

Chapter 1

Introduction

Challenge to Maneuver

Maneuver warfare is the warfighting philosophy of the Marine Corps. This philosophy seeks to shatter the enemy's cohesion through a series of rapid, violent, and unexpected actions. Speed, surprise, and suppressive firepower are key. Maneuver warfare depends on freedom of movement and seeks to avoid enemy strengths in order to focus efforts on enemy weaknesses whenever possible. The enemy will use firepower, terrain, and manmade obstacles to strip our freedom to maneuver. Friendly forces will first attempt to bypass such obstacles; however, this may not always be an option. In this case, breaching operations restore the ability to wage maneuver warfare once again. Obstacles which limit maneuver, whether on land or at sea, must be overcome.

Overcoming Obstacles

An obstacle is any obstruction designed or employed to disrupt, fix, turn, or block the movement of an opposing force, and to impose additional losses in personnel, time, and equipment on the opposing force. Obstacles can exist naturally or can be manmade, or can be a combination of both (Joint Pub 1-02). The effectiveness of an obstacle is enhanced considerably when covered by observation and fire. As friendly forces breach or bypass obstacles they may be exposed to direct and indirect fire. Mines will typically be employed with other obstacle types, such as wire and tank ditches, to create complex obstacles. Complex obstacles are often used to reinforce a natural obstacle feature such as a river, dry gap, or surf zone.

Obstacles can include abatis, antitank ditches, blown bridges, built-up areas, minefields, rivers, road craters, terrain, and wire (FMFRP 0-14). Manmade obstacles can be either tactical or protective. Tactical obstacles limit the attacker's ability to maneuver, particularly mechanized forces, and may or may not be within small arms range. Tactical obstacles are integrated into the defense's scheme of maneuver and fire support plan. Protective obstacles provide close-in protection and are usually placed just outside of hand grenade range.

Obstacle breaching is the employment of a combination of tactics and techniques to project combat power to the far side of an obstacle. Understanding breaching theory is the first step to understanding breaching tactics. Breaching is conducted by rapidly applying concentrated force at a point to penetrate the obstacle and rupture the defense. This is a combined-arms operation. The commander's intent must be understood when planning breaching operations, and the main effort must be clearly designated and supported by other units. The commander should plan to shift personnel and equipment consistent with the main effort. The shift of breaching assets is particularly critical when successive breaching operations are anticipated. He should also plan for redundancy of breaching assets to allow for losses of personnel and equipment.

Breaching Actions

Breaching actions are the tactics that the unit will execute on contact with obstacles. Forces encountering obstacles either attempt to bypass or reduce the obstacles. A **bypass** is a route that avoids the obstacle. Bypassing obstacles must be done with caution to avoid killing zones. **Obstacle reduction** is the physical creation of a lane through or over obstacles. Attempting to force or "bull" through an obstacle is not a breaching operation. It is a desperate course of action undertaken only when a commander must extricate his force from an untenable position within an obstacle and when no other breaching options are available. Normally, engineers and specialized equipment are required to reduce an obstacle. Obstacle reduction is a primary task of ground combat element (GCE) engineers during offensive operations.

After lanes are reduced, proofing may be necessary. **Proofing** is verifying that a breached lane is free of live mines by checking the breached lane with a secondary breaching means other than explosives, such as probing, mine detectors, mine plows, or mine rollers. Proofing is done only when the potential risk of live mines remaining in the lane exceeds the risk of loss due to enemy fire while a force is waiting to proof a lane.

Reorganization

After a force passes through an obstacle, the commander should reorganize the force and determine if it has enough combat power to continue the attack. Resupply of critical materiel must be conducted and assets redistributed for future breaching operations. New support, breach, and assault forces may be designated. Breached obstacles are reported to higher headquarters, marked, and handed over to follow-on units. Higher headquarters is responsible for disseminating obstacle breach locations throughout the command and to follow-on units.

Obstacle Clearing

Obstacle clearing is the total elimination or neutralization of obstacles. Clearing operations are generally not conducted under fire and are carried out by combat service support element (CSSE) engineers and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) personnel. However, they may be performed by engineers in the GCE, CSSE, or aviation combat element (ACE).

Types of Breaching Operations

In-Stride Breach

An in-stride breach is a rapid breaching technique that task-organized GCE forces may be required to conduct independent of the MAGTF. It consists of preplanned, well-trained, and well-rehearsed breaching actions. The in-stride breach takes advantage of surprise and momentum to penetrate obstacles. The force uses the in-stride breach against either weak defenders

or very simple obstacles and executes it on the move. Forces should always move configured to execute an in-stride breach except when a deliberate breach is planned. Chapter 2 discusses the in-stride breach.

Deliberate Breach

A deliberate breach is used against a strong defense or complex obstacle system. It is similar to a deliberate attack, requiring detailed knowledge of both the defense and the obstacle systems. It is further characterized by a buildup of combat power on the near side of obstacles. Subordinate units are task-organized to accomplish the breach. The breach often requires securing the far side of the obstacle with an assault force before or during reduction. Deliberate breaching operations require significant planning and preparation. Chapter 3 discusses the deliberate breach.

Amphibious Breach

Forces conducting an amphibious assault may be required to conduct an amphibious breach, which is a type of a deliberate breach. This breach is specifically designed to overcome antilanding defenses in order to conduct an amphibious assault. Chapter 4 discusses the amphibious breach.

Assault Breach

An assault breach is used against enemy protective obstacles. Depending on the size and strength of the defensive obstacle system, the assault breaching procedure can be a variation of either deliberate or in-stride breaching techniques. Chapter 5 discusses the assault breach.

Covert Breach

Covert breaching operations are used to secretly pass through obstacles. The covert breach uses elements of the deliberate and in-stride breach. Covert breaching is characterized by using stealth to reduce obstacles with the support and assault forces executing their mission only if reduction is detected. Chapter 6 discusses the covert breach.

Breaching Fundamentals

The breaching fundamentals are suppress, obscure, secure, reduce, and re-supply (SOSRR). These fundamentals will always apply, but may vary in degree based on the situation.

Suppress

Focusing all available fire on enemy personnel, weapons, or equipment in order to prevent the enemy from interfering with friendly forces is critical during breaching operations. Suppression helps to isolate the breaching site and fix the enemy in position. It usually triggers the actual act of breaching. Fire support coordination measures are used to ensure that all fire is coordinated and integrated with other actions at the obstacle.

Obscure

Obstacle reduction efforts should be hidden from enemy observation as much as possible. Consideration is always given to selecting a breaching site where the terrain provides natural concealment from enemy observation. Obscuring smoke placed in the breaching area or between the breaching area and the enemy conceals movement and obstacle reduction activities. Smoke should be employed across a wide front in order to deceive the enemy as to the actual breach site(s). The use of smoke must be carefully planned to degrade enemy observation and fire without significantly degrading friendly fire and control.

Secure

The breaching site is secured by a support force to prevent the enemy from interfering with the breach and assault force(s). A force must control the breaching site before it can reduce the obstacle. This is accomplished by physical occupation and/or suppressive fire.

Reduce

The number and width of lanes created varies with the situation and type of breaching operation. Lanes must be wide enough to allow a force to rapidly pass through the obstacle and continue the attack. The unit reducing the obstacle marks and reports obstacle and lane locations and conditions to higher headquarters. Lanes are handed over to follow-on forces who will further reduce or clear the obstacle when possible. Reduction cannot be accomplished until the suppress, obscure, and secure breaching fundamentals have been implemented.

Resupply

Breaching operations are logistic-intensive. Resupply of critical class V materials, such as demolitions, mine-clearing line charge (MICLIC) reloads, smoke, artillery, mortar, and small arms ammunition must be planned. Equipment such as mine detectors, mine rollers, and plows need to be readily available to continue forward momentum. The commander anticipates when these assets might be used and develops a plan for rapidly moving them forward in order to resupply units. Much of the current breaching and mobility equipment (tanks mounted with mine rollers, vehicles towing the trailer-mounted MK 2, and armored vehicle-launched bridges (AVLBs)) can slow the rate of advance of a mechanized unit. This must also be taken into consideration.

Breaching Organization

The commander task-organizes his forces into support, breach, and assault forces to accomplish the SOSRR breaching fundamentals.

Support Force

The support force mission is to provide suppression to eliminate the enemy's ability to interfere with the breaching operation. All available assets, including artillery, air, and naval surface fire support (NSFS), should be

used to suppress the enemy. The support force also controls and coordinates smoke for obscuration.

Breach Force

The breach force mission is to create and mark lanes that enable the assault force to pass through an obstacle to continue the attack. The breach force deploys and begins reducing the obstacle as soon as enemy fire has been suppressed to the point where it does not prevent the breach force from reducing lanes. It is a combined-arms force and may include engineers, infantry, tanks, assault amphibious vehicles (AAVs), and light armored vehicles (LAVs). The breach force must be capable of providing local security against enemy counterattack.

Assets are allocated based on the number of lanes required. For a deliberate breach, the breach force must be capable of creating a minimum of two lanes for an assaulting task-organized regiment. Two breached lanes per task-organized battalion is highly desired. For an amphibious breach, a minimum of two lanes per colored beach is required. However, the tactical situation may require additional lanes to quickly pass a large assault force through obstacles. The breach force commander should expect a 50 percent loss of mobility assets in executing a combat breach. Therefore, redundancy of breaching assets is essential for mission accomplishment. Lanes must be far enough apart to reduce the effects of enemy fire yet close enough to permit the mutual support and shifting of friendly forces.

Once the breach force has reduced the obstacle and the assault force has passed through breached lanes, guides are left to hand them over to follow-on units. At a minimum, lanes must be marked and their locations and conditions reported to higher headquarters and follow-on units. Chapter 7 discusses breach lane marking.

Assault Force

The assault force mission is to destroy or dislodge the enemy on the far side of the obstacle in order to allow combat forces to continue the attack. It secures the far side by physical occupation in most deliberate breaching operations. If the obstacles are defended by only a small force, the assault force mission may be combined with the breach force mission. This simplifies command and control (C²) and provides more immediate combat power for security and suppression. To overcome the defender during an assault, the commander must ensure that sufficient combat power will remain after sustaining losses during the breaching mission. Figures 1-1 through 1-4 graphically depict the roles of the support, breach, and assault forces.

Intelligence

Battlefield success depends largely on the ability of the commander to “see the battlefield.” The commander must identify how the enemy is using the ground in order to minimize the risk of surprise. This is particularly true when attempting to counter enemy use of obstacles. The locations and types of obstacles encountered are an excellent indicator of enemy intentions. For example, rapid mining across an enemy front may indicate a shift to a hasty defense. Surface-laid minefields may indicate that the enemy intends to resume the offensive through the minefields. Antipersonnel (AP) and antihandling devices may suggest that the enemy intends to remain in a defensive position for more than a few hours. A commander determines such situations by intelligence preparation of the battlespace (IPB).

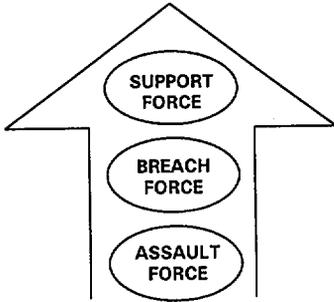


Figure 1-1. Approach.

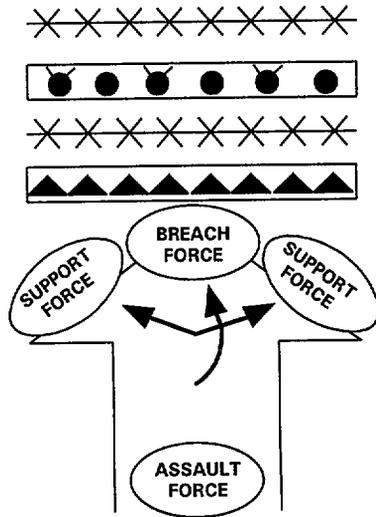


Figure 1-2. Deploy.

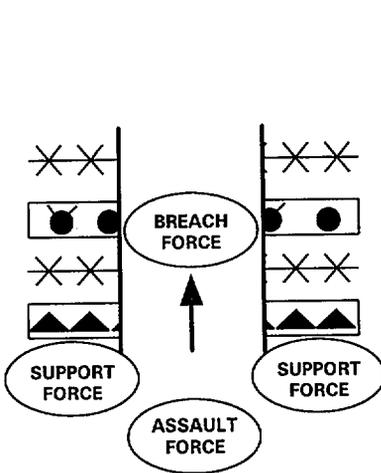


Figure 1-3. Breach.

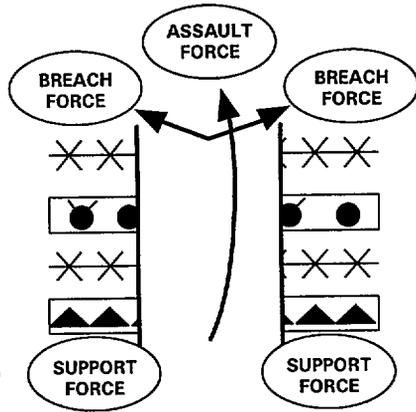


Figure 1-4. Assault.

IPB is a systematic and continuous process that analyzes the enemy, weather, and terrain in an area of operations. The IPB process integrates enemy doctrine and mission with the effects of weather and terrain to evaluate enemy capabilities, vulnerabilities, and probable courses of action (COAs). The IPB process achieves greatest results when all available intelligence-gathering assets are focused to obtain well-chosen essential elements of information (EEIs). Information gathered by reconnaissance becomes the foundation for developing and revising the estimate of the situation.

In any operation where enemy obstacles can interfere with friendly maneuver, obstacle intelligence (OBSTINTEL) becomes an EEI. OBSTINTEL is essential to determine enemy intentions and defensive strength. Areas defended with obstacles may indicate the location of high value targets and key terrain to the enemy defense. Examples of OBSTINTEL include obstacle location, type, and orientations, gaps and bypasses, and the location of enemy weapons.

Obtaining OBSTINTEL normally requires all available collection assets. The ACE may be tasked with identifying enemy fortification and obstacle emplacement activity in the deep battle area. Reconnaissance units task-organized with engineers should collect information on likely obstacle locations. Combat patrols should search for bypasses and identify obstacles. Specific collection tasks are detailed in a collection plan which identifies named areas of interest (NAIs) that focus reconnaissance on gathering information that confirms or denies the estimated enemy situation.

Engineers engaged in reconnaissance for OBSTINTEL should not be used to reduce obstacles during the reconnaissance (although they make ideal leaders for subsequent breaching operations). Inadvertent detonation, enemy detection of cut wire or marked lanes, and the time required during such reduction may compromise and defeat the purpose of the reconnaissance mission. It may also compromise the entire attack. Units encountering obstacles should immediately inform the commander. Rapidly updating previous OBSTINTEL is a constant requirement.

If the enemy has employed mines, it is critical to determine the minefield composition, forward edge, depth, width, types of mines, and mine fuzes that have been used. This information is used to determine which reduction techniques offer the best chance for success and minimize risk to the breach force. This may require a reconnaissance patrol to examine mines within the minefield. EOD units can provide information concerning the functioning of enemy mines. Engineers assist in conducting threat evaluation. Based on knowledge of the obstacles, enemy tactics and equipment, and the time available to the enemy, the intelligence officer and engineer evaluate enemy obstacle capabilities.

Breach Planning

Breaching operations require precise synchronization among support, breach, and assault forces. Synchronization is the orderly arrangement of events to take place during an operation in order to ensure success. Failure to synchronize suppression and obscuration with obstacle reduction and assault can result in rapid, devastating losses of friendly forces. The commander ensures success through proper planning and force preparation.

Commander's Intent

Commander's intent gives subordinates a clear understanding of what the commander wants to do and why he wants to do it. The most important thing for subordinates to understand is what end result the commander desires. Understanding the commander's intent allows subordinates to adapt to changing circumstances and still achieve the desired end result.

The commander should carefully plan breaching operations based on mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available-time available (METT-T) analysis and force requirements. If information indicates a weak and/or weakly defended obstacle, the commander may elect to employ in-stride breaching techniques. If information indicates a strong

and/or strongly defended obstacle, the commander should develop a detailed plan to employ deliberate breaching operations.

If insufficient OBSTINTEL is available to prepare detailed breaching plans, the force should continuously refine plans to conduct in-stride breaching operations. Information is often acquired from units that have encountered or entered an obstacle zone. In either case, the force should extricate itself and obtain enough information for the commander to make a decision. If available, engineers with the engaged element conduct a rapid obstacle reconnaissance. The lead unit should attempt an in-stride breach of weak or weakly defended obstacles. Follow-on forces should immediately move into overwatch positions and provide suppressive fire on the enemy to help the lead element, and to allow rapid transition to a deliberate breach, if faced with a strongly defended obstacle.

Command and Control

Effective C² is crucial to achieve proper synchronization. C² is integrated into the plan through the use of maneuver control measures and the positioning of key leaders to observe the battle. Maneuver control measures enable the commander to graphically convey on the map his intent, scheme of maneuver, and subordinate unit tasks. Relating unit actions to the terrain is critical to successful execution.

The commander must be positioned to best control the battle. Since effective suppression is critical during breaching, the commander usually positions himself with the support force. This enables him to personally influence the control of fire and facilitate the necessary coordination between breach and assault forces.

Reverse Planning Sequence

Breach planning is driven by the estimate of the enemy situation and begins by identifying enemy and friendly strengths and weaknesses. Appendix A is a sample breach plan adapted from the breaching plan appendix in FMFM 3-1, *Command and Staff Action*. The commander should first

decide how to attack the objective to accomplish the mission. This decision drives the when, where, how, and size of the support, breach, and assault forces. Breaching operations should take advantage of surprise, whenever possible. Sufficient lanes must be created to rapidly project combat power onto the objective, not just to the far side of the obstacle. **Reverse planning** ensures that actions at obstacles support actions on the objectives. The commander designs a scheme of maneuver for the breaching phase of the operation that achieves adequate suppression, obscuration, and security. The sequence below should be used to develop a breaching plan:

- Reverse planning begins with actions on the objectives.
- Actions on the objective drive the size and composition of the assault force.
- Actions on the objective determine the number and location of lanes to be breached.
- Lane requirements and types of obstacles drive the amount and types of breaching assets assigned to the breach force.
- The enemy's ability to interfere with the breach determines the size of the support force and whether the breaching site is to be secured by fire or by force.

Achieving Surprise

In any tactical operation, surprise is essential to obtain the maximum advantage. The effect of surprise should be sought by all units at every stage of action. German *blitzkrieg* tactics during World War II “. . . involved multiple thrusts with reinforcements following whichever thrusts were most successful. The multitude of thrusts created paralyzing uncertainty in the opponent because he could not determine which constituted the real attack.” (FMFM 1-3, *Tactics*.) It is not essential that the enemy be taken unaware, but only that he become aware too late to react effectively. Tactical surprise in breaching operations may be obtained by moving under the cover of darkness, fog, or smoke. Terrain can also be used to mask movement. A supporting force may conduct a feint or demonstration to deceive the enemy as to the actual breach site.

Achieving Mass

Massed combat power is directed against enemy weakness. The location selected for breaching depends largely on weakness in the enemy defense and areas where its covering fire is minimized. If the attacker cannot find a natural weakness, he creates one by fixing the majority of the defending force and isolating a small portion of it for attack. The isolated portion is then suppressed to eliminate effective fires on the breach. Smoke and terrain are used to assist in isolating the force under attack.

The breach force is task-organized and equipped to use several different reduction techniques in case the primary technique fails. Additional reduction assets should be present to handle unexpected setbacks. A 100 percent redundancy of breaching assets per breached lane is recommended to successfully reduce complex obstacles.

Achieving necessary mass for the assault requires the breach force to open enough lanes through obstacles to permit rapid passage and the buildup of friendly forces on the far side. The breach force attempts as many simultaneous breaches as are necessary to ensure that at least two are successful and attempts to create as many additional lanes as possible within its capability. The need for massing assets to breach the current obstacle must be balanced against the need for those same assets to breach subsequent obstacles. A breaching capability must be retained up through the assault of defending positions.

Rehearsal

A well-rehearsed force is vital for successful breaching operations. The complexity of breaching operations makes rehearsals at every level essential to success. A commander must afford subordinates the time to plan how they will execute their assigned missions and to rehearse that plan with their unit. Units should rehearse immediate action breaching drills as well as their support, breach, and assault roles. Rehearsals should focus on the coordination of maneuver among support, breach, and assault forces in order to achieve the SOSRR breaching fundamentals and highlight key tasks. Chapter 8 discusses breach training and rehearsal.



The following excerpt demonstrates how breaching fundamentals were successfully implemented in World War II.

In April 1941, during the German attack on Australian and British forces at Tobruk, Libya, “. . . out of the red sunset a score of Stukas came screaming down to bomb and machine-gun the forward positions. Their ammunition expended, they turned away, to be followed by yet another formation which hurled its bombs on the barbed-wire and the infantry positions . . . Then, as the last Stuka headed for home, its magazines empty, the Germans laid down a deadly barrage of artillery fire on the same positions and, under the cover of dust and growing darkness, the 2nd Machine-Gun Battalion and sappers of the 33rd Panzer Pioneers raced forward to render safe the mines and blast gaps in the wire . . . The men in the forward posts had been so heavily bombed and shelled that they were unable to prevent German penetrations between their widely dispersed posts or to stop them setting up machine-gun nests in their rear.” The next day “. . . when the mist cleared, the situation was even worse than had been feared. The Germans had not only established themselves a bridgehead a mile and a half wide, but had overrun seven of the advanced posts . . .”

Anthony Heckstall-Smith, *Tobruk* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1959) pp. 67–68.

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