

Culminating Point

by Capt Michael G. McCarthy, Jr.

Situation

You are the company commander for Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines operating in the province of Aceh, Indonesia. Your battalion is operating as part of a special purpose Marine air-ground task force with a general mission of conducting operations to clear the area of ex-government units involved in a rebellion against a newly elected civilian government. Enemy units have generally been operating in squad- to platoon-sized elements with only small arms and medium machineguns, primarily during daylight hours. Prior to today, no contact with the enemy forces had been reported by any elements of your battalion, despite 2 days of extensive patrolling. There are no friendly foreign national units in your battalion or company zone of operations.

Your company mission is to clear in zone in order to deny the enemy a safe haven from which to conduct operations against the civilian government. Your battalion commander's desired end state is no cohesive enemy units in the area of greater than squad size. Once that criterion has been met, the sector can be considered cleared and loyal government units can move in and complete the "pacification" process. Alpha Company was assigned the zone

considered most likely to produce enemy activity based on prior reports and has been designated the main effort.

Bravo Company is a standard table of organization rifle company, with an attached host-nation interrogator-translator team (ITT). You task organized for this mission into patrolling/clearing elements consisting of 1st and 3d Platoons (generally eastern and western portions of the zone respectively), and a reserve/reaction force consisting of 2d Platoon following in trace of the two clearing platoons in the center of the company zone. The machinegun section from weapons platoon moves with 2d Platoon to provide supporting fires should you encounter enemy forces. The mortar section moves in trace of 2d Platoon with security provided by the SMAW (shoulder launched multipurpose assault weapon) section. You have attached the host-nation ITT to the company headquarters element under the watchful eye of your company gunnery sergeant. No artillery or close air support assets are available, although the battalion 81mm mortar platoon can range the majority of your sector.

Today, at 0700, you advanced into a previously untouched sector. The terrain is hilly, single canopy jungle, interspersed with large clearings and cultivated areas. 3d Squad, 1st Platoon, after 2 hours of exhausting movement, reported signs of enemy activity on a lightly wooded ridgeline 200 meters to their north. You immediately ordered 2d Platoon to move forward to 3d Squad's position, which the 3d Squad would secure for use as an assault position for 2d Platoon's attack. You moved forward along with the ITT to the attack position, and after a quick visual reconnaissance and conference with 3d Squad leader and 2d Platoon commander, confirmed the personnel were in fact an enemy unit. You then emplaced the machinegun section at a 70-degree offset to provide a base of fire. You ordered 2d Platoon to pre-

pare to attack the enemy position and radioed the battalion commander to inform him of your situation. After a quick discussion, you were given permission to begin the attack.

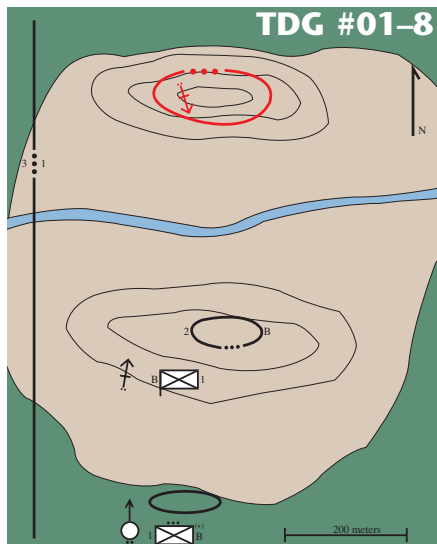
2d Platoon conducted their attack in a professional manner, and after an exhausting uphill climb under heavy enemy fire, reported the enemy reinforced squad's surrender. Friendly casualties were two men killed and three wounded. The enemy casualties were four dead and three wounded enemy prisoners of war. At least two enemy soldiers had escaped. They had, however, used up half of their ammunition in the process. A quick situation report from 3d Platoon revealed that they still had no enemy sightings. As you moved up to the ridgeline to inspect the results of the fight, the 2d Platoon commander reported enemy in at least two-squad strength moving into assault formation and at least two machineguns being set up on the next hill over.

At this time, your machinegun section is still moving onto the ridgeline, 1st Platoon is still consolidating with two squads at the old attack position, and one squad is still on the move. 3d Platoon continues to patrol in sector to the west. What do you do?

Requirement

In a time limit of 5 minutes, issue your orders to your team leaders. Provide a brief rationale for your actions and a sketch of your plan. Submit your solution to *Marine Corps Gazette*, TDG #01-8, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134, fax 703-630-9147, or e-mail <gazette@mca-marines.org>.

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