

# Plow Platoon Operations

by Captain Patrick A. Callahan

“Panther X-Ray, this is Maddog X-Ray, enemy obstacle report follows:”

**Line 1:** Wire and mine obstacle

**Line 2:** Starting at Grid AB 303148 to Grid AB 311149

**Line 3:** Obstacle is 800m in length, from SW to NE

**Line 4:** Depth of obstacle: 100m

**Line 5:** Obstacle sighting has been confirmed by Maddog Red 1 at \_\_\_hrs.

“Panther X-Ray, this is Panther 6. I monitored Maddog’s report. Execute TM Bulldog, time now!”

In the summer of 1998, 2-69 Armor Battalion began using a new playbook that included the concept of using a plow platoon within each company/team.

Initially, the company commanders were skeptical and reluctant to change to this new concept of breaching. We had very little knowledge about the tactics, techniques, or procedures for using the plow platoon concept in our warfighting METL. Our train-up for the National Training Center (NTC) was to begin in two weeks (two companies had just returned from Intrinsic Action 98-02 and two companies were still deployed in support of Operation Desert Thunder), and the company commanders, like the rest of the unit, didn’t want the additional requirement to train a time-consuming new concept to go along with the numerous other requirements prior to deploying to the NTC.

I formed a plow platoon within my company. The biggest “sell” was to my soldiers: “Sir, how come it has to be *our* platoon?” or “Sir, do you realize that you are sending us to our death in the breach?” These were just a few questions for me to think about during my second week as an M1A1 tank company commander.



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Like all units within 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, we trained hard during our train-up period for the NTC, but more importantly, our unit had deployed to Kuwait for real world contingency operations twice within the last three years (Operations Desert Vigilance, Desert Fox/Thunder).

The end result: Task Force Panther did well during NTC Rotation 98-02. We won some battles, and we lost some battles, but overall, we were a better trained and battle ready unit after the rotation.

This article discusses the use of the “plow platoon” in co/tm offensive operations. It is by no means *the* answer to all tactical breaching scenarios, rather a task force and company/team SOP developed through trial and error during our train-up to the NTC in the fall of 1998. For the units using the “plow platoon” concept, the following SOP may aid in breaching operations at the task force and co/tm level.

## Platoon Task Organization

- 1-Mine roller
- 2-Mine plow
- 3-Mine plow
- 4-Mine plow

## Plow Concept

The plow tank must build up enough spoil (turned dirt) prior to entering the minefield in order to push and redirect the explosion of the mine(s) away from the tank. In order to develop enough spoil, the plow must be dropped 50-80 meters from the edge of the minefield. This is terrain- and soil-dependent; essentially, there should be a minimum of 13 inches of spoil in front of the mine plow. Prior to creating a lane with the plow, the tank must traverse its turret to the side in order to protect the gun tube from any possible frontal mine explosions. The turret should

be traversed to the left side so that the TC may use the .50 caliber machine gun while in the lane. In order to protect the crew from direct and indirect fires, and exploding mines, all hatches must be closed while creating the lane.

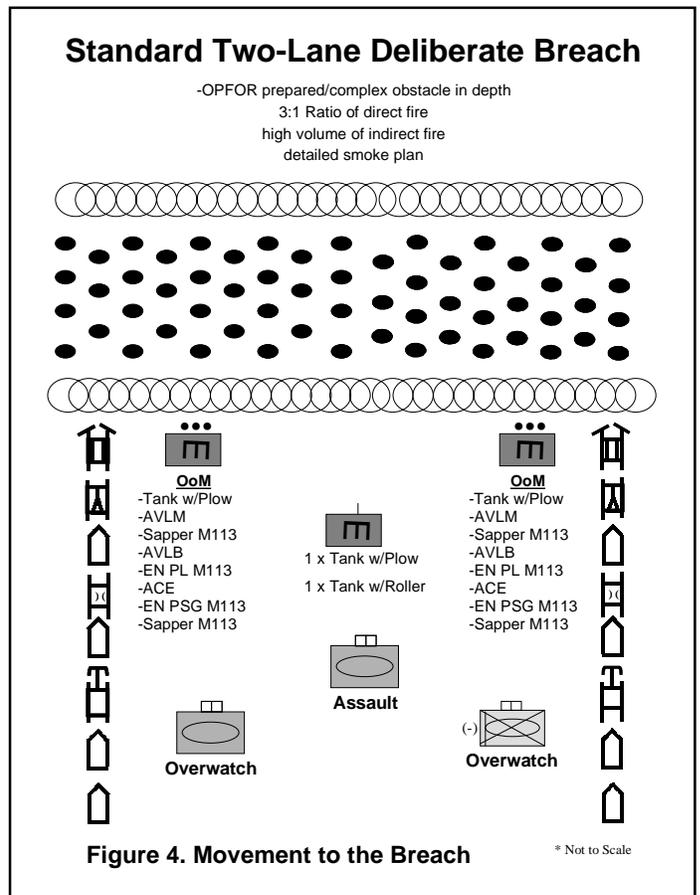
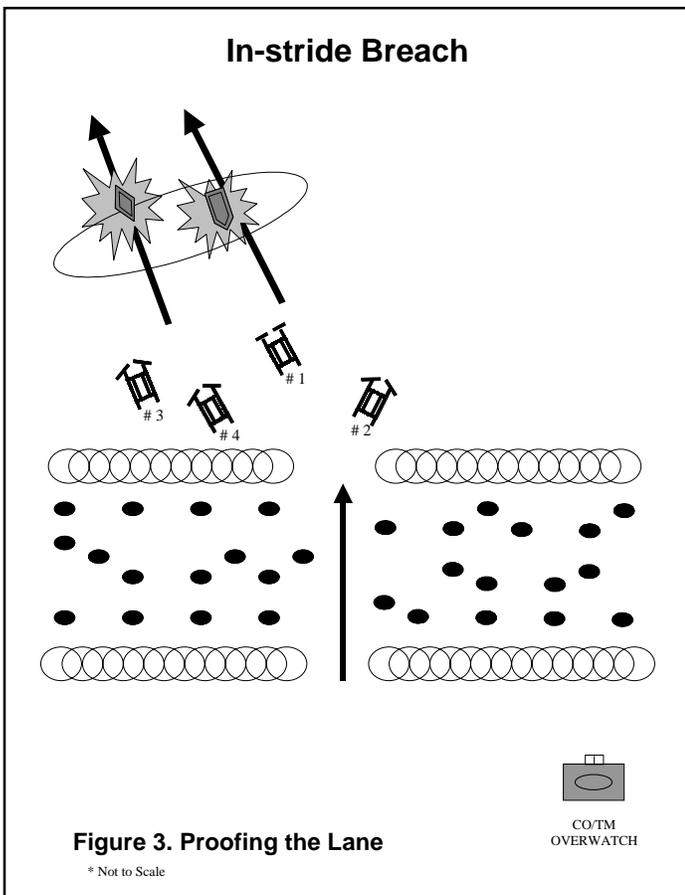
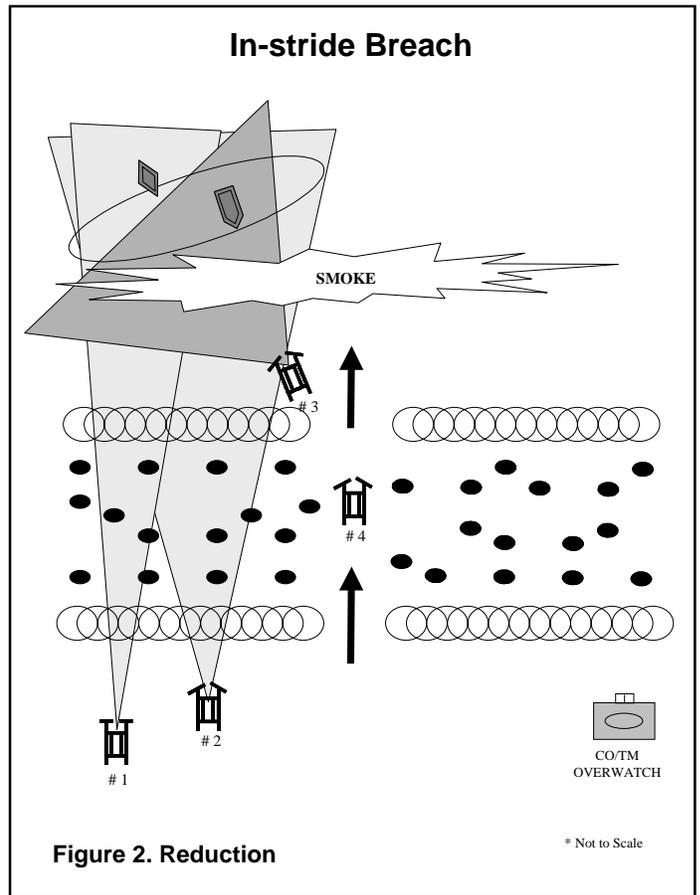
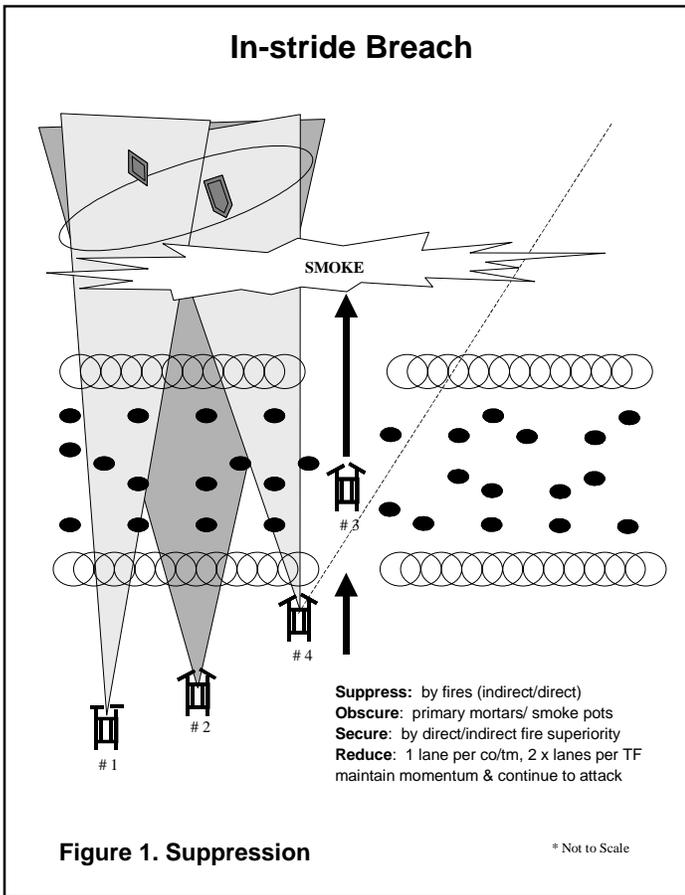
## Mine Roller Concept

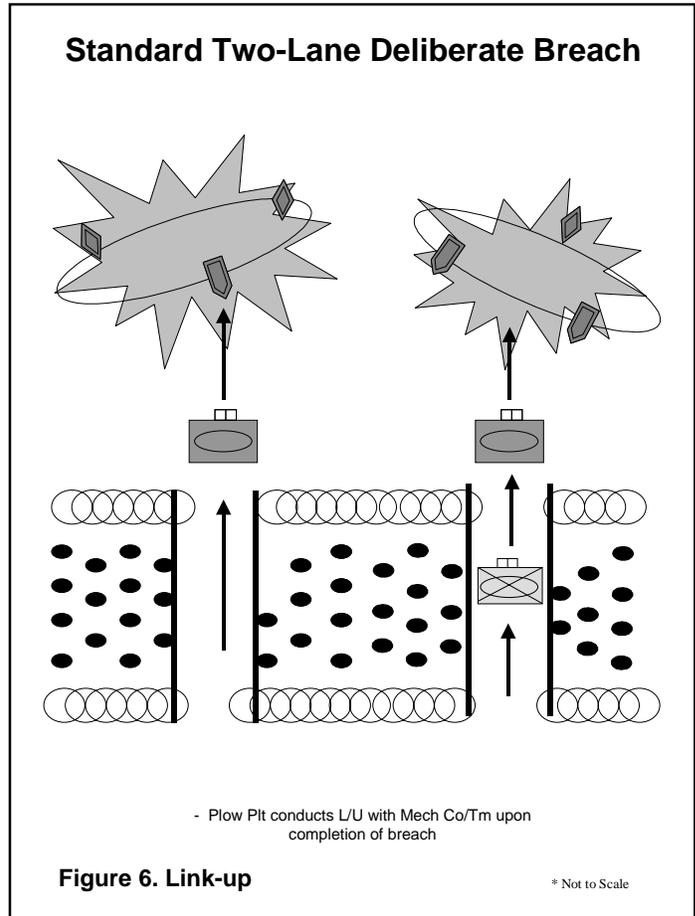
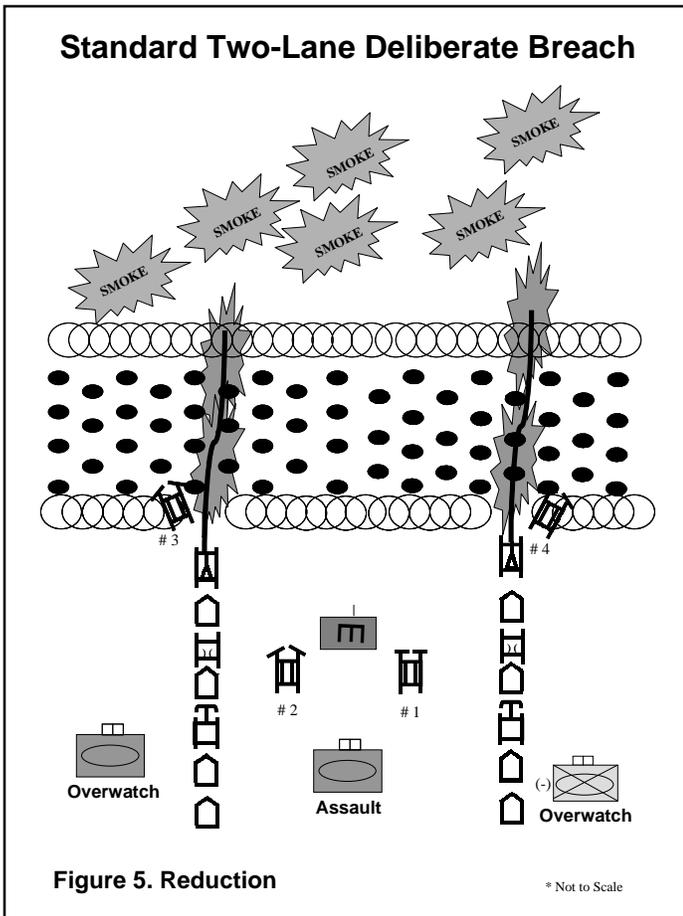
The mine roller is mounted on the tank prior to use during a mission. The mine roller tank detects the edge of the minefield upon visual contact or by exploding the first mine. The roller tank then backs up in order to allow a plow tank to clear a lane. The roller is also used for proofing a lane after a plow tank or engineer unit has already cleared a path through the minefield.

## In-Stride Breach (See Figs. 1-3)

Concept:

Prior to conducting a breach with unit assets, the normal SOSR (suppress, obscure, secure, reduce) conditions must be met. This is done with platoon internal assets, company/team assets, or task force assets, depending on the size and composition of the obstacle and enemy strength covering the obstacle. Once the obstacle is identified, a plow tank section acts as the lane creator and lane proofer. The other tank section provides overwatch and suppression during the breach.





**Suppression** (Figure 1) is conducted by the overwatch section and any other assets working to accomplish the breach.

**Obscuration** is called by the PL or the primary observer for the obscuration mission.

**Security** (near side) is conducted by the breach section as it prepares to execute the breach mission.

**Reduction** (Figure 2) is conducted by the #3 tank. It drops its plow 50-80 meters from the edge of the minefield while the #4 tank continues to provide near-side security (vic edge of minefield; enemy and terrain dependent). The #3 tank creates the lane.

Once the #3 tank creates the lane the #4 tank follows with its plow dropped in order to proof the lane (Figure 3). While the #4 tank is proofing the lane, the #3 tank provides far-side security.

Once the lane has been proofed, the #1 and #2 tanks advance through the obstacle in order to provide far-side security, additional suppression, or assist in assaulting enemy positions.

In order to provide redundancy, the #2 tank acts as the back-up breach tank in case the #3 and #4 tanks are rendered

NMC. The #2 tank also acts as the FASCAM response vehicle if the enemy places FASCAM on the breach site.

In that case, in order to re-establish the breach, the #2 tank drops its plow and breaches the same lane created by the previous plow tanks.

**TF Deliberate Breach With Engineer Assets** (See Figs. 4-6)

**TASK ORGANIZATION:**

TM BULLDOG/ B/317 EN (Breach Teams)

1/B/317 EN (#3 Tank, 1xAVLM, 4xM113, 1xAVLB, 1xACE)

2/B/317 EN (#4 Tank, 1xAVLM, 4xM113, 1xAVLB, 1xACE)

3/A/2-69 AR (#1 and #2 Tank)

**Concept:**

When breaching with engineer assets, the task force commander determines whether to create a one- or two-lane breach. If it is the standard two-lane breach, then the #3 and #4 tanks are OPCON to B/317 EN. The #1 and #2 tanks remain in a position to oversee the breach operation and act as a FASCAM breach reserve. The tank platoon

remains OPCON to TM BULLDOG until the breach mission is complete and lane(s) are established. The #4 plow tank must maintain FM comms with the platoon leader (#1 tank) in order to ensure the latest SITREPs are known within the platoon.

The plow platoon maneuvers as a platoon until the last covered and concealed position as designated by CDR, TM BULLDOG. Once in the final position, the #3 and #4 tanks separate from the plow platoon and prepare to lead their respective platoons toward the breach site. The typical order of march to the breach site for each platoon will be: tank w/plow, AVLM, sapper M113, AVLB, EN PL M113, ACE, EN PSG M113, and sapper M113 (Figure 4).

**Suppression** is conducted by the #1 and #2 tank and other units assigned the mission according to the TF play book.

**Obscuration** is called by the engineer commander or by the primary/secondary observer; designated by the TF FSO.

**Security** (near side) is conducted by TM\_/2-69 AR from the overwatch.

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## Plow Platoon from Page 13

**Reduction.** (Figure 5) The #3 and #4 plow tanks drop their plows 50-80 meters from the edge of the minefield (due to the standoff range and limited range of the AVLM). Once everybody within the safety range of the AVLM is “buttoned up,” the AVLM fires the rocket and detonates the line charge that clears the lane of mines. Once the lane is detonated, the #3 tank and #4 tank proceed to clear the lane. If necessary, the plow tanks need to be prepared to stop and allow the AVLM to fire another rocket (if the minefield is over 100m in depth). Once the lane is cleared, the #2 tank provides security (far side) should the #3 and #4 tank become NMC.

Upon completion of the breach mission, the tank plow platoon conducts link up with the follow-on company/team (Figure 6). It is the responsibility of the plow tank platoon leader to ensure FM commo has been established between the plow platoon and the mech or tank company/team after the breach. (\*According to the TF playbook        IN is the team that the plow platoon is attached to once the breach has been completed and the task force continues the attack.)

### FASCAM Re-Seed

While B/317 EN conducts the breach, the #2 tank must be prepared to clear a FASCAM re-seed. On order, the #2 tank advances from the overwatch position to clear a lane through the FASCAM minefield. CDR, TM BULLDOG will specify which lane to clear.

Upon completion of lane proofing, the sapper squads begin marking the lane entrance and exit points (see the 2-69 Armor Battalion TACSOP for marking identification). Violet smoke marks the breach entrance. Once the lanes are cleared, the lead elements continue to attack.

*The author would like to thank Mr. Alex Spencer (late of 3 Pl, D/2-69 AR Bn) for being first through the breach and LTC David Styles for giving us his guidance during planning and his patience during execution.*

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CPT P.A. Callahan enlisted in the infantry as an 11M in 1988 and was assigned to 3d Bde, 3AD, Friedberg, Germany. After finishing his degree and being commissioned as a chemical officer from Georgetown University, he was assigned to 3d Sqdn, 3d ACR in 1993. In 1994, he branch transferred to armor and served as a tank platoon leader and rear detachment S3 when the regiment moved to Ft. Carson in 1996. After attending the advanced course, he was assigned to 3d Bde, 3D ID (M) serving as the assistant brigade ops officer; S4, 2-69 AR Bn; commander, D/2-69 AR Bn; and commander, HHC/2-69 AR Bn. He is a graduate of the Airborne, Air Assault, BMO, and TCCC (M1A1) courses. Currently, he is the U.S. liaison officer to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.