

Mobs, Refugees, and Armor: Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures

by Major Robert G. Ivy

Bosnia, August 1996. 1-4 Cavalry was operating in sector supporting various missions, including the occupation of platoon-sized observation posts, treaty verification, and security support for the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Mahala, a former Muslim village on the Serb side of the Inter-Entity Boundary Line (IEBL) had recently been reoccupied by Muslim refugees. These refugees, supported by the Muslim government, stood accused by the Serbs of carrying arms and endangering Serb civilians. A group of Serb policemen were dispatched to clear the town of the Muslims and were reported to the squadron headquarters by a patrol that supported the ICTY mission.

Squadron elements responded by sending a tank and Bradley scout section to Mahala to observe. Meanwhile, Serb police clashed with the Muslim refugees. Separating the two factions, the squadron guarded each until representatives from the two governments could be brought to Mahala to negotiate an end state. The Serb government responded by broadcasting on local radio stations that NATO had arrested the Serb police. Serb mobs appeared throughout the squadron sector shortly thereafter, blocking most of the key road intersections. The Serbs began transporting hundreds of people to an intersection close to Mahala. Soon, a massive Serbian mob moved toward Mahala to take control of the Serb policemen. The brigade commander, wanting to maintain control, instructed the squadron to stop the mob.

There have been several incidents similar to the one at Mahala. In most of these situations, U.S. armored forces were present in some form. Therefore, it is important for Armor leaders to understand that mob situations can be controlled.

For the purpose of this paper, a crowd is a large gathering of people that is not mobile and does not possess any kind of command and control. A mob also is made up of a large number of people, but a mob possesses command and control, is mobile, operates according

to a plan, and many times has communications contact with a higher level element. A crowd is usually a spontaneous reaction to an event, whereas a mob is a planned and controlled unit. Mobs occur during planned events. Examples of planned events are various domestic protests, political rallies, and confrontations between entities. In contrast, crowds are caused by unplanned or spontaneous events. Examples of unplanned spontaneous events are crowds gathered for food and water; distribution of limited resources, such as refugee supplies; and gatherings after religious or sporting events.

Before 1-4 Cavalry deployed to Bosnia in 1996, the squadron trained at the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) and was certified for the Bosnia deployment. The squadron had trained on handling crowds and was prepared to execute an array of civil-military missions. However, it encountered several incidents that were not anticipated during training — in particular, how to deal with mobs and refugees. Through the experience of the squadron as a whole, we identified several characteristics of mobs and refugees and then developed actions that would enable the squadron to move from a reactive condition to one that put the local commander back in control. First, I'll discuss the characteristics that we identified in both mob and refugee movements, especially in Bosnia, then address the tactics, techniques and procedures we developed to gain control of the situation. I'll conclude with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Contingency Plans (CONPLANS) that can be applied to company teams or even platoons.

In April 1996, the squadron encountered its first mob activity. The incident was sparked when the Moslems gathered a group of people to cross the Inter-Entity Boundary Line into Serb-held territory. Our first indication of movement was when our observation posts started to report unusually large groups of people crossing the IEBL. The group moved into a former Muslim village on the Serb side, close to the

IEBL. The Serbs reacted by deploying their special police forces into the town, initiating a conflict. The two sides faced each other and threw various items at each other, including hand grenades. Attempts by our troops to stop the incident resulted in soldiers quickly finding themselves between the two parties and unable to affect the situation.

One of the unique aspects of the Bosnia refugee situation is their forced removal from their homes, either by opposing forces or their own friendly forces. In addition, most refugees carry all of their possessions in or on a single vehicle, either motorized or animal-drawn. Typically, every group of refugees has a leader or leaders. Usually the refugees have a plan on where they want to displace to, even if it is just following another group. Typically, refugee groups are built around someone's family unit and usually have family members of all ages, to include children and elderly. These groups then attract former neighbors or people that have lost their families. They have, on average, little food and are almost always short of water.

Like refugees, mobs also have leaders. If the mob is planned, the mob leaders may have communication with their "headquarters." During events in Bosnia, this was usually done via a person following the leader with a concealed pocket radio. Runners using residential phones were also used. Leaders control the mobs by moving the participating people to a designated area by vehicle, then forming and moving to the targeted area. Upon completion of the demonstration, the people in the mob are then moved to a pick-up area to meet their transportation.

The key to dealing with both refugees and mobs is preparation. Shaping the area of operation is still the first part of any operation, including peacekeeping. Therefore, Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) is paramount. Both mobs and refugees use avenues of approach, are affected by terrain, and typically are characterized as moving units. Therefore, Named Areas of Interest (NAIs) should be determined,

Decision Points selected, and a Decision Matrix developed. The key to control of refugees and mobs is controlling their mobility. Choosing the routes they can use and restricting their mass and speed helps control their mobility. Therefore, Targeted Areas of Interest (TAIs) still play an important part in shaping any area. In this case, TAIs are made up of obstacles, checkpoints, and holding areas.

A mob or refugee scenario would have preplanned TAIs that have prepared obstacles linked with the terrain. These obstacles in the preplanned stage are just engineer stakes and wire laid at a TAI so that a tank or scout section can close the obstacle in minutes. Every vehicle in the unit, therefore, will carry the necessary wire and other class IV needed to complete and close any TAI obstacle.

Early detection of refugee or mob activity is important. This will give the commander and the operations group time to start the orders process and activate the unit's plan. Likewise, the destination of the groups needs to be known quickly. Contact must be made with the group and maintained. Using available Civil Affairs (CA) or Counter Intelligence (CI) assets is best. The bottomline is to get someone to find the mob's or refugee's leadership and try to extract information while providing location and situational updates. Commanders can then slow, channel, or divert the groups as needed, using the network of TAIs.

The general principle towards refugees is to keep them moving towards food and shelter without crowding routes or blocking key terrain. The general principle in dealing with mobs is to slow or prevent the gathering. Once a mob or refugee movement is detected, it is important to act quickly in order to maintain the initiative. Clearly, the commander needs to identify and refine his intelligence requirements in a timely fashion. The soldiers manning the OPs, checkpoints, and even in convoys can help provide the commander needed information.

In addition to TAIs, holding areas are important to shaping any area. The idea of a holding area is to receive incoming groups and then break them down into manageable sizes. Holding areas can be used to supply refugees with water, in addition to breaking up masses of people. Holding areas are ideal for coordination or processing points for local authorities and NGOs, such as the UNHCR. This will allow the com-

mander to thin the flow of groups entering an area of operation.

In general, any plan would be to limit the maneuverability of any group by using TAIs. Both mobs and refugees usually stay on roads which are also avenues of approach. Therefore TAIs can be very useful. Refugees require channeling. They tend to be passive and are easily guided. However, if they do not receive guidance, they will gather wherever they can obtain food, water, or shelter. The lack of a plan could result in potential logistical or humanitarian problems.

Mobs, on the other hand, require containment. In addition, within planned crowds there will be people designed to attract press coverage. Elderly, children, and pregnant women all have been forced to the front of mobs to be beaten by the Serbs, thereby increasing press coverage. Efforts should be made to safely separate these people from the mob. For example, a restriction of no vehicles in an area will cause the mob to walk further and the elderly, children, and pregnant women to drift to the rear of the mob, where they are less effective.

A tank or scout section can man a typical TAI. It is important to tie the TAI into other support and overwatch so that the section is not isolated. Consecutive TAIs could also be used to support one another. It is important that once the TAI is established, the sections both man their vehicles and provide themselves local security on the ground. This security should be in the form of two-man teams. The security teams also provide the important function of giving the members of the mobs or refugees someone to talk to. Avoid using the TAIs as blocking obstacles. Rather TAIs should act as delaying points that thin out the crowds, gather intelligence from passers-by, and observe situational conditions.

CONPLANS and SOPs are critical to success when dealing with mobs and refugees. Units should develop an execution matrix of the tasks required for dealing with mobs and refugees. This matrix needs to be updated daily so as to properly match sections and platoons operating in respective areas with their required CONPLAN tasks. For example, patrols should be briefed on NAIs, TAIs, and key terrain for each CONPLAN and be prepared to execute. In addition, patrols should have, as a SOP, the required equipment and barrier material needed to execute CONPLANS included in their vehicle loadplans.

In review, mobs and refugees typically follow a plan. Both mobs and refugees have leaders and a command and control system. Likewise, mobs have a means of communication with their "controlling headquarters." Armor units can successfully manage mob or refugee activity if they prepare. Intelligence preparation of the battlefield, decision points, and a decision matrix focused on controlling mob or refugee movements are the keys to dealing with mobs and refugees.

The August 1996 incident ended successfully as squadron elements enacted their plan and slowed the mob by using several scout sections along the mob's route. These sections acted as a sifter, causing the mob to thin as mob members were stopped at the different sections. Able to go no further, mob members could only yell or talk to the soldiers present. By the time the mob reached the final TAI prior to Mahala, it had been reduced from several hundred to a few dozen people. This enabled the squadron soldiers to negotiate the withdrawal of the mob back to their intersection start point. A key point of this negotiation was the promise of information on the current situation to be relayed to the mob leaders via the senior squadron officer present. Eventually the Serb police were allowed to return to their station and the mob boarded their buses and returned home.

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