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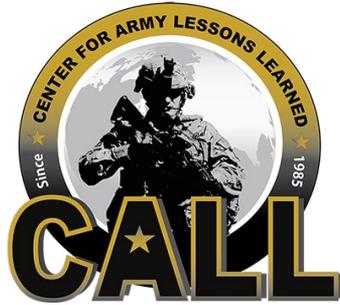
MUSICIANS OF MARS



VOLUME III: THE COBRA STRIKES

TACTICAL VIGNETTES FOR PROFESSIONAL DISCUSSION

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Musicians of Mars: Tactical Vignettes for Professional Discussion Volume III: The Cobra Strikes

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Foreword

“There is still a tendency in each separate unit ... to be a one-handed puncher. By that I mean that the rifleman wants to shoot, the tanker to charge, the artilleryman to fire ... that is not the way to win battles. If the band played a piece first with the piccolo, then with the brass horn, then with the clarinet, and then with the trumpet there would be a hell of a lot of noise but no music. To get harmony in music, each instrument must support the others. To get harmony in battle, each weapon must support the other. Team play wins. You musicians of Mars ... must come into the concert at the proper place at the proper time.” — MG George S. Patton Jr., Address to the 2nd Armored Division, 08 JUL 1941

In 2016, the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) gave a contemporary update to the classic Musicians of Mars from June 1990. This was done in response to guidance from the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command that indicated the Army’s brigade and battalion leaders needed a training aid for decisive operations. The updated work, released as Musicians of Mars II, was intended to facilitate the Army’s return to the “blocking and tackling” of decisive action operations. With inputs from the combat training centers (CTCs) and the Maneuver Center of Excellence, Musicians of Mars II was an instant hit with leaders at the company and battalion levels.

Responses from tactical audiences that read Musicians of Mars II indicated an appetite for a follow-on publication that emphasized offensive operations. This publication picks up with LTC Milner and TF Mustang addressing the question of “what next” following their successful defense in engagement area Blackjack. With the publication of the new Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, and recent events in Eastern Europe, the Army has made a conscious effort to re-examine large-scale ground combat operations (LSGCO). Although much of the changes that have occurred due to multi-domain battle and facets of “gray zone warfare” in Eastern Europe are

above the battalion and TF level, the impacts are not. Although Musicians of Mars II attempted to address “new generation warfare,” this volume will make a more earnest effort to do so as TF Mustang progresses to offensive operations.

As with Musicians of Mars II, this volume will take the reader through a fictional scenario where the tactical leaders make decisions, some good and some not so good, that impact subsequent actions. Thus, it harkens more to the format of the epic *Defense of Duffer’s Drift* rather than interactive decision texts (e.g., John Antal’s Tank Platoon and Infantry Combat). As recent and historical U.S. military operations have shown, experience is the best teacher. Musicians of Mars III will have its leaders learning and improving as they progress through tactical engagements. This was intentional in the development of this publication, and is designed to facilitate tactical discussions at the company and platoon levels.

This publication assumes that our near-peer opponents will strive to leverage relationships with proxy paramilitary forces in the gray zone while crossing into the line of open conflict. Due to this, Musicians of Mars III emphasizes mission command in a degraded and disrupted electromagnetic environment, when digital communications and GPS signals do not work as effectively. CALL has also chosen to emphasize the reality that Army tactical formations will effectively operate underneath an adversary air defense “snowdome” (i.e., an integrated air defense system [IADS] that is designed to negate supporting joint air and organic attack aviation.) Additionally, Soldiers will also need to confidently operate within the effective radius of enemy indirect fire systems and still accomplish the mission. Lastly, the ubiquitous presence of unmanned aircraft systems on the battlefield, as informed by current operations in Syria and Iraq, portend a greater use of this technology in the near future. Many of these aspects of future near-peer warfare are already being introduced into recently updated CTC scenarios.

Seeing through the fog of war against a near-peer opponent will be difficult. Without discussing the methods and details on how an enemy force could do this, a heavily degraded electromagnetic environment is central to the scenario in this publication. Musicians of Mars, like other works of this genre, assumes that the enemy is competent and will take away our “eyes and ears.” Readers should avoid focusing on the mechanism of how this occurs but instead on what to do when it does. In the following pages, TF Mustang’s need to fight for intelligence should spur discussions on how other organizations will do the same. Furthermore, commanders should speak with all of their subordinates on how they and their S-2 will use their military intuition to paint in additional details (“assumptions”) when information gaps remain.

CALL anticipates that this follow-on volume will facilitate unit-level professional development discussions much as Musicians of Mars and Musicians of Mars II did. The CTCs have noted many insights and issues from training rotations. Some of these issues include: combined arms breaching, deliberate military decisionmaking process (MDMP) at the battalion level, command post operations, reconnaissance and security, degraded adjacent unit coordination, operational graphic control measures, making contact with the smallest unit possible, transitions, and integrating enablers. Each of these issues is addressed in Musicians of Mars III.

The unit and events depicted in this publication are completely fictional. The task organization has been updated from Musicians of Mars II in order to reflect reader feedback and changes to U.S. Army doctrine. Astute commanders and staffs will be able to discern how this scenario could play out with various near-peer opponents. Conducting up-tempo operations in a decisive action environment is a distinct expectation. Planning operations while a formation is simultaneously executing tactical missions in a dynamic and time-compressed tempo is not new. However, recent operational experiences in counterinsurgency have developed habits, some well-intended, that will not be as effective in a decisive action training environment (DATE) fight. This offensive-themed Musicians of Mars III was written to address and reinforce the tempo and demands of DATE.

This fictional account of a battalion task force's encounter with a hybrid force is but one version of a potential outcome. The intent of this publication is to also get readers to tease out other outcomes that might be more difficult, ones that defy easy solutions, and ones that at the moment we might have difficulty imagining. First battles against enemies that possess many unknowns or misunderstood capabilities tend to be complex encounters. Use Musicians of Mars III to stretch your imagination on the full range of possibilities.



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Summary

The nations of Bolcavia and Arcania, including any references to cities, towns, or other locations, are fictional as are the characters of the story. Any reference to actual names or places is coincidental and not intended. References to U.S. and coalition forces and previous combat operations are provided only for context of the fictional scenario.

This short story was written to emphasize critical synchronization tasks, combat leadership principles, and factors for consideration, primarily for company and team commanders, but also applicable to leaders throughout tactical unit levels. The importance of integrating and synchronizing available combat power, both lethal and nonlethal, in the decisive action environment against potential hybrid threats is critical to unit success on the battlefield.

This project is an update to *Musicians of Mars*, June 1990, and is the sequel to *Musicians of Mars II*, April 2016. Both publications were originally developed by the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL). This update accounts for changes to doctrine, training, threat and technology as applicable in today's decisive action environment, and contemporary worldwide hybrid threats.

When this project started, CALL identified specific tasks from Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1-03, *The Army Universal Task List*, October 2015, which applied to offense, defense, and stability operations in large-scale ground operations. These tasks were coordinated with the Maneuver Center of Excellence to emphasize specific areas of importance. Current doctrinal references, applicable to the principles of offense, defense, and stability operations were applied in the context of the story. In addition to those references listed, principles and tactics, techniques, and procedures from Army techniques publications (ATPs), training circulars (TCs) and field manuals (FMs) applicable to all warfighting functions were used in the development of the story. The specific tasks applied to the scenario can be found in Appendix B.

Through the mission command philosophy, commanders understand that subordinates and staffs require a clear intent to guide their actions. Leaders must be able to clearly portray intent to subordinate leaders, enable and empower subordinate leaders to execute critical tasks, and continue to lead and assess throughout execution of missions to ensure success at all levels.

Training at individual and collective levels sets the conditions for synchronization. Standards must be met or set. Leaders must integrate key assets and enablers into collective unit training plans. In many cases, this requires creativity and initiative to account for those assets that may not be

organic to the training unit. Leaders must identify the critical mission tasks across the spectrum, actively pursue available resources for training, and execute training to the established standards. Each piece of the orchestra must practice individually and then collectively in order to achieve the harmony of synchronization.

CHAPTER 1

Reconsolidation

Editor's Note: Musicians of Mars II ended when task force (TF) Mustang had just blocked the enemy attack in engagement area (EA) Blackjack. A recap of that fight is not included in this publication; however, readers are encouraged to start with CALL Handbook 16-12, Musicians of Mars II, April 2016. This sequel picks up where that publication ended. LTC Milner will now guide his battalion as it transitions into the attack.

Exhausted, LTC Milner slumped in his chair in the tactical operations center (TOC). The adrenaline of battle had left him and the resulting crash was hitting him hard. He could see the same results in his staff as they gathered reports from the teams and began orchestrating recovery assets, medical evacuation, and other necessary post-battle actions.

The battle had seemed to be here and over in a flash. The frustration of failing communications, however, seemed to last an eternity as Milner desperately tried to get status reports from his subordinates. Through intermittent communications, Milner fought to track the situation reporting from each team: combat power, enemy actions, friendly actions, and ammunition status. It was chaos, and far different from the training they had conducted in permissive communications environments.

Over the course of an hour, LTC Milner and the staff eventually were able to receive the reports through various means. LTC Milner was glad to see that the staff's assumptions, based on the commanders' fractured reports, had matched up fairly well with the tactical situation. Overall, TF Mustang had held up nicely. Unfortunately, Team (TM) Badger specifically had not. The team's commanding officer (CO), CPT Morris, was not a bad officer. However, Morris had not paid attention to detail like most of his peers had, and it had cost his unit casualties. LTC Milner knew Morris would be taking the losses hard.

Fortunately, CPT Crafton and TM Dagger had executed his intended counterattack almost flawlessly. When Dagger became the decisive operation, they decimated the enemy during the counterattack. Like his commander, Crafton had always driven himself to be able to visualize, describe, direct, lead, and assess in complex environments. Milner was glad to see the man's preparatory work pay off for both himself and TM Dagger.

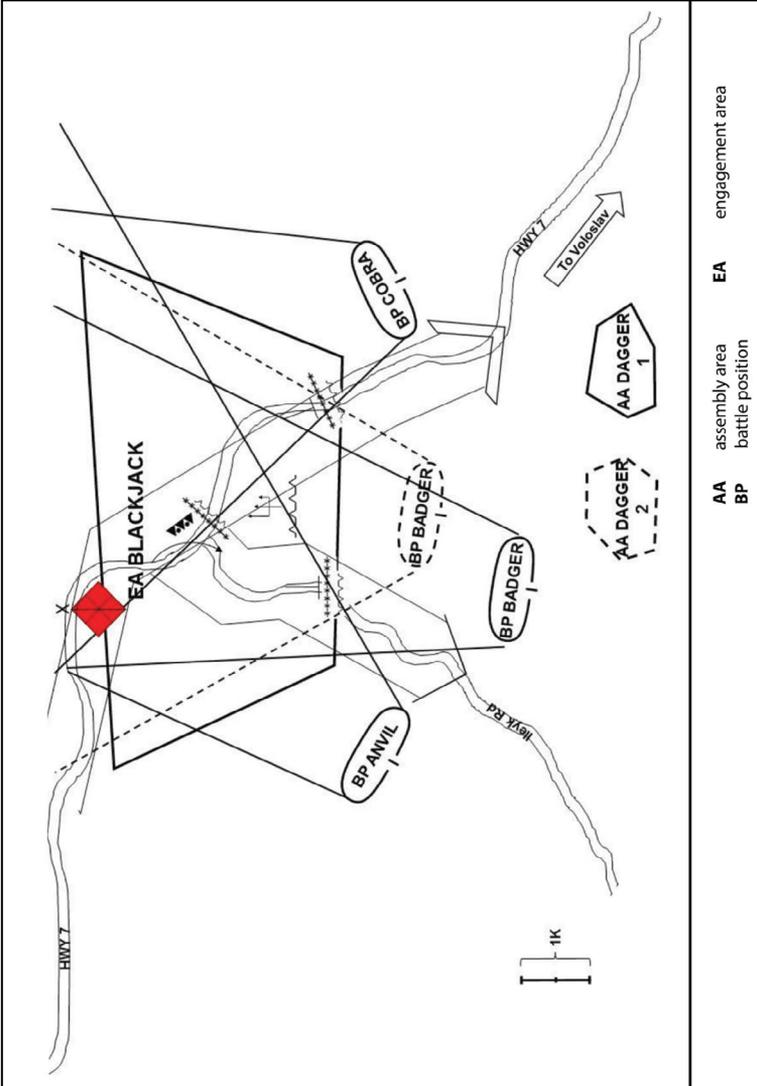


Figure 1-1. Engagement area Blackjack

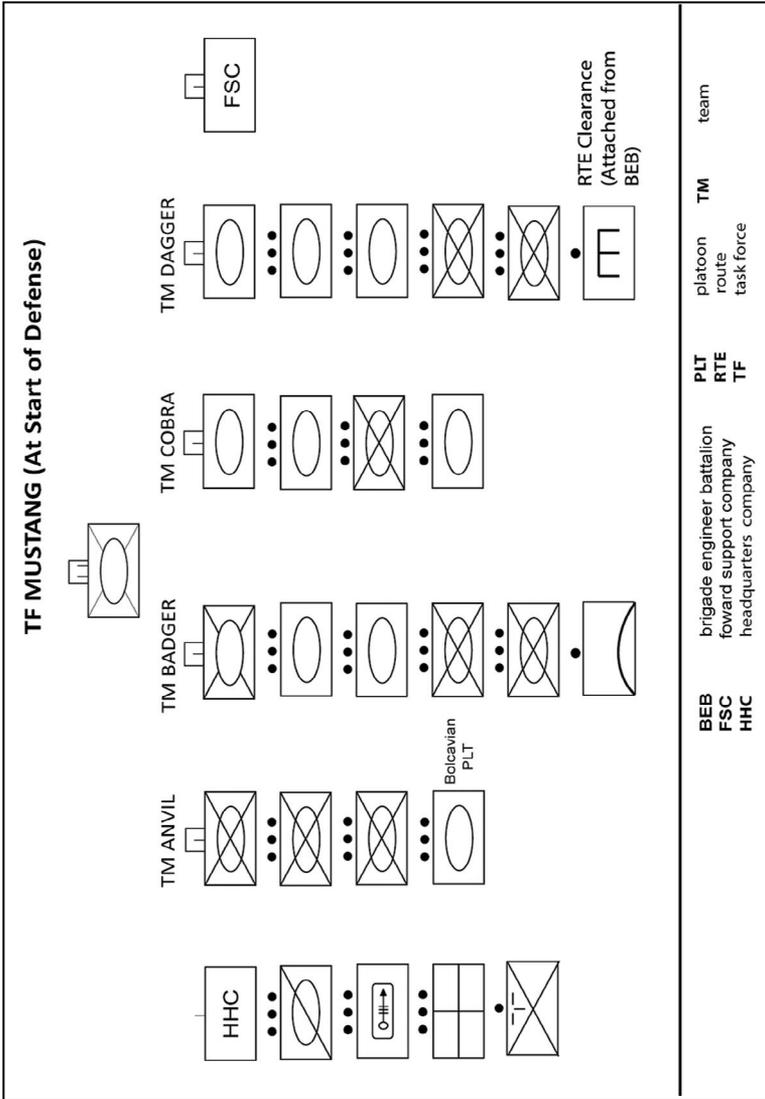


Figure 1-2. TF Mustang task organization

Note: The above task organization is a representation of the task organization as modified to reflect current doctrine. It does not absolutely match that presented at the conclusion of Musicians of Mars II.

TRANSITION

“Sir, you might want to read this; it is from the brigade commander, Colonel Morrison,” said SGT Willis, one of the watch noncommissioned officers.

LTC Milner had been collecting his thoughts and assembling in his mind the tactical guidance he was about to give to his company commanders. He hadn’t yet written anything down in his log book as he waved at SGT Willis to acknowledge the latter’s report.

We gave better than we got, but that doesn’t make it any easier, Milner thought as he stood up to move to Willis’ station. He composed himself as he took the few short steps.

Malaise, like fear, is contagious, and we are in way too deep to feed that monster right now, Milner thought. With every passing minute, Mustang Six knew the enemy’s surviving elements stood an even greater chance of getting out of the engagement area (EA) if TF Mustang did not immediately pursue. The enemy had shown great skill despite their defeat, and giving them a break meant they’d be back wiser in months. Pulling out his glasses, Milner leaned over SGT Willis’ shoulder.

“Great job on the defense, Mustang Six! Enemy main effort continues to press Task Force (TF) Griffon along Phase Line (PL) Red.”

Milner visualized the fight in his head. TF Griffon, a multinational force, was on his left flank. The BCT S-2 had expected the bulk of the enemy effort to land there in an attempt to inflict casualties more than gain territory. It appeared that those indicators had at least been read correctly, and the sounds of ongoing combat to the west were audible as he continued reading the inferior, substitute fragmentary order.

“Proceed into the attack in order to relieve pressure on TF Griffon. Regain contact with the enemy force and exploit the pursuit if possible. Be prepared to conduct a flank attack into enemy forces engaged with TF Griffon. Realize you have casualties, will conduct reconsolidation and reinforcement as assets become available. Expedite. Iron 6.”

Having worked for COL Kendrick for more than a year now, LTC Milner remembered the man’s guidance, often delivered with a friendly chortle: “When in doubt, do something, and do that well.”

Time to do something well ... again.

LTC Milner glanced down at his watch, the time was 1137. He understood the urgency of the moment and having played two years of college basketball, he understood that transitions, when executed quickly and with purpose, tended to change the tide of a game. This was clearly not a game as the consequences of this fight were far more serious. He looked over

at his operations officer and said, “Jorge, I know you read Brigade Six’s direction. Let’s rough sketch our next move and get the battalion reoriented on keeping in contact with the enemy force that just backed out of our EA. Let’s step out of the TOC (tactical operations center) to work on this.”

MAJ Santiago replied, “I’ll be right there, I just pushed a fragmentary order to Team [TM] Cobra directing them to pursue the enemy to the northeast.” Milner nodded in agreement as he walked to the TOC exit.

Pursuit. An offensive operation designed to catch or cut off a hostile force attempting to escape, with the aim of destroying it.

Movement to Contact. An offensive task designed to develop the situation and establish or regain contact.

The TOC was situated in a defilade position to the rear of the fight. LTC Milner could not directly see any evidence of the struggle that had just taken place. The air outside the TOC, however, carried hints of the stench from EA Blackjack. Milner felt a frantic urge to visit with TM Cobra before they stepped out in search of the enemy force that had just been blocked in EA Blackjack.

Your job is to help the TF plan the next fight, not conduct battlefield circulation, Milner admonished himself. *Hernandez knows what he’s doing; help him to win the fight he has coming.*

TM Cobra, as the least engaged team during the defense of EA Blackjack, was the right company to conduct the movement to contact. With TM Badger a broken ruin and TM Dagger having just conducted a counterattack, it was up to Hernandez to turn TF Mustang’s victory into a rout.

What to do after TM Cobra gains contact is the question, Milner thought. He was in the midst of answering this question when MAJ Santiago joined him outside the TOC.

“Jorge, thanks for getting TM Cobra set,” Milner said. “We have to figure out how to either get brigade to shift us some ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) from TF Griffon or come up with a plan to fight for our own.”

“Sir, I need to get CPT Robinson to provide you with a quick update, but my intuition tells me the enemy is falling back to within supporting distance of their indirect fires systems over the border,” MAJ Santiago said after a moment. “That means we’ve got roughly 40 miles to chase them.”

Santiago pointed to the map. “There are two water obstacles and a village that is directly between us and them reaching sanctuary,” he continued. “If I was a betting man, and I think CPT Robinson will agree with me, they will likely use those water obstacles to delay our chase.”

We’re going to need bridging assets, Milner thought.

“If they fight us how they’ve been fighting the Bolcavians, also expect them to use the local population to support their operations,” Santiago said.

Milner exhaled through clenched teeth. “This is a complex human terrain that we cannot ignore,” he said. “How to shape that human terrain is the tough part.”

“Sir, I was anticipating that we would be going back on the offense at some point and built rudimentary maneuver control measures in the COP to facilitate cross-boundary coordination and control of forward movement,” Santiago said.

“Not sure if that’s going to be enough, Jorge,” LTC Milner replied. “We couldn’t determine where each company team would advance in the offense. These graphics are incomplete; does TM Cobra know that?”

“Sir, TM Cobra has our full frontage at the moment as they step forward of the EA,” MAJ Santiago pointed out. “I know this is not complete. We will improve these graphics as we develop the situation.”

“Okay, Jorge, I get it. But we faced this problem back at the NTC (National Training Center) and I’m getting a sense of déjà vu.” Milner said. “Difference is, rather than some trainers picking at us, we could get ourselves and a bunch of civilians killed.”

MAJ Santiago regarded him silently.

OK, I’m asking my subordinate to do the impossible, LTC Milner thought, *and that’s tell the future.*

“I know you’re working on it, just make sure everyone else understands it’s a priority,” LTC Milner said by way of partial apology. “How quickly do you expect TM Anvil and TM Dagger to be ready to transition into the offense?”

“Sir, I estimate they will be ready to go on the offense in four to six hours, but absent a more complete plan and a sense for where the enemy has headed, I suggest we hold them tight for the moment,” Santiago replied. “No need cutting them short on reconsolidation just to potentially ride around doing nothing.”

“Do we want to try shuffling assets internally to try to reconstitute TM Badger?”

“Badger Six is a mess, sir,” MAJ Santiago said. “At best they’re a rifle platoon with a captain in charge of it. I’d rather use what is left of Badger to beef up security for the battalion tactical (TAC) command post and have them fall under Mustang Five.”

“You don’t want to send them to the rear?”

“No, sir. I might send Badger Six back, but not his unit,” Santiago said.

LTC Milner let that one go. He’d considered relieving CPT Morris, but that was a discussion for another day.

“Have we had any luck finding local forces?” Milner asked.

“Sir, all I know is that the local forces are kind of a hybrid of a national police and National Guard units and fell back in disarray during the enemy advance that we just halted,” Santiago said. “It is my understanding they have congregated just south of the brigade. I will ask brigade operations to expedite their return to our sector. They certainly would know the area better than we do and could probably help us gain trust with the local population.”

“It wouldn’t hurt,” LTC Milner replied. “Good idea, execute. How are we looking in terms of attached and supporting engineer assets to assist us in getting over those wet gaps?”

“Sir, are we sure we can’t ford the two streams?” Santiago asked. “Iron Three basically acted like I was growing a second head when I asked him that question.”

“I recall the deuce telling me that the river is narrow but the banks are steep and the water flow is too fast to ford,” LTC Milner said. “Tell TM Cobra that is a priority intelligence requirement.”

“Will do, sir.”

“Jorge, you did a good job in getting TM Cobra out in front,” Milner said. “Let’s not rush to stick our fist in a hornet’s nest, and make sure Hernandez gets good graphics ASAP. We’ll rethink our scheme of maneuver as Cobra and the scouts develop the situation. No time for a full MDMP [military decisionmaking process], so we’ll have to rethink things on the fly.”

“Understood, sir,” MAJ Santiago said. “I’m planning on going with two up and one back once we get Dagger and Anvil through reconsolidation and make contact with the enemy.”

“Matches what I was thinking,” LTC Milner said. “I think our opponents across the way are hoping to get time and space to return the favor from a prepared position. We’ll have Dagger be the company we hold back, get them some breach assets and have them start rehearsing.”

“We need to get in better contact with the maneuver teams,” LTC Milner said. “Get with the XO and Six on putting together a TAC so we can make that happen. Nothing fancy, just need to shorten the command span.”

“Understood, sir,” Santiago said.

“I’m going to go talk to the XO, then head over to Badger to try to see what can be salvaged of that situation,” LTC Milner said. Santiago’s glance told him the S-3 understood the subtext of a possible relief in the offing. “I’ll contact COL Kendrick and give him an update. You do the same with Iron Three. See you in a bit.”

As LTC Milner turned his attentions to the XO, the S-3 pulled together the battalion primary staff for an impromptu planning huddle.

Operational Graphics

Units must practice effective use of graphic control measures and direct fire control measures to apply the science of control to operations. Units must develop course of action (COA) sketches and graphics that depict unit and subordinate boundaries, the line of departure and phase lines, reconnaissance and security graphics, ground and air axes of advance, assembly areas, battle positions, strongpoints, engagement areas, and objectives. Units must also develop direct fire control measures to control the scheme of maneuver at the templated line of contact to include fire support control measures, target reference points, and restricted fire lines to better portray how the combined arms concept will be conducted and successfully accomplished. Units must also incorporate these control measures and graphics into rehearsals.

Adjacent Unit Coordination

Maneuver control measures in the form of boundaries and phase lines are an excellent method of de-conflicting adjacent maneuver formations. However, a more effective means of coordinating the effects and maneuver of two or more adjacent units is to conduct thorough rehearsals that shed light on potential points of friction before the risk of fratricide is real in the maneuver box.

Fratricide Mitigation

The use of maneuver control graphics and fire support control measures during planning are excellent techniques for mitigating the potential of fratricide. Examples are templating boundaries between units, restrictive fire area, restrictive fire line, and no fire areas. Carrying forward these fratricide mitigation measures into execution requires making adjustments as changes to the situation dictate.

Deliberate MDMP at the Battalion Level

Battalion staffs do not often conduct deliberate MDMP concluding with a hard copy operations order with graphics for subordinate units. Plans frequently lack the details required for synchronized operations. Often, staffs will only work on a directed COA, or only develop one COA which often translates to no war game or little analysis to produce the level of detail required to develop a plan that synchronizes each of the warfighting functions. Because battalions do not conduct deliberate MDMP, plans frequently never make it past the conceptual stage.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- 1.) TF Mustang committed its reserve, TM Dagger, to the defense as TM Badger was attrited. Should this have precluded a shift to the offense?
- 2.) Should LTC Milner form a new reserve prior to transitioning to the offensive?
- 3.) What could have been done differently to retain options enabling a faster transition to the offense?

CHAPTER 2

Pursuit

CPT Hernandez's Team (TM) Cobra had been relatively unscathed during the defense of engagement area (EA) Blackjack. Other than an enemy mechanized platoon that engaged ineffectively with long-range antitank guided missile (ATGM), cannon, and medium machine gun fire, TM Cobra had not been engaged directly. For that, CPT Hernandez felt fortunate. As the enemy dismounts disengaged due to TM Dagger's counterattack, CPT Hernandez reminded his company leadership to prepare to transition into the attack. By nature, Hernandez hated to sit still in the defense and cede initiative to the enemy.

Time to see if all the impromptu decision-making exercises worked, Cobra Six thought.

During home station training, CPT Hernandez and 1SG Dwight Gegg had placed emphasis on noncommissioned officer (NCO) leadership development. The intent had been twofold: One, Hernandez firmly believed in preparing for casualties, as his professional study had indicated that platoon leaders and platoon sergeants would often be hit on the battlefield. Two, 1SG Gegg wanted to build a first-rate team of enlisted leaders that took the initiative in terms of maintenance, weapons qualification, and preparations for combat.

As Hernandez turned from watching the enemy mechanized platoon disengage from four kilometers away, he could already see 1SG Gegg coming forward with support platoon elements to top off fuel and replenish ammunition.

"Sir, BFT [blue force tracker] message!" Hernandez's gunner called from the commander's hatch of his Bradley fighting vehicle (BFV). Hernandez turned from watching 1SG Gegg work his magic.

Figured that was coming, Hernandez thought. Especially with all the FM jamming. He clambered back on his track and into the commander's hatch. The order was more or less what he had expected.

"On order, TM Cobra conducts movement to contact in zone to re-establish contact with enemy forces falling back to the northeast in order to develop the situation for subsequent battalion operations. Submit maneuver control and fire support coordination measures that support company scheme of

maneuver. Sauron (scout platoon) will be operating to your left/east flank. Identify river crossing sites that support multiple battalion axis of advance. Submit company scheme of maneuver and graphics sketch to battalion operations via BFT. Be prepared to initiate movement to contact no later than 1600 local. Mustang Three out.”

CPT Hernandez read the short order three times as his executive officer, 1LT Dietze, came trotting over from Cobra 65.

“XO, it looks like we have a new mission,” he said. “Get the PLs [platoon leaders] and platoon sergeants around the terrain model in thirty minutes. Tell everyone not to come all at once, but stagger leaving their vehicles and make sure we have camo netting over the model.”

“Sir?” Dietze inquired, confused.

“You know those enemy UASs [unmanned aerial systems] are always watching out, and I don’t feel like inviting a mortar strike when I’m trying to give an OPORD [operation order],” Hernandez pointed out.

“Roger, sir, I’m on it,” answered Dietze, understanding immediately. Not for the first time, Hernandez was glad LTC Milner, MAJ Santiago, and MAJ Fitch had tried to match XOs with commanders of similar personalities.

The company’s master gunner, SFC O’Hare, was bouncing from vehicle to vehicle going over pre-combat inspections with each gunner. An energetic NCO, SFC O’Hare had taken pride in the company’s training statistics and gunnery performance. To his credit, O’Hare had always reminded the crews that this high performance had to be married to tactical proficiency and good maintenance to be effective in combat. Now, he was demonstrating why 1SG Gegg called him “Mother Hen,” as the man nervously checked over every vehicle for stray damage or faults caused from the extreme long-range engagement with the enemy mechanized platoon.

Hate to be fixed like that, but I’m not leaving defensive positions we took all night to build, Hernandez thought to himself. The sound of gunfire from the west continued, and he briefly pondered whether TF Griffon was going to be able to hold.

“Sir, XO said you needed to see me?” A voice sounded from the bottom of his track. Hernandez turned in surprise to find his fire support officer (FSO), 1LT Powell, standing at 66’s front.

Good initiative, XO, he thought.

“Yeah, we need to talk about this movement to contact,” Hernandez said, clambering down to 66’s front slope. He laid out his map, seeing 1LT Powell’s forehead wrinkling in thought. Before Hernandez could start, the duo was joined by SPC Rice, an intelligence analyst from the Mustang S-2 shop.

“Sir, MAJ Santiago sent me over,” Rice said by way of explanation.

So this is what it’s like to be the main effort, Hernandez thought with a smile.

“Welcome, Riceman,” Hernandez said, using the battalion’s nickname for the supremely competent Rice. “What can you tell me about the enemy situation?”

“Sir, the latest that I have from brigade and battalion indicates the enemy are in the process of falling back above the first river line with a screening force just south of that obstacle,” Rice began, pointing to Hernandez’s map. Hernandez handed over his collapsible pointer. The specialist gratefully accepted the item, moving it to a town north of TF Mustang’s current position.

“Please note, Zhodkiva, just about seven miles north of the river, is composed of more than 38 percent ethnic Arcanians,” Rice began. “While the town was over 50 percent Bolcavian, they fled when the enemy came through the town and very few remained. It is expected the enemy will delay our advance from that town, which forms a chokepoint along the road north toward the border.”

“Sorry, Riceman, but time is short,” Hernandez interrupted. “What does that mean to us? I need to know what we’re facing, not a social studies lesson.”

To his credit, Rice’s expression never changed. “We just faced the lead elements of a brigade (BDE) in EA Blackjack as a supporting attack against the two brigade-sized elements currently attacking TF Griffon,” Rice said. “The S-2 shop expects that the enemy reserve will attempt to cover the retreat between the southern and northern river tributaries, including the town. BDE estimates that our air attrited that force by roughly 35 to 40 percent.”

Hernandez forced himself not to show his frustration.

Telling me some table or organization is attrited by a given percentage doesn’t help me imagine what I might face, he thought. SPC Rice, perceptive as always, changed tack.

“Sir, I think between our current location and the river, you will likely encounter light resistance,” Rice said. “Terrain doesn’t support a hasty defense, plus they’re probably trying to figure out who is in charge of what after what happened in EA Blackjack.”

As if to put emphasis on the last, one of the hostile tanks in EA Blackjack suffered a massive secondary explosion, its turret flipping into the air.

Have to remind everyone to stay away from vehicles we’ve hit, Hernandez thought.

Rice, having nearly dived under Cobra 66’s front slope, sheepishly continued. “The enemy is clearly interested in keeping us from getting across that river,” Rice said. “With its banks and the current going faster due to the rain we had the last two days, we’re either going to have to cross at one of the bridges or find a good location for our own bridge.”

Rice looked at the map and narrowed his eyes. “The problem with using our own bridge is that we’d have to do it again just 20 miles farther north. I doubt the enemy will let us use these two bridges. They will likely leave them standing just long enough to get their screen force north of the river.”

“What did air assets report back on the enemy up north?”

“Sir, friendly air isn’t going too far north,” Rice said. “ADA [air defense artillery] units across the border have overwatch down to the first wet gap.”

Washington is trying to keep this conflict from escalating, Hernandez thought, frustrated. *So those SAMs [surface to air missiles] are able to threaten anything that is near the border.*

“We’ve got to get those bridges,” Hernandez said. “Doug, what do you have plotted in the AFATDS [advanced field artillery tactical data system] to support our movement to contact with fires?”

“Sir, we have targeted both bridges with the intent we can shift from a known point if required,” 1LT Powell replied. “Additionally, I have established targets along the road at the following four points.”

“OK, thanks,” CPT Hernandez replied. “That will work based upon the ops overlay in BFT.”

Hernandez looked at the map once more before he spoke.

“I think we can, in the interest of time, safely initiate the movement to contact,” he stated.

“Sir, shouldn’t we conduct further coordination with the other two teams?” Powell asked, once again clearly in thought. “At least send them an update as to what you’re thinking?”

“No time for that,” Hernandez replied. “We’re the battalion’s main effort, we have orders to move, and the only folks I’m really concerned about are Sauron. Speaking of which, where are the scouts?”

“Conducting resupply, sir,” the XO stated as he walked up. “I have the unit leadership around the terrain model and we’re ready for the FRAGO [fragmentary order].”

“Thanks, XO. I’ll be right over.”

CPT Hernandez stepped over to the terrain model and did a quick scan of the audience.

We’ve got to get a move on, he thought. *Burning daylight*. Hernandez would have skipped the hasty orders brief, but he considered that a recipe for disaster.

Don’t want to end up like poor Badger, he thought.

“Gentlemen,” he began after looking at his notes, “battalion has ordered TM Cobra to conduct a movement to contact in order to keep pressure on the enemy we just defeated in EA Blackjack. The battalion order reads as follows ...”

As he reiterated his guidance from memory, Hernandez scanned the group.

Good, I have their attention, he thought.

“My mission is as follows,” he continued aloud. “On order, TM Cobra conducts movement to contact in zone in order to re-establish contact with enemy forces retreating northeast. The purpose is to develop the situation for subsequent offensive operations to PL Black, the international border.”

Hernandez repeated both the mission and purpose as he walked to the terrain model. “We will move out in column formation and conduct traveling overwatch movement up Highway 7/Route Falcon to this bridge.”

I should have made that an objective, he thought. *Can’t do it now; don’t want to conflict with battalion if they name it*.

“I want Red (1st Platoon) leading the company, with Green (1st Platoon, B/1-26 IN), then White (2nd Platoon) in trace,” Hernandez said. He looked

to make sure all three of his platoon leaders and sergeants had written down the march order before he continued. "I'll be behind Red, XO will be behind Green, and the company trains will be in front of White. Everyone clear on the march order?"

There were acknowledgments of varied intensity. 1LT Malik, 1/B/1-26's platoon leader, kept looking toward the dark columns of smoke still rising from TM Badger's positions. The young officer, Bravo Company's senior platoon leader, turned pale.

Either I or Top need to talk to him, Hernandez thought. *He's shook*. It wasn't that Hernandez was indifferent to TM Badger's casualties, to include his own 3rd Platoon leader, 1LT Conti, who had been cross attached. It was that not focusing would lead to additional losses.

"The bypass criteria will have no change from the base OPORD," Hernandez said. "Does anyone need that restated?"

Again, there was a wide range of reactions. However, seeing no obvious confusion, Hernandez pushed on.

"I don't want to get bogged down by every idiot running around with a heavy machine gun and an RPG. Time is of the essence. Top?"

1SG Gegg stepped forward to brief paragraph four. "Everyone should be topped off with fuel and ammo before we leave here," he said. "We'll figure out medical evacuation on the fly. Back to you, sir."

On the fly? Well, something had to give.

"The PACE [primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency] plan remains unchanged and on the move. I expect BFT and company tactical very-high frequency communications to keep us up to speed internally and allow us to report," Hernandez said. "Succession of command is no change from previous OPORD. What are your questions?"

1LT Powell interrupted the long silence that followed.

"Gents, I have placed target designators on the terrain model," he said, pointing at the hastily drawn-on MRE covers. "We will have priority of fires within the battalion for artillery, even though we are not the main effort for brigade."

"We will have priority of fires from the battalion 120mm mortars," Powell continued. "From their current position, that gets us fires up to just south of the bridges."

There were several looks around the gathered group.

“I’m working with battalion to get a section of 120s displaced forward to provide range just beyond the bridge on the terrain model. I will push text message over BFT to update you on where they will be located.”

“What’s the situation for air support look like?” the XO asked.

“We will have priority of attack air and joint fixed wing from the battalion, but again, we are not the brigade main effort,” Robinson replied. “Joint air still has no scheduled sorties until 2200, but brigade reports they’re trying to cycle strip alert birds. Attack aviation is over with TF Griffon.”

“If we need additional targets, what’s the process for nominating them?” 1LT Malik asked.

“Get with me in the next 15 minutes with your list and I’ll try to get it up through battalion and brigade on the AFATDS,” Robinson said. He looked at the gathered group. “Anyone else?”

“Hey, Doug, thanks. Well done.” CPT Hernandez said after a long pause. “Gents, that is about it. We need to get going and I want to get to that bridge before sundown. Comms check as per the PACE plan, good hunting.”

The group started to break up.

“XO, hold up a second,” Hernandez said. 1LT Dietze came over, looking worriedly at the terrain map.

“Did BN ever send that engineer representative we were promised in the hasty OPORD?” Hernandez asked, looking around.

“Yes, sir, he’ll be here with Sauron One anytime now,” Dietze said, rolling his eyes at the Scout platoon’s call sign.

“Thanks XO, I knew you would have that squared away,” Hernandez said.

As if summoned by his call sign, Sauron One pulled up in his vehicle at that moment. The man hopped out with his platoon sergeant and an NCO that Hernandez could only assume was the engineer representative.

“Greetings, oh evil one,” Dietze said sarcastically, drawing a puzzled look, then sly recognition from the engineer NCO.

“Come on over, 1LT Hendrickson,” Hernandez said. “Let’s talk about this maneuver plan.”

Across the TM Cobra assembly area, 2LT Rogerson, “White One,” was trying to make sense of what CPT Hernandez had just briefed them. Rogerson was new to TF Mustang, having joined the battalion just before its National Training Center (NTC) rotation. He’d been shuffled into second platoon leadership just before NTC because his predecessor was injured during railhead operations.

This doesn’t seem like they said it would be in the Basic Course, 2LT Rogerson thought as he walked back to his tank platoon with his platoon sergeant.

“Why was CPT Hernandez in such a rush?” He finally asked SFC Foss, his platoon sergeant.

“Probably given a tight timeline by battalion,” Foss answered, putting in a dip. “We should be all right; it will shake itself out.”

People keep saying that, Rogerson thought. *But I can’t shake the feeling it’s more blind faith than careful analysis.* Although he had faith in the M1A2, he had been the platoon adjacent to TM Badger and watched what happened during the defense.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

At the conclusion of the successful defense in EA Blackjack, TF Mustang is bunched up in the battle positions with no clear plan on how to uncoil the battalion and enable a rapid transition to the offense.

- 1.) Is it a reasonable expectation for a TF staff to prepare for possible offensive operations after a defense? Discuss.
- 2.) What are some things LTC Milner or MAJ Santiago could have done to facilitate CPT Hernandez's future operations?
- 3.) Was TM Cobra the right choice to transition to the offense? Why or why not?
- 4.) What steps can TM and TF leaders take to facilitate rapid mission planning and orders issuance?
- 5.) Do you agree with the decision to assume risk in not focusing on casualty evacuation at TF and TM level in order to expedite movement? How can TF and TMs streamline this process in large-scale combat operations?

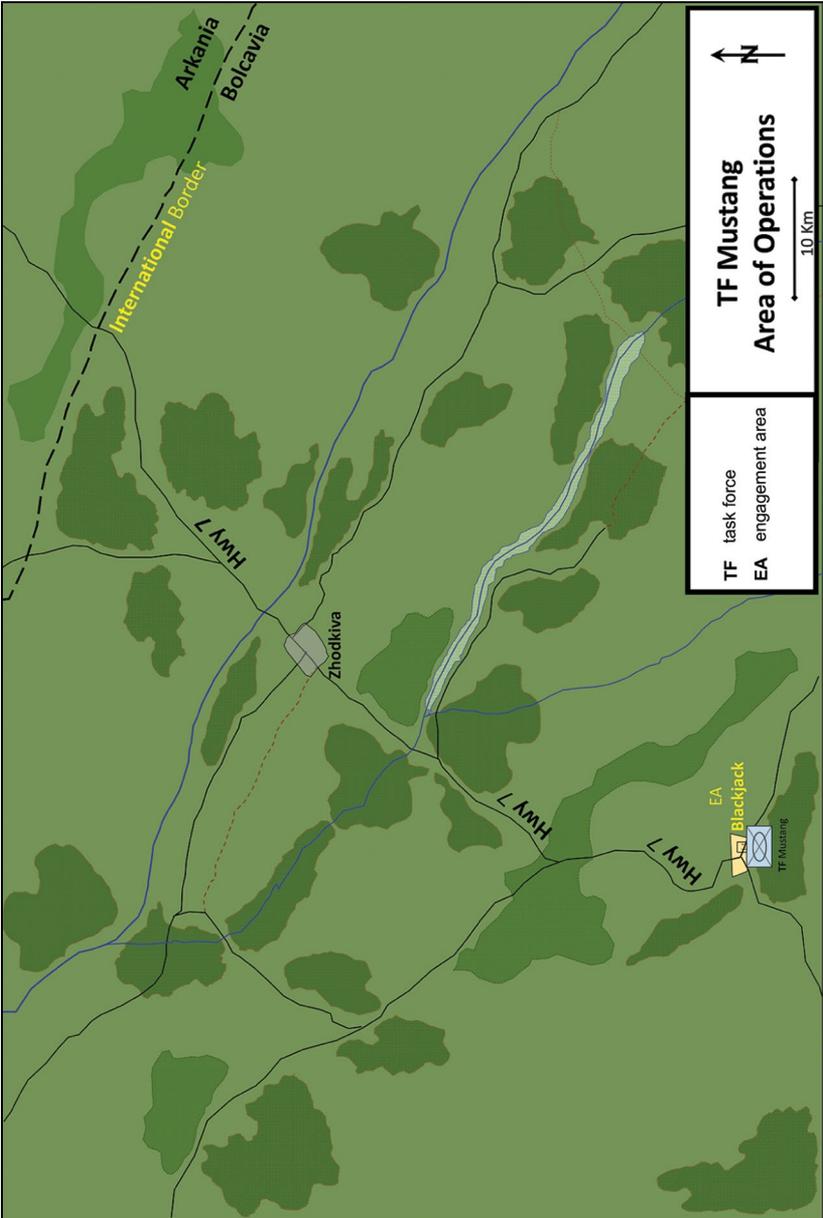


Figure 2-1. TF Mustang area of operation

CHAPTER 3

The Fight for the First Bridge

CPT Hernandez's Team (TM) Cobra eased into column formation behind the engineers, guiding them through engagement area (EA) Blackjack's obstacles.

Now we see if this goes as well as we planned it initially, Hernandez thought nervously. *Just have to be patient.*

It took roughly 30 minutes to get TM Cobra through the planned gaps. The EA was far from safe, as secondary explosions still rocked destroyed vehicles and the human and equipment detritus of a successful defense lay strewn about. Hernandez jumped as an enemy antitank missile cooked off, shrieking vertically into the sky like an oversized bottle rocket.

Nerves, he thought disgustedly as C66's gunner continued to scan.

Hernandez would have been even more nervous if he'd realized hostile eyes were already on TM Cobra as it began to wind onto Highway 7. Maneuvered by a distant "auxiliary," one of the ubiquitous quadcopters used the cover of smoke and vehicles to keep an eye on TM Cobra.



LTC Milner entered the battalion (BN) tactical operations center (TOC) after returning from seeing TM Badger. The visit had shaken him, and he made a note to ask BDE for replacements.

"Mustang Three, status report," he said.

"TM Cobra's lead elements have not yet emerged from the obstacle belt in EA Blackjack," Santiago said.

"Do you have their execution checklist?" Milner asked. "Iron Six wanted to take a look at it."

Santiago winced. "No, sir, they will report their progress via BFT [blue force tracker]," he said. "I was trying to get them out of the gate."

"That's not how we do business, Three," Milner snapped, then caught himself.

Never bite someone's head off for showing initiative, or you'll have a group you have to tell to do everything. His first battalion commander's words echoed in his memory.

"Yes, I wanted to pursue the retreating enemy quickly, but I wanted to do so responsibly," Milner said. "We won't hold Cobra up now that he is moving."

"Understood, sir," Santiago said.

"Understand — I don't think Hernandez will have trouble thinking on his feet," Milner continued. "However, some of his lieutenants don't, and if Cobra Six ends up a casualty, things could unravel quick."

"Understood, sir," Santiago said. "Won't happen again."

"Where is Sauron?" Milner asked, then shook his head.

"I know, sir, we never should have approved it," Santiago muttered. "I intentionally held them back so they could refuel and do a lateral transfer of some Javelins from Badger."

Milner nodded. Giving the scouts some additional antitank weapons was a good plan.

"After the engineer escort returns from guiding Cobra forward of the EA, they will return to do the same with the scouts," Santiago continued.

"We need to make sure the battle captains are ready for tonight," Milner said. "If they haven't already gotten some rest, they need to do so. You or Five should probably follow suit."

"Roger, sir," Santiago said.

"I'm going to lead by example on that one," Milner continued. "I'm going to take a quick cat nap. Wake me if there's contact or once Sauron is out of the obstacle belt, whichever comes first."



Cobra 66 finally cleared the north end of the obstacle belt.

That's going to be a pain to come back through if this goes poorly, Hernandez thought.

“Red One, go ahead and hold up in a security halt,” he said into his radio. “Driver, find a hasty hull down.”

As C66 lurched forward, he turned back and saw 1SG Gegg standing near the obstacle exit counting vehicles.

“Cobra Five, let me know when we’re through the obstacle belt.”

“Roger,” Dietze replied.

Hernandez turned back forward and scanned the skies.

I can't shake the feeling I'm being watched by those UASs [unmanned aerial systems], he thought. *We could be a tempting target for indirect.* Despite his fears, the following 60 minutes passed without incident. He felt a palpable sense of relief when his blue force tracker beeped with the message that the last Cobra truck was through the obstacle.

Here we go, Hernandez thought as he sent a message back to the battalion tactical operations center (BN TOC).

“Mustang Main, we have cleared EA Blackjack, are crossing LD [line of departure], and initiating pursuit operations,” he mumbled to himself as he read his message aloud. He looked down at his watch.

That took way too long, he thought. *I thought we'd be through that in 30 minutes, not almost an hour and a half.* Sunset would be in another four hours, and Hernandez felt like he was already falling behind. His BFT beeped.

“Well, I was expecting a bit more than ‘Roger,’ but OK,” he muttered. “Oh well, can’t complain about higher always looking over my shoulder then be upset when they’re finally not.”

He depressed his hand mike, briefly considered not sending a radio message then shook his head.

They've got eyes on, so direction finding is pretty much overkill, Hernandez thought.

“Guidons, Cobra Six, resume movement.”

Transition from Movement to Maneuver

Commanders who thoroughly understand the enemy situation template and terrain of their assigned areas of operation (AOs) are better able to plan their movements by selecting when and where specific movement techniques (traveling, traveling overwatch, and bounding overwatch) and movement formations (column, line, wedge, vee, and file) should be employed in order to maximize security and maintain adequate tempo. This analysis begins during the military decisionmaking process (MDMP) and operation order (OPORD) development when commanders identify points along the route where movement techniques and formations transition in accordance with the probability of enemy contact.

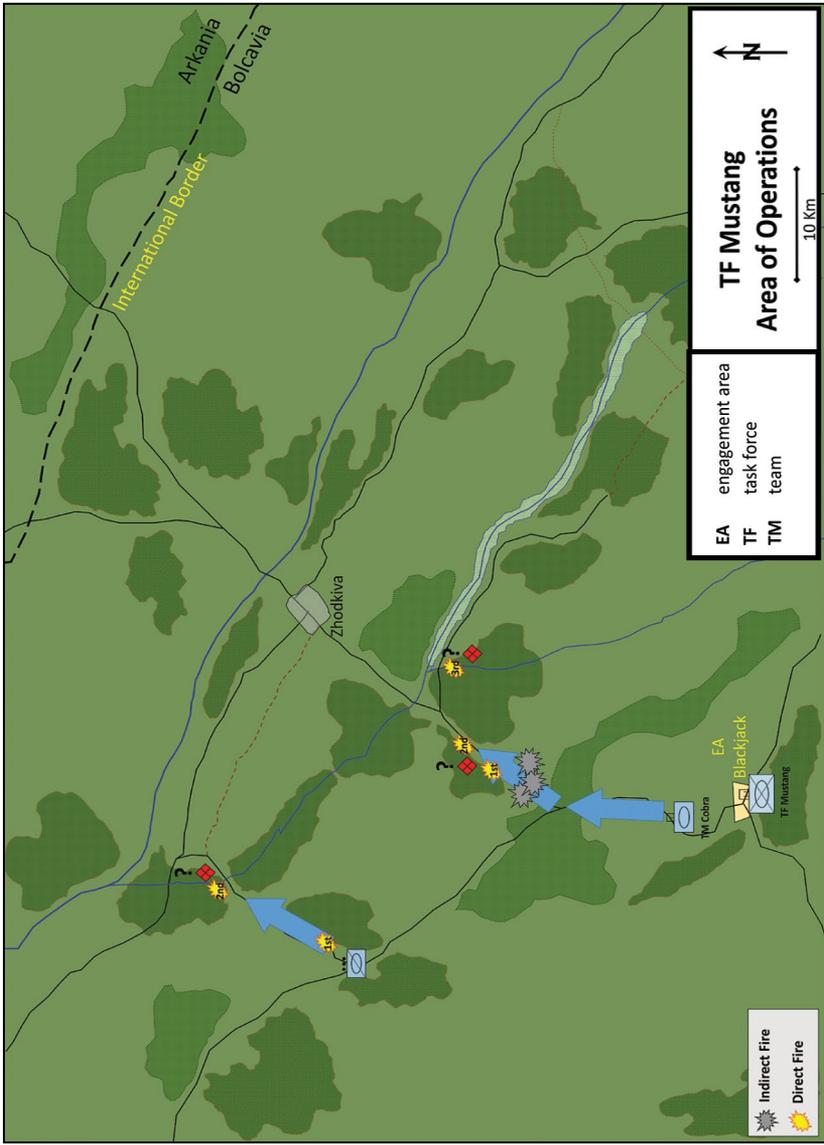


Figure 3-1. TF Mustang movement

“Red Two, let’s go,” 2LT Depaul ordered. The young lieutenant swallowed heavily as he stood in C11’s hatch. Ahead of him, SSG Witherspoon, C12’s tank commander, gave a wave of acknowledgment, then spoke into his combat vehicle crewman’s (CVC’s) microphone.

This road is too constricted, Depaul thought. Highway 7 was bounded by trees on both sides, meaning that even in daylight it was hard to see too far into the forest with the naked eye. Although most of the brush would not technically stop C11 from getting off the road, the lack of visibility made Depaul nervous. Looking at his map, he saw they had roughly 12 kilometers to get to the bridge.

I also can’t see terrain features, he thought. *Hard to tell how far I’ve gone unless I keep check ...*

Two things happened simultaneously at that point. First, C12 and C11 both broke out into an open field. Second, a pair of artillery rounds landed roughly one hundred meters away on his right.

What the hell? Depaul thought. He tried to remember whether there had been a preparatory fire plan.

“Cobra Six, Red Four, contact, observing indirect.”

His platoon sergeant’s report stopped Depaul’s mental recall.

“Red, Red One,” he said rapidly, trying to keep fear out of his voice. “Keep pushing forward!”

The next barrage, a group of four shells, was much closer to the road. As 1st Platoon accelerated away from the incoming artillery, Depaul started to prepare a more detailed report for Cobra 6. It was at that point he realized that his BFT was not indicating his actual position, being frozen roughly five minutes before.

That’s odd, he thought. Opening his hatch and poking his head back out, he saw no obvious damage that would account for the lack of GPS signals.

“Red, Red One,” he said into his hand mike. “Is anyone else experiencing GPS issues?”

“Red One, Red Three, roger,” came the quick reply from C13. “I was about to ask the same.”

Oh no, he thought as the platoon pushed through the vegetation. As the trees began thinning to the north, he halted the platoon. Behind him, the indirect

fire had increased, as both artillery and indirect were now pounding the area his platoon had just left.

“Where is C66?” he asked his loader, gesturing behind him.

“I don’t know, LT,” SPC Richter replied. Looking at his map, Depaul figured that they were now at least one kilometer, if not two, ahead of Green.

“Sir! Sir!” He heard the yell dimly from his right. He turned to see SFC Swett, his platoon sergeant, standing on top of C14 and shouting at him. Puzzled, he took his own CVC helmet off of his head.

“FM’s jammed!”

“OK, understood!” he shouted back. “We’ll hold here!”

Explains why I haven’t heard from Cobra Six, he realized. His BFT suddenly beeped rapidly like it was having a seizure. Looking, he saw that he had a whole slew of messages from Cobra Six. Just as he was sitting down to start reading them, the FM net came back with a vengeance.

“Any Red element, this is Black Six,” came CPT Hernandez’s frustrated voice.

“Black Six, Red One, experiencing jamming in my location,” Depaul said in a rush.

“All other elements besides Red, clear this net now!” 1LT Dietze barked.

“Red, send your report again!”

As he repeated himself, 2LT Depaul realized that the enemy indirect had abruptly ceased. As he updated CPT Hernandez on the situation, he saw C66 coming through the smoke and dust roughly a kilometer behind him. A moment later, it was followed by the lead Bradley fighting vehicle (BFV) of Green platoon.

“Red One, what’s your lead trace?” 1LT Dietze said. “I have to update BN.”

“Black Five, lead trace is estimated to be at grid 47535431, over.” Depaul replied.

“Red One, how certain are you of that grid?” CPT Hernandez asked.

Depaul rolled his eyes, sensing that the only reason his CO doubted it was because of Depaul’s relative experience.

“Ninety percent, Black Six,” Depaul replied.

“Roger, stand by,” Hernandez replied.

I’d be a lot more confident if I could see something, Depaul thought, surprised at how much dust and haze concentrated indirect caused.



Well this day just got a lot worse, CPT Hernandez thought angrily. *I was not expecting GPS jammers in addition to the FM getting screwed with.*

“Guidons, going to need a front line trace every 10 miles,” he stated. “Black Five, you’re going to have to send that up to BN. Get confirmation after you do so.”

“Roger Six, wilco.”

I was not expecting them to get their collective crap back together so fast after we smacked them around in EA Blackjack, Hernandez thought.

Although the indirect had not been particularly effective and was apparently mainly lower caliber, it had still reinforced that the enemy’s intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities were much better than expected.

“Cobra Six, Mustang Six, your net!”

That’s not good, Hernandez thought.

“Mustang Six, Cobra Six,” he replied.

“Looked at the trace your Five sent, it is not matching BFT!” Milner stated.

“Roger, Mustang, we are experiencing GPS and FM difficulties,” Hernandez said. “I believe we are facing some EW [electronic warfare].”

There was a long pause.

“Understood, we will get with higher to see what we can do about that,” Milner replied. “TF Griffon is reporting similar issues on the BDE [brigade] net. Keep working to reestablish connection, press on. Need you to expedite regaining contact. Mustang Six out.”

Hernandez was about to contact 1LT Dietze when there was the sound of weapons fire to his front. A pair of M1A2 main guns and answering machine gun fire told him 1PLT was in contact.

“Cobra Six, Cobra Six, this is Red One! Contact! I say again ...”

The transmission abruptly cut off as Hernandez felt a surge of adrenaline.



The machine gun fire had nearly killed 2LT Depaul. The heavy round had somehow missed him despite impacting all around his tank commander’s (TC’s) hatch, close enough that spall and fragments had opened up a couple of burning cuts on his face. He’d been in the middle of shouting something to SFC Swett when the enemy had sprung their attack. Now, an antitank guided missile (ATGM) blast caused him to release the hand mike mid contact report and blood poured down his face; he was temporarily stunned.

“On the way!” his gunner shouted. Belatedly, he heard Red Four completing his contact report just as his tank lurched backwards. He saw the reason why the driver had put the vehicle in reverse as another ATGM shot like a fireball over his hatch and impacted a tree behind them.

Get up and fight your platoon, you idiot. Wiping his face, Depaul stood up and looked through his commander’s independent thermal viewer (CITV) as his gunner fired again.

“Red, Red One, status report!”

As the platoon answered, Depaul realized that they were facing a sizeable enemy dismantled force. They had scored hits on his own track, Red Three, and Red Four with ATGMs. The heavy machine guns had apparently been addressed with main gun fire, but the dismantles appeared to be quickly firing then shifting the ATGMs.

“Troops!” his gunner shouted. A moment later, the coaxial machine gun began to chatter.

“You got the tank!” he shouted to his gunner.

“Red One, Black Six, push through those dismantles if you can,” CPT Hernandez ordered. Depaul heard the dim crump of indirect fire. “We can’t stay here, they’re trying to delay us.”

“Roger, Cobra Six,” Depaul said. “Red, platoon on line.”

As the tank platoon shifted, he took a quick scan with his CITV. It did appear to be a reinforced platoon of dismounts. He watched as a main gun round impacted right where an ATGM had just launched. A secondary explosion told him that they'd likely hit something just beside the launcher.

"Red, Red One," he said. "Assault, assault, assault."

Depaul's opposite number had come to the conclusion that it was time to retreat at just about the point 12's main gun round had destroyed one of his two ATGMs. The ethnic Arcanian had just barked the order to do so when Red began rushing forward like fire-spitting dragons, their main guns and TCs' weapons lashing his position.

"Leave the equipment; fall back!" the man shouted. He had just enough time to motion for his first squad to begin moving when a .50-caliber bullet ended his campaign.

"Run them down!" Depaul shouted as the Arcanians broke. As he looked, he realized that the denser vegetation where the platoon had attempted to delay them was funneling his platoon toward the road. The running men seemed dressed in a mishmash of uniforms. To his surprise, they were attempting to run deeper into the forest in a disciplined manner, not in a full-on rout.

"Black Six, Red One, enemy disengaging," he reported on the FM. There was no response, and looking at his BFT he noticed that his icon was now sitting stationary just north of the engagement area. Furthermore, his GPS was not functioning properly either, the console indicating it was perpetually searching for a signal.

I hope that is a local problem and someone hasn't knocked out a satellite, he thought, then turned back to his platoon. I have commander's intent.

"Red, Red Four," SFC Swett said. "Spread it out, we can't all pluck this chicken."

Depaul cursed inwardly as he noted that the platoon was indeed bunching up as they continued to push north. Looking down, he realized that he was still bleeding all over his station, including his map. Ripping his aid pouch out of his pocket, he pressed against the cut over his eye. Looking down at the map, he realized his platoon would have to push northward another four or five kilometers. However, without a reliable GPS and with the dense woods, he couldn't be certain.

"Hey sir, the road's torn up ahead," his driver warned. "It might get bumpy!"

Depaul poked his head out of the hatch. The highway was indeed heavily worn blacktop. Most of the potholes were filled with hard-packed gravel, and the ditches to either side showed indications of heavy vehicle use.

There's got to be something up ahead, he thought nervously.

"... Cobra Six, your ..." his radio briefly crackled. Depaul turned to look behind him and realized that C66 was not with his platoon.

"Sir, something in the road up ahead!" His driver said nervously. Depaul turned to look and saw five fallen trees ahead of him. It was clear that someone had cut the trees to fall as a hasty obstacle, as they were not very thick nor were they arranged in a cradle.

Won't stop a tank but they'll be a problem for anything else, he thought, using hand and arm signals to bring the platoon to a halt. Dropping down into his turret, he saw that Red Four had already sent up a synchronized predeployment and operational tracker (SPOT) report using the BFT. He thought back to CPT Hernandez's orders.

"Red, we're going to bypass," he said over the radio. His driver had just turned off the road to go around the first tree when C11 rocked backwards from a cannon round slamming into the front slope.

Tanks! he thought, dropping down in the hatch. Two more rounds passed by his vehicle and one hit Red Four's turret. Moments later, additional machine gun rounds and a pair of ATGMs shot past the platoon. He reached over and pressed the smoke dischargers as his gunner scanned.

"Guns, Guns, Red One," he said over the company net. To his immense relief, 1LT Robinson's voice came over the net in response.

"This is Guns," Robinson said. Depaul quickly rattled off a request for mortar support on one of the marked targets. Startled, he realized that the enemy appeared to be close to the bridge.

"Where the hell are those tanks?" his gunner asked, continuing to scan. There was the sound of incoming fire, and he felt a moment of elation. That quickly changed as he realized that was not friendly, as the incoming fire burst in the air roughly 200 meters in front of his position. Flaming particles fell from the puff balls, sifting to the ground like slow falling fog.

"Sir, I can't see anything!" his gunner said. Dropping to look through the CITV, Depaul realized that the enemy obscuration was able to block his thermals.

“Red One, Guns,” came Robinson’s disgusted voice. “Be advised: Mustang Main is calling that danger close to the bridges due to the extended range.”

“What?” Depaul asked. As he was about to complain that he was receiving fire, he realized that the enemy fusillade had ceased.

“I’m going to try to get some rotary-wing out here,” Robinson said apologetically. “But mortars had to displace due to enemy indirect.”

“Red One, disengage,” came CPT Hernandez’s voice.

“Roger, Black Six,” Depaul said, jamming and his Louisiana accent making him barely intelligible. Hernandez signaled for his loader to switch to Green’s net as C66 continued to push forward.

I don’t know what Malik’s problem is, but he’s about to get some help solving it, Hernandez thought angrily.

Green had been hesitant pressing forward, both in response to the indirect and again in supporting Depaul’s platoon. Now the BFVs were advancing very cautiously given the reports of enemy armor about.

“Cobra Six, Mustang Six.” The battalion net crackled. “We will likely have rotary wing at your location in two zero miles.”

“Roger, Mustang Six,” Hernandez replied, smiling.

“Don’t be too happy,” LTC Milner replied. “No fixed-wing is available after the fight in Griffon’s sector.”

TF Griffon had apparently held, but only just. Because Mustang’s advance was not technically scripted in either the BDE or DIV OPORD, their higher headquarters was loathe to use the emergency fixed-wing until the situation fully developed.

“Cobra Six, this is Red One,” Depaul said. “Holding my position, I believe we’ve extricated ourselves from the enemy.”

Vehicle Dispersion When Transitioning From Different Movement Techniques

In this case, there was appropriate lateral depth and dispersion between the maneuver platoons within TM Cobra. This prevented the inadvertent piling on of forces when all that would do is sap tempo. Having unit operating procedures that describe different “plays” that address these contingencies is critical and rehearsing them is even more important. Knowing when to feed additional forces to address the enemy versus bypass and keep the momentum of the operation on pace takes finesse. Leadership up front helps expedite these decisions.

I shouldn't have fallen back to nursemaid Malik, Hernandez thought. I've lost control of the situation.

“Red One, this is Green One,” Malik said over the net. “I am approximately 800 meters to your southwest, coming up on your left flank.”

Hernandez was about to make a sharp rebuke at Malik for clogging the company net, then stopped himself.

With the confused situation and no BFT, that's actually smart, he thought. Especially with Red having just been in contact and us forward of TF Griffon's trace.

“Cobra Six, Sauron One, your net,” 1LT Hendrickson said.

“Send your traffic, Sauron,” Hernandez said.

“I have eyes on your Green element,” 1LT Hendrickson said. “I am moving down a trail in the woods on their western flank. Please advise Green ...”

The Scout Platoon leader's transmission cut off.

“Say again, Sauron,” Hernandez said. There was silence.

“Any station this net, any station this net, Cobra Six,” he stated. There was no answer. Hernandez cursed loudly, banging the hand mike on the commander's hatch before he realized that was extremely stupid.

Long end of a supply chain.



“Hey sir, what’s the plan for linking up with Green?”

The question startled 2LT Depaul from where he was attempting to discern any enemy to his platoon’s front. Sauron had just been cut off, and his inquiries on the company command net were going unanswered.

At least we have platoon net for right now, he thought.

“Red One, Green One, your push.”

“Green One, Red One, send traffic.”

“I’ll meet you at the link-up point in about five miles,” Malik said.

What link-up point? Depaul thought, scanning his graphics.

“Negative, Green One,” SFC Swett stated. “We have no link-up point on our graphics.”

Oh thank goodness, it’s not just me.

There was a long pause.

“Roger, White Four,” Malik replied. “We don’t need a fratricide incident. Ideas for near and far recognition signals?”

“White star cluster is my recommendation, White One,” SFC Swett said. Even though his platoon sergeant could not see it, Depaul nodded at the man’s professional courtesy.

“Green One, White One, that sounds like a plan,” he stated. The sun seemed to be plummeting toward the western horizon, but it was still light enough for him to see a couple hundred meters in the forest. “Near recognition will be a VS-17 panel.”

“Roger,” Malik replied.

A few minutes later, Depaul could hear the sound of a BFV approaching from the platoon’s left rear. The lengthening shadows and dense brush made actually seeing the vehicle difficult, but the white star cluster shooting into the sky helped him orient.

Oh no, I don’t have a ...

C22 fired a star cluster in return. Not for the first time, 2LT Depaul was grateful for his NCO’s professionalism.

“I see your two track,” Malik stated. “We’re tying in on the left flank.”

A familiar shape broke away from the Bradley, and C66 pulled up beside C11.

“What do you have to your front?” CPT Hernandez yelled across. 2LT Depaul gave him a quick debriefing, seeing the CO’s eyes narrow at the report of tanks.

“Are you certain there were tanks up there?” Hernandez asked. Fighting to maintain his bearing, Depaul pointed to the marks on his turret and front slope. CPT Hernandez nodded, then dropped down into his turret.

“We’ve got rotary-wing en route,” the captain yelled across to Depaul. “They’ll go up there and sort those folks out.”

“Roger, sir!” 2LT Depaul shouted back.

“Back your vehicle up into the woods further, and we’ll get Green One over here for a quick talk!” Hernandez yelled.

Make Contact With the Smallest Unit Possible

Mounted platoons often fail to maneuver with a small element ahead of the main body to make contact with an enemy force with the smallest element possible. Platoons often maneuver with all vehicles driving in a file and by the time they identify an enemy obstacle or fighting position, they are already in the enemy engagement area.

When the platoon vehicles identify an enemy obstacle or fighting position, they often stop and attempt to maneuver to the rear. Before they can exit the enemy engagement area, the enemy has already initiated direct or indirect fire on the maneuvering platoon’s position. This often results in the partial or total destruction of the maneuvering platoon.

As he waited for his two platoon leaders, CPT Hernandez tried to figure out how to regain control of the situation.

I still have my doubts those were tanks, he thought. Red should have been able to see them if they were tanks. As he heard White moving up, Hernandez watched the sun setting. With the overcast sky, it was getting colder.

It's 1700, he thought, looking at his watch. *I thought we'd be at the bridge by now.*

“What’s your status, Red?” He asked, as Depaul walked up.

“C12’s pack is acting up, and he’s experiencing turret problems,” Depaul said. “C14 has turret issues as well. Whatever hit us, it hit us hard.”

“Understood, but Mustang Six’s intent was clear,” CPT Hernandez said. “We have to keep pushing. Do I need to pass White through you?”

CPT Hernandez saw Depaul considering things.

“Sir, we’ll be all right,” he replied.

“Green, we’re going to keep moving up, but with you abreast of Red,” Hernandez said. “I’m going to put Sauron out on your west flank.”

“Roger, sir,” 1LT Malik replied.

“If we have tanks or whatever those were pop up again, you need to close with them and finish them off.”

“Understood, sir,” Depaul said, echoed by 1LT Malik a couple seconds later.

“If it’s dismounts, you keep them suppressed while Green closes and finishes them. Understand?”

Both lieutenants nodded.

“Good job on executing the PACE [primary, alternate, contingency, emergency] plan,” Hernandez said. “Let’s get to the bridge. I’ll shoot a green star cluster when you need to start moving.”

As the two platoon leaders walked back toward their tracks, Hernandez saw 1LT Robinson trying to flag him down.

That’s not good, he thought, running over to the fire support officer’s Bradley fire support team vehicle (B-FIST).

“Rotary-wing got engaged by MANPADS [man-portable air defense system] before they reached the FARP [forward arming and refueling point],” the artillery officer shouted. “They got an Apache damaged, another one crash-landed over in TF Strike’s sector.”

Well crap, Hernandez thought.

“Brigade is trying to figure out how they’ve got MANPADS in the support area,” Robinson said. “Long story short is, we’re not getting any aviation assets for a couple of hours at least, sir!”

Someone on the other side is too clever, Hernandez mused. Good thing that wasn't a Chinook full of infantry.

Hernandez nodded his understanding.

“Are they moving the mortars up?” he asked.

“Hammer is coming up to just south of EA Blackjack. They should be set in 15 minutes.”

Something occurred to Hernandez. “How in the hell do you have comms?” he asked.

Robinson shrugged.

“Fires net comes and goes, just like the other ones,” he replied. “I just sent our trace to brigade in the hopes it will get to Mustang.”

“I’m going to get Red and Green moving before the enemy gets more reinforcements,” he stated. Not for the first time, he considered going to ground until the TF net was functional once again.

Once the offensive has been assumed, it must be maintained to the last extremity, Hernandez thought. Briefs well, but Napoleon didn't have to worry about quadcopters and indirect.

With that, he climbed up onto C66 and grabbed the star clusters.

The flare arcing above the tree line in the twilight puzzled 2LT Depaul.

Did the Apaches go in and we just didn't hear it? he wondered.

“Red, Red One, execute movement.”

The four M1A2s pushed past the logs, their mass knocking several of them out of the way. Turning in the turret, Depaul looked past C12 farther into the forest. He could hear the Bradleys moving, but could not see them.

“Hey sir, there’s a fork in the road!” his driver shouted. Looking forward, Depaul could just make out that the road did indeed split.

“What?” Depaul asked. He looked down at his map. There was no fork in the road on the paper. Turning to his BFT, he realized that it was roughly the same image as that on the map.

Need to pull out the NVGs [night visions goggles] if I'm going to be out of the turret, he thought, dropping down to look through the CITV. He had just begun scanning when a bright streak from right to left across his front slope seemed to provide the answer.

“Contact right! Troops!” he heard SFC Swett report. A moment later, he heard C14 and C13’s coaxial machine guns open fire. Looking at where the rounds were impacting, he saw a low series of berms. To the left, he saw nothing.

That’s got to be the way to the bridge, he thought, pulling the hatch to open protected. *No one builds fighting positions for no good reason.*

“Driver, take the right one,” he ordered. “Gunner, coax, troops!”

Machine gun rounds began smacking into the turret, followed by a pair of RPGs. Looking right, Depaul saw that C14 and C13 had reoriented and were now joining him in a rapid advance toward the enemy. He saw C14’s main gun go off, followed by an expression of awe from his driver as the beehive round ended much of the enemy fire. C12 followed his platoon sergeant’s example, and the burst of flechettes seemed to break the dismounts’ spirit.

We can seize the bridge, Depaul thought excitedly.

“Red, go, go, go!” he said into the platoon net.

Just as C11’s engine throttled up, there was a large bang underneath the tank’s front accompanied by a cry of shock and surprise from the driver. The subsequent braking action threw Depaul forward into the rim of his hatch, and he felt his nose smash back into his face in a bright flash of stars. Stunned, he crumpled in his station as C11 lurched to a stop. Dimly, he heard SFC Swett asking if he was all right.

What ... what ...

“Sir! Sir! You okay?” his gunner asked.

Suddenly pain was shooting all across his face, it was difficult to breath, and blood filled his mouth. “Red, Red Four! Stop, stop, stop!” He heard SFC Swett say, as if from the end of a long tunnel.



CPT Hernandez was in shock.

“Say again slant!” He asked Red Four. He could hear the sound of continued machine gun fire from Red’s direction, even as Green was engaging enemy forces with their 25mm guns to his front. 1LT Malik had reported being in contact with enemy dismounts and at least two anti-tank (AT) systems. Hernandez was moving forward to lend C66’s main gun to the fight when Red’s report had reached him.

“Red is slant two,” came SFC Swett’s measured tone. “C12 is in the creek, C11 was hit by an IED [improvised explosive device]. Have engaged and destroyed an estimated two squads of enemy infantry, continuing to engage dismounts on the far side of the river.”

How did you idiots get in the creek? Hernandez wanted to scream over the radio.

“Cobra Six, Cobra Seven, I’m en route to Red’s position with the 88,” 1SG Gegg stated.

“Cobra Six, Cobra Five, Mustang wants a status report,” 1LT Dietze stated.

“Engaged with dismounts, developing the situation,” Hernandez snapped. “White, come forward up the route to my position. Do not take the right fork.”

“White One, roger.”

How did this happen? Hernandez asked himself. He watched as White One began to move past his tank.

“Green One, splash, over,” 1LT Robinson said.

“Guns, g ...”

Green’s transmission was cut off. The sound of mortar shells going overhead toward the bridge and then impacting was a welcome one. His satisfactory smile at that sound turned to horror as he watched a large-caliber shell smash into B22. The Bradley lurched backwards in a shower of sparks, its back ramp slapping onto the ground behind it.

“AT gun!” His gunner shouted.

“Fire!” Hernandez said reflexively. He belatedly realized C66’s line of fire went right past the hit B22, but the 120mm roared before he could correct himself. There was a bright flash just beyond the bridge as the offending anti-tank gun’s ammunition cooked off. C65 fired a moment later, with an identical explosion occurring as B22 began to burn.

“Cobra Six, Green One,” 1LT Malik said, his voice bursting suddenly in CPT Hernandez’s headphones. “I have one victor down, over.”

“Roger, Green One,” Hernandez replied. “Seven, did you copy?”

There was a moment’s silence.

“I copy,” came 1SG Gegg’s voice. “I am in the midst of MEDEVAC [medical evacuation] for Red One.”

Say what? Once more, Hernandez was about to erupt when he realized Red Four’s reports had probably been jammed. “Roger!” he stated. “We have likely litter urgent this location.”

“Understood,” 1SG Gegg replied. “Will expedite with Mercy.”

“Cobra Six, be advised that I have eyes on an obstacle across the road,” 1LT Malik reported. “We put some 25 mike into it and there was a small explosion, not sure if there are more explosives inside.”

Hernandez cursed.

“We are no longer receiving direct fire from the far or near side of the bridge,” 1LT Malik continued. “Have destroyed two ATGMs and two anti-tank guns.”

“Roger,” Hernandez said. “Guns, request obscuration.”

“Cobra 6, Guns, be advised Hammer is conducting survival displacement at this time,” 1LT Robinson said.

Where is the task force? Hernandez thought, looking behind him.

“Green, hold tight where you’re at,” Hernandez said. “We’re going to get the engineers up here to look at that obstacle.”



“Sir, Cobra reports in contact!” 1LT Eric Goldstein, the task force battle captain, stated.

The battle captain’s report caused all work to cease.

“Is this new contact or the report finally breaking through the jamming?” LTC Milner asked. Goldstein looked surprised by the question, then turned to the task force signal officer.

“Sir, we don’t have FM back yet,” 1LT Holmes reported.

Now why did you not know that? LTC Milner nearly screamed at Goldstein. Instead, he gave the battle captain a withering look, then turned to MAJ Santiago. A short nod told him that the S-3 would handle the problem later.

“Sir, that report just came in over the AFATDS [advanced field artillery tactical data system],” the operations sergeant MAJ Gabriel Wolfe said. “Cobra has lost one Bradley, has one tank in the creek. They also have engaged and destroyed an estimated two platoons of dismounts, three ATGMs, and two anti-tank guns.”

“Anti-tank guns?” LTC Milner asked, looking at his new S-2. CPT Glenn Robinson had been called up to Iron Main to replace the BDE S-2, MAJ Santos, after the latter had been shot by an apparent sniper.

“Sir, the ethnic Arcanians were reported to have ‘stolen’ several anti-tank guns in order to protect themselves ‘against the possibility of a Bolcavian genocide against their people’ roughly two weeks ago,” Franklin said. “Brigade S-2 did not believe we would see any in our sector.”

Just like the enemy allegedly didn’t have the ability to obscure thermals with their indirect assets, LTC Milner thought angrily.

“Send that to higher,” he ordered. “What is Cobra doing now?”

“CPT Hernandez is holding position until the engineers can remove the hasty obstacle, sir,” Goldstein stated. “They have eyes on the bridge.”

“MEDEVAC?”

“Rotary-wing MEDEVAC is a no go, sir,” Goldstein said. “Brigade is still attempting to find the enemy forces that engaged the Apaches.”

That’s not good, LTC Milner thought.

“MAJ Santiago, we need to figure out a ground CASEVAC [casualty evacuation] plan immediately,” he said. “Tell Dagger and Anvil to be prepared to move forward, get engineer support to Cobra. Immediately.”

I screwed up, LTC Milner thought as he listened to MAJ Santiago start issuing orders. He had expected some opposition centered on the ethnic Arcanians situated in the town north of the bridge. What he had not expected was a militia that seemed to indicate months of training by Arcanian conventional force advisors.

How did we miss this? he thought. They had focused on the conventional force-on-force fight and ignored the signs of any nascent hybrid proxy fight. This was going to complicate any attempt at extending their lines as the enemy situation was fluid and apparently everywhere.

“Excuse me, sir, we have a new report from brigade,” 1LT Franklin said. “Division launched two UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles] to try to get us some eyes on the bridge.”

The young officer looked down at his notes.

It’s never good when a subordinate wants to tell you exactly how bad their news is, LTC Milner thought.

“Both UAVs appear to have been interdicted by enemy forces, either on this side of the border or from across the international boundary,” Franklin stated. “Division thought the first one was just an in-flight maintenance problem causing us to lose control of the aircraft. They had no idea where it landed, so they could not examine it.”

Son of a ...

“The second crashed shortly after takeoff and nearly landed on the TF Strike TOC,” Franklin continued. “Tactical forensics seems to indicate the second one was taken over and downed, but that’s an initial report.”

“I take it that means no UAVs for a while?” Milner asked.

“Yes, sir,” Franklin confirmed.

“Division has started conducting analysis based on the jamming and interdiction of the UAVs,” MAJ Fitch, the battalion XO, interjected. LTC Milner had not noticed the man slip in from his leader rest. “They’re going to give us a rough phase line north of which we can expect to be regularly jammed or interfered with. Division is cuing sensors to look for things based on our reports.”

“Let’s get Cobra some help, but we’re going to stop trying to rush into this,” LTC Milner said. “I ...”

“Sir, Sauron reports contact with enemy dismounts,” 1LT Goldstein interrupted. He pointed at the map west of TM Cobra near the western bridge. “It appears they snuck up on another pair of those anti-tank guns being moved in and took them out with Javelins. They’re falling back and maintaining eyes on the bridge.”

LTC Milner looked at MAJ Santiago. Before he could say anything, once more he realized his S-3 was on the same wavelength.

“Tell Sauron he’s not to initiate any more direct fire contact with hostile forces,” Santiago said. “Pass along an attaboy, but tell him not to do that crap again.”

Nodding his agreement, LTC Milner turned to MAJ Fitch.

“XO, you have the main,” he said. “Three, come with me.”

The two men stepped out into the darkness, making sure the heavy flap meant to keep the interior light from spilling properly closed.

“One of us needs to go forward,” LTC Milner said. “CPT Hernandez is a good officer, but he can’t fight his company and report to us in this environment. I think it should be me, but I know that might not be the best decision.”

“Sir, you need to go forward so I can jump the TOC,” Santiago replied. “We’ve been here too long, and someone’s going to start dropping indirect on us.”

“Agreed,” LTC Milner said after a moment’s reflection. “Inform CPT Hernandez I’m heading in his direction.”

“Roger, sir,” MAJ Santiago said.



“We have one KIA [killed in action], two litter urgent, and four walking wounded,” 1SG Gegg said. “MEDEVAC is down, I’m taking C65 and heading back to the battalion aid station.”

“What happened with Red, Top?” CPT Hernandez asked.

“Partisans apparently planned on hitting whomever came up the road in the flank once they attacked the bridge,” 1SG Gegg said, his face grim in the light of the burning B22. “Lucky actually, as they probably would have bagged one or two tanks if they hadn’t gotten buck fever.”

“How long until 2LT Depaul has all his tracks back?”

“Probably four to six hours,” 1SG Gegg said. “They threw track and shook up everything in the tank, plus his nose is definitely broken.”

“Do we need to send him back?” Hernandez asked.

“I wouldn’t do that, sir,” 1SG Gegg said, causing Cobra 6 to raise an eyebrow. “Medics checked him for a concussion; he’s fine. If you send him back now, it will look like you’re firing him.”

“The thought crossed my mind,” Hernandez said.

“Sir, anyone would have made that mistake,” 1SG Gegg replied.

CPT Hernandez recognized his 1SG’s tone.

Amazing how NCOs can tell us we’re being idiots without saying the words, he thought.

“Old man is telling us to maintain this position,” Hernandez said. “I’ll make sure everyone gets their security out. We don’t need to hand out any more freebies tonight.”

“Agreed, sir,” 1SG Gegg said. “When we get back from battalion, we’ll get people starting to initiate a rest plan.”

The sound of an approaching vehicle caused both men to look up. They recognized the engineer detachment assigned to TF Mustang.

“Sir, I’m getting the wounded back,” 1SG Gegg said. Hernandez nodded, and watched as the 1SG departed with C65, providing security.

“Sir, I really hope they don’t bend my tank,” 1LT Dietze said beside him.

“I think 1SG Gegg’s got a plan to keep that from happening,” Hernandez said. “I also think that tank will keep those dismounts Red scattered from trying their luck.”

“Evening, sir,” SSG Bolten, the engineer team NCO in charge, said as he walked up. “Looks like someone’s put a pretty good obstacle out there in front of us.”

“Can you clear it, you think?” CPT Hernandez asked.

“I wouldn’t want to do it in the dark without a good reason, sir,” SSG Bolten said. “If they had that mostly in place before they hit the EA, I imagine it’s complex. Maybe even a couple of command-detonated IEDs in there.”

“We don’t want to give them time to come up and wire the bridge,” CPT Hernandez said.

SSG Bolten shrugged at that. “Sir, I think they packed a bunch of boom in the short distance between this obstacle and the actual bridge,” he replied. “That’s not a flimsy structure, so if we’re dealing with folks that had enough to wire the bridge as well, then it’s probably already done.”

Bolten chewed on his lip as he considered what he was going to say next. “Bottom line, sir, I need more engineer capability to bust through this obstacle and get us moving over the bridge,” he said.

“What do you need?” Hernandez asked resignedly.

“An MCLIC [mine-clearing line charge] might be too much to clear this breach,” Bolten said. “If you just need the roadbed clear and will deliberately breach the approaches later, we could do an APOB [anti-personnel obstacle breaching system] breach and see where that gets us.”

Thank goodness he didn't actually ask for a MCLIC, CPT Hernandez thought, surprised. “We’ll give the APOB a shot.”

Twenty minutes later, as Green and White platoons suppressed the far side with harassing fire, SSG Bolten and his team moved forward to put the APOB in place.

Although Hernandez was skeptical as to the APOB’s effectiveness against the deadfall in front of them, SSG Bolten’s enthusiasm was infectious. With the objective mainly to set up a foot path to facilitate a further, deliberate breach in daylight, it was critical that they lined up the shot well for maximum effect. As he watched Bolten and his assistant assess the wind direction, Hernandez noticed the fog starting to thicken around the river.

That could be a problem for security, he thought. SSG Bolten, apparently satisfied with lining up the shot, primed the line charge and jogged backwards with his assistant.

We need more training opportunities with that thing at the CTCs [combat training centers] or home station, Hernandez thought. *Of course, they’re rarer than hen’s teeth.*

If the APOB somehow failed, the nearest one was in the TF trains. Hernandez kicked himself for not thinking of that during the orders process. Even in the defense, the APOB might have had a use.

The initial shot report rocket carrying the line charge up and over the obstacle interrupted his self-castigation. With the rocket's drift due to ambient winds, the charge landed west of the main obstacle. The explosion followed by several sympathetic detonations indicated that the APOB had done something. SSG Bolten and his assistant fired a white star cluster, the signal for the suppressing units to cease fire and remain in overwatch. The two men quickly stepped off to walk the APOB path, and Hernandez was very conscious of just how exposed they were.

This is insane, he thought. The two men walked to the other side of the obstacle. Seemingly satisfied, they came jogging back. After another five minutes, the two men were standing, still shaking slightly with adrenaline, next to C66.

"Sir, we got lucky. The APOB performed flawlessly," said SSG Bolten. "We have a lane that extends into the complex obstacle about 40 meters but I still cannot see a cleared path to the bridge. I need at least one or two more APOBs to clear a foot path to the bridge."

"Do you think there are more IEDs?" Hernandez asked.

"Probably," Bolten said. "I will be better able to report on what else is in there tomorrow when it gets light. Absent that luxury, I need to get a MCLIC and a dozer to clear this abatis and establish a lane."

"Well done, SSG Bolten," Hernandez said gratefully. "I'll get battalion to try to bring those assets forward by first light."

"Thank you, sir," Bolten said. "I would like to take an OP [observation post] to the end of the path so that we don't have someone sneak in and put mines back in the cleared area."

"Get with Green," CPT Hernandez said after a moment.

"Will do," SSG Bolten said.

We're not going to regain contact with the main body, CPT Hernandez thought. *But we still managed to keep them from pushing south across this bridge again.*

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- 1.) TM Cobra initiated the movement to contact fairly quickly. What steps could CPT Hernandez have taken to facilitate this process without sacrificing speed?
- 2.) What steps could TM Cobra have taken at the platoon and company levels to mitigate being surprised by dismounted forces?
- 3.) What steps can junior leaders take to prepare to operate in a degraded communications and GPS environment?
- 4.) What steps can a company team take to conduct internal hasty breaching?
- 5.) How can a company team or task force mitigate outdated maps when they arrive in an area of operations?
- 6.) How do tactical units conduct CASEVAC in the absence of rotary-wing assets?

CHAPTER 4

Hasty Mission Orders and a Change of Mission

It had been three hours since Team (TM) Cobra had halted their operations.

I messed up on the planning, MAJ Santiago thought despondently, even as his face remained impassive to his planners. We were too aggressive and Cobra paid the price.

It had seemed reasonable to believe that the Arcanian separatists, their mechanized forces broken, would fold under offensive pressure.

You know what they say about assumptions, Santiago thought. Now I'm running around wearing the donkey's head.

“OK, gentlemen, let’s begin,” LTC Milner began. The task force (TF) commander, Mustang Three, Mustang Five, and representatives from each of the staff sections had convened in the TF Mustang plans tent.

Santiago could see Mustang Six was fatigued, but the man had come back after his battlefield circulation with a much clearer grasp of the tactical situation. Now, with Mustang Six still idling in the background, the group was meeting in the hours before dawn to put together a task force operation order (OPORD).

“First, no more of the long faces,” Milner said. “We accepted risk in pushing TM Cobra forward, and they managed to defeat two platoons of dismounts that were well armed. They took losses, but we have the assets within the task force to replace those, and we hold key terrain that will prevent the enemy from moving any sizeable mechanized force into sector.”

Santiago found himself nodding along with several others in the tent. Even though Mustang Six was clearly tired, he could tell that the man was working to steady the TF’s resolve.

“Now, task and purpose: TF Mustang conducts a deliberate attack to PL [phase line] Red in order to defeat Arcanian separatists south of Route Condor,” Milner said. He repeated himself to give his staff time to write things down.

“I want the battalion to use two avenues of approach, each corresponding with the highways leading up to the bridge,” Milner said. “Cobra is already sitting astride one, and I want Anvil to take the other to the bridge where scouts are along the river. We’re going to designate that PL Orange, then

that little tributary coming off of it to Cobra's east PL Yellow.”

Again, he waited for the staff's note-taking to catch up with what he said. As Milner did so, Santiago began thinking of what graphics were needed to support his commander's guidance.

“TM Dagger will be the TF reserve again. We'll use them to exploit whichever axis has success getting across the river.”

Dagger is going to hate being in reserve again, Santiago thought.

“I don't want to get bogged down in an urban fight in Zhodkiva,” Milner stated emphatically. “I would prefer that we contain and bypass the built-up area and hand off the detailed clearance of the village to security forces of the host nation. The river that runs west and northwest of the village is wider and runs more swiftly; we need to plan our attack across that river using engineer assets from the BEB [brigade engineer battalion].”

I don't know if brigade is going to support us going all the way to PL Black, Santiago mused. *TF Griffon cannot support to our west, and TF Strike still has not re-established contact with the force that fixed it.*

“Deuce, brigade has thrown the door wide open on requests for ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] support,” LTC Milner continued, looking at 1LT Franklin. “I want you to get together with your folks and figure out what we can ask for that's not GPS or UAS [unmanned aerial system] dependent. I don't care if it's satellite imagery that's three days old, that beats going in totally blind.”

Milner turned to Santiago.

“Brigade has stated we should already have two tank platoons of T-72s with us,” Milner said. “Other than the one that lost a track during the defense, we haven't heard anything from the host nation. I asked brigade to release us the reserve or send us some of the host nation forces to clear that village. Iron Six said he'd see what he could do, but I need you to keep poking Iron Three.”

Santiago nodded. “Iron Five is not going to be happy with me ...” he started to say.

“You tell Iron Five if he's got a problem with you asking for support, he can take it up with me,” Milner snapped. “We can push the enemy out of this AO [area of operation] or we can clear the village with what we've already got, but I cannot do both.”

The S-2's issued satellite phone chose that moment to chirp. Ignoring MAJ Santiago and LTC Milner's simultaneous glare, 1LT Franklin looked down at the screen.

“Sir, the mayor of Voloslav is requesting a meeting with you at your convenience this morning,” 1LT Franklin said.

Milner looked aghast at his S-2.

“Pertinence, 1LT Franklin?” Mustang Five asked. Santiago looked across at the task force XO.

You clearly know something that I and the old man don't, Santiago thought.

“Sorry, sir,” 1LT Franklin said, realizing that he'd assumed all the field grades had discussed this information. “Mayor Galkin of Voloslav is the first cousin of Mayor Kovalchik of Zhodkiva, so he will have some information that is pertinent to conducting human intelligence and coordinating action.”

“Mustang Three, we can figure that meeting out after the briefing,” LTC Milner said, only slightly mollified. 1LT Franklin turned the phone to silent as the battalion commander looked over the map.

“Sir, I'd suggest pushing TM Dagger to follow and assume TM Cobra,” MAJ Fitch said. LTC Milner turned to look at him.

“Reasoning?” Mustang Six asked.

“Given the current comms environment, we'll have difficulty shifting TM Dagger from a reserve position to follow either team,” MAJ Fitch replied. “Ideally, we'd like to be able to exploit either axis, but in reality the enemy's ability to introduce friction means we're better off just choosing one. Send the host nation forces up behind TM Anvil and we'll have roughly the same effect.”

“MAJ Santiago?” LTC Milner asked.

“XO has a good point, sir,” MAJ Santiago said. “It's the best route north, so we might as well take it from the enemy by force.”

“Okay, let's shift the plan that way then,” LTC Milner said. “We'll have what's left of Badger secure the trains and the main. Also, have TM Badger detach a BFV [Bradley fighting vehicle] to replace Cobra's loss.”

TM Badger didn't have a lot of BFVs left, Santiago thought. *But he's right, Hernandez needs to be up at full strength.*

“In that same vein, Mustang Four, I need a cannibalization plan for the vehicles TM Badger lost,” LTC Milner said. “Figure it out quickly before Iron Four says all of them belong to him.”

Santiago saw Mustang Four gulp, then turn a bit pale. He felt a little queasy himself as he thought about the task force's mechanics swarming over damaged vehicles for critical parts.

LTC Milner looked at his watch. “Mustang Three, I need a backbrief of a plan in one hour. Let’s get the graphics to the companies by that time, on acetate as well as electronically,” he said. “We’ll put out an execution matrix once the FRAGO [fragmentary order] is done.”

“Yes, sir,” Santiago said, inwardly wincing at what he was going to have to do.

“Brigade is a mess thanks to the sniper and a couple of indirect attacks,” Milner observed. “We need to figure out a plan for moving this CP [command post] every 8 to 12 hours, both for purposes of command and control and to avoid being a target ourselves.”

Santiago saw Fitch nodding and jotting down notes.

“Finally, let’s figure out a plan for passing the host nation forces through our lines if and when they get here,” LTC Milner said, then paused. “Pending the 15-6, I don’t want to imply Badger committed fratricide. But I also want to make sure we’re not asking ourselves if that was a possible outcome in future operations. Understood?”

“Yes, sir,” MAJ Santiago replied.

“Are there any questions?” LTC Milner asked.

“Sir, what is brigade’s plan for conducting resupply operations with the hybrid threat so active in the support area?” Mustang Four asked. “We’re amber on fuel and I’m pretty sure we won’t have enough to conduct a wet gap crossing followed by a deliberate breach.”

“Brigade does not have a plan yet,” LTC Milner allowed. “To be frank, we’re pulling brigade forward a little bit.”

Read: If we’re already at the river and asking for bridging assets before the old man gives us a firm “no,” they’re not going to make us give the ground back, Santiago thought.

“Anyone else?” LTC Milner asked. He scanned the assembled group and saw no one else seemed curious.

“Very good. Mustang Three, a word.”

MAJ Santiago turned to his plans team, 1LT(P) Mustaine and SSG Hetfield.

“Go grab your tools and meet me back here,” MAJ Santiago said. Both men nodded and carried out his instructions as Santiago and Milner left the tent to go to the main operations area. The two officers entered the buzz of the main tactical operations center (TOC), going to stand before the primary map.

“Do not waste energy on multiple COAs [courses of action],” Milner said. “We don’t have time, and I’d rather have you focusing on deconflicting movement and maneuver to avoid further fratricide.”

“Understood, sir,” Santiago replied.

“We’ll have Hammer conduct split sections,” Milner said as he looked at the map.

“Sir, we’ll need to be sparing with Hammer,” Santiago observed. “They nearly got smashed by counterbattery a couple of times yesterday.”

Milner nodded. “Not like Iraq at all, is it?” He asked rhetorically.

“No, sir, that it isn’t,” Santiago replied wearily. “Not at all.”

“Do you need more time, Jorge?” LTC Milner asked.

“Sir?” Santiago replied, surprised.

“The more I think about this, the more I realize that we kind of rushed things yesterday after the defense,” Mustang Six explained. “Now, as I look at this map, we’re trying to make a lot of things happen. Add in the Bolcavians, and we’re trying to make things happen with a language barrier thrown in.”

Santiago remained silent, knowing that LTC Milner was thinking aloud.

“What I’m saying is, if you need a couple of hours to do a MDMP [military decisionmaking process], do it,” Milner finished. “I still want the graphics out to everyone within an hour, but we need to make sure the execution checklist and contingency branches will hold up if the enemy does something different.”

Santiago nodded, looking at the area between PLs Orange and Black.

I would not want to get caught there with one team forward if the enemy launched a spoiling attack with a reinforced battalion, he thought.

“Sir, I’ll take the time if you think we have it,” Santiago replied. “We’ll expedite, but I think the TF will be better off for it.”

Operational Graphics

A graphic control measure is a symbol used on maps and displays to regulate forces and warfighting functions. Commanders establish measures to regulate maneuver, movement, fires, airspace use, and other aspects of operations. In general, all graphic control measures should relate to easily identifiable natural or manmade terrain features.

As the staff began the planning process, MAJ Santiago was glad that he had asked for more time.

The RFIs [requests for information] about the Bolcavians alone are going to be a half page, Santiago thought to himself. We need to know their size, composition, unique capabilities, ethical and cultural considerations, and uniforms if nothing else. Santiago had the feeling he was forgetting something, and that it would be vitally important at the worst time.

“Gentlemen, you all heard Mustang Six,” he said, looking at the assembled planners. “LTC Milner modified his guidance to give us time to take a wider view of what the enemy intends to accomplish. SPC Rice, I want you to take a holistic view of the battlefield and try to get inside our opponents’ collective head.”

SPC Rice nodded, and Santiago tried to ignore the dark circles under the young man’s eyes.

We need to get the paperwork through for him to have a battlefield promotion, Santiago thought. He’s doing a sergeant’s job, he needs to have the requisite rank.

“Next, the graphics — we need to put things in place that make it easier for commanders to cross talk with each other as well as us,” Santiago continued. “As per SOP, we’ll use monetary denominations for the objectives.”

Stepping up to where the OPS sergeant major had already laid out acetate over the tactical map, Santiago took a Sharpie from the pocket of his Nomex.

“Team Cobra’s bridge will be OBJ Penny,” Santiago said, making a broad circle around the structure CPT Hernandez’s company was currently overlooking. “The bridge and ford Sauron is currently sitting atop of will be OBJ Quarter.”

Shame about the bridge not being rated for mechanized traffic, Santiago thought forlornly. Good thing someone thought to ask the locals the

difference between our maps and what was actually there.

Apparently the bridge Sauron was looking at had been damaged by flooding several years before. The Bolcavian government had created a ford near it for mechanized forces to travel through, but somehow this information had not been included in S-2 briefings until SPC Rice thought to ask.

“Assume the ford is mined,” Santiago stated. “We don’t have any definite information to that effect, but it’s what I would do in the enemy’s case.”

Considering the map, Santiago pulled out a different color Sharpie and began marking routes in blue.

“Route Owl for TM Anvil, this blackball that connects OBJ Quarter to Zhodkiva will become Route Condor,” Santiago continued.

“Sir, are we going to make Zhodkiva an objective?” SPC Rice asked. “It will make it easier when we’re requesting assets to support the Bolcavians.”

“OBJ Dime,” Santiago said. He looked at the map, then at his planners.

“Don’t make the mistake of drawing a boundary right down the middle of any of the routes,” he said. “Given the boss’ guidance, be prepared to add a cordon around Zhodkiva.”

“Yes, sir,” Mustaine and Hetfield said in unison.

I feel like I’m forgetting something, Santiago thought. We just have to make sure we don’t end up in a fight within that village.

SPC Rice was measuring something on the map and consulting a calculator. The man did a double take and guffawed.

“What gives, Riceman?” 1LT Mustaine asked, a touch of concern in his voice.

“It’s roughly 26 miles from OBJ Dime to PL Black,” SPC Rice replied, shaking his head. “Basically a marathon.”

Santiago smirked even as he shook his head at SPC Rice’s observation.

“We can come back in 20 years and run a memorial event,” SSG Hetfield said. “For now, focus.”

“We’re well within range of artillery fire from inside Arcania,” 1LT Mustaine observed. “Or it’s fairly easy for them to cross the border, fire quickly, then get back into sanctuary.”

“Why are we letting them do this?” SSG Hartfield asked.

“Gentlemen, that’s above our pay grade,” Santiago observed. “Let’s remain

concerned with what is in our control, just account for the indirect in your planning.”

There was mutual assent from around the table. Over the next hour, the gathered staff worked through the planning SOP. The time was interspersed with contact reports in the battalion sector, as well as continued operations on TF Mustang’s flanks.

Judging from the activity, MAJ Santiago could tell their adversaries were trying to establish TF Mustang’s positions. Sauron, to their credit, did their best to parry this activity with both indirect fire and, in one case, direct fire engagement of two dismounted squads.

If I ever questioned the value of having an aggressive, competent scout platoon leader, this night will remove those doubts, Santiago thought.

“Okay, time to complete the war-gaming process,” Santiago stated. “Let’s get MAJ Fitch in here to oversee things.”

The staff took another hour to war-game their single course of action. In both cases, 1LT Franklin was able to disrupt the battalion plans, but only once TF Mustang attempted the second wet gap crossing north of PL Red.

Identifying shortcomings, many of which were outside his TF’s ability to control, MAJ Santiago made a list of assets TF Mustang would request from brigade and, in a couple of cases, division. However, given the time available, in consultation with CPT King, the TF engineer, these included the necessary bridging assets for the second wet gap crossing. All of the requests, however, would take time. TF Mustang would have to initiate operations while waiting for the request process to work.

The separatists conducted a force-oriented operation in TF Griffon’s sector, MAJ Santiago thought. They seem to think causing casualties is the way to create division between us and our international allies.

Reports were still coming in, but it appeared TF Griffon had taken roughly 20 percent casualties. The BBC was already noting that the operation, if it remained at its current pace, would incur more dead in one week for the British Army than “were suffered during the entirety of ground operations throughout the entire Falklands War.” Given that, Santiago could not shake the feeling that rather than fleeing en masse, the separatists were attempting to draw TF Mustang into a position where they could launch a counterattack.

Don’t borrow worry. His grandmother’s advice always came back to him at times like this.

After the war-gaming session, they had a plan for resisting an Arcanian

counterattack north of PL Orange. It would be up to the TF to detect it early, then mass fires and destroy it. So far their opponents had made good use of asymmetric assets to counter TF Mustang's strengths, but when it had come to direct fire and tactical engagements the Army's superior training and equipment had narrowly won out. Even with TM Badger's mauling in EA Blackjack, TF Mustang had managed to hold and seize territory in the counterattack.

"Sir, I've got the concept of support overlay," CPT Beaudoin, the TF S-4, stated.

Well this is critical, Santiago thought to himself. Cobra had lost two Soldiers who had died of wounds due to the extensive time it had taken to conduct CASEVAC. Rotary-wing CASEVAC had resumed, albeit through taking away armed Apaches that could have been better put to use affecting the maneuver situation. Still, just in case, Santiago had instructed the TF S-4 to focus on providing fuel and CASEVAC as his two primary concerns.

"This is good work," Santiago said, looking at the S-4s plan. He scanned the rest of the gathered group. "Okay, let's get ready to brief the old man in 20 minutes, then the company commanders 30 minutes after that," Santiago said wearily. "Call it 0540 for the commander's brief."

Taking the Time to Thoroughly Execute the Military Decisionmaking Process (MDMP)

MDMP is often considered an unwieldy and time-consuming process. It normally takes a number of detailed MDMP iterations in order to identify shortcuts and identify efficiencies that best preserve the "one third, two thirds" time for your subordinate tactical echelons. Shortcuts in planning, although tempting, normally take more time to fix in the long run.

Tactical Control (TACON)

The authority over forces that is limited to the detailed direction and control of movements or maneuvers within the operational area necessary to accomplish missions or tasks assigned.

Operational Control (OPCON)

The authority to perform those functions of command over subordinate forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, designating objectives, and giving authoritative direction necessary to accomplish the mission.

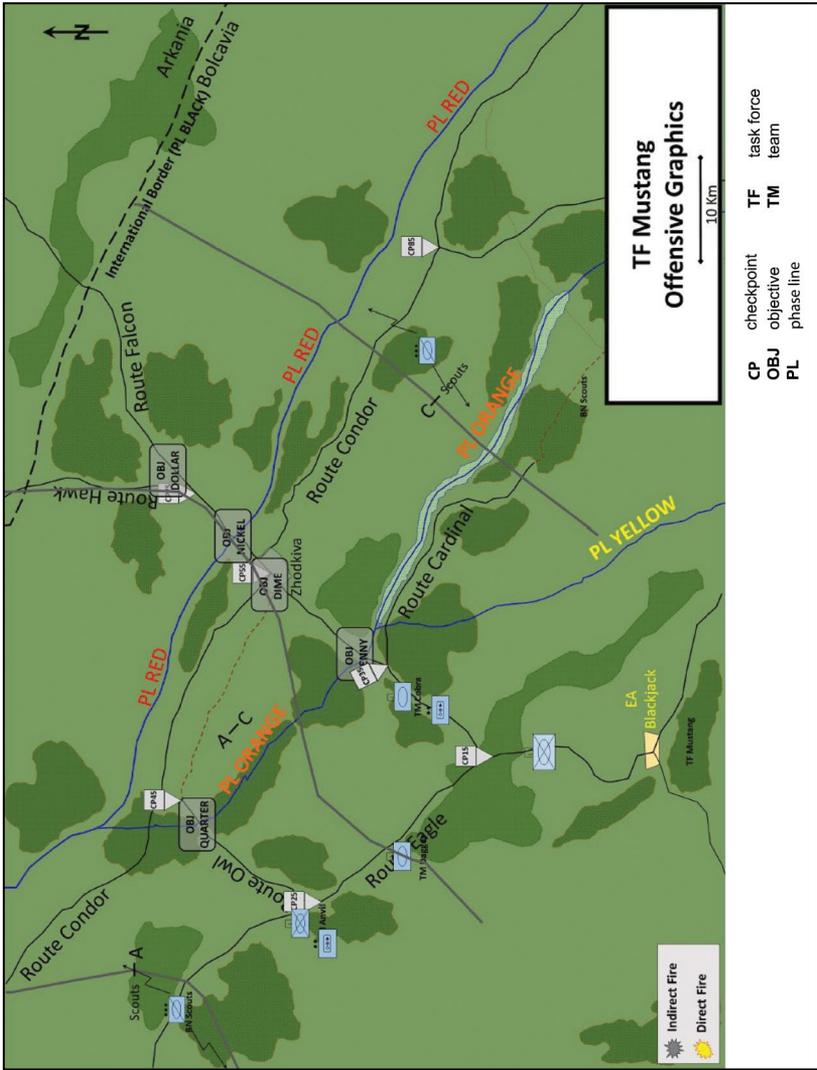


Figure 4-1. TF Mustang offensive graphics

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- 1.) What do you think CPT Hernandez understood TM Cobra's mission to be?
- 2.) What did LTC Milner and MAJ Santiago understand TM Cobra's mission to be?
- 3.) Given TF Mustang's primarily defensive task in the brigade scheme, do you feel that LTC Milner and MAJ Santiago actually made an error in their plan? How did their offensive operations fit within the larger scheme of the brigade defensive operation?
- 4.) Did MAJ Santiago actually "mess up on the planning?" Or did TF Mustang, as LTC Milner stated, operate within initiative in the absence of strict brigade orders?
- 5.) What assets should a battalion staff request in TF Mustang's situation?
- 6.) What steps can TF Mustang take to avoid fratricide?
- 7.) Is LTC Milner reasonable in asking Mustang Four for a cannibalization plan? Is he reasonable in directing the transfer of a BFV and crew between TM Badger and TM Cobra? If so, why? If not, why not?
- 8.) What are some other questions you think MAJ Santiago could ask about host nation forces?
- 9.) Look at the graphics at the end of this chapter. What other items might you add to the graphic control measures?
- 10.) What do you feel, if anything, MAJ Santiago forgot in his instructions to the planning section?

CHAPTER 5

Milner's Run to the North

“Mustang Six, Mustang Six, this is Iron Six.”

COL Kendrick's voice woke LTC Milner from his brief catnap.

“Iron Six, Mustang Six,” LTC Milner said, waving off his gunner reaching for the hand mike.

“I'm five minutes out from your Main,” COL Kendrick stated. “Need to conduct face-to-face with you, your Five, and your Three.”

Milner winced. COL Kendrick did not sound pleased.

“Roger,” Milner said. He looked at his watch. *I hope they're right about 20-minute naps being better than nothing at all*, he thought.

“SGT Dai,” he said, looking at his gunner. “Go tell MSG Wolf that we have Iron Six en route. I need MAJ Fitch and MAJ Santiago, ASAP.”

“Roger, sir,” SGT Dai said, already slithering past Mustang 66's breech and out of the loader hatch.

LTC Milner ran his hand over his face and was glad he had shaved before trying to catch some sleep. He clambered down off his track in the early morning light. Having provided some additional guidance to MAJ Santiago regarding reconnaissance and surveillance (R&S) operations and not wanting his commanders to be moving through hostile territory in the predawn darkness, LTC Milner had directed that the battalion (BN) orders briefing be pushed back to 0730 local.

Looks like I'll either have additional guidance, we won't be attacking after all, or someone else will be giving orders shortly to the task force [TF], he thought. *At least Cobra and Anvil are getting more fuel.*

He had accepted the risk and used the last of TF Mustang's reserves to ensure his two lead teams were stepping off of line of departure (LD) with more than 80 percent fuel. Dagger was at 65 percent, but LTC Milner was confident they would be able to resupply prior to being employed.

The sound of multiple vehicles winding up the forest trail to Mustang Main's current position told LTC Milner he did not have much time. Taking quick care of personal hygiene, he was standing next to Mustang 66 when

the four Humvees and two Bradley fighting vehicles (BFVs) pulled into the TF Main's perimeter. COL Kendrick, LTC Halsey, an unknown British officer, and TF Mustang's LNO to brigade (BDE), 1LT DeMaio.

"Iron Six does not look happy," MAJ Santiago observed, startling LTC Milner.

"No, he does not," LTC Milner replied. He watched as 1LT DeMaio made a beeline for the tactical operations center (TOC) entrance, something that was a bad sign.

"Would someone care to explain to me why we conducted Milner's Run yesterday evening?" COL Kendrick asked. "You can imagine my surprise during the brigade war game when my new S-2 piped up that this TF was about 20 kilometers north of what my staff had on my situation map!"

Now that's some bull. LTC Milner started to think before MAJ Fitch answered the brigade commander.

"Iron Main confirmed the trace we sent them at 1715 and again at 2215, sir," Mustang Five stated bluntly, drawing a glower from LTC Halsey.

"My command post's internal problems aside," Kendrick snapped, "I don't think that answers my larger question."

"Sir, I operated within your intent," LTC Milner stated. "I initiated pursuit to re-establish contact and attempt to relieve pressure on TF Griffon."

He saw the British officer wince. LTC Milner glanced at the man's rank and was startled to see obvious bloodstains.

"Speaking of TF Griffon, this is CPT Fisk, acting Griffon Five," COL Kendrick said. "Now, explain to me how attacking 20 kilometers north without conducting flank unit coordination is somehow relieving pressure on TF Griffon."

LTC Milner struggled to keep his face impassive.

"Sir, if you'll come over to the terrain model," he stated, hoping that it did not come out as much a hiss as it sounded like.

"Lead on, Mustang Six," COL Kendrick said as the group was joined by two more American officers and a Bolcavian lieutenant colonel. One of the captains looked familiar, but LTC Milner had neither the time nor inclination to try to place him. The short walk to the Mustang terrain model gave LTC Milner time to regain his military bearing.

“I see that LTC Halsey has not misinformed me,” COL Kendrick stated, observing the offensive graphics. “As you’ve apparently prepared to move north, we’ll skip explaining how we got here and instead move on to you briefing me on why I should let you continue.”

“Sir, if LTC Halsey spent a little more time coordinating his staff rather than second guessing your commanders, I might not have wasted my S-3’s time last night,” LTC Milner snapped, then immediately regretted it as Iron Five started to color.

“Noted,” COL Kendrick said, forestalling LTC Halsey’s angry reply. “Now, as I stated, walk me through your plan.”

“Sir, I have Team (TM) Anvil prepared to force the western crossing, labeled OBJ (objective) Quarter on this model,” LTC Milner said. “The purpose will be to protect TM Cobra’s flank and potentially set the conditions for TM Dagger to bypass Zhodkiva, OBJ Dime, to the west.”

COL Kendrick nodded, crossing his arms as he looked at the map.

“TM Cobra will simultaneously move to seize the bridge at OBJ Penny,” LTC Milner stated. “They’ve had eyes on OBJ Penny since last night, they were just waiting to start breaching in daylight.”

“You know that means they’ll likely have to deal with indirect now, correct?” Kendrick asked.

“Yes, sir,” LTC Milner said. “I realize we’re in range from enemy systems dashing across PL Black, firing, then returning to sanctuary. We requested Q-36 support last night through AFATDS [advanced field artillery tactical data system].”

“LTC Halsey, if I agree to this, I want TM Cobra to have priority for CAS [close air support] sorties,” COL Kendrick said. “Start taking notes for a possible FRAGO [fragmentary order].”

“Yes, sir,” LTC Halsey said.

“Continue, Mustang Six,” COL Kendrick said.

“TM Dagger will follow behind TM Cobra,” LTC Milner stated. “It will either happen at OBJ Penny or north of Zhodkiva.”

“What is your decision criteria for passing Dagger forward?” Kendrick asked.

LTC Milner felt his stomach drop. *How did we not think that through?* he wondered.

Kendrick looked from LTC Milner to MAJ Santiago, then to MAJ Fitch.

“Well don’t just make something up on my account,” the brigade commander cautioned. “What is your plan for Zhodkiva?”

LTC Milner gestured toward the Bolcavian lieutenant colonel.

“Sir, my plan was to establish a cordon, then let the host nation forces conduct operations within the village,” Milner stated.

“That is what we would prefer, yes,” the Bolcavian officer said, his accent light. “I am LTC Sorokin, deputy commander of the 1st Battalion, 33rd Motorized Regiment. First, thank you all for helping us to meet Arcanian aggression.”

LTC Milner could tell Sorokin was not merely speaking platitudes.

“Second, two of my companies will be here within the next four hours,” he stated. “They are currently supporting, how you say ... rear area operations.”

Technically not a doctrinal term anymore, but I’m not going to correct him, Milner thought.

“You will also have a replacement tank platoon for the one that lost a vehicle during the defense,” Sorokin stated.

“Can we keep both platoons?” MAJ Santiago asked quickly.

Sorokin looked surprised. “You have many Abrams,” he said incredulously. “Why would you want some worn out T-72s? No, I must insist we take the damaged platoon back. I cannot give you all of my tanks.”

“Thank you for what you have given us,” LTC Milner said.

Sorokin nodded at him. “Understand that Zhodkiva has been problematic since these troubles started,” he said. “The mayor and his chief of police are reliable men, but the rest of the population I cannot be sure of. Our infantry will deal with them.”

I need to make sure Cobra and Anvil understand the current rules of engagement, LTC Milner thought. *Something in his tone concerns me.*

“Are you going to have TM Anvil try to find an additional crossing besides OBJ Nickel?” COL Kendrick asked. “LTC Sorokin swears that he remembers there being another ford along PL Red when he was a junior lieutenant in this area.”

“We will have CPT Wang make a search while he’s protecting the western flank or either Cobra or Dagger,” LTC Milner stated.

“Very good,” COL Kendrick said. “Okay, I’m convinced, but you’re going to have to wait a day so Griffon and Strike can set conditions to support you.”

Dammit, LTC Milner thought. That’s another day for the enemy to prepare.

“Trust me, the support you’ll get will far outweigh giving the enemy more time,” Kendrick replied. “Specifically, we might be able to do something about that jamming that keeps occurring, as division thinks it will only get worse as you get closer to the border.”

That just might be worth giving the enemy another day to dig in, yes, LTC Milner grudgingly allowed.

“I may be able to scare up additional bridging assets for you as well,” Kendrick stated. “We’re the division main effort, and I know that 2nd BDE’s engineers are already off the railhead.”

“Thank you, sir,” LTC Milner said.

“CPT Fisk, can you get a liaison officer over to Mustang in the next 12 hours?” COL Kendrick asked.

Fisk looked apprehensive.

“No is an acceptable answer,” Kendrick prodded gently. “I know you’ve had heavy casualties.”

“It will be difficult,” Fisk conceded. “But I also know with the poor communications that it may be necessary. If we get a replacement for MAJ Sikeston, I will likely take the task myself.”

“Understood.”

“When is your orders brief, LTC Milner?” COL Kendrick asked. “I imagine soon, given your original timeline.”

“In about 20 minutes, sir,” MAJ Santiago said. As if on cue, there was the distant sound of an Abrams approaching.

“We’ll stay through the end of it,” COL Kendrick stated. “LTC Halsey will need to know what to put in the brigade FRAGO to support you. LTC Milner, let’s go for a walk.”

“Yes, sir,” Milner replied.

The two senior officers walked down the trail to the brigade commander’s vehicle. LTC Halsey started to follow, but stopped after COL Kendrick waved him off.

“I do not want to squash your initiative,” Kendrick began. “But do not pull a stunt like this again.”

“Understood, sir,” LTC Milner said.

“In order to operate within intent, you have to keep me informed,” Kendrick continued. “Yes, you made contact with Main. However, at the point where you started running into ATGMs and anti-tank guns, you should have gone to ground and made sure you spoke with me, Iron Five, or Iron Three.”

Milner kept his face impassive.

“Also, that was a cheap shot against Iron Five,” Kendrick stated. “Unless you think you can do better through three indirect and two sniper incidents, keep snide comments about the staff coordination to yourself in a public setting.”

“Sir, he star ...”

“My children are back at home station,” Kendrick barked. “I am not interested in assigning blame. Rest assured, he’s going to get reminded that his purpose is to support task force commanders in the field, period. But that will be in private, not in front of a captain still covered in his battalion commander’s blood and host nation officers.”

LTC Milner looked at Iron Six aghast. COL Kendrick realized that Milner had clearly not been informed of what was happening with his flank units.

“Griffon Six is dead,” the brigade commander said flatly. “His deputy is now running the battalion, two of his companies are being run by platoon leaders, and Alpha Company from TF Strike is down to four vehicles.”

Milner felt the blood run from his face.

“So, now you understand why I’m a little hesitant to let you go rushing north to PL Red while your left flank is flapping in the wind like clothes

on the line,” Kendrick continued. “My initial intent was to have you and Strike shift westward, but the staff lost the bubble on you being sent to PL Orange.”

“Sorry, sir,” Milner said, realizing just how wrong things could have gone the previous evening.

“Don’t be,” Kendrick said. “I’m pretty sure you’re the reason the enemy didn’t finish Griffon off. Division was wondering why they didn’t commit the reserve that’s somewhere north of PL Red south into our sector. The G-2 thinks you being at PL Orange might be as good a reason as any.”

“Do I have enough assets to push north against what they think is there?” LTC Milner asked.

“Well, odds are the corps reserve will be passing through TF Griffon in roughly 24 hours,” Kendrick said with a smile. “So if you don’t, you’ll fix whatever’s to your front while TF Cavalier kicks in their flank.”

Milner raised his eyebrows in surprise. TF Cavalier was a second international task force built around a reinforced armored battalion. The brigade S-3 had mentioned it in passing as a possible asset for offensive operations, but he’d dismissed that out of hand due to his usual experiences with national caveats.

“So, yes, there’s a reason I’m grabbing the pit bull’s collar,” Kendrick stated. “Now, get some sleep after you give your order, you look like hell.”

“Sir, the engineers are done,” 1LT Loggins, Anvil Five, said.



Janet’s going to have to figure out prom on her own, I’m afraid, CPT Li Wang, Anvil Six, thought as he folded up his wife’s letter. CPT Wang forced thoughts of home away as he considered EA Blackjack in front of him.

“I think those lanes are certainly marked well enough for us,” he said with a smile. “The engineers put that time to use.”

It had been nine hours since the TF OPORD. He was glad to see that the majority of the destroyed vehicles within the EA had finally stopped burning. The engineers’ bright orange lane markings stood out like a field of mutant flowers, zigzagging through the battlefield debris. Wang watched as flocks of crows lifted up from blackened mounds that he tried not to study too closely.

I think someone should figure out what to do about those bodies, Wang thought.

“Time to get this circus started,” Wang said. “Tell the platoons to get to Redcon 1, PLs to meet here at my track.”

“Roger, sir,” Loggins replied. He started moving off at a trot.

“It’s going to be weird having T-72s in the formation,” 1SG Charles Lockwood observed as he walked up. The senior NCO was walking with a slight limp, having caught a mortar fragment in the leg during the defense of EA Blackjack.

“I’m not going to argue with more firepower,” Wang said. “Even if those idiots in Badger strained relations somewhat.”

Lockwood grunted. Apparently the Bolcavian platoon leader, 1LT Sergei Borzkho, had asked to be replaced. His lieutenant colonel had agreed, but had informed him that since Borzkho would no longer be with the Americans, his lost tank would not be replaced. That had caused a total change of demeanor, but the Bolcavian platoon leader was still angry about the needless death of his men.

“I’m surprised you didn’t put them in front, sir,” 1SG Lockwood observed. “If we run into something as heavy as Cobra did, Red might have some difficulties.”

Wang looked to see if anyone was in ear shot. “They went through all the trouble of adding some things to those T-72s but never fixed the night-fighting capability,” he said. “I think Red will see something before they would.”

Anvil’s order to march was Farley’s 1st Platoon (Red), Borzkho’s T-72s (Purple), and then 2LT Billy Farnum’s 2nd Platoon (White). Wang was going to place himself between Red and Purple, while Anvil Five, Seven, and the company trains would be between the Bolcavians and White. The T-72s, their reactive armor now fully replaced, would be the pacesetters for their movement up Route Eagle to the intersection with Route Falcon at Checkpoint (CP) 15.

It’s a good way to clear the route for TM Dagger, he thought, smiling at CPT Crafton being near apoplectic at ending up as the reserve again. As CPT Crafton was a close friend, Wang knew that his role in two straight operations was driving the man crazy.

“You think we’re going to be able to communicate with them effectively?” Anvil Seven asked.

“I thought about having SFC Valencia ride with them,” Wang replied. “Then I realized the T-72 is a three-man tank, and the thought of SFC Valencia with a 125mm main gun under his control gave me nightmares.”

1SG Lockwood patiently waited for CPT Wang to answer his question.

“I have no idea, Top,” Wang finally replied. “We’ll figure it out on the fly.”

“Not sure I like moving up without the scouts in front,” 1SG Lockwood stated.

“We should be able to scout for ourselves until we get to our attack position,” Wang replied. “If the enemy thought Cobra handed out free beatings yesterday, they’re going to love what happens if they pick a fight with mechanized infantry.”

**Using Reconnaissance and Surveillance (R&S)
Formations to Retain Freedom of Maneuver and Develop
Tactical Options**

R&S operations are not unique to the battalion scout platoon, or cavalry troop/squadron formations. The R&S mindset needs to be inculcated into junior leaders and reinforced at the lowest tactical echelons. A very good example is the execution of a movement to contact the enemy using the smallest force possible in order to exploit the situation and develop options for the commander. Developing the wisdom to quickly discern what enemy force is on your front and what actions to take next takes practice.

Roughly 100 meters away, one of those platoon leaders was busy doing his final pre-combat checks. As he worked his way around the turret, 2LT Farley noticed that his global positioning system and digital communications equipment were working ... at the moment.

I hope that whatever was jamming Cobra got taken out by that airstrike a couple hours ago, he thought. Probably wishful thinking.

Taking advantage of the functional system, Farley double-checked his map.

The TM Cobra rear party will be at CP 15, he thought, then jotted notes for terrain features near the checkpoint. He then made another note for the far contact line, which was 800 meters south of the intersection located at CP 15. Once his platoon was a kilometer past CP 15, they were to enter into a hasty herringbone while the rest of TM Anvil passed through.

“Red, Black Six,” CPT Wang said over the radio. “Execute.”

Farley swallowed. Standing up in his turret, he gave the hand and arm signal to begin movement. With the loud roar of diesel and a puff of black smoke, A12 began movement down the hardball to CP 15. TF Mustang’s push to the north was underway.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- 1.) What are the steps senior leaders can take to enable a proper rest plan?
- 2.) What flank coordination steps could LTC Milner and MAJ Santiago have emphasized in their initial move to the north? What responsibilities did their higher headquarters have to control coordination?
- 3.) Should TF Mustang have detached a runner to the BCT Main in light of their own C3 disruptions?
- 4.) Does your unit and its higher have a “degraded communications” SOP and, if so, how familiar is your staff with it? How could it be improved?
- 5.) How do battalion and below officers prepare to conduct operations with host nation forces? What are some techniques and products that are available?
- 6.) Do you agree with COL Kendrick’s assessment of LTC Milner’s decisions to advance? What is the balance between subordinate unit initiative and recklessness? How should commanders convey this?
- 7.) TF Griffon has suffered heavy casualties and has many junior leaders in senior positions. Given the casualty rates of large scale ground combat operations, what steps can a unit take to prepare itself for leader casualties before hostilities? How does a battalion groom captains and lieutenants in preparation for assuming positions of greater responsibility?
- 8.) Whose responsibility is it to police enemy remains and destroyed equipment on the battlefield? How is this supported at the TF level?
- 9.) What are some far and near recognition signals that TM Anvil and TM Cobra could have worked out during the TF OPORD?

CHAPTER 6

Getting Aligned on PL Orange

The sound of a Bradley's main gun jerked CPT Hernandez awake.

This better not be another false alarm, he thought. Several .50-caliber machine guns joining the weapon moments later told him that whatever was being shot at was either a mass hallucination or an actual threat.

“Contact, UAS [unmanned aerial system]!” Cobra Seven shouted, just as C12 and C13 both engaged with their main guns. Hernandez had picked up the hand mike and started to depress the button when 1SG Gegg followed up his report with an incredulous, “Target!”

Blinking away sleep, CPT Hernandez sat up on the top of C66. He saw a small fire burning on the north side of PL Orange. Dropping to the turret and moving the commander's independent thermal viewer (CITV) reticle over to the blaze, he could see a broken wing near the impact area.

“Cobra Six, Red One,” 2LT Depaul said. “Have engaged and destroyed one UAS.”

Man I hope that wasn't a friendly, Hernandez thought.

“Cobra Five, get a contact report up to Mustang Main,” he said, shaking the cobwebs out of his head.

“Cobra Six, Cobra 5G. Cobra Five is on the ground at Charlie Papa 15 conducting passage of lines with Anvil elements.”

That's why I should make sure I'm fully conscious before giving orders, Hernandez thought uncharitably.

“Mustang Main, Mustang Main, Cobra Seven,” he heard 1SG Gegg start on the task force (TF) net. *Bless you, 1SG.*

“Red One, Mike Golf,” SFC O'Hara said over the team net. “Who shot at that thing with a main gun?”

Good question, Hernandez thought.

“Mike Golf, Red Four, that was an MPAT [multi-purpose anti-tank] engagement,” SFC Swett stated.

“Outstanding, Red Four!” SFC O'Hara replied. “Charlie, mike.”

Red seems to be recovering from their little jaunt into the creek, Hernandez thought. The platoon had absorbed a couple of replacements from battalion, as both of their “walking wounded” had been found to actually have fractures. Hernandez had never thought that daylight would make such a difference to medical evaluations, but apparently a broken collarbone and tibia were hard to see in the dark.

“Green, status report on the patrol?” He asked.

“Debriefing now, Cobra Six,” 1LT Malik replied. “Will meet you at your track in 10 minutes.”

I was wrong about that man, Hernandez thought.

Green had been tasked with searching the enemy dismounted positions for possible intelligence and equipment. In addition to confirming that Team (TM) Cobra had engaged and destroyed Arcanian paramilitaries rather than the better organized separatists, Green had found several watercraft.

It was 1LT Malik who had suggested a patrol north of Phase Line (PL) Orange. Hernandez had assumed some risk and agreed to the probe, which had confirmed there were no enemy waiting north of Objective (OBJ) Penny.

Not technically jumping LD [line of departure], Hernandez thought. *But I’ll probably mention that to Mustang Six much later.*

Green had confirmed that the bridge had taken some damage but, as SSG Bolten had suspected, the structure was robust. More importantly, it did not appear to be rigged with any explosives.

“Cobra 5G, what’s Anvil’s status?”



“Man those things are ugly,” 1LT Dietze remarked as the Bolcavian T-72 platoon rumbled by. The boxy reactive armor plate and active defense array made the tanks look almost alien respective to the angular lines of an Abrams.

“You’ll get no disagreement from me,” CPT Wang said. The two men stood in front of the latter’s Bradley fighting vehicle (BFV), counting tracks as they went by. As they watched, a BFV detached itself from the middle of the column and trundled over to their position.

“I think that’s your replacement from Badger,” CPT Wang said. The BFV started to come to a stop, the Bradley commander (BC) nearly falling out of the turret in his rush to dismount. The man walked up to 1LT Dietze and CPT Wang, and both officers could see that he was dirty and unshaven.

On one hand, I understand that they’ve been through a lot in the last 72 hours, Wang thought. On the other, CPT Morris’ lack of attention to detail is part of the reason they got their heads handed to them.

“Sir,” the SSG said, nodding. “SSG Crebs with B31 reporting.”

“B31?” 1LT Dietze asked.

“It’s the track that the mechanics were able to get up from the repair yard,” SSG Crebs explained.

“What happened to 1LT Odom?” 1LT Dietze asked. SSG Crebs looked at him in surprise, then realization.

“1LT Odom was KIA, sir,” he replied.

Wang winced, seeing Dietze’s face fall.

“Sir! Cobra Six would like a status report!” 1LT Dietze’s gunner shouted.

Wang watched as 1LT Dietze visibly gathered himself.

“Move on over to 65,” Dietze said. “I’d advise you and your men to get a shave before you see 1SG Gegg, SSG Crebs.”

SSG Crebs looked like he was about to say something, but a subtle head shake from CPT Wang stopped him. As 1LT Dietze headed back to his tank, Wang walked in closer to the SSG.

Always criticize in private, never publicly. Or alternatively, not at all.

“SSG Crebs, you never miss a chance to make a good first impression,” CPT Wang said. “Get with my gunner, we’ve got some hygiene items in back in case your guys’ got lost in the defense.”

The NCO stiffened for a moment, then realized that CPT Wang was trying to help him, not chastise.

“Thank you, sir,” Crebs said.

“Good luck to you, SSG Crebs.”

The NCO turned and climbed back up on his track. Now that he was looking at the BFV, CPT Wang could see the battle damage.

Team (TM) Badger took a beating, he thought. He noted SSG Crebs' BC's hatch was a different shade than the surrounding armor, and wondered exactly what had happened to B31. Shaking his head to clear the morbid thoughts, he turned back.

"That's the last of your folks," 1LT Dietze said, pointing. "TM Dagger is coming up behind."

CPT Wang nodded. "See you at OBJ Dime," he said, clasping the other officer's hand.

"Roger, sir," 1LT Dietze said. As the two men parted, the lead elements of TM Dagger began to exit the engineer lanes behind them.

"TM Dagger is through the lanes. TM Anvil is conducting battle handover with the scouts," MAJ Santiago told LTC Milner. The latter man was conducting his own final pre-combat checks, Mustang 66's turbine starting to spool up.

"Good!" LTC Milner replied. "Are the CFZ's [critical friendly zones] active?"

"Yes, sir," Santiago replied.

Twenty minutes to LD, Milner thought.

"See you on the other side of PL Orange, Jorge!" Milner shouted.

"Yes, sir!"

"Driver, move out," he said into the combat vehicle crewman helmet's microphone.

As the Abrams lurched forward, Milner considered what was about to unfold. *I've done everything I can*, he thought. *It's up to the Soldiers now.*

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- 1.) Was Team Cobra's patrol across PL Orange a good example of initiative? What could have gone wrong?
- 2.) Does your unit have an intelligence gathering plan for enemy equipment? If so, what are its elements? If not, what components do you think such a plan should have at the TF level?
- 3.) Is it appropriate to use captured enemy equipment? What safety measures should be put in place? Do you think Team Cobra thought through the possible ramifications of equipment being booby-trapped or the possibility of GPS trackers being affixed to it?
- 4.) How should a TF pass along information regarding casualties, especially the numbers expected in large-scale operations? When time does not allow for memorial services? How do leaders not only support themselves, but their colleagues?
- 5.) What are the expectations for maintaining unit discipline in the field? Given both personal experiences and regulations, what things should leaders "let go of" in a combat situation? What items are possible precursors to larger issues?

APPENDIX A:

TF Mustang Task Organization

TASK FORCE MUSTANG

TOC (Mustang Main)

Scout Platoon/1-26 (Call sign Sauron)

120 mm Mortar Platoon/1-26 (Call sign Hammer)

Medical Platoon/1-26 (Call sign Mercy)

Communications Platoon/1-26

1/2/46th Ada (Avenger) Attached

TEAM ANVIL (+)

1/A/1-26 Infantry (Bradley fighting vehicle [BFV])

2/A/1-26 Infantry (BFV)

1/277 Armor (BL) (T-72) Attached [Bolcavia]

1/1/A/9th Engineer Squad (-)

TEAM BADGER (+)

2/B/1-26 Infantry (BFV)

3/B/1-26 Infantry (BFV)

3/C/1-26 Infantry (M1A2)

3/C/1-18 Armor (M1A2)

TEAM COBRA (+)

1/C/1-26 Infantry (M1A2)

2/C/1-26 Infantry (M1A2)

1/B/1-26 Infantry (BFV)

2/1/A/9th Engineer Squad (-)

TEAM DAGGER (+)

1/C/1-18 Armor (M1A2)

2/C/1-18 Armor (M1A2)

1/B/1-26 Infantry (BFV)

3/A/1-26 Infantry (BFV)

3/1/A/9th Engineer Squad (-)

E FSC/177TH BRIGADE SUPPORT BATTALION

Distribution Platoon

2nd Platoon/177th Maintenance

Anvil/Field Maintenance Team

Badger/Field Maintenance Team

Cobra/Field Maintenance Team

Dagger/Field Maintenance Team

APPENDIX B:**Army Universal Task List (AUTL) Tasks**

- Conduct Tactical Maneuver, Army Tactical Task (ART) 1.2
- Conduct Passage of Lines, ART 1.2.8
- Occupy an Attack and Assault Position, ART 1.5.2
- Occupy and Establish a Battle or Defensive Position, ART 1.5.3
- Overcome Barriers, Obstacles, and Mines, ART 1.6.1
- Conduct Breaching Operations, ART 1.6.1.1
- Conduct Gap-Crossing Operations, ART 1.6.1.3
- Enhance Movement and Maneuver, ART 1.6.2
- Conduct Countermobility Operations, ART 1.7
- Conduct Reconnaissance, ART 1.8
- Conduct Maneuver Support Operations, ART 1.10
- Integrate Fires, ART 3.1
- Employ Fires, ART 3.2.1
- Conduct Surface to Surface Attack, ART 3.2.1.1
- Employ Close Air Support, ART 3.2.1.2.2
- Employ Air and Missile Defense, ART 3.4
- Provide Combat Casualty Care, ART 4.3.1
- Provide Medical Evacuation (Air and Ground), ART 4.3.2
- Prepare for Tactical Operations, ART 5.1.2
- Reorganize Units as Part of a Reconstitution Effort, ART 5.1.3.6.1
- Conduct Public Affairs Operations, ART 5.7
- Conduct Electronic Warfare, ART 5.9.2
- Synchronize Information-Related Capabilities, ART 5.12

- Conduct Civil Affairs Operations, ART 5.15
- Prepare Fighting Positions, ART 6.6.1.2
- Prepare Protective Positions, ART 6.6.1.3
- Implement Operations Security, ART 6.10
- Assault an Objective, ART 7.1.2.2
- Conduct a Counterattack, ART 7.1.2.3
- Conduct an Area Defense, ART 7.2.2
- Attack by Fire an Enemy Force or Position, ART 7.5.1

APPENDIX C:

TF Mustang Personnel

(Note: At start of operations)

TF MUSTANG HEADQUARTERS

TF Commander	LTC Milner
TF XO	MAJ Fitch
TF S-3	MAJ Santiago
TF FSO	CPT Wilson
Battle Captain	1LT Eric Goldstein
OPS SGM	MSG Gabriel Wolf
TF Plans OIC	1LT(P) Mustaine
TF Plans NCOIC / Chemo NCO	SSG Hetfield
TF S-2, Acting	1LT Franklin
TF S-4	CPT Beaudoin
TF SIGO	1LT Holmes
Scout PL (Sauron)	1LT Hendrickson
TF Engineer	CPT King

TEAM ANVIL

CO	CPT Wang
XO	1LT Loggins
1SG	1SG Charles Lockwood
1st Platoon (Red)	2LT John Farley
1st Platoon PSG	SFC Valencia
2nd Platoon -- Bolcavian (Purple)	1LT Sergei Borzkho
2nd Platoon (White)	2LT Billy Farnum

TEAM BADGER

CO	CPT Morris
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TEAM COBRA

CO	CPT Hernandez
XO	1LT Dietze
1SG	1SG Gegg
1st Platoon (Red)	2LT Depaul
1st Platoon PSG	SFC Swett
1st Platoon, B/1-26IN (Green)	1LT Malik
2nd Platoon (White)	2LT Rogerson
2nd Platoon PSG	SFC Foss
Master Gunner	SFC O’Hare
FSO	1LT Robinson

TEAM DAGGER

CO	CPT Crafton
XO	1LT Loggins
1SG	1SG Young
FSO	1LT Farmer

OTHER UNITS

Iron BCT CDR	COL Kendrick
Iron Five	LTC Halsey
Mustang LNO	1LT DeMaio
Griffon Five	CPT Fisk

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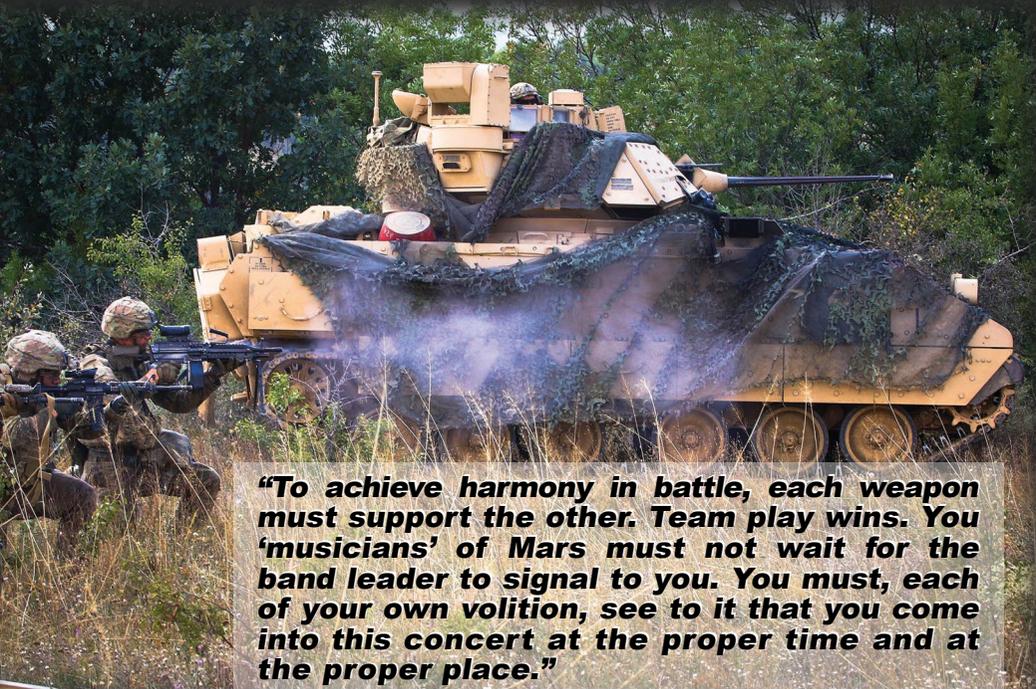
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“To achieve harmony in battle, each weapon must support the other. Team play wins. You ‘musicians’ of Mars must not wait for the band leader to signal to you. You must, each of your own volition, see to it that you come into this concert at the proper time and at the proper place.”

*MG George S. Patton Jr.,
Address to the 2nd Armored Division, 08 JUL 1941*



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