

Solutions to Tactical Decision Game 94-6*

The Defense Solutions

Tactical Decision Game #94-6, "The Defense," was presented in detail in MCG, Jun94. In the scenario you are the commanding officer of Company L, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines. Your company, with an engineer squad (10 antitank mines) and a Dragon section attached, has been ordered to establish a blocking position to prevent the enemy from attacking toward El Trombone some 5 miles to the southwest. You have priority of fires from the 81mm mortars. A battalion of the 2d Marines is on your right. Company I is on your left, about 1,300 meters north of Hill 202.

The enemy force, estimated to be a motorized infantry battalion, has been spotted some 20 miles to the northeast in the Route 3 corridor. Route 3 is an improved road—a high-speed avenue of approach—but traffic is frequently restricted to the road by loose, wet sand areas known as sebkhas.

You received your orders at 1400. It is a clear day and visibility is about 10 kilometers. The vegetation is limited to sparse scrub brush. In a time limit of 10 minutes develop your defensive plan so your subordinate units and attachments can move into position and begin defensive preparations.

Solution A

by Staff, Infantry Officer Course

Defensive Plan

Since the enemy is a motorized infantry battalion, speed, mobility, and firepower are his key strengths. We plan on making maximum use of the terrain, obstacles (both natural and man-made), and our supporting weapons to negate these strengths and create a dilemma for him. Our defensive plan is as follows:

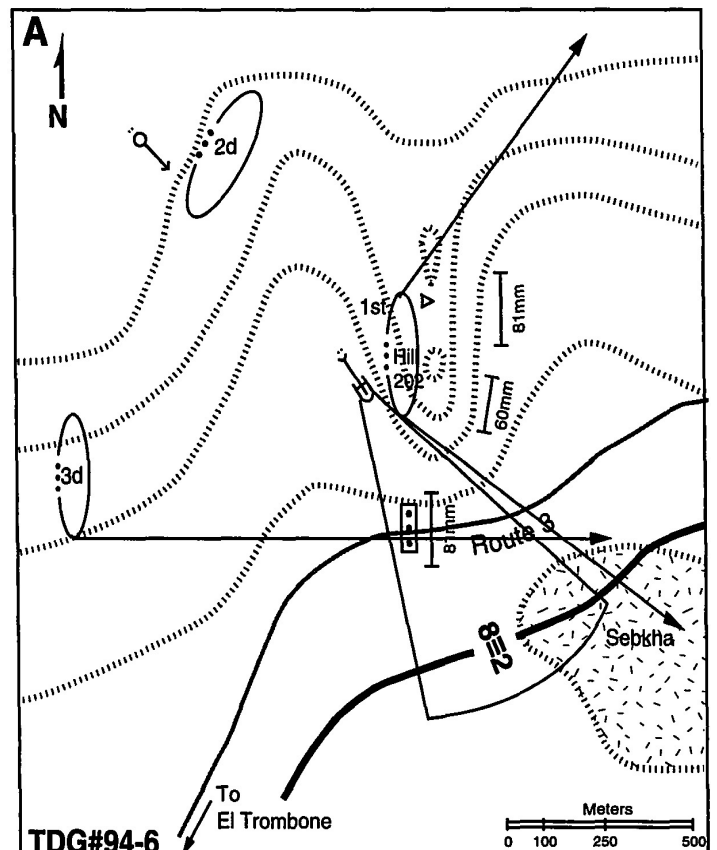
1st Platoon will establish a reverse slope defensive position in the vicinity of Hill 202; two machinegun squads will fire PDFs (principal direction of fire) to cover the flanks; mines will be laid at intervals along Route 3 to the south; "dummy" mines will be interspersed to make the minefield appear more extensive; the Dragon section and the assault section will establish positions to the rear of Hill 202 in order to engage the flanks of enemy vehicles traveling along Route 3.

2d Platoon will establish a position 500 meters north west of Hill 202 in order to prevent enemy attempts to flank in that direction.

The 60mm mortars will establish a firing position to the rear of 2d Platoon.

3d Platoon, with an attached machinegun squad, will establish a position southwest of Hill 202 in order to enfilade enemy attempts to flank Hill 202 from the south or breach the minefield.

The 81mm and 60mm mortars will fire targets on the forward slope of Hill 202 as well as the minefield.



Rationale

By establishing a reverse slope defense, we can hit the enemy with observed indirect fire on the forward slope as well as “ambush” his forces if he crests Hill 202. The “invisibility” of the reverse slope position will protect our forces from observation and direct fire thereby increasing chances of surprising the enemy. Additionally, through the positioning of our forces, we can effectively negate any potential attempt to “flank” our position. During the night, we will augment our standard night vision capability by equipping the observation post with a Dragon night tracker. If the enemy attempts to use smoke to obscure visibility, we will continue to engage his forces through the thermal sights of the Dragons.

In March 1943, elements of the German Afrika Corps attacked southwest toward the town of El Guettar, Tunisia. An American platoon from the 1st Infantry Division used the reverse slope defense to stop this major German counteroffensive, inflicting 500 German casualties while suffering 7 of their own. Our defensive plan reflects the same basic approach.

Solution B

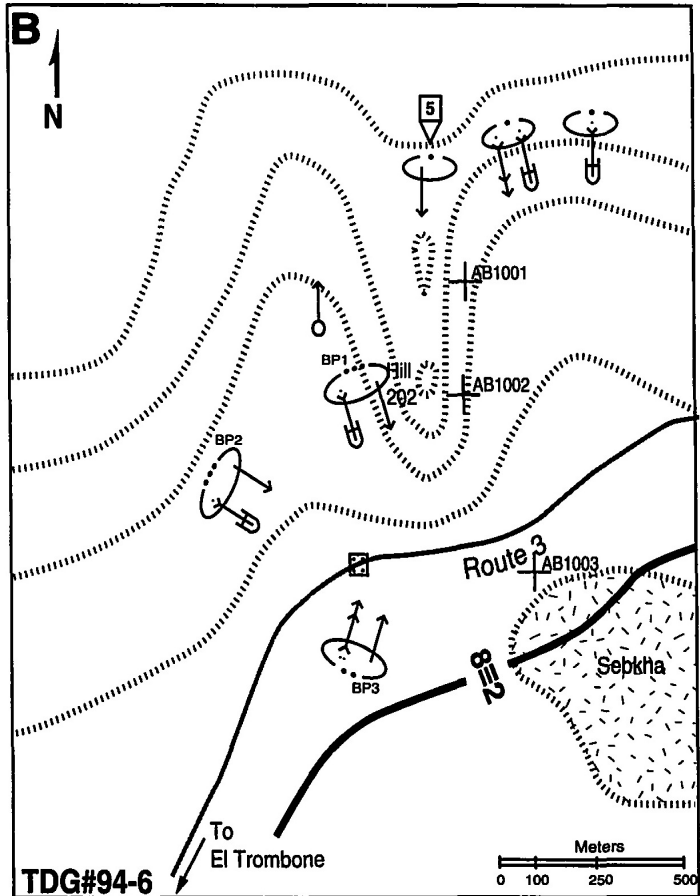
by Capt Gary E. Brown, Jr.

Defensive Plan

I intend to accomplish the mission by preventing the enemy from bringing his combat power to bear on my main position while forcing him to feed his forces into my kill zone on a narrow frontage.

1st Platoon with four Dragons, two SMAWs, and one machinegun squad attached, will defend from vicinity Checkpoint 5, east along the high ground in order to deny the enemy access to the crest of the finger to the south and to disrupt his movement along Route 3. 1st Platoon is the main effort and will have priority of all fires.

2d & 3d Platoons, with two Dragons and one machinegun squad attached, will defend from battle positions 1 (BP1) and BP2 respectively in order to destroy the enemy in our kill zone to the east of the minefield.



SMAW Section (-)(Rein), with engineers and their organic M60E3 and SMAW attached, will defend from MP3 in order to destroy any enemy forces penetrating west of the minefield.

Engineer Squad will place a minefield as indicated in order to halt the enemy’s movement along Route 3 after he moves into the kill zone. Once complete, the squad will be attached to the SMAW section.

Mortar section will establish a firing position behind BP1 and provide priority of fires to 1st Platoon.

Rationale

I expect that the enemy battalion will make maximum use of Route 3 on its movement toward El Trombone. He will cover his movement with supporting arms and Hill 202 will certainly attract his indirect fires. I want to set up a reverse slope ambush with BP1 and BP2. The enemy should be blind to my intentions as he passes south of Hill 202. If the ambush is set correctly, the

enemy’s first indication of my presence will be the hasty minefield. This minefield may or may not produce casualties, but it will force the enemy to stop. This event will trigger the ambush, which should be powerful enough to destroy anything that has passed between Hill 202 and the sebkha. The remaining enemy forces east of Hill 202 will then be faced with the choice of (1) pressing their attack along Route 3, (2) attacking over the high ground in the vicinity of Hill 202, or (3) withdrawing northeast along Route 3. If they choose the first option, I can use supporting arms as they squeeze between Hill 202 and the sebkha and destroy them with the cross-fire from BP1 and BP2. If the enemy chooses the second option, control of the crest of the finger containing Hill 202 will be critical. For this reason, 1st Platoon is my main effort and must retain control of this terrain. 1st Platoon must make maximum use of supporting arms to destroy any forces moving to seize Hill 202. It must also use its

Dragons to create as much destruction and confusion as possible in the enemy force stalled along Route 3. If the enemy chooses his third option and withdraws, I will have achieved my mission. The enemy is forced to choose between a meat grinder or withdrawal. BP3 will be manned by a force composed of a SMAW section (-) and an engineer squad. This unit will be AT4 heavy and arrayed in depth. Their job will be to destroy any "leakers" that penetrate west of the minefield. Too often engineers are tasked with creating an obstacle and then left in a tactical nether region. An engineer squad usually comes with an M60E3, a SMAW, and a SAW as part of their weaponry. If integrated into the defense, they can be a significant addition to combat power.

Solution C

by Capt Scott D. Aiken

Defensive Plan

Company L defends to block the enemy in the vicinity of Hill 202 in order to prevent him from attacking southwest into El Trombone. My intent is to accomplish this mission by destroying as many enemy vehicles as possible in order to reduce his mobility. My defensive plan is as follows:

- 1st Platoon, with an attached machinegun section will occupy Battle Position 1 (BP1) and orient southeast. It will support the main effort's ambush by fire.
- 2d Platoon, with the Dragon Section and Assault Section attached, will occupy BP2 and orient south. It is the main effort and will, on order, conduct a vehicular ambush to destroy the enemy in engagement area Kathy.
- 3d Platoon, with the Engineer Section attached, will occupy BP3 and orient southeast. It will emplace the antitank mines in engagement area Kathy, be prepared to attack the enemy in engagement area Kathy in order to protect the main effort's eastern flank. 3d Platoon is the company reserve.
- Mortars will occupy firing position shown and oper-

ate under company control.

Explanation

I intend to block the enemy attack by maximizing our antitank and assault weapons. My intent is to destroy as many enemy vehicles as possible in order to reduce his mobility. If I can destroy several enemy vehicles with the troops on board, so much the better! I see the enemy's critical vulnerability as being his loss of mobility. If his vehicles are destroyed, he will lose his combat sustainment and will also become extremely vulnerable to combined arms. The end result that I want to achieve is a successful engagement of the enemy and his subsequent withdrawal.

The company will defend in an existing natural chokepoint created by a sebkha and a hill mass. The company will defend with two reinforced platoons up and one in reserve. One platoon will suppress and attrit the enemy in the engagement area while the company's main effort destroys the enemy and his vehicles in the engagement area.

Due to the short time for planning, I have decided to use an on-order initiation of the engagement area instead of an event-driven initiation.

The purpose of indirect fires will be to destroy enemy soft-skinned vehicles. An 81mm mortar priority target will be plotted in the engagement area (AH3000). Mortar fires will be planned to impact in the engagement area, artillery fires will be planned just to the east of the engagement area.

I feel that if the enemy does manage to break through our defense, he will be severely attrited and will not prove to be a serious problem for the rest of our forces to deal with.



**originally published in August 1994*

