

Complementary Case Studies for *Paintball and Airsoft Battle Tactics*

Case Study A

In August 1990, the Ocala Raiders paintball team hosted the “Operation Broken Eagle” Vietnam reenactment event at The Survival Zone field in Ocala, Florida. Andrew ‘DORSAI’ Van Der Plaats (www.NLTM.us) was in command of a detachment of the 5th Special Forces during this mission.

The U.S. forces were to cover down on a given geographic location to stop the Viet Cong movement through their sector. Van Der Plaats’ forces occupied Firebase Delaware, a rectangular defensive position that dominated the terrain. To add depth to this position, Van Der Plaats positioned several three-man observation post/listening posts (OP/LP) throughout his sector. One OP/LP in particular oversaw a bridgehead some 20 minutes march from the U.S. firebase.

Additionally, Van Der Plaats employed a reserve force using a 12-man A Team not located inside the firebase but, instead, located in a hide position known as the “Fu Qua Depression.” From this depression, the reserve force could maneuver to the rear of any advancing enemy force to conduct spoiling attacks. In this manner, they built considerable depth and flexibility into what appeared to be a run of the mill area defense.

Earlier that day, the VC made a half-hearted attempt to simultaneously attack Firebase Delaware from multiple directions. The U.S. team rather easily repelled the attack because the OP/LPs had identified the enemy in enough time to readily occupy the perimeter defenses. However, the VC determined only the most difficult approaches to the firebase were mined. The high-speed avenues of approach that afforded the defenders decent sectors of fire were left un-mined.

By 0130 Hrs in the morning, Van Der Plaats’ radio came alive with chatter. The OP/LP at the bridgehead reported a very large VC force moving across the bridge in the direction of the firebase. The reserve force at Fu Qua was put on alert.

At 0200 Hrs, the VC assault leader blew a whistle and the attack was underway. As planned, the VC used the high-speed avenues of approach to advance toward the firebase, completely side-stepping the mined areas. As planned, the U.S. troops defending the firebase had the very difficult job of identifying and engaging the enemy troops in near total darkness. The enemy advanced rapidly, hitting the firebase’s defensive perimeter.

Just as the VC seemed destined to overrun the first line of defenses, the U.S. troops turned on several large spotlights and illuminated the attacking enemy. The United States increased the volume and accuracy of their fires inflicting significant casualties. The battle raged on for another half-hour.

Several VC troops managed to gain a position with a decided advantage over the firebase’s defensive line. The enemy poured fire into the trenches from an enfilade,

causing the U.S. troops to fall back to more secure positions in the firebase interior. Seeing a possible collapse of his position, Van Der Plaats ordered the deployment of his reserves.

The OP/LPs had not reported any follow-on enemy forces. This told the A Team commander in reserve that the enemy was unlikely to hit him from the rear. His team quickly advanced toward the firebase following along the enemy's axis of attack.

When the reserve force was in position, they radioed Van Der Plaats, and Van Der Plaats instructed the defending troops to spotlight the known enemy positions and yell out the enemy locations. United States troops then shifted their fires—in this case intentionally firing at high volume into the earth in front of them, rather than shifting left or right or lifting their fires. Such fires might have been controlled, but without knowing exactly where the A Team was, the troops in the firebase would have risked hitting their own reserve force.

This high rate of fire caused the VC to respond in kind. Together, both the United States fires shifted downward coupled with the VC fires to try and maintain an upper hand in fire superiority had the effect of masking the sound of the reserve forces' rush forward.

With the enemy's massed positions spotlighted, the A Team hit multiple strong points along the enemy's attack simultaneously. After each position had been neutralized, the reserve forces moved quickly to the next target of opportunity. The reserve's counterattack from the enemy's rear worked like a classic "hammer and anvil" tactic and had the effect of completely disrupting the enemy's attack.

Lessons Learned? Though the area defense is often thought of as linear and static, when properly implemented, the area defense makes use of considerable depth—such as OP/LPs and the reserve force. The area defense also makes use of tactical deception such as increased rates of fire to mask movement and intentionally mining the defilades while leaving the high-speed avenues of approach un-mined, thereby, pulling the enemy into carefully prepared sectors of fire.

Furthermore, while placing the reserve force outside the defensive perimeter is a bit unorthodox, it worked. If it works, it ain't stupid! The lesson learned here is to deploy the reserve force at an appropriate time and to maneuver it into a position where it can do the most good.

Case Study B

In January 2007, BattleSim (www.BattleSim.com) hosted "The Long Winter" airsoft event near Duvall, Washington. This event reenacts the Ardennes Campaign of World War II. John Robison of the Airsoft Recondo School acted as an observer/controller (O/C) and relayed the following report.

A U.S. Army infantry section of two rifle squads had been tasked with defending a main supply route running through a heavily wooded valley. The sheer size of the valley coupled with the known mechanized force of the enemy meant there would be no time or resources to conduct an area defense. Instead, a mobile defense would permit this small infantry section the necessary flexibility to maneuver and strike at the advancing German Army forces as they pushed through the valley.

The U.S. Army infantry had one bazooka, a 60mm mortar, and two medium machineguns as integral teams within their two squads. The senior NCO identified a noteworthy bend in the road and formed the section into an L-shaped defensive line high on the military crest of the ridgeline on the north side of the valley. He positioned his bazooka team well forward of the rest of the section so if an armored column approached, the bazooka team would be in position to maneuver to their rear. This was necessary because the bazooka was ineffective at engaging hard armor vehicles from the front or sides. The battlefield was set.

Within a couple of hours, the U.S. infantry detected movement. A German mechanized infantry platoon was moving up the valley toward the U.S. forces. A motorcycle scout team led the enemy, followed a hundred meters behind by the first German infantry squad who were walking on foot to screen for anti-armor mines and bazooka teams. Behind this squad rumbled a main battle tank, and behind the tank, followed a captured American-made halftrack with another squad of German infantry inside. Finally, pulling up the drag behind this considerable force was another dismounted German infantry squad to protect their rear.

The German force numbered about 35 infantry troops, an armored infantry carrier, a tank, and a motorcycle scout team. The Germans had several medium and heavy machineguns, mortars, and of course, the main gun of the Panzer!

With little other option, the U.S. infantry section allowed the motorcycle scouts to pass and, then, engaged the German force twice its size. The initial volley of fire from two U.S. machinegun teams had an impressive effect against the forward German infantry, cutting down the majority of that squad. The rest retreated behind the tank's armor and the mounted infantry also dismounted and sought cover behind the armored vehicles.

A heated exchange of small arms erupted, but when the Panzer opened up with its main gun, the effect on the U.S. line was devastating. It blew large gaps in the line, and the U.S. infantry began taking high casualties.

However, the obstinacy of the U.S. troops holding the line paid off when the bazooka team was able to maneuver up behind the Panzer and fire two shots in rapid succession into the rear of the tank, destroying it and its crew. As the bazooka team displaced and attempted to maneuver to the rear of the halftrack, the German platoon quickly overwhelmed and killed them.

It was a simple game of attrition, but with only a handful of U.S. troops left, the odds of holding back the German platoon seemed slim. What's more, the U.S. infantry realized their most serious mistake when the German infantry began lining up along the north side of the road, using the high banks of a cliff as protection from fire. United States forces had not mined or placed explosives in this defilade—a natural defense.

With just a handful of its troops on the cliff above the gathering German squad below, the U.S. mortar section attempted to disrupt the massing enemy, but to no avail. The mortar team had run out of mortar ammunition. Picking up small arms, they joined the remaining few Americans along the line. The German mortars concentrated fire along the ridgeline. It was time for a creative solution.

One American grabbed a stout, solid branch from a large fir tree, and with a short running jump, leapt out into the thin air from the cliff above the German infantry only moments before their platoon leader was to give the order to assault. As the American troop swung unseen 20 feet above the heads of the enemy troops, he let off a burst of fire that struck no less than three of the massed enemy soldiers. Just as the Germans looked up to find their tormentor, the fir tree sprung erect, plucking the American back on top of the cliff like a bungee cord!

The Germans were literally dumbfounded. As they excitedly yelled and pointed, trying to explain to each other what had just happened, out springs this American GI again, blazing away at the Germans. He struck another two Germans and was again plucked back to the top of the cliff.

Deciding only a fool would tempt fate a third time, the American gave up this approach and returned to holding the line with the pitiful few troops left from his section. But, the impact of this action was devastating to the German force. This lone troop had just inflicted at least five casualties on the German force—about half of the number of the massed squad below.

With the high casualty rate and the loss of their Panzer, the momentum of the German attack faltered. In spite of their superior numbers, they retreated back down the valley.

Lessons Learned? Even in losing 70 percent of their forces to casualties, the creativity and flexibility of the U.S. troops' mobile defense achieved its purpose. A relatively small section of light infantry repelled The German Army's mechanized advanced. The U.S. troops used the terrain and their integral weapon systems effectively, hitting the enemy from directions the enemy was ill prepared to fight.

There are two other lessons worth carrying away from this engagement: the need to mine or otherwise deny the enemy from using natural defilades as protection within the intended engagement area, and fir trees have an amazing capacity for springiness and resiliency. (Waiver: Proceed at your own risk!)

Case Study C

In June 2006, The Bunker Extreme (www.oklahomadday.com) hosted the ninth annual “D-Day” event in Wyandotte, Oklahoma—the largest paintball event in the world with literally thousands of players. Steve Risken was assigned as an Allied battalion commander with two rifle companies to maneuver in a mini-scenario based on the WWII Battle of Monte Cassino.

Risken’s objective was to seize an airfield that was positioned on a ridgeline with a flat top surface. All that was known about the German Army force defending this terrain was that they were in similar size to Risken’s force—perhaps 150 to 200 troops. Additionally, Risken was warned that four prominent gun towers defended the airstrip, and that he could expect densely vegetated forest over steep ridges and ravines.

Risken’s U.S. battalion was given a two-hour time hack to complete the mission. Clearly, this offensive action would require MTC, with the primary objective the airport and the terrain associated with it.

With little other information to go on, Risken kept one company in reserve and broke the remaining company into three platoon-sized vanguards posted to the front, forward left, and forward right. The airstrip was just out of small arms range.

Passing the short distance through the woods, Risken’s vanguard forces were soon all in contact with the enemy entrenched on the high ground and firing down the steep ridge. Additionally, a two-story-high gun tower further buttressed the center enemy position. The height of this tower gave the Germans a decided advantage on that side of the enemy defenses, so Risken chose to commit his reserve to the northern border of the airstrip.

Although the initial push against the northern perimeter penetrated into the enemy line, Risken’s force soon realized they had gone as far as they could when the forest came to an abrupt break. An open field separated the main attack from the airstrip, which was still well-guarded by an entrenched German force along a tree line on the far side of the open field. Several attempts to rush this position had netted disastrous results.

Risken gave the reserve force the order to withdraw back to the assault position. He quickly reconsolidated and reorganized his force. Now, he would try the enemy’s center line. He had one vanguard platoon still in contact with the enemy at the center. The steep terrain and dense vegetation made any massing of combat power nearly impossible. The German defenders slung a withering volume of fire down from their trenches and gun towers, stopping the U.S. assault cold.

Again, Risken withdrew the main body of his reserve force back to the assault position. These two attempts had taken over one hour. He had just under one hour left to accomplish the mission, and the vanguard platoon that was pressing south of the enemy’s position was meeting relatively light resistance. Risken realized that if he swung considerably south in a large enveloping maneuver, he would come on level terrain with

the German defenders. Furthermore, the Germans were unlikely to expect an assault from that direction.

Risken's force had taken a beating with casualties mounting. He had to economize his force. He decided to fold into his main body the vanguard platoon from the north. This gave him almost 100 troops in his reserves force. He would continue to allow the front vanguard to fix the German center through close engagement. That would keep the enemy focused there.

Finally, Risken would use the vanguard platoon in the south as a masking force. He would move his main body reserves further south and press westward until he came up on top of the ridges flat surface. Though this maneuver would take more time, it had the highest potential for success.

It worked beautifully. At an hour and twenty-five minutes into the MTC operation, Risken's main body made contact on the enemy's far western perimeter. The U.S. troops could see the airstrip clearly. Four towers protected each corner, and two damaged aircraft, a hanger, and a fuel station provided additional cover for the enemy to fall back. The U.S. force attacked suddenly and aggressively.

The first tower inflicted a high number of casualties against Risken's force, but fell within a few minutes. Risken took the second tower almost immediately. The momentum of the MTC was building!

Realizing they were in a pincer maneuver, the Germans abandoned their trenches on the far side and escape. The airstrip defenses collapsed within minutes.

Risken's force secured the airstrip, reconsolidated, reorganized combat power, and immediately sent squad-sized patrols in pursuit of the escaping German force. These patrols conducted spoiling attacks against the enemy as they attempted to rally for a counterattack. In spite of the large number of German troops who escaped the U.S. envelopment and attack, they were unable to post a single counterattack within the assigned timeframe.

Lessons learned? MTC is a dynamic maneuver that requires considerable situational awareness by the commander. Risken achieved situational awareness from his vanguards' reports. The critical decision a commander makes in the MTC is when and where to commit the main body—the reserve force. Clearly, that was the case here.

Risken committed his main force not once, but three separate times before he achieved success. This is not uncommon. The lesson here is to be flexible. The situation can and will change. One course of action may fail; the information coming back from the vanguard forces continues to develop; and these facts may change the commander's decision. The commander has to be diligent yet willing to admit when he's been wrong, and try again.

Case Study D

In June 2004, the Bunker Extreme (www.oklahomadday.com) hosted its seventh annual “D-Day” event in Wyandotte, Oklahoma. Rick Louiselle was assigned as a rifleman with the Allies’ U.S. 82nd Airborne Division. His unit was tasked with the capture of the German-occupied town of St. Lo.

True to history, the D-Day event does not place the airborne troops on the ground within their unit integrity because the airborne drop the night before had scattered the troops in the wind. Instead, they formed ad hoc units and went about trying to achieve the known objectives. Such was the case in the 2004 game.

Louiselle had teamed up with approximately 150 troops from various units but mostly from the 82nd Division. His company commander explained that St. Lo had to be taken by 1200 Hrs. The town was in a wooded area that would allow the company to get very close; however, the town had bunkers surrounding it. Additionally, the troops were told the enemy had perhaps 100 German Army troops in St. Lo and another 82nd Airborne company would be pressing St. Lo from different direction.

With this information, the two Allied companies moved toward St. Lo. By 1000 Hrs, Louiselle’s company was in position forming a quarter-ring around the town. The second airborne company had also formed a quarter-ring around the town. So, before the first shot was fired, the airborne troops had already laid siege halfway around St. Lo!

Soon afterwards, an order to advance came. To Louiselle’s surprise, 90 percent of the troops rushed forward in one simultaneous motion! He described the action as “sort of a mad brawl.” The German sharpshooters were skilled and rained havoc on the airborne troops as they advanced. American casualties mounted fast; in spite of the fact the troops were hitting the town from two, three, and sometimes four directions at once. The German bunkers around St. Lo seemed impenetrable.

The Americans used smoke canisters but not in any massed manner. Instead, they tossed smoke into bunkers to flush out the German troops. It seemed to have the desired effect, but the smoke did not screen the advancing airborne troops to mask their movements and make them more difficult targets, and German gunners inflicted an unacceptable casualty ratio upon the Allies.

The battle raged on for almost two full hours in over 90-degree heat. The noon deadline was fast approaching, but so too was complete exhaustion. Finally, Louiselle saw a small airborne force punch through and past several German bunkers on one side of the town’s defenses. Within minutes, other airborne troops identified the gap. The size of the force pouring into St. Lo was now unstoppable. The Germans had simply lost the game of attrition.

St. Lo fell to the Allied airborne forces just minutes before noon, but the Allied victory came at an incredibly high price. Louiselle explained, “All I saw that morning were

World War One linear tactics. No one would really try to take the town that way because of the massive loss of life.”

Lessons Learned? A plan should have been devised and an OPORD issued. There certainly seemed to be enough information about the objective and just enough time. This may have meant the troops would have hit their objective another half-hour later, but one could certainly argue that the payoff could have carried great dividends if the town fell faster and with less Allied casualties.

Knowing the lay of the terrain and vegetation, the approximate strength of the enemy, as well as location and type of enemy fortifications, commanders should have issued specific tasks should to specific units. Even a simplified shoulder-to-shoulder rehearsal would have allowed the troops to see the bigger picture and how their efforts fit into the mission.

The effort here clearly was to create a breach in the German defenses to pave the way for the airborne troops’ ultimate success, and in fact, that is what happened. But, again, attacking the enemy along their entire defense only presented the enemy more Allied targets and needlessly racked up horrifying friendly casualties.

To create a breach, the commanders should have massed their firepower, troops, and smoke screening assets at two or three places along the enemy’s defense. Only one of these efforts would have been the actual breach team and assault force. With adequate smoke screens, the enemy wouldn’t be able to determine which attack was real and which were feigns. In such a case, the defenders would not know where to deploy their reserve forces.

By attacking just one narrow point along the enemy’s defense and deceiving the enemy with one or more feign attacks, the airborne troops could have achieved success with an acceptable number of Allied casualties. Such action would have disrupted the enemy defensive plan, effectively screened the airborne troops from the German gunners’ withering fire, and created a gap in the enemy’s defense while exposing only the minimal number of troops necessary.

Case Study E

In June 1984, One Shepherd (www.1Shepherd.com) took part in a gaming scenario just outside of Weston, Missouri in what is today called Weston Bend State Park. The opposing forces (OPFOR), played by the ‘Prairie Dogs,’ were tasked to deny enemy access into Coffee Valley. The blue forces (BLUFOR), dubbed ‘Wolfmen,’ were tasked with projecting their force into the valley and dominating the main route through it. BLUFOR assigned Andrew Larsen as commander.

Rising steeply at the very heart of Coffee Valley is a convex sloped hill un-affectionately known as ‘the bastard.’ Though not as tall as the bluffs pinching the opening of the valley to the west, BLUFOR could monitor and engage the main route from this will. Larsen

calculated that this terrain would be key to achieving his mission. The problem was that, on the valley floor below the bastard, OPFOR aggressively patrolled the mix of grasslands and tree lines. BLUFOR would have to locate and push OPFOR from this area.

Skirting the creek on the southern side of the valley, Larsen's pointman came hurrying back. He had detected a large number of OPFOR troops—perhaps a dozen—100 meters north in a wooded depression at the foot of the bastard. The BLUFOR had located the enemy first and, for the moment, had the upper hand. However, Larsen knew it wouldn't be long before his nine-troop squad was also discovered. Battlefield information has a very short shelf-life. Larsen had to make a decision quickly.

Attempting to bypass the OPFOR and maneuver to the bastard would likely mean exposing his patrol in the open grassy fields. The enemy was already positioned in the trees at the bottom of the bastard. They would have open fields of fire against his force. Moving directly against the enemy force had risks, too. They were located on the far side of the main supply route. His forces would have to cross this natural danger area in broad daylight, under the noses of the OPFOR, just 50 meters away in the treed depression. Even if he could mass his troops into a single, focused attack, the enemy would have plenty of time and opportunity to retreat to the top of the hill.

Larsen decided to do both. He would lead his Bravo fireteam due north across the road and strike the enemy while they rested in the depression. But, he would only maneuver inside the tree line just enough to offer protection for his troops. They would lay a base of fire from there that would keep the enemy's attention south. His Alpha fireteam would swing far west through the open field. With any luck, the enemy wouldn't be monitoring that open terrain in the first minute of the fight, and Alpha fireteam could strike from the west at the very base of the bastard. This maneuver would hit the OPFOR at their rear right flank of their current position.

Alpha fireteam departed to take up position further west along the creek, waiting to hear the opening shots. Larsen pressed Bravo fireteam slowly forward. When they came to the main road, the fireteam formed on-line and crossed the road on their hands and knees. They tucked safely into the far tree line without detection. Hearing OPFOR troops Larsen believed were just 20 meters away, he initiated a volley of fire with all of Bravo fireteam joining in.

In fact, the OPFOR troops were more than 50 meters away, sitting safely below the cratered wall of the depression. But, the volley got their attention. They'd been caught off-guard.

The OPFOR responded just as Larsen had predicted, placing a great deal of fire south and then bounding to try to roll the BLUFOR flank. This was the gamble, and fortunately for Larsen, the OPFOR bounded east away from Alpha fireteam. Had OPFOR instead bounded west, they would have certainly caught Alpha fireteam in the open grassy field and cut them to pieces. And, that would have left Larsen in a very precarious position,

since he could no longer retreat across the main route without taking significant casualties!

Larsen and his Bravo fireteam held the line, exchanging fire with the OPFOR. In truth, no one had inflicted a single casualty on either side. But, the BLUFOR was achieving the desired effect of keeping the enemy focused south. Within a minute Alpha fireteam attacked the OPFOR on their exposed flank.

The four-man team moved quickly from the open field and into the tree line. They fired blindly until they received return fire. Two of Alpha fireteam's troops were hit immediately, sending the other two to the ground behind cover. They continued to put up a volume of fire, however, with only two troops; they could no longer threaten the enemy's flank. The OPFOR didn't know this. They had been caught off-guard twice in less than a minute, and they were taking casualties. The OPFOR began pulling out of the depression to withdraw east, further into the forest.

Larsen saw the opportunity he was looking for. With what was left of Alpha fireteam laying a base of fire against the retreating enemy, Larsen picked up his Bravo fireteam and rushed north. Exhausted, but solidly in control at the top of the bastard, Larsen directed Bravo fireteam's plunging fires at the dismayed OPFOR below. The remainder of Alpha fireteam soon joined in, and the OPFOR had little choice but to continue their withdrawal to the east.

Lessons Learned? Larsen understood the importance of the valley's key terrain. He intentionally sought to secure that terrain and dominate the valley. Larsen used the available information to size up the situation, and made a calculated guess as to how the enemy might react to his attack. He then arrayed his forces accordingly, hoping to knock the enemy off balance with a series of surprises. When the plan worked, and the enemy began to withdraw, Larsen did not pursue the enemy, though, that may have seemed the logical choice. Instead, he exploited the situation by seizing the dominant terrain behind the enemy and took control of the valley.

Case Study F

In October 2005, the Kansas City Airsoft Association (www.kcairsoft.com) hosted a scenario based on the Ivory Coast incident where a United Nations Peacekeeping Force had to be extracted due to the hostilities of a local militia. Steve Staggenborg was a radio operator (RTO) with the UN Peacekeepers.

The scenario placed a small team of Peacekeepers in a tactical assembly area for security purposes while they coordinated their escape route to coincide with the arrival of helicopters from 'Sirocco' task force at the pickup zone (PZ). Meanwhile, the militia conducted a search and destroy mission, looking for the UN Forces. The major problem for the UN Forces was that the militia was local—meaning they knew the terrain very well, understood that their enemy was attempting to extract from the region, and had

already guessed which PZ would most likely be used. Additionally, the militia was made more than five times the size of the UN Peacekeepers. The odds were stacked.

As the Peacekeepers moved along their escape route, the commander decided to lay in ambush for the militia in case they were being trailed. Within minutes, it became clear a single squad of militia was trailing them. The ambush successfully eliminated all but one militia member. Regrettably, this militia troop was also an RTO, and he broadcast the UN Peacekeepers' location as he escaped. Then, it was a race against the clock.

The militia transitioned from a search-and-destroy mission into a pursuit as the UN Forces moved rapidly over a half kilometer of heavily wooded terrain. Numerous times, a fireteam-sized militia force momentarily fixed the Peacekeepers' patrol, but the UN Forces broke free and continued their escape and evasion. At the very next turn, they were engaged again.

The militia had been unable to fix the UN Forces long enough to bring their main force to bear, but they continued to dispatch fixing forces and monitored the situation. A militia force was finally able to fix the UN Peacekeepers a couple hundred meters short of their extraction point. Then, the militia committed the main body of their attack force.

The UN Forces commander radioed in his location and requested extraction. Sirocco answered that the helicopter's ETA was 20 minutes out and warned that the Peacekeepers would have to make it to the PZ and secure it for the birds to actually land. Otherwise, the helicopters would be at great risk and no use to the Peacekeepers.

The Peacekeepers did not last that long. The militia massed on target, and a lopsided firefight ensued. Out-gunned 5 to 1, the Peacekeeping Forces fractured. Most of their troops became casualties as they desperately attempted to make it to the PZ. The militia captured the few that attempted a breakout. A half-hour later, the only UN Peacekeeper to be extracted was the Staggenborg who managed to lie still in the tall grass after his commander was shot. The militia members swept the objective and simply had not discovered him.

Lessons Learned? The militia achieved an excellent level of situational awareness. They understood the size and capability of their UN opponent. They also understood the political mindset of the UN Forces—specifically, the UN reluctance to engage the militia and their desire to withdraw from the dangerous countryside. The militia used this information against the UN troops.

What's more is that the militia was able to transition from their primary form of attack into a pursuit as soon as they realized the UN Peacekeepers had begun an attempt to escape and evade. The UN patrol was smaller than the large militia force, and they moved faster than the main body of the militia. So, to mitigate this advantage, the militia commander dispatched small fireteams in an effort to fix their enemy. This had the intended effect of delaying the Peacekeepers' withdraw and worked very well.

Lastly, the fireteams attempting to fix the UN Forces continually developed the situation for the militia commander so he could monitor the UN movement. Once it was clear the Peacekeepers were trying to extract from the suspected PZ, the militia's main force moved quickly and aggressively to engage their enemy.

Excellent situational awareness, a series of agile fixing patrols, and an aggressive main force produced a successful pursuit.

Case Study G

In March 2005, Steven 'Shoobie' Hooper was in command of a "green forces" or GRNFOR platoon of the Kansas City Airsoft Association (www.KCAirsoft.com) outside Gower, Missouri. His platoon was a small command element, three rifle squads, and a single scout reconnaissance team.

Hooper's mission was to conduct a mobile defense running east to west along a series of north-south footpaths set in relatively flat, but heavily wooded terrain with intermittent streams. This area was far too vast for a single platoon—thus, the mobile defense. Due to the winter months, visibility was far better than normal.

Hooper planned to establish three separate squad-sized hide positions that would function as objective rally points (ORP) where the squads could be tasked to conduct spoiling attacks against any advancing enemy forces. These hide positions stretched east to west along a tree line that allowed an impressive view of open terrain to the north—the direction of the 'TANFOR' enemy. Hooper's command post (CP) was set in the southeast and would coordinate the movements of the maneuver squads using intel the scout team gathered as it deployed forward to monitor the named area of interest (NAI)—footpaths suspected to be the enemy's avenue of approach.

Almost immediately, the maneuver squads were reporting that TANFOR patrols were moving south of their positions! The squads reported they were dispatching from their hide positions to engage the enemy patrols, and Hooper got on the scout team's frequency to ask for an intel update. No dice. The scout team wasn't detecting any movement at all.

However, far to the south of the scouts, the enemy was already engaging the maneuver squads and even engaging the CP very early into the scenario. Things were not going well for Hooper's GRNFOR platoon, but they managed to hold their tenuous line.

Hooper had a tense conversation with the scouts over the radio. He explained the NAI wasn't the scouts' only responsibility, and that they needed to develop the situation so Hooper would have a better awareness of enemy movement. TANFOR was moving in squad-sized teams or even larger, and the scouts were failing to detect this movement in broad daylight under ideal visibility conditions.

Frustrated and anxious to redeem themselves, the scout team took off to hunt for the enemy. Within a relatively short time, they did indeed locate an enemy patrol and called this information back to Hooper's CP. The problem was that the small scout team had actually engaged the much larger enemy patrol and was in a frantic fight to break contact. This cycle repeated itself numerous times throughout the day.

In spite of having advanced navigational equipment, the scout team failed to identify their location for Hooper to direct the maneuver squads. Additionally, because they were perpetually engaged in firefights with the enemy, the scout team took little notice that, each time they located and engaged TANFOR patrols, the enemy had been near or even skirting a creek bed.

The end result was that Hooper's GRNFOR section presented the TANFOR enemy with a porous zone of advance.

"Twice, the CP was threatened, and I personally had to use my weapon to engage enemy forces," Hooper exclaims incredulously. "Once, the CP was seized and had to be retaken by force."

In spite of inflicting as many casualties upon the enemy force as they had managed to give the GRNFOR platoon, Hooper considered the mission a failure. "As the commander, I never received the information I needed from the recon element which would have allowed me to adequately counter the enemy threat."

Lessons Learned? The GRNFOR platoon's after action review (AAR) indicated the scout team's poor performance was rooted in two key failures—navigation and communication. Being slow to report enemy activity, the information was often too dated to be useful to the maneuver squads. Even when the scouts' communication had been more timely, not keeping an accurate account of their navigation meant the scouts rarely knew their own location, much less the location of the enemy patrol.

Finally, much of the scouts' shortcomings stemmed from the complications of constantly being engaged by enemy fires. The scout team was far too small and had far too little combat power to engage enemy forces that are three, four, or five times their size. The scout team's initial frustration led to a series of poor decisions to engage the enemy, and they failed to develop the situation from the relative safety of secluded observation. In short, the scouts stopped being scouts. They became, by choice, an ineffective fireteam, leaving the platoon leader blind to enemy movements.

Case Study H

In September 2006, One Shepherd (www.1Shepherd.com) hosted their 'FALL STX' training event outside of Columbia, Missouri. For the nighttime lane training, the blue forces (BLUFOR) were given the mission to conduct a near ambush along a main supply route and assigned Allan Ensor as the opposing forces (OPFOR) patrol leader.

Enzor's squad was tasked with conducting a route reconnaissance in force. His squad was to traverse a mile-long gravel road and investigate any potential vulnerability to vehicle and foot traffic. This was a difficult task in complete darkness, but Ensor's OPFOR squad was equipped with high-power tactical weapon lights that could capably penetrate into the tree line to search for enemy ambushes and scouts.

Enzor studied the map carefully. The road was straight, but the rolling hills meant that low ground was vulnerable to ambush. He decided his team would conduct this task very slowly. Time was not a significant factor. Ensor pulled together his fireteam leaders to discuss the potential danger areas and different "actions on contact" battle drills. By 2100 Hrs, the OPFOR squad was ready to roll.

In departing the assembly area, Ensor placed the Alpha fireteam leader and one rifleman about 100 meters forward of the remainder of the squad. These two troops would act as a forward vanguard and alert the rest of the squad of any danger.

Fifteen minutes later and a half-mile into the recon, Ensor radioed his Alpha fireteam leader for a situation report. As the fireteam leader stopped and took a knee on the shoulder of the gravel road to report back, the right side of the road erupted into a dozen bursts of white-hot muzzle flashes! The pointman had just stepped into the very center of the BLUFOR near ambush. He was cut down instantly.

The fireteam leader rolled backward, then onto his stomach and returned fire, rapidly double-tapping in the direction of the overwhelming number of muzzle flashes. Within a few short bursts, the BLUFOR's left security team honed their fire in on the OPFOR fireteam leader and eliminated him as well.

Upon the opening volley, Ensor and the rest of the OPFOR squad fell to the ground. It took only a couple of seconds for them to realize the ambush was a hundred meters in front of them, and that their vanguard team was getting hit hard. No word came back over the radio—not a good sign.

The enemy had not hit the vanguard in low terrain, as Ensor had anticipated. Instead, the BLUFOR chose the high ground that offered them the greatest view and longest sectors of fire. Ensor's squad would have to bound and maneuver down the hill from their current position and up the next hill to rescue their vanguard team.

The entire OPFOR squad was moving in just a matter of a few seconds, but seeing only muzzle flashes at that distance in the near total darkness, they had not yet fired a shot. Within twenty seconds and bounding from both the left and right side of the road, Ensor's squad was within 40 meters of the enemy ambush when the BLUFOR ceased fire and dispatched their assault team to clear the kill zone. That was the first enemy personnel the OPFOR had seen. Ensor's troops opened up in unison as the assault team attempted to cross the kill zone. One BLUFOR troop went down, and the rest quickly leapt behind any available cover.

The BLUFOR assault team was now pinned in a small ditch running parallel to the road. Their support team was also genuinely caught off guard, and one BLUFOR troop shouted, “Cease fire!”—thinking the left security team was firing on their own assault team.

In fact, the left side security again came to the aid of the BLUFOR ambush patrol by laying suppressive fires down the road. Ensor’s OPFOR squad could make no further gains. As the BLUFOR assault team gathered their senses and began to orient fires in the OPFOR direction, Ensor yelled for his troops to conduct the “break contact” battle drill.

Ensor wasn’t yet sure as to the fate of his vanguard force, but he decided he couldn’t risk losing more troops since the vanguard force may have simply broke contact and run away. He would have to return later and look for the two-man vanguard force.

Lessons Learned? From the BLUFOR perspective, this ambush netted less-than-impressive results. Two enemy troops killed for the cost of one of their own. That’s not as high of an attrition advantage as one would expect from a “surprise attack.” More to the point was the lost opportunity for the BLUFOR ambush patrol.

The BLUFOR patrol leader was equipped with the latest generation night vision goggles, as were the patrol’s security teams. His troops were also equipped with tactical weapon lights. The PL’s plan was solid, and his execution of the ambush from the ORP up until the initial shot was very good. However, upon seeing just a single enemy soldier in the kill zone, the PL made the decision to initiate the ambush. To their credit, the ambush patrol’s volley of fire was absolutely perfect!

The problem was the target was supposed to be an entire enemy squad, or at least a fireteam. The BLUFOR PL later explained he had assumed that, because there was one enemy troop in the kill zone, the rest had to be nearby. He was quite surprised to find out later in the AAR that the enemy had posted a forward vanguard, and in fact, the left side security team was quite aware only two enemy troops had entered the kill zone. This meant the BLUFOR PL not only missed the bulk of his intended target, but the OPFOR patrol’s aggressive reaction cost him one of his own troops.

Bottom line? The ambush takes a great deal of patience and nerve. The PL must communicate with the left and right security to know what is in the kill zone and what else is coming down the road.

Case Study I

In February, 2006, the Kansas City Airsoft Association (www.kcairsoft.com) hosted the “Rushvenian vs. Achissenian” scenario in Rushville, Missouri. Allan Swayze commanded a Russian VDV paratrooper detachment assigned as UN Peacekeepers.

This ongoing scenario, based loosely on the Bosnian conflict, pitted the powerful Rushvenian “green forces” or GRNFOR troops against the smaller, poorly armed

contingent of Achissenian TANFOR in the steeply rolling bluffs along the Missouri River. Though the trees were bare in February, a wet snowfall contributed to limited visibility and quiet movement—excellent conditions for stealth.

Swayze's team of eleven UN Peacekeepers were tasked to monitor an 800-meter swath of grass field that broke up a dense forest to the north, occupied by the GRNFOR, and a relatively sparse forest to the south where the TANFOR was operating. With their superior numbers, the GRNFOR had been attempting to infiltrate across this east-west axis all morning. But, a single, well-placed checkpoint, coupled with active Russian patrols, had seriously impeded GRNFOR attempts to move south and aggress against the massing Achissenians.

In the couple of instances a small Rushvenian patrol did manage to cross the border unseen, the TANFOR quickly neutralized the enemy patrol. GRNFOR was getting nowhere fast with the UN Peacekeepers in the way.

Shortly after noon, Swayze spotted a squad-sized element of GRNFOR moving along the field to the east. These troops were not crossing the border but just moving along it. With a fireteam already patrolling to the west, Swayze instructed one paratrooper to accompany him as he approached the Rushvenian forces to discuss their intent. He told the remainder of the fireteam to stand to. Swayze sensed some tension building with the GRNFOR troops and was cautious that they might resort to violence in order to rid themselves of the UN Peacekeepers and pass south into the TANFOR sector.

As Swayze made his way east, he thought he heard movement to the north. Another GRNFOR patrol? He sensed the checkpoint might soon be a target.

Swayze caught up with the Rushvenian force. The squad leader explained his orders were to move to the border and monitor any TANFOR movement. And, in fact, the Rushvenian squad was spread out evenly across the ridgeline looking down south into the Achissenian sector with binoculars and riflescopes. They made no attempt to cross, so there was little Swayze could do. He decided to fall back to his checkpoint and consolidate his combat power by pulling in the other paratrooper fireteam.

Upon returning to the checkpoint, Swayze immediately loaded his weapon and told the other paratroopers to do the same. As he reached for the radio to contact the paratroopers on patrol, a violent volley of fire sounded from the west, in a low point along the border. The radio came alive with chatter, and there was no doubt the Russian peacekeeper patrol had been ambushed. Before Swayze could turn around, he felt the sting of multiple BBs strike the middle of his back. The ambush signaled a series of pulsating attacks against the checkpoint.

The checkpoint came under fire from the north and the south. The GRNFOR troops who had been standing in the field with binoculars were steadily closing the distance to strike from the east as well. The Rushvenian GRNFOR had watched the Russian routine and had used this routine to their advantage.

With their commander down and half their force caught in an ambush several hundred meters away, the checkpoint was in a three-direction battle. GRNFOR quickly overwhelmed the UN Peacekeepers and moved aggressively into the Achissenian sector.

Lessons Learned? The GRNFOR platoon gathered intelligence all morning on the Russian paratroopers. The GRNFOR commander understood that little more than a fireteam could be located at the checkpoint at any one given time. Furthermore, he knew the low point in the open field was out of view of the checkpoint and, thereby, presented an excellent killing zone for an ambush.

Four squads approached the UN Peacekeeping Force from four directions, using four different routes. The ambush initiated the attack, and their attack against the checkpoint was well-synchronized. The attack neutralized the Russian paratroopers before they could radio the situation, and the GRNFOR platoon moved rapidly south to press its swarming attack against the TANFOR.

Swarming attacks rarely knock out the target in a single strike, such as this case, but the synchronizing of combat power adds to the synergy of the swarming attack. Certainly, the Russian peacekeepers on the receiving end of this attack duly noted the synchronized effect of this attack!

Case Study J

In May 2005, TAW Paintball hosted the “Storms of Fate” paintball event on the Combat Zone field in Oroville, California. Rob Cardoso was the commander of Delta Project (www.TeamDeltaProject.com), a scenario paintball team from San Francisco.

Late in the afternoon of Day 1, Cardoso’s six-man team was tasked to conduct a raid against an enemy stronghold—a bunker complex that dominated all nearby terrain. Cardoso was told to expect a dozen enemy troops inside the bunker complex and that the enemy was deploying and resting small patrols within this base.

Cardoso’s team knew the bunker complex from previous games. With little time to spare, he quickly developed a plan including the routes to and from the objective, actions on contact, and actions on the objective. Cardoso led his team in battle drill rehearsals to make sure everyone knew their role, position, and the mission’s bigger picture.

En-route to the objective, Delta Project inadvertently walked into an enemy ambush. Cardoso’s pointman realized he had stepped into the kill zone almost the same instant the enemy initiated the ambush with a large volume of fire. Communicating “near ambush right!” Delta Project rushed into the enemy’s line and, true to form, the enemy gunners soon began shooting at their own team members. Such confusion forced the enemy to withdraw while Delta Project hastened their retreat with an attack by fire.

Cardoso picked up his team and continued toward the objective, wanting to place some distance between Delta Project and the ambush site in case another enemy patrol decided to come investigate. Within minutes, they came to the ORP, just shy of the objective.

Delta Project moved into position undetected. At Cardoso's signal they assaulted the bunker complex with a series of bound and overwatch drills. Cardoso's six-man team took control of the entire bunker complex in just 15 seconds! Not only were a dozen enemy troops occupying the base, but another eight-man enemy patrol was resting inside, having just returned from a patrol. Delta Project hit all 20 enemy personnel without a single casualty. The field referees actually cheered the team's victory!

Lessons Learned? A raid requires very specific information about the target. Delta Project's previous experience with the objective lent a wealth of information about the lay of the land, enemy positions, and obstacles. Higher commands provided additional information about approximate enemy strength and activity. Without this information, Cardoso's force would have been sent toward failure.

What's more, the troops of Delta Project were excellently skilled at their battle drills. Upon receiving the mission, Cardoso's guidance spelled out exactly which battle drills would be necessary for the mission, and rehearsed them. This paid off not only on the objective, earlier when Delta Team came up against an enemy ambush.

For their impressive victory, Delta Project was awarded "Most Valuable Team" for the event.