

*"...Team play wins."*

# Task Force Operations

by Major Wayne T. Seidler and Captain Cameron A. Leiker

*"There is still a tendency in each separate unit... to be a one-handed puncher. By that I mean the rifleman wants to shoot, the tank to charge, the artilleryman to fire... that is not the way to win battles. ...To get harmony in battle, each weapon must support the others. Team play wins."*

*MG George S. Patton Jr.  
Ft. Benning, Ga. 1941*

This article describes some of the tactics, techniques, and procedures used by one armor-heavy task force in Korea. These recommendations for combat are based on one commander's METT-T assessment. The purpose of this article is to spur discussion about fighting in restricted terrain to help other commanders and units think about the difficulties of operations in mountainous regions.

## Techniques

The techniques that form the basis for pre-combat training should include an understanding of how the threat will use the terrain, a realization of the required frequency of training, and an emphasis on winning the direct-fire fight. In restricted terrain, the enemy will defend from keyhole shot positions that conceal his fire until the last moment. Platoon leaders, company/team commanders, and task force commanders have less time to react to enemy actions in restricted terrain. To react successfully under these conditions, all sub-elements of the unit must know much more about fighting the force as a whole than is normally required. It

requires a team that can anticipate the enemy's moves.

To win in restricted terrain requires a high frequency of training. Most of the skills required to train tank and mechanized infantry crews are highly perishable. In a place like Korea, where most people serve a short one year tour, personnel turbulence exacerbates the challenge of maintaining a high level of training on the functional capabilities of the individual tank or Bradley, much less the collective force. The tank and Bradley commander's mastery of technical and tactical subjects is the link to reaching the objective at the other side of the defile.

A basic rule of combat is that the first to fire is the first to kill. This is especially important in the defile fight, where the three-to-six-second-advantage is, literally, a matter of life or death. The words of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel concerning this issue are still as true today as when he uttered them nearly half a century ago: "the day goes to the side that is the first to plaster its opponents with fire. The man who lies low and awaits developments usually comes off second-best."

When fighting the defile fight, firing first is a decisive advantage to the attacking tank, section, platoon, and company/team. If the lead attacking tank is destroyed or disabled, and the defile is blocked, an entire task force attack can be stopped or slowed. In restricted terrain, an enemy with inferior weapons and training can nullify our capabilities by using well-placed keyhole positions.

## Procedures

A variety of functions help the commander build and sustain combat power in restricted terrain. To synchronize forces and effects on the battlefield, Army leaders examine large, complex operations in terms of functional operating systems that exist at each level of war. Commanders integrate and coordinate these functions to synchronize battle effects in time, space, and purpose. At the tactical level, the *battlefield operating systems* enable a comprehensive examination in a straightforward manner that facilitates the integration, coordination, preparation, and execution of successful combined-arms operations. Some of the most important sub-elements for our battlefield management while operating in restrictive terrain are described below:

## Intelligence

Intelligence operations are the commander's best organized efforts to gather and analyze information on the environment of operations and the enemy. Obtaining and synthesizing battlefield information prior to beginning operations is vital, and assembling an accurate picture of the battlefield is particularly important in restricted terrain.

In restricted terrain particularly, the commander drives the intelligence system to help him set the conditions for tactical success. He must ask the right questions because that will focus the intelligence work. He must know the enemy. The commander's personal involvement and knowledge have no substitutes. He helps his intelligence system work effectively by clearly stating his intent and decisively designating his priority intelligence requirements.

The Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) is critical to maneuver in restricted terrain. Movement information [bridge locations and weight capacities; traffic-capable trails; choke points; likely key enemy positions and keyhole shots; ford crossing sites] is a vital component of developing the basic operations plan. Every action in war is based on the enemy. The base plan must be the basis for changes. These changes are driven by an understanding of where the enemy is, and what he



can do. A combat force in restricted terrain must be able to change plans rapidly to fit the reality of the situation.

All of this depends on reconnaissance. Reconnaissance forces serve two primary functions for an armored force in restricted terrain. Some scouts (flank scouts) must move along parallel routes, or dismount to the flanks to confirm or deny the IPB. Other scouts (route scouts) — or armored units trained for the reconnaissance role — should be used to lead the column. This provides maximum information on the route and allows the commander to develop the situation by changing direction or developing a more deliberate attack of the enemy waiting in ambush. Route and flank scouts should be reinforced by ground surveillance radar [GSR], artillery lasing teams [COLTs], engineers and, if chemical use is likely, chemical reconnaissance personnel. In addition, the commander should consider adding to the scouts an enlisted tactical air controller (ETAC) to gain the option of using available close air support assets early in the fight against large enemy concentrations or strong-points. Reconnaissance assets must have priority of fires and are the main effort during the reconnaissance battle. To create the conditions for the success of reconnaissance, commanders may have to maneuver mortar and artillery units.

### Maneuver

Maneuver is movement relative to the enemy and intended to put him at a disadvantage. Commanders maneuver their forces to create the conditions for tactical and operational success. Generating combat power on the battlefield requires combining the movement of combat forces and employment of their direct fires in combination with fire support. The more immediate the combat in time and space, the more intertwined are maneuver and firepower.

In restricted terrain, intervisibility lines (IV) create small engagement areas where direct fire weapon systems can dominate the engagement area (Figure 1). Between intervisibility lines, there may be an enemy ambush. A smart enemy defends the defile against an armored penetration by reinforcing his defense with the terrain. Keyhole positions anchor his defense. The successful application of maneuver requires agility of thought, plans, operations, and organizations. Original plans may require modifications as the enemy situation changes or becomes more clear. Attacking forces, therefore, must be able to modify or change their direction of attack. Defending forces must be capable of rapidly changing the orientation of the defense. The mental agility of the commander, organizational agility of his staff, and physical agility of his units are vital to success. In restricted terrain, plans are a basis for changes, but there must be a base plan and branch plan for every mission.

In restricted terrain, the commander must try to “feel” the battlefield, rather than see it. It is usually impossible to see the battlefield in restricted terrain, because commanders practice fighting in open terrain. In restricted terrain, the commander must anticipate battlefield decisions in order to know the best place to be.

Restricted terrain requires units to fight as combined arms teams. The requirement for combined arms in companies, and even combined arms platoons, is paramount. Units must not be afraid to mix sections if required. The defile fight may force the unit into combined arms organizations below platoon level — but it takes practice first. The goal of this combined arms organization must be to place a decisive concentration of direct and indirect fires against the enemy’s fragmentation. The conditions for success must be set with reconnaissance, smoke, mortars and artillery, using the advantages of the hasty/deliberate defense whenever possible. Cavalry charges work best in pursuits, not when rushing into the fire sack. But, when in doubt, **ATTACK!**

### Fire Support

Commanders are responsible for fighting their fire and maneuver assets. They fight much of their fires through the function of fire support, the collective and coordinated employment of indirect fires to support combat operations. This is especially true in restricted terrain, where effective fire support provides a density of force that is not achievable with direct fire systems because of terrain limitations. Massing fire effects, rather than concentrating forces, can help numerically inferior forces achieve decisive results,

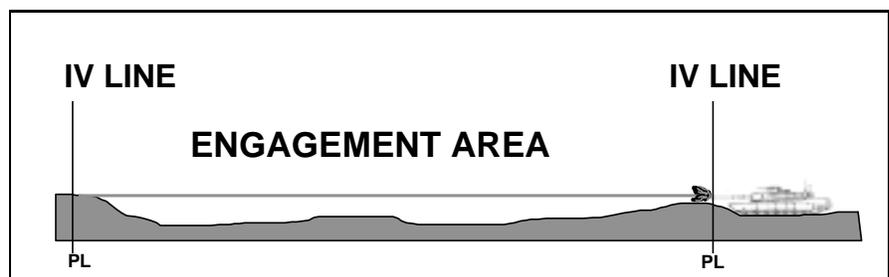


Figure 1. Intervisibility Diagram

---

while limiting exposure to enemy fire. In the Korean War, "artillery alone could not demolish the deep nKPA fortifications, though the 2d Infantry Division Artillery fired 229,724 rounds" in its attack at Heartbreak Ridge over a two-day period.

Suppression saves lives and buys time for the tank or Bradley crew in the defile. Accurate artillery or mortar fire, suppressing enemy keyhole positions with smoke and HE munitions, can make the difference between success and failure or unacceptable casualties for the attacking force in the defile fight. The lead tank attacking down a defile is key to the indirect fire suppression task. Every vehicle commander and squad leader must know how to call for fire. Mortars are the most versatile and useful means of fire support suppression in the defile fight. The mission of mortars will normally be suppression of key enemy positions along the direction of attack. Artillery has a difficult time destroying or neutralizing targets in restrictive terrain due to its lower trajectory. In fast-moving situations of restricted terrain combat, the commander should not count on the destruction of enemy positions by indirect fires. Attacking units must train to button up and fight through our own artillery, if necessary.

Tactical air can be a tremendous force multiplier in restricted terrain, if it can be effectively employed. The use of smart munitions will be limited by the steep terrain that will prohibit their use from low-threat altitudes (20,000 feet). The use of unguided, dumb munitions will require their use against targets that are not in close proximity to friendly forces, and not on their route, to ensure their effects will not impede our movement. Tactical air must be pushed down to the lead task force which will retain control through its tactical air control party (TACP). The lead task force must control the air as far forward as possible by either employing its ETACs forward with its reconnaissance forces or lead company/team; or through the lead FIST vehicle, which can lase targets and relay target information.

### **Air Defense**

In restricted terrain, the air defense assets task-organized to an armor or mechanized combined arms task force must be able to keep up with the force while also having the firepower to pro-

tect the force from enemy air and itself from enemy direct fire systems. One or more Bradley-Stinger Fighting Vehicle (BSFV) platoons are best suited for this role. These assets should support the task force's scheme of maneuver and be employed as a unit most of the time. When attacking in restricted terrain, these assets should be toward the rear of the task force formation, because the enemy's air request system is not as flexible or responsive as ours.

The task force will require the massed fires of these systems because nKPA air tactics call for massing aircraft against a target; a way to compensate for their limited acquisition assets. When the task force is conducting a road march, having the air defense unit task-organized with one of the trail maneuver units provides the commander the flexibility to employ them to clear the route of march while overwatching air avenues of approach. This permits the commander the option of covering his movement with an air defense umbrella when it is most restricted. In restricted terrain with a high density of forces, such as Korea, this may be a big challenge. In addition, this employment method permits the commander to attack from the march without delay.

### **Mobility/Counter-mobility/ Survivability**

Engineers are worth more than their weight in gold in restricted terrain, but unfortunately there are never enough engineers for the missions identified. All units must be able to breach in stride and establish hasty defenses without engineer support.

The key to a successful breach-in-stride is clearing the obstacle before the enemy can concentrate his artillery against you — 10-15 minutes. In our battalion task force, the advance guard team, supported by engineer assets, will breach in stride using M1A1 plows, M1A1 rollers, MICLICs, or if necessary, manual breaching methods and bangalore torpedoes.

When a more deliberate breach is required, the task force must have a battle drill established using a combined arms team. In the Dragon Force, Team C, 2-72 AR — the breach company — has the bulk of the engineer breaching assets and conducts the deliberate breach. This organization must train together at least once a quarter and consists of one support (direct fire) platoon, two breach tank platoons (with 2

plows or a plow and a roller) and an engineer company(-).

In restricted terrain, the ability to block or defend a defile with a company or smaller force may be required on short notice. Each company/team should carry on its vehicles enough class IV so it can establish 100 meters of a point minefield and 200 meters of triple strand wire on its own. The task force should plan to carry critical class IV and mines on one cargo HEMMT in the combat trains where it can be pushed forward quickly.

### **Command and Control — [Battle Command]**

Battle command is the art of battle decision-making, leading, and motivating soldiers and their organizations into action to accomplish missions with the fewest casualties. It begins in the training a commander provides for his command, and it ends with the successful redeployment and recovery of the command in preparation for its next mission. It includes visualizing the current state of the unit and desired future states, and then deciding how to get from one to the other at least cost to the force. The two elements of battle command are the ability to decide and the ability to lead. Here are a few areas to focus on that will help your C2 in restricted terrain:

- Plans are a basis for changes! Focus plans on the enemy as they are, not as you want them. Always have a base plan and at least one branch plan.
- Troop-leading procedures — know them; use them; have them in your notebook.
- Rehearse! Conduct parallel rehearsals — when the plan is being developed, have the NCOs rehearse breaching drills, fording operations, actions on contact and movement from the AA to the LD, etc. Rehearse the key actions in your plan. You must have a rehearsed plan to get from the AA to the LD. And the best plan will never be successful if you don't cross the LD.
- C2 Facilities include the command group, TAC, TOC, CTCP and field trains command post. Within restricted terrain, the command group may be split up to control the battle on multiple axes. This causes problems not normally found in open terrain.
- The commander must be able to "see" the battlefield while deployed

forward. The TAC and ETAC move forward behind the battalion commander's combat vehicle to assist in controlling the battle. The TAC and ETAC are M113A3 C2 vehicles. The TAC has four radios and the ETAC has the battalion air liaison team's high frequency radio set. The TAC/ETAC has an operations battle captain, the BICC, the FSO, an enlisted ALO, drivers and track commanders to support the battalion commander in coordinating battle operating systems. The TAC/ETAC, because of its small footprint and mobility, can easily maneuver over all types of terrain and can more easily "jump" to better support the battalion.

- Within restricted terrain, communication is the most important factor in selecting the TOC site. The SIGO and the TOC quartering party must ensure the TOC site can support communication with maneuver units and higher headquarters as well as security from detection. The TOC controls the battle and reports to higher headquarters by coordinating with adjacent and higher units.

- Work of communications. The restricted terrain of Korea represents the greatest challenge and obstacle to communications. SINCGARS training and operations must be constantly worked within the task force. The task force net control station (NCS) must be proactive and ensure strict enforcement of "Plugger" time within the unit.

- Deception operations can be a great force multiplier in restricted terrain, however, it is usually the last task a unit trains or incorporates into a plan. Carry a few tank targets to place inside your defensive positions to act as dummy positions; emplace dummy mines in every live minefield so that dummy minefields can be employed later, and use smoke on alternate routes to confuse the enemy on your route of movement.

### Training for Restricted terrain

The following tasks should be accomplished before a battalion-level ARTEP. Many of these things can be accomplished by embedding them into your execution of gunnery. Some can be taught to the leadership during the OC mission, or when your unit is in a red training cycle.

- Move your company at night, using the standard night recognition signals.

- Practice fording procedures and ford marking.

- Create and inspect crew obstacle breaching kits. Practice point obstacle breaching.

- Work on MILES boresighting and gunnery.

- Use company lanes to practice platoon critical tasks. Platoon drills should include reaction drills (React to Artillery, React to Direct Fire, React to NBC), tactical movement (Traveling in Column, Traveling Overwatch, Bounding Overwatch), Occupy a Firing Line, Assault, Breach a Mine and Wire Point Obstacle.

- Practice and rehearse SOPs, casualty evacuation, and LOGPAC procedures.

### Conclusion

The role and mission of the heavy force in restricted terrain operations has important implications for future U.S. Army operations. During the Korean War, the U.S. Army found that "armor remained an indispensable part of ground combat, regardless of any limiting conditions under which it had to operate." If Armor leaders see combat in Bosnia, or fight again in the hills of Korea, the ability of tank and Bradley crews to fight through and penetrate defended defiles in restricted terrain will be decisive.

If the U.S. Army fights in restricted terrain, force protection will be a major issue. There is never enough infantry or artillery. In restricted terrain, an armored combined arms force is the weapon of choice for a quick, decisive victory that produces a minimum of friendly casualties. Combined arms warfare produces effects that are greater than the sum of the individual parts. The combined arms team strives to conduct fully integrated operations in the dimensions of time, space, purpose, and resources. The goal is to confuse, demoralize, and destroy the enemy with the coordinated impact of combat power. Our Abrams tank, with its excellent armor protection, provides a mobile, tough, battle-winning platform that is an important part of the

combined arms battle in restricted terrain.

Tank and Bradley crew skills are at a premium in restricted terrain. Battlefield situation awareness is the critical component of success in gaining the three-to-six second advantage. If tanks are used to penetrate a defile, tank crews will be challenged to destroy an enemy defender who controls all the natural advantages. Tank crews can steal that advantage and gain the initiative by building high-performing tank crews that can master the techniques of acquiring targets and apply techniques to rapidly win the close-range, direct-fire fight.

Major Wayne T. Seidler is a 1982 graduate of the United States Military Academy. He has served as a rifle platoon leader, antitank platoon leader, and combat support company XO in the 5-502 IN, Berlin Brigade. He has served in all levels of command within Europe from company to theater, to include company command in 1-7 IN and as assistant brigade S4 in 3 Bde, 1AD during Desert Storm/Shield. He is currently the battalion S3 of 2-72 AR, 2ID.

Captain Cameron A. Leiker is a 1990 distinguished military graduate of the Emporia State University ROTC program. He has served as a tank platoon leader, support platoon leader, and battalion liaison officer in 4-69 AR, 3ID; 3-2 ACR; and 4-67 AR, 1AD in Germany. He was also the S3 air for 2-72 AR, 2ID, Camp Casey, Korea. He has graduated from the Armor Officer Basic Course and the United States Marine Corps' Amphibious Warfare School. He is currently the company commander for C/2-72 AR, 2ID.