

# Road March Planning In Restrictive Terrain



by Captain Don L. Willadsen

*“The finest theories and most minute plans often crumble. Complex systems fall by the wayside... Then raw truth is before us.”*

*- Major General Charles W. O’Daniel*

The tactical road march is the most appropriate mission to conduct when a unit must move over long distances through a secured area. Due to the complexity of such a movement, particularly in the context of the battlefield rear areas, a successful road march requires meticulous planning. In the Republic of Korea, restrictive terrain further complicates the situation. The purpose of this article is to present tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) for planning road marches in restrictive terrain, particularly within the factors of METT-T, for an armor-heavy task force in the Republic of Korea. The technique for presenting these TTPs will describe how the Dragon Force performs them.

## Restrictive Terrain Description

Restrictive terrain presents several unique problems for the planner, particularly in Korea, in which mobility is restricted due to a combination of steep, forested mountains and open rice paddies. The planner must contend with nar-

row mobility corridors, scarce or nonexistent alternate routes, readily available ambush positions for enemy forces, limited line of sight for direct command and control, and disruption of FM radio communication. In addition to these obvious problems which emerge with terrain analysis, however, further factors emerge with weather integration and threat integration.

Restrictive terrain, when combined with the effects of the weather in Korea, is particularly daunting. Precipitation variations result in widely varying water levels at fords, unpredictable soil trafficability, and varying road conditions. Temperature variations also affect soil trafficability. For example, the depth of the ford at the Sinyong-Ni River, commonly used by 2ID units, averages less than one foot in winter. During the monsoon season this year, the depth went from three feet to 30 feet deep in a week.

The planner must also contend with other variables, such as the effects of the local populace and the enemy. Even in peacetime, a road march in Korea is a dangerous exercise, though more so to the local populace than to an armor-heavy force. This is due to the poor conditions of the roads north of Seoul, the limited load classifications of bridges (which necessitate fords or bypasses by the heavier vehicles in the task force),

the ever-increasing number of privately owned vehicles on Korean roads, and the impatience with which some Koreans drive. In wartime, the enemy would further complicate the situation by blending in with the local population to conduct their rear-area raids and interdiction missions.

## Planning

A task force usually organizes into march units to enhance command and control. In the Dragon Force, the march is organized in one of two ways. In an administrative march, when the battalion is not task-organized, each company marches with its battalion-internal support slice as a march unit. In a tactical road march, when the task force is task-organized in its habitual task organization, the SOP dictates a specific formation called Attack from the March (Figure 1). In either case, the planning factors remain the same.

The march planner designates critical points on the route, defined as points at which interference with the march may occur. In Korea, two common critical points are built-up areas and bridges. Most of these points along the major routes are designated by standardized 2ID checkpoints, and so are easily referred to in our operations orders (OPORDs) and fragmentary orders (FRAGOs). Given the high threat of

Special Operations Forces (SOF) in Korea during a war, the planner must consider the naturally-occurring choke points on a route as critical points. Finally, restrictive terrain requires the planner to designate Command and Control (C2) node locations, so that the task force can maintain continuous FM communication with all of its units during the road march.

After identifying critical points, the planner decides what actions to take to minimize the impact of each critical point on the road march, such as establishing a Traffic Control Point (TCP) at an intersection, tasking the scout platoon to conduct area reconnaissance on a choke point prior to the arrival of the march column, or tasking a staff officer to man a C2 node to relay FM communications to the TOC.

In the Dragon Force, a peacetime task force road march quickly exhausts the scout platoon in providing TCPs and requires the mortar platoon and Military Police to augment the TCP force. The battalion TAC (an M113A3 modified as a command and control vehicle), battalion XO, and battalion S3 form the C2 nodes, augmented by other staff members if necessary. In wartime, the battalion SOP is to use an armor-heavy team

to follow the scouts on their route reconnaissance and establish required TCPs in vehicle sections, with air defense support where appropriate, with the secondary task to protect any C2 node which may be co-located with the TCP. The battalion XO or B Team XO, depending on who controls the TCPs, collapses the TCPs as the task force passes.

The march planner then designates and organizes the Reconnaissance Force, whose task is to recon the route in order to verify travel time, determine the condition of the route and its underpasses, bridges, fords, etc., and locate obstacles and enemy forces which influence the route. The instructions to the recon force must be clear and precise, and the planner must provide them with the resources, including troops, equipment, and time, to accomplish their mission.

The scout platoon conducts a doctrinal route reconnaissance only if enemy contact is not likely and time allows, such as in peacetime. If enemy contact is likely, the task force conducts an Attack from the March, with route scouts attached to Team D, the advance guard team, as in Figure 1.

If required, the march planner designates and organizes a quartering party whose task is to recon the area at the ter-

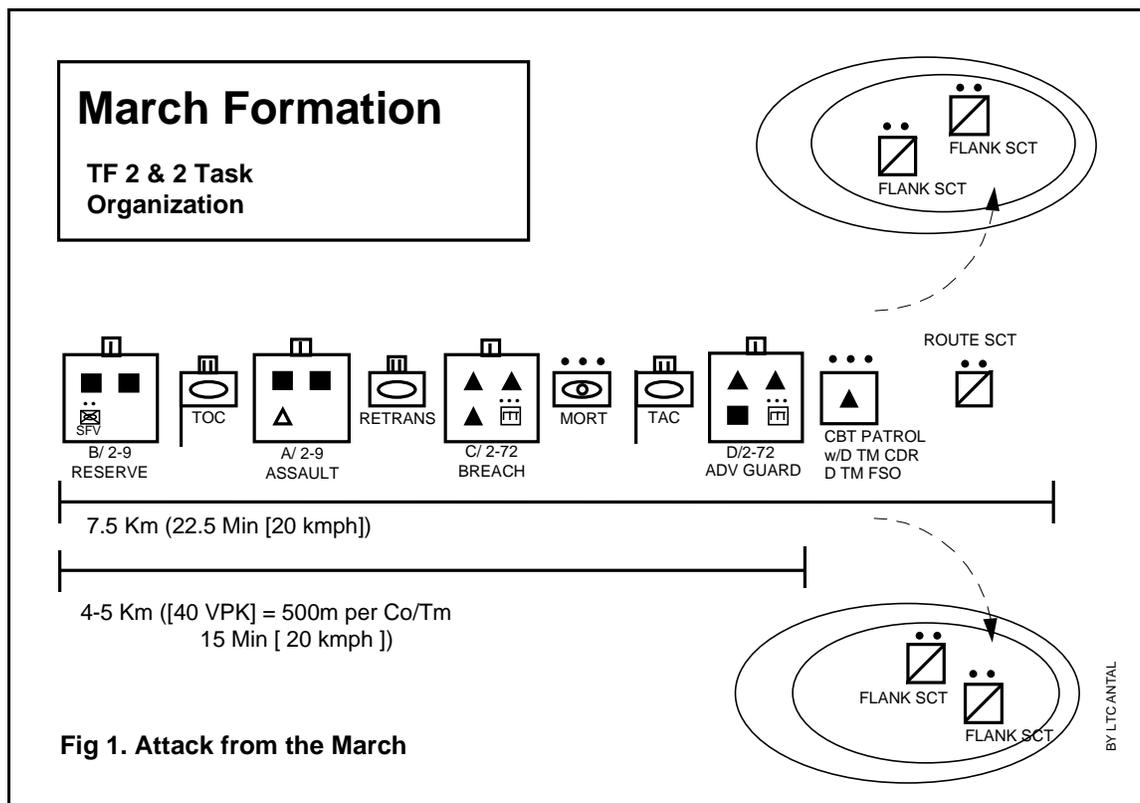
minus of the march and guide the main body into the area. He tasks the quartering party with specific instructions as to the area to be occupied (assembly area, battle position, or attack position).

The CSM leads the quartering party, which consists of one vehicle per subunit and one combat vehicle per platoon. It may move with Team B or separately as it marches on the route.

The march planner must consider logistical issues, which for a heavy task force always include refueling, medical support, and recovery. He must consider where to position medical and recovery assets to best support the march units, while balancing flexibility to respond to emergencies. He must ensure that the coordinating instructions are clear and precise in describing how individual vehicle crews must respond to problems. In Korea, a single broken-down vehicle can block the entire route, because bypasses are difficult or impossible.

Each company has its Class III and maintenance support slice for the road march, with the remaining fuelers in the field trains, and the unit maintenance collection point (UMCP marching as the last element in the task force. In a tactical situation, the fuelers are prepositioned for a tactical refuel near the release point (RP), and the UMCP marches at the rear of the task force.

The march planner completes the plan in the form of a march OPORD or FRAGO. The road march table is the commander's tool for graphically depicting the road march over its planned time period. As such, it must contain information critical to understanding and executing the road march, including speed, interval, unit information, pass times, and SP times. The times at which units are expected to hit each critical point, particularly the refueling point, are helpful, because they allow the staff to coor-



| DRAGON FORCE ROAD MARCH TABLE   |      |      |                  |       |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|---|------|------|------------------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| FRAGO 1 TO OPORD 07-96: TRIPLE THREAT 3   |      |      |                  |       |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| SPEED:  | 20   | KPH  | CRITICAL POINT:  | SP    | CP    | CP   | CP   | CP   | CP   | CP   | CP   | RP   |
| INTERVAL:   | 50   | M    | LOCATION (CP)    | 8     | 37    | 144  | 35   | 109  | 5    | 153  | 47   |      |
|   |      |      | TCP ASSIGNED:    | SCT   | SCT   | SCT  | SCT  | SCT  | MP   | SCT  |      | MP   |
|   |      |      | C2 NODE PRESENT: | TOC   |       |      |      | TAC  |      |      |      | CSM  |
|   |      |      | KM FROM PREV PT: |       | 2     | 5    | 4    | 7    | 4    | 5    | 6    |      |
| DATE  | UNIT | #VEH | PASS             | WT CL | TIMES |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| 21-Jul-96   | A    | 23   | 5                | 70    | 1:30  | 1:32 | 1:38 | 1:43 | 1:51 | 1:56 | 2:02 | 2:09 |
|   | CTCP | 18   | 4                | 15    | 1:50  | 1:52 | 1:58 | 2:03 | 2:11 | 2:16 | 2:22 | 2:29 |
|   | B    | 24   | 5                | 70    | 2:10  | 2:12 | 2:18 | 2:23 | 2:31 | 2:36 | 2:42 | 2:49 |
|   | UMCP | 15   | 4                | 70    | 2:40  | 2:42 | 2:48 | 2:53 | 3:01 | 3:06 | 3:12 | 3:19 |
| COORDINATING INSTRUCTIONS:  |      |      |                  |       |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| TCPs SP at 2030 under the control of the Scout Platoon Leader.                          |      |      |                  |       |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Heavy convoys use the "fisherman's bridge" at CP 144 and the ford at CP 109.            |      |      |                  |       |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Light convoys stay on the main roads.   |      |      |                  |       |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| MP support available for CP 5 ("Little Chicago") and the RP (CP 47, Camp Casey Gate 2). |      |      |                  |       |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| BN XO collapses all TCPs once the trail party has passed.                               |      |      |                  |       |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |

**FORMULAS USED:**

Pass Time {for cell D10} = IF (B10<>"",ROUND(C10\*60/((1000/(\$B\$5+6))\*\$B\$4),0)+ROUND(C10/25,0),"")

CP Arrival Time {for cell G10} = IF (\$B10<>"",F10+G\$8/\$B\$4/60,"")

**Figure 2. Road March Table**

dinate sharing the march route with other units. Unfortunately, these CP times can be cumbersome to calculate.

In the Dragon Force, an Microsoft Excel spreadsheet on a laptop computer calculates the data automatically. The planner inputs the march speed, vehicle interval, unit data, critical point data, and SP times (shaded areas on the table). The spreadsheet calculates the pass times and the times at which the unit can expect to hit each critical point.

This allows the commander to evaluate his options. With the addition of coordinating instructions, the table itself becomes the road march OPORD or FRAGO. Figure 2 depicts an example road march table, with the addition of special notes and the row and column headings, to aid other units in reconstructing the table.

Additionally, task force SOP dictates a Driver's Sketch Card, which each vehicle driver prepares under the supervision of his vehicle commander. It contains a table with the azimuth, distance, and description for each leg of the road march, a sketch detailing the physical layout of the route and major landmarks on the route, and a section for the driver to calculate what his odometer readings should be at each critical point. The driver's sketch card ensures that each driver understands the route well enough that he can complete the march if separated from his march unit, without having to rely on his vehicle commander, and allows the driver to assist the vehicle commander with land navigation. A sample sketch card is shown in Figure 3.

**Execution**

Execution of a road march in Korea is almost always an exciting event. Traffic

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| DRIVER'S SKETCH CARD               |                |   |  |
|------------------------------------|----------------|---|--|
| LEG                                | AZIMUTH        | DISTANCE  | DESCRIPTION  |
| Route 1                            | 12             | 10  | Route 1 hard ball to village ABC, turn right at church |
| Route 2                            | 39             | 20  | Route 3 hard ball to village DEF, go straight at curve |
| Trail                              | 84             | 10  | Trail to bridge w/ white building on left              |
| Trail                              | 90             | 30  | Trail to village XYZ with red building on right        |
|                                    |                |   |  |
|                                    |                |   |  |
| ROUTE SKETCH                       |                | LEGEND    SP    CP    RP<br>KEY TERRAIN    (K)    SP    11    RP          |  |
|                                    |                |   |  |
| START ODOMETER READING <u>0100</u> |                | ROAD MARCH SPEED <u>20</u> KPH  |  |
| CP <u>11</u>                       | CP <u>12</u>   | CP <u>13</u>  | CP <u>RP</u>   |
| OD <u>0110</u>                     | OD <u>0130</u> | OD <u>0140</u>  | OD <u>0170</u>   |
|                                    |                | <input checked="" type="radio"/> OPEN <input type="radio"/> CLOSED COLUMN |  |

**Figure 3: Sample Driver's Sketch Card**

## **ROAD MARCH PLANNING** *(Continued from Page 9)*

jams, ROK units on unscheduled road marches, the occasional vehicle breakdown, and the occasional accident all serve to stress the C2 nodes as they maintain control of the march units. The C2 nodes use the road march table to track the actual progress of march units. Vehicles in need of assistance must report their locations accurately, so that the C2 nodes can vector in the support. Finally, accidents or incidents must be reported up immediately, so that the appropriate elements can take action.

In wartime, the road march would be further complicated by the increased traffic of other units, SOF activity along

the route of march, and the increased number of elements in support of the task force. In wartime, units in Korea can expect to see from 8 to 12 divisions (3 mechanized and 6 to 9 motorized) in a 20km by 20km area.

### **Conclusion**

The reward for good planning is a smooth road march, one in which lost vehicles, wrong turns, or traffic jams are nonexistent. Avoiding accidents, damage to equipment, and lost training time are well worth the effort required to plan coherently and completely.

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