the enemy. One dismantled squad leader supervised the

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Contact persisted at BP1. It was still very difficult to maneuver against the enemy. The enemy soon gave up his attempts to engage us at close range. The lack of knockdown power of the 5.56mm cartridge was quickly apparent. Twice the rooftop position engaged an RPG shooter at 200 meters, and twice the enemy misfired his RPG but was able to escape. The enemy quit sending his wounded to the local hospital where we would find them. The enemy had an excellent casualty evacuation plan and it was rare to find bodies. The enemy shifted to TRP4 and TRP2. This is when we noticed the scouting element. In the morning we would notice a black pickup truck come by every 15 minutes. After we didn't see the truck

for about an hour, we would be engaged from TRP 4. The fire at TRP 4 would come from a car in the form of a Dragunov sniper rifle. It was difficult to gain positive identification of a target at that range with the optics we had, so the positive identification would have to come from our sniper and his M-24 sniper rifle. We used the report from the sniper rifle to engage with the M240B. The enemy quickly adapted and would pull the vehicle forward so that we could not engage the driver or the engine of the vehicle. With a 700 meter head start, it was difficult to catch the vehicle. The enemy also used common vehicles to prevent identification by air. The enemy would also use our rules of engagement against us. They would drive up and stop briefly in the same location but not present a weapon or engage and then drive off. The effectiveness of our rooftop sniper position garnered attention from the enemy. On June 10, BP1 was engaged by a salvo of mortar fire. Approximately eight rounds of 82mm mortars were fired with no effect. This forced us to provide overhead cover on the rooftop, but did not force us to displace the position.



BP2 was our response to the persistent engagement of BP1 from the extended range. BP2 was a few hundred meters north east of BP1. BP1 was not able to mutually support BP2 with direct fire, but BP2 had enfilading fires against TRP4 and TRP1. We fortified BP2 much the same way as BP1. The only place in BP2 that had good observation and fields of fire was the rooftop. The rooftop of BP2 was especially dangerous due to its position deeper in the city and the ability to engage it from built up urban areas. Having myself been wounded there by a sniper, I was leery of establishing a position there. The benefit of having another position and creating an engagement area seemed to outweigh the danger at the time. BP2 would be manned by a squad, which left BP 1 short handed. Now when we attempted to maneuver against the enemy, I would only have three other dismounts and lacked a dismounted squad leader so I had to play both squad leader and platoon leader. BP2 could support the JCC from the south side and overwatch patrols entering the JCC. The truck in the courtyard mounted an M-60D and protected the only gate into the compound. The IA also dispatched a squad to assist in force protection at BP2. The IA would inspect people coming into and out of the grainery. The grainery was still operational at the time so the inside of the BP was continually dusted out. I always wondered and thankfully never found out if BP2 would explode like a grain silo if it were hit with an RPG. First Platoon suffered a casualty during the operation. The Soldier was hit in the upper left side of his chest with a single round from a sniper rifle. He was evacuated to the FOB and then to a field hospital where he recovered.

The problem with BP2's location was while it supported BP1 no other position was able to support BP2. Alpha Company lacked the manpower to occupy positions all over the city and could not support every position. BP2 actually did more harm than good. It forced the enemy out of our established engagement areas and allowed him to regain some of the initiative based off his ability to attack BP2. It also made for two undermanned battle positions rather than one strong one. My ability to maneuver with anything resembling an effective force was drastically reduced based on man power requirements of the two BPs. BP 2 proved to be more of a liability than an asset.

Battle Positions 3 and 4 were manned completely by the Iraqi Army. BP3 was located across the canal on the south western side of the city. This battle position could observe a bridge which had been blown nearly in half by repeated IED detonations. Battle Position 3 later became the CP for the 5th IA battalion assigned to the city. BP3 had a tower on that was about 50 meters from south bridge, the bridge crossing the canal. For force protection at these BPs we provided the sandbags, plywood, netting, and wire for the Iraqi Army to use to fortify them but left it up to the Iraqis to do the actual fortification. A bare minimum of fortification was done and most of the material was either stolen or used for things other than force protection. A lack of leadership pushed forward by the Iraqi Army was the most significant factor. It was rare to ever find an officer on patrol with his unit. Due to the Iraqis' different style of command, the officer is the only one with any real power. Most of the time you would get a squad of nine "Jundi" (soldier in Arabic) instead of another maneuver element.

BPs 3 and 4 were often engaged at night. We would see tracer fire going up at these BPs, but would not see any return fire nor

would the IA element in contact report. Very rarely they would report minor casualties. I determined after launching my strike element several times in support of our Iraqi counterparts that we were being set up for a baited ambush. After we stopped launching every time BP3 or BP4 came in contact, the instances of the BPs being fired on dropped dramatically.

The two towers put up to help secure the IA battle positions were also a subject of contention. The towers themselves were very sturdy. They were made of sections of reinforced concrete and had a heavy roof. The towers had a machine gun mount for the Iraqi's PKC machine gun, and we showed them how to make range cards. The tower near BP3 was the first to be destroyed. The Iraqi who was crewing the tower was simply told to leave by the insurgent forces while a large IED was placed inside the tower and detonated. The Iraqi soldier said he had been attacked by 40 insurgents but never fired his weapon. A week later the tower by BP4 was destroyed in much the same manner. The two Iraqis manning the tower this time were reported kidnapped and the tower destroyed by a large IED. The Iraqis who were kidnapped were found later unharmed. The towers had become icons of American occupation in Hawija and were attacked accordingly. The towers themselves had not hampered the insurgent's ability to conduct operations; it was merely a symbolic gesture.

The JCC was an integral part of Operation Caesar Returns. The JCC provided the communications nucleus between American and Iraqi forces. An MP NCO and his platoon alternated occupying the JCC with the battalion mortar platoon. We were in constant radio contact with the American forces at the JCC. At first we had to coordinate logistics support for our Iraqi Army counter parts through the American forces at the JCC but the IA quickly developed a process of their own. The JCC also helped the IA and IP track their patrols. The MP NCO led many integrated patrols in the city. This helped the IP develop sound tactics as well as establish some type of battle rhythm. The IP got used to going on patrol everyday and it became less difficult to goad them into action. The IP also began launching their own quick reaction forces. The IP would send units to support patrols who were having difficulty, especially around the gas station where civil unrest was the norm. The IP could also radio the JCC who was in direct radio contact with the battalion tactical operations center (TOC) and could request support from our explosives ordinance disposal (EOD) teams or illumination rounds from the battalion mortars.

All the platoons from the company rotated to the BPs. This rotation allowed our forces to take advantage of the battalion's maintenance facilities and the chow hall. Soldiers' morale remained high because they could still call home when we were back on the FOB. This rotation limited the exposure of logistics packages because we would carry all the food water and ammunition we needed on our way out. The company had its own emergency resupply package assembled in case the BPs needed immediate resupply but this package would be carried forward by our own quick reaction force. The platoon that was going to occupy the BPs next would be at REDCON 2 (able to launch in less than 15 minutes) to be used as a QRF or for time sensitive targets. BP1's position in town also provided the company commander with more flexibility in his operations. For company- sized operations we could surge the entire company into town and have

the BP to act as a company command post, casualty collection point, detainee collection point, and forward resupply.

The BP concept effectively took the initiative away from the enemy. The attacker usually maintains the initiative in linear operations but the BP concept forced him to play to our strengths. By forcing the enemy to come to us we negated his ability to blend into the populace, and forced him into our own prepared engagement areas. The positioning of BP1 provided standoff which took away his most effective weapons the RKG-3 and the IED. The enemy could not engage us from any closer than 200 meters and in doing so had to present himself as a target. He could no longer target us with impunity by using remote IEDs. Having dismounts in a position to engage from a prepared defense maximized the useable firepower of the platoon while minimizing the risk to Soldiers.

The concept of BP's manned by dismounted infantry also gave flexibility to the platoon leader and diminished the enemy's ability to pattern us. I was able to launch patrols at times of my own choosing and for specific purposes. This allowed me to patrol at times when it was most effective and patrol only for specific purposes. The most dangerous types of patrols are the long presence patrols in a certain sector. When conducting these types of patrols, it is difficult not to pattern yourself. Patrols of shorter duration increased the Soldiers' vigilance and reduced the amount of time we were exposed to the enemy's most effective weapons. Presence inside town also made our raids more effective. The enemy no longer received reports that we were in town so his early warning system became less effective. At night we could slip out of the BP leaving only the vehicles in place and conduct dismounted patrols which at the time were inherently safer and more effective.

Operation Caesar Returns completely unbalanced the enemy. Denied the ability to target our mounted patrols in terrain that made them vulnerable, he was forced to attack us on more even terms. The attacks against BP1 were not only more resource intensive to the enemy but also more costly in personnel. It was less resource intensive to us because we were not constantly repairing our vehicles after IED strikes. Soldiers preferred the BP to presence

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patrols because they felt like it put them in a better position to engage the enemy without being vulnerable to weapons they could do little about such as the IED. My Soldiers became adept at recognizing the signs of a coming enemy attack and we were able to interdict these attacks. The BP provided the opportunity for Soldiers to identify a target and shoot first rather than being completely reactive. Two Soldiers, a sergeant and a specialist, were able to spot an RPG team moving into position to attack the BP from TRP 5. The machine gunner noticed the man through the PAS-13 sight on the M240 and brought it to the sergeant's attention. He spotted the same group through his light PAS-13 and identified the RPG as well. The gunner engaged at a range of 500 meters and forced the enemy to withdraw. We are unsure if he killed the RPG gunner because the strike element was supporting IA in contact vicinity of BP 4 and we could not maneuver, but it is encouraging that we were able to shoot first rather than react to enemy action. Our sniper repeatedly spotted threats with his M-24 and engaged before the enemy could fire. In an environment that makes positive identification of a target so difficult the ability to shoot first is a large step towards success. The enemy became more desperate in their attempts to destroy BP1. The most original attack was in the form of an ice cream cart rigged with 57mm rockets that would fire by remote. The first rocket that fired missed wide and capsized the cart causing the rest of the rockets to miss also.

Contact at BP1 dropped to almost nothing during the month of August. This could be due to a myriad of reasons, but I believe that it was due to the enemy's inability to effectively target BP1, and because the mounting cost of his previous operations forced him into a refit cycle. No casualties were suffered inside BP1 and only one at BP2. In comparison to our previous operations, this fact is remarkable especially because of the amount of combat power the enemy dedicated to destroying it. After nearly daily contact for two

months, BP1 was still standing; the enemy was frustrated for the first time. It seemed like a doctrinal oxymoron that going static could in fact turn you into the hunter, but it worked. The IA also benefitted from our example at the BPs and the JCC. They learned how to make range cards, control direct fires, and establish effective rest and refit plans. The IA at BPs 1 and 2 became units that you could count on and use as another maneuver element rather than bystanders. IP forces and IA forces learned to cooperate and launch patrols in support of one another.

Battle positions proved to be very effective in dealing with hostile areas. At BP1 we had the best of both worlds. We had the support of a battalion-sized FOB in close proximity as well as the autonomy of a smaller outpost. What allowed our BP to be so effective was the support structure behind it. One temptation that should be avoided by commanders is to dedicate so much of their force to decentralized battle positions that they are unable to support each other or they lose all flexibility of maneuver because all of their forces are committed. To effectively man BPs in the north side of town would have required an entire other company. The temptation to stretch your forces too thin results in battle positions that are targetable and you set yourself up more for tragedy than for success. There is no such thing as an economy of force when you cannot template the enemy. Battle positions that are supportable and most importantly sustainable are an incredible combat multiplier for larger units operating in that sector.

At the time this article was written, **Captain Eric G. Evans** was attending the Maneuver Captains Career Course at Fort Benning, Georgia. He is currently serving as the S-4 for the 2-70 Combined Arms Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, at Fort Riley, Kansas. He was commissioned in May 2004. After completing the Infantry Officers Basic Course and Ranger School he was assigned to A Company, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, as a platoon leader and then company executive officer.
