Points of Attack: Lessons From the Breach

by Major James K. Morningstar

"Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more..."

William Shakespeare
The Life of King Henry the Fifth, III i

As the plans officer for a naval-based joint staff, I don't often spot Armor issues on my horizon. However, a recent Advanced Technology Concept Demonstration (ATCD) brief on breaching minefields in a joint exercise raised some tanker concerns. Like a dog responding to its master's voice, my ears went up. The subject sounded faint echoes of my past life as the commander of Delta Company, 3d Battalion, 37th Armor, in the First Infantry Division, one of the units that breached the Iraqi defenses at the point of the VII Corps attack. Subsequently, the briefers and I engaged in a discussion arising from the thoughts, lessons, and opinions of my experience and, for what its worth, I would like to share some of them in the following paragraphs.

The ATCD briefing presented information on new systems designed to breach minefields that reminded me of old misconceptions I held. As a tank platoon leader in Germany, my training on breaching complex obstacles was almost nonexistent. I did learn three rules: (1) find a bypass; (2) call for engineers; or (3) improvise. In those days of "active defense," I don't think NATO expected to face an enemy defending behind complex obstacles. The ATCD brief focused on systems that could: (1) locate a bypass; (2) be used by engineers to clear mines; or (3) improvise. As we move into FORCE XXI, it doesn't seem like we expect to face an enemy defending behind complex obstacles. Is it any wonder that some people believe "deja vu" is an Army acronym?

Many of us in the Big Red One followed the August 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait with great interest, but our focus was elsewhere. While the XVIII Airborne Corps was deploying to the Arabian desert, my brigade was preparing for a December deployment to the National Training Center (NTC) in the Mojave desert. By Halloween, rumors were already swirling about a possible change of plans when our battalion leaders went on a reconnaissance visit to the NTC. Upon our arrival, members of the Cobra Team asked us, "Why are you here? Your rotation is going to be canceled because you're deploying to the Gulf."

During our reconnaissance, the battalion commander, LTC David Gross, began to focus our attention on the "Global Training Center." When told to avoid the area between Siberian Ridge and the Whale Gap because engineers were conducting a demonstration breach of an Iraqi-style obstacle, we stealthily infiltrated to the top of the Whale to watch. The obstacle had wire, mines, obstacles, and ditches. The breach was impressive, daunting, successful — and unopposed. I found myself thinking more about how much easier it would be to defend the obstacle than to breach it. When we noticed two tank plows near a warehouse, I went through the gates and took a dozen pictures to show my company. When later I passed the pictures around to my officers, my XO, LT Keonig, asked if we were going to breach pictures of mines.

In our "ramp-up" for the NTC, we trained to avoid obstacles. One company field exercise included an easily by-passable patch of mines and wire. Upon finding the obstacle, it seemed each company went to great lengths to avoid a by-pass and conduct a hasty breach. This caused our engineers to remark, "If you build it, they will come." The lesson: (1) find a bypass; (2) call for engineers; or (3) improvise.

On 8 November, we learned from Wolf Blitzer on CNN that we were indeed to deploy to the Gulf. Now we found most of our time absorbed in the effort to pick up and move an entire armor-heavy mechanized division half way around the world. Still, our leadership took every opportunity to get some gunnery and maneuver training in between vehicle maintenance, personnel preparations, and intelligence briefs. When the trains, with our tanks, departed for the port in early December, however, we had not trained for breaching operations.

Our brigade commander was Colonel Anthony Moreno, a great leader with combat infantry experience from Vietnam. In mid-November, he summoned all the company commanders and presented the first cut of the brigade plan. My company would conduct the breach for VII Corps but we would do it as part of the 2-16 Infantry Battalion Task Force. This contradicted a long standing exchange of Bravo companies between our battalion task forces. When Alpha 3-37 was also chopped to Task Force 2-16, I could see that the two highest scoring gunnery companies in 3-37 Amor were now part of the breaching task force. It seemed the brigade was building a strong team, but a team that would not work together until we arrived in theater.

The plan included cross-attaching platoons to form a breach company team of two tank platoons, one mech (Bradley) platoon, and an engineer platoon. My company would later receive an ITV platoon and a COLT (to augment my FIST), greatly extending our range of fires. I liked that idea. The plan dictated that the breach team commander would turn his unit over to an engineer captain at the breach and then resume command on the other side of the breach. That idea I didn't like. Fortunately, the engineer captain in question supported my whining against such a violation of unity of command and the brigade dropped the idea.

Each company would mount six tank plows and breach two lanes. Three tanks with plows would advance in echelon, the following tank slightly overlapping the path of the tank before it, to create a lane at least two tank widths wide (this disastrous method is still taught in the current FM 17-15 *Tank Platoon,* Apr 96). A fourth tank with a roller would

follow and "proof" the lane. An engineer friend pointed out that, according to doctrine, the roller should lead, and that neither the roller nor the plows would survive the first mine hit. This bothered me: what would the following plow tanks do if the lead tank stopped? What if the middle plow hit the first mine? In echelon, the following tanks would have their fields of fire blocked by the tanks before them. I knew the brigade plan was subject to refinement (and nit-picking by dozens of would-be Rommels like me), but I began to feel there was a better way. The only problem was that this company commander didn't have a better idea at that time.

Another topic of concern was wire. What happened if the enemy strung thick bands of relatively cheap concertina wire in front of his minefields? Would the plows bog-down? Would they be immobilized by wire spooling around the drive sprockets? I thought of an answer: napalm. Get the Air Force to drop napalm on the obstacles to fry the wire and make it brittle (it might also uncover the mines); but the Air Force didn't have napalm any more. OK, what about white phosphorus (WP) rounds? We had 105mm guns and someone had heard the Marine tankers had WP in their inventory. Hell, while we're at it, see if we can get some "beehive" anti-personnel rounds. That was also a no-go. Maybe, when the need arose, we could get indirect fires to place WP on the wire.

Ft. Riley had a Simulation Center with a great terrain board, a wide variety of micro-armor, and a number of guys working there who loved to research and assist training. With intel from division and a $50 purchase of mine, *Lessons in Modern Warfare, Vol II, The Iran-Iraq Conflict* , they worked up a model of the triangular defense we thought the Iraqis would use. Utilizing Iraqi and U.S. force combat tables, my platoon leaders and I spent hours wargaming an attack against a well defended Iraqi position.

One thing we learned: artillery and air would play a major role. If supporting fires didn't reduce a selected point in the enemy defense, we would not get through. If we failed to exploit the effects of indirect fires before the enemy could reposition, we would not get through. The model made us realize that to achieve success, our actions would have to be a well synchronized part of a combined arms effort. Complex obstacles require complex solutions.

Members of D Co., 3-37 Armor got their first look at mine plows at this exhibit at the NTC, while on a rotation there. The unit learned it would be called up for the Gulf War from CNN. Below, a demonstration of the MICLIC device that clears mines by overpressure...when it works.

In the months prior to deployment, Colonel Moreno and his S2 would often take me to the brigade intel vault and show me a large map of the Iraqi defenses. Day by day, I watched as the obstacles grew in width, depth, and complexity. I knew that no matter where the division attacked, my company would breach on the division's east flank where the defenses would be the thickest.

There was a bright spot; on the evening before Thanksgiving, we were told that when we arrived in theater we would turn in our dogged-out rebuilt M1s for new M1A1s. I really wanted those powerful transmissions of the M1A1s to power us through the expected obstacles. I should have known better: that same evening we were promised the holiday off, yet at 0530 hours Thanksgiving morning, I received the call to get the company in to paint the tanks. Needless to say on arriving in the Gulf, I found out we would "dance with the tanks that brung us."

There was a morally disturbing aspect to keeping the old tanks. For years, we had been told we would never go to war with these tanks because we would draw on our POMCUS stocks. Now we had intel folks telling us that from many angles our 105mm guns could not penetrate Soviet armor (we would prove this to be false). In theater, we found we were going to be the only battalion of 105mm M1s in the Gulf. Were we expendable? (These thoughts were reinforced when a week before the ground attack, we were told to turn in our issued series-833 rounds for the lesser series-700!)

After the war, the Task Force 2-16 chaplain told me how the headquarters expected us to take up to 80% casualties in the breach. The message was clear: to

the planners at least, we were a throw-away unit.

We dripped into theater. Ships failed to show up and heavy transports broke down. We arrived with nine tanks, knee deep in mud in pitch black darkness around 0300, 17 January, in time to watch the first air attacks scream overhead on their way into Iraq. At dawn, the division commander, MG Rhames, arrived to tell us we were all he had between the division headquarters and the Egyptian positions to our front and that we would attack in *six days*. Meanwhile, we were to assume a defensive position oriented north (with miles of empty trackless desert on both flanks). I also dropped off six tanks to receive plows. A lesson learned: never plan to conduct essential training upon arrival in theater; missions get in the way.

Over the next month, while the coalition air forces pounded the enemy, we gradually pulled our forces out of the ports and into the field. We learned to use new equipment and were attached to our new task forces. I gave up my third platoon (whose members never forgave me) and picked up my attachments, none of whom had ever worked with my company before. I also received a large smoke platoon which had no ammo, no maps, and no mission. I had no use for them. I gave them back to higher headquarters, which used them for EPW control, much to the smokers' resentment. The engineer platoon consisted of two squads in M113s, and two AVLMs (Armor Vehicle Launch MICLIC). This was the first time I had seen these particular vehicles.

In the following weeks, I discussed my concerns about the echelon breaching technique with a number of people. On 20 January, Task Force 2-16 S-3, Major Rachmeler, suggested we test the concept, and so we did the following day. We constructed a mock minefield, using half-filled sandbags as mines. We learned that as the first tanks plowed the field, it pushed dirt and mines to the left and right. The second tank, following behind and to the left of the first, would consistently catch the right side of its plow in the dirt pile the first had plowed aside. This would cause the right side of the plow to dig in and down and lift the left side up a few inches. Invariably, the following tank ran over "mines." Not good. The result of our test? We received word to give up three plows. We would breach two lanes, each with a plow followed by a roller, followed by an AVLM. The company's third plow would be in reserve. The rest of the plows would go to a follow-on task force so that if we got stuck in the breach, they would conduct a new breach somewhere else. Plan B: the first breach gets stuck and fixes the enemy, the follow-on forces conducts a bypass breach.

On 22 January, we went to our first MICLIC demonstration. We were blessed with outstanding engineers in the First Infantry Division who created a mind-boggling practice breach area. In a section of wire, dummy mines, and trenches, a MICLIC blew an impressive lane through the obstacles. Everyone gathered in the scorched breach lane and nodded approvingly. The second MICLIC rocket broke its tether and fell inertly on the ground. Everyone held their breaths awaiting the explosion, but none came. In my journal, I noted that by 26 January, we had witnessed 7 MICLIC firings, two of which worked properly. Nothing stops an operation faster than that explosive cord laying on the ground. The fastest successful launch and detonation was 50 seconds. During that time no one could key a mike for fear of a static-related detonation, and all the buttoned-up crews were left to wonder what was going on. No one wanted to be in front of a MICLIC that may misfire or break free.

Although the misfires were later found to be caused by a bad lot of explosive cords, these demonstrations raised some doubts and led us to decide only to use the MICLICs if the plows ran into trouble. When they worked, they made wonderful flat scorched lanes through wire obstacles and did major damage to trenches. I was certain they would clear mines, except for the Iraqis' 9 million, Italian-made, MICLIC-proof overpressure-resistant mines. But those were probably in some other sector of the Iraqi defenses.

Our plan began to crystallize. My second platoon, under LT Steve Miller, volunteered to take the plows. By now we believed the breach area had minimal wire, possible mines, and a manned trench, but bad weather prevented aerial reconnaissance. I, like the entire chain of command, wanted to put as much firepower as possible on the enemy while two breach teams cut the lanes. Each team would lead with a plow, followed by a roller, followed by an AVLM with MICLIC, followed by an engineer squad in an M113. Although some in the battalion still argued for infantry to clear the trenches, the decision was to give that role to the tanks. The lead plow would push through the obstacles then turn east and crush the first trench. The roller would proof the lane, then face west at the trench and suppress that section. The AVLM would stand by to fire over the obstacles if the tanks got stuck. The engineers would get out of the trail M113, emplace two 10-foot high panels, one each side of the lane opening, then drive through the lane throwing out water bottles containing glow stick solution to mark the sides of the lane. They had originally planned to mark the lanes with "tippy-toms," but found them inadequate.

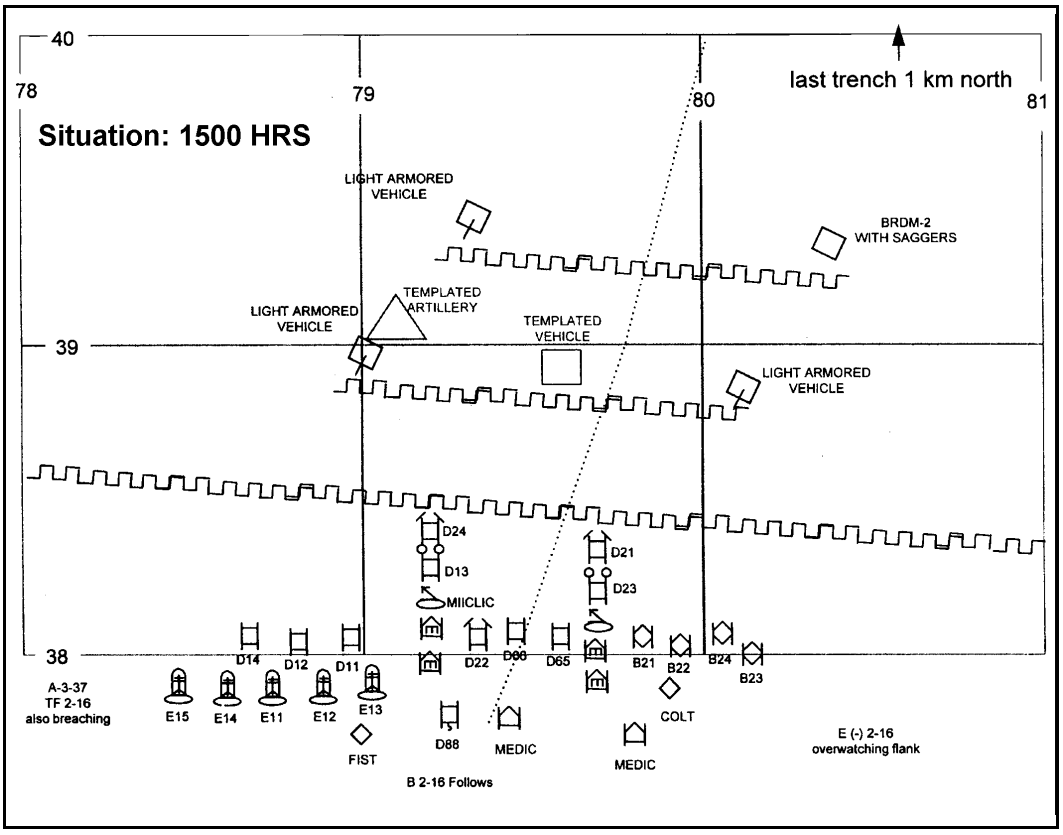
I was more worried about the exposed engineers than anything else. We did not know what kind of fire to expect from the Iraqi trenches. I wanted to get some Vulcans to suppress the trenches, but that proved unfeasible. I placed my first platoon, under LT Dan Redden, on left flank and LT Hubb (2/B/2-16) and his Bradley platoon on my right to suppress the trenches. We carefully selected main gun and machine gun angles to ensure maximum interlocking fires. If they were not needed for the obstacles, I intended to fire the MICLICs down the enemy trenches if necessary. It is not enough to place tanks in the overwatch; you must orchestrate sectors of fire and weapons selection for the expected targets.

We had other missions beyond the breach: destroy the trenches in vicinity of the breach, penetrate to and destroy the farthest enemy trench line (approximately three kilometers away), and protect the task force's northern flank from counterattack as it turned east. We knew we had to conserve ammo and quickly complete the breach.

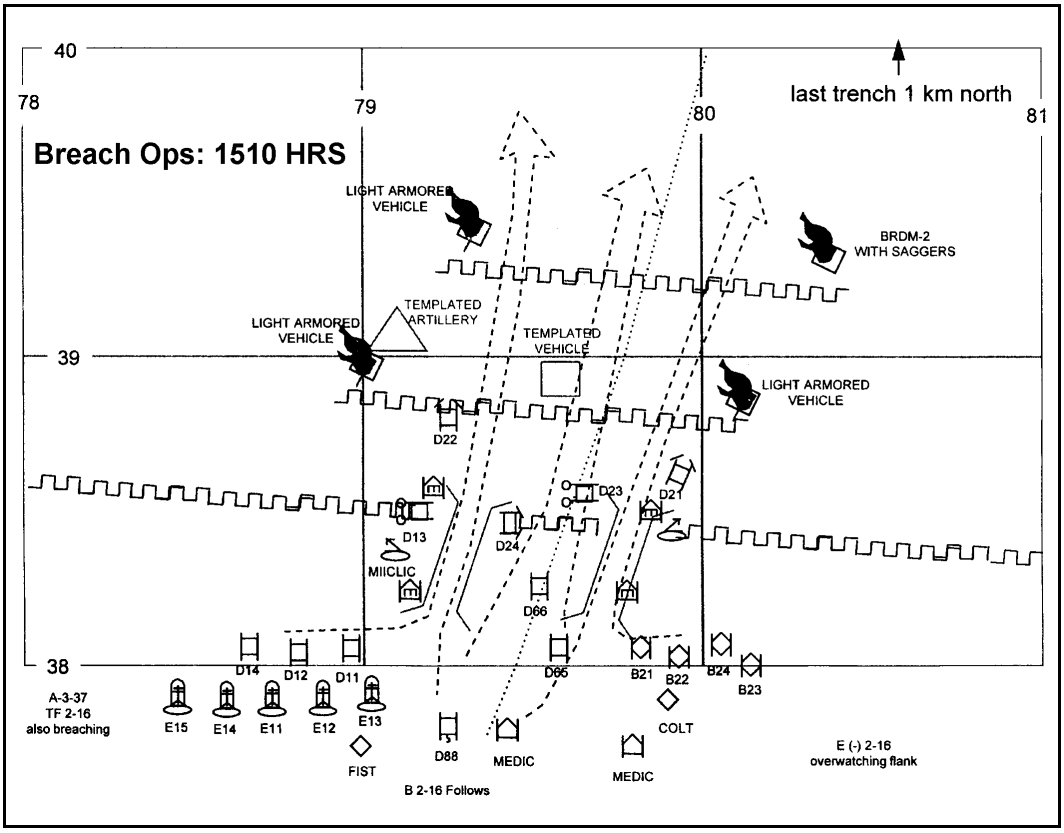
At 0900, January 29, we began a series of mounted, brigade-level rehearsals. We practiced a rate of advance of 10 minutes per kilometer to keep us just behind a steady advance of artillery fire. I was afraid this was too slow and would allow enemy reserves to reposition before we hit the third trench, but the division and brigade believed supporting air power would negate that threat. After the first rehearsal, Colonel Moreno put an end to further changes. He said we were all now "signed to the contract." The time for "great ideas" was over.

Our rehearsals on 1 February, especially at night, revealed an unexpected problem. The task force had so many vehicles pouring through the breach lanes

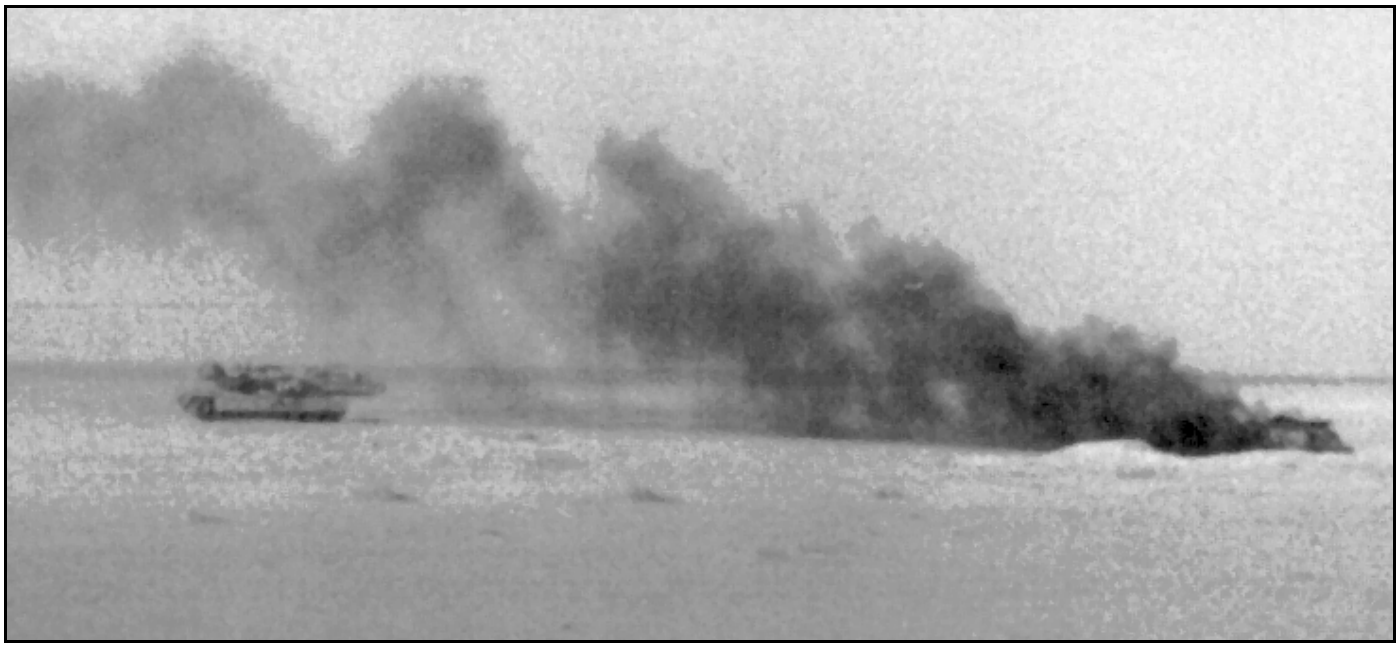
BREACH OPERATIONS



SITUATION:
1500 HRS



BREACH OPS:
1510 Hrs.



that individuals became confused and intermingled. Expecting that this would be worse with battle dust and smoke, we decided to fly yellow flags on every vehicle in the Delta team. It didn't help matters that every GPS in my company shorted out in the rain and had to be turned in for maintenance.

We moved to the division practice breach site prior to sunset on 4 February. Before sunrise, after watching a nearby M109 blow up and burn, we conducted a rehearsal in which we breached the wrong berm and got our asses chewed for it. In four subsequent mounted, and one walk-through rehearsal, the ITV platoon leader nearly broke his ribs, two plows broke while crossing trenches, and a lot of people lost their tempers. Still, we kept at it, got the kinks out of our task force, and learned valuable lessons. CPT Tony Schwalm of Alpha Company demonstrated how to drive an M1 without a plow astride a trench, steer a little left and a little right, and cave in the sides. I wondered if a brave enemy with an RPG round would be able to fire into the underbelly of a tank performing such a maneuver, but we agreed they would probably have other things on their mind at such a time.

The most important lesson of our breach site rehearsals was this: no one system conducts a breach. It is the truest form of synergy on the battlefield. Some systems can clear mines. Some can reduce wire. Others can suppress the enemy. Some kill. But you can't get from here to there unless they all work together. There was not a crew and not a man in our outfit who did not understand how their piece of the operation fit into the whole. Weapons orientations, ammo selection, sequences through the breach, and operations on the other side were items of particular importance and training. When we finished with the mock site, we constructed a company walk-through terrain board (finding adequate space was never a problem) and rehearsed each crew through the operation. We were lucky to have the time to drill this operation to perfection.

On 14 February, we repositioned 70 miles west as part of the "Hail Mary" maneuver. The plows and rollers were transported on flat bed trailers and remounted after the move. We occupied Battle Position 22, overwatching cuts 13, 14, and 15 in the 12-foot high and 12-foot wide berm dividing the neutral zone. There we conducted counterrecon, watched the counterartillery fight, defended, and prepared to attack. Breach practice was over.

At a meeting at TF headquarters at 1800 on 21 February, we received orders that the ground attack would commence on the 24th. We conducted two more walk-through rehearsals that simply confirmed we were ready.

On the night prior to the attack, I visited my engineers. It is hard to express the feelings you go through when you look at men that you know may be killed the next day while under your command. I could only think, "God bless the engineers." They were upbeat, confident, and only expressed worries about us DATs and grunts.

We moved out at 0328, 24 February. Fifteen hours earlier, we received orders changing the lane we were to take through the berm. We had been forbidden from practicing the maneuver through the berm so as to prevent the Iraqis from getting suspicious about our direction of attack. In the absolute darkness, things quickly bogged down and when I walked forward to straighten things out, I was surprised that someone nearby fired a main gun round. I ran around asking who fired and why, but no one claimed responsibility. It was my FIST who later told me that it was an incoming mortar round.

The approach to the breach was slow. At 1200 hours, two kilometers south of Phase Line Wisconsin, we took our first prisoners. This caused us to go into EPW drills, which meant detaching infantry squads. This almost disrupted our breach organization. Another lesson learned: expect to conduct such actions on the way to the breach and plan accordingly. Be ready to deal with enemy OPs, ambushes, and deserters. We should have passed the EPWs to a follow-on company.

By 1430, we were on line in sight of the Iraqi trenches and watched the division artillery pound the enemy. Overhead, flights of Apaches hovered, dropped their tails, and fired their rockets as indirect artillery. After about 30 minutes, we waited to collect more prisoners and then attacked.

We received some small arms fire and mortar rounds, so we knew not all the enemy had surrendered or deserted. My gunner spotted what he thought was a tank overwatching the breach area. We fired and with the fireball that went up, I realized we had hit a fuel pod. However, the armored vehicle next to the pod returned fire. That was his last mistake. About five of my tanks immediately re-

SGT Balladad, in D24, turns right to begin plowing the Iraqi trench system as SSG Daniel Eckert in D22, carrying the reserve plow, moves forward. Note the Iraqi soldier exiting the trench system behind D24.

Below, D21 and D66 pass an Iraqi wheeled armored vehicle that had been set up in an overwatch position. Its cannon fired only once.

turned fire and struck the Iraqi vehicle. A few more Iraqi armored vehicles made similar fatal errors. The ITVs, assigned to look deep, spotted a T-55 to the northwest more than three kilometers away. After taking the time to ask one tank to move out of their field of fire, they engaged. Although I didn't think so at the time, by comparing the way that target burned to what I later saw, I am now convinced they destroyed that tank.

There was no wire. The plows went down, almost. I had taken the position in between the two breach lanes and on my left, second platoon sergeant, SSG Balladad, got out of his tank and jumped up and down on his plow to get it to drop into position. Despite the distraction of sporadic enemy small arms fire, he got the plow into position, and his tank spent the rest of the day plowing up desert wherever he went.

When the breach teams reached the trenches, it was clear there were no mines. Higher command had indeed outflanked the Iraqi obstacle belt. I told my driver move out, and we drove between the two plowed lanes into Iraq. The rest of the company team moved exactly as rehearsed. Vehicles positioned quickly to overwatch every square inch of the enemy defense. D24, working from west to east, crushed our assigned section of the first trench. Some Iraqis jumped out of the trenches and surrendered; others remain there to this day. We never fired the MICLICs. The engineers were never touched.

We went on to the final trench about three kilometers to the north. It turned out to be the fourth trench. One company failed to destroy their assigned trench to our south, so we went back and destroyed that one also. First Sergeant Morrow, a Vietnam combat veteran, got into the fight and destroyed enemy positions with the M88. Our tanks rolled up the trenches from the 75 grid line to the 88 grid line, all the while positioned to defend the right flank against a counterattack that never came. We destroyed five vehicles, three of which had engaged us. We took over 350 prisoners that day and suffered not one casualty (we would later).

I later questioned many of our prisoners about how they prepared to defend against our attack. They said they were prepared to defend against what they were told would be a dismounted attack by Egyptian infantry. When they looked out and saw tanks, Bradleys, and Apaches it looked exactly like the pictures on the leaflets dropped on their po-

sitions. If the leaflets correctly foretold of the attack, they reasoned, then the end was also foretold. More than half had surrendered or deserted before we conducted the breach.

In the years since, I have often thought our success was due more to the unique conditions we enjoyed than to anything else. We did not see the equipment or units with which we were to accomplish the breach until we arrived in the field only weeks before the ground attack. Still, we were lucky. We had the luxury of time, materials, and leadership that allowed us to assemble and train. We had generals at the highest levels who maneuvered us to face the weakest spot in the enemy's line. We also had an obliging enemy whose military incompetence allowed us to overcome deficiencies in our doctrine and pre-war training. Would our procedures work under different conditions? As an OC at the NTC, I saw enough failed breach attempts to answer, "probably not."

The major deficiency in our peacetime approach was brought home to me in the ATCD brief. We develop systems that can remove mines without designing them in conjunction with breaching forces. While several of these systems could no doubt remove mines from an area, they could not breach a field defended by anti-armor systems.

The simple removal of mines is a "mine-clearing" operation. "Breaching" occurs when your create a lane for maneuver through a minefield against opposition. If no one is firing at me, I can clear a minefield with a butter knife and snow shoes. It may take a while, but it can be done. A billion dollar light-skinned vehicle with a complex bulldozer blade, GPS systems, and comms can also clear a minefield, but it cannot breach a defense.

As an aside, I believe the roller tanks were a waste of tanks. They are very cumbersome, limited the abilities of the tank, and were not going to find anything the lead plow wouldn't have discovered. An engineer vehicle could do better. Interestingly, General Starry had reported the same observations from Vietnam some 30 years earlier.

Rollers were first tested by the 11th ACR in Vietnam in 1969 and then again by the 5th ID and, in both instances, were found insufficient. Only in a third test, when the 4th ID placed them on engineer vehicles, were they deemed acceptable.[1]

The biggest obstacle to maneuver is an enemy opposing efforts to breach an obstacle. The most critical element of breaching is to neutralize that enemy. As the Gulf war proved, airpower, though effective, will not accomplish this task alone. Concentrating vehicles to force one or two breach lanes out ahead of the killing forces makes it easy for the enemy to concentrate fires on the breaching vehicles. One or two accurate shots from the defenders can stop a corps attack. In a future where accuracy can be bought at the local Radio Shack, current tactics will be obsolete.

D Company's infantry platoon processes Iraqi prisoners of war. Many told intelligence officers they were expecting an infantry assault by Egyptian troops.

The solution is to first kill the enemy and then conduct a breach. Tank plows are not designed to clear lanes but they can get single tanks through the obstacles. Instead of six plows for two lanes, the breaching company should have plows on each and every tank. After the indirect systems prepare the breach area, let the lead tanks get themselves through the obstacles and get on top of the enemy positions. The most effective way to suppress an enemy is to get on top of them and kill them. Guderian stated a similar sentiment in regards to breach operations when he said, "...within the tanks' own combat zone nothing short of the destruction of the defense will do, if we are to develop the attack into a successful breakthrough. ...The attacking forces must therefore penetrate the defensive zone in great force and at great speed...."[2] A following engineer platoon could then select the paths of the successful plow tanks; clear, proof, and mark those lanes; and pass other forces through.

The key to a deliberate breach is achieving the synergy between systems of differing abilities to accomplish the essential parts of the mission at the proper moments. We were able to achieve such synergy through constant practice. Future units may not have that opportunity once in theater. Therefore doctrine, TO&E, and training must pick up the slack.

A final observation: choose only your best troops to conduct the breach. As General Fred Franks observed, "Breaching a complex obstacle covered by enemy fire is the toughest attack mission a unit can get."[3] Only the best units can be expected to confidently conduct breach operations. Sending forth anything less is just plain stupid. The breach is the seed of the attack: all success grows from the breach. Choose your best men, give them the best equipment, train them hard, and support them all the way. They risk their lives so that the attack will succeed. Maybe it is time we risk a little brain power and sweat to develop doctrine that will ensure their success the next time we send them "once more unto the breach."

Or we can hope to be lucky again.

Notes

[1]See General Donn A. Starry's *Armored Combat In Vietnam* (Arno Press, NY: 1980), p. 82.

[2]Major General Heinz Guderian, *Achtung Panzer* (Arms and Armour Press, London: 1993) p. 179.

[3]General Fred Franks and Tom Clancy, *Into the Storm: A Study In Command* (G.P. Putnam & Sons, NY: 1997) p. 268.

MAJ James K. Morningstar is a 1983 graduate of the U. S. Military Academy. He served as a tank platoon leader and company XO in the 3rd Armored Division in Germany. He served on the REFORGER 88 Planning Group and as S4 for 1/4 Cavalry Squadron at Ft. Riley. As stated in the article, he commanded D Co, 3-37 Armor in the Gulf War. After the war, he spent three years as an observer/controller with the Brigade Staff Trainer Team at the NTC. Currently, he is the Army Liaison Officer and J51 Plans Officer for COMSECONDFLT/COMSTRIKFLTLANT/CJTF 120 on board the USS Mt. Whitney somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean.