

IDEAS & ISSUES (FUTURE CONFLICT)

Ambrosia

Chapter 6

by Maj Victor Ruble

“Crossing Phase Line Red,” Aidan instructed over the company net, not completely certain that there was anyone there to receive it.

Mack Prophet had an affinity for making sure that everyone knew he was from Arkansas. One of his “Easter Eggs” was the fact that he always used the colors of the University of Arkansas (phase lines), names of Arkansas towns (objectives), or names of major streets in Arkansas (main supply routes) as the naming conventions for his tactical control measures. As benign as the term “red” may seem to the lay person, it had significance, and if Mack Prophet was still alive, this brevity code was going to illicit a response.

After an overly dramatic pause, Capt Prophet responded with a simple, “Roger.”

Aidan sighed out loud, half relieved his company commander was alive enough to still come over the net, and

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half relieved that what he was relying on with that brevity code was on its way.

“We’re online now,” Aidan responded.

“Roger, I got you. Stand by.”

In maneuver warfare, timing and phasing are absolutely critical. The most critical. Things have to happen exactly when they are supposed to happen or else you end up conducting fire-and-movement or, worse, movement under fire. But the enemy always gets a vote, so you have to make things event driven rather than time driven in an oversimplified sense. In this case, rather than ordering Aidan to be in the assault in 15 minutes, he was essentially saying, “Let me know when you hit Phase Line

Red, and I’ll make ‘X, Y, Z’ happen.” His response of “stand by” meant that X, Y, Z was about to go down.

Based on nothing more than the volume of smoke that began to emerge from the AST compound, Aidan had to assume that the Box was still in play. Obscuration fires began to rain on the fortified area. With a mechanized platoon of Marines having used the water way to completely envelope its exposed northern sector, AST was now vulnerable.

“Battle speed, battle speed, battle speed” Aidan announced over the platoon net. He suspected that SSgt Washington—the waterborne maneuver commander—wanted to make the call, but this was an opportunity that Aidan was just not willing to pass up.

With that, all five ACVs immediately pivoted in the water, bringing the armored amphibious column on line, and began to assault the beach of the unprotected AST sector. Whether AST was unable to erect battlements on this side of the island because of the topography, location of the desalination plant, or just underestimation of a potential enemy’s capability, the northern shore was an “amtrackers” dream—an unprepared beach that had been sufficiently suppressed and obscured. In layman’s terms, it was ripe for the picking.

Aidan and his platoon, reinforced by a section from Weapons Platoon, hit center beach with little more than a slight burst from a 7.62 medium machine gun in response with all five ACVs. Setting into a hasty-180, the three remaining vehicles of SSgt Washington’s section began to lace into the soft side of the AST defense. At this range, the 30mm cannons made small work of AST’s compound. The two Weapons Platoon vehicles made short work of the four AST indirect fire



Sparks flew, the ECP no longer functioned. (Photo by PFC Sullivan Laramie.)

automations, and as Aidan saw them reduced to nothing more than burning metal and track, he hoped that the rest of his company was now free to conduct its maneuver.

Marines poured from the armored wheeled vehicles as ramps lowered. With the amount of obscuration smoke that had been brought to bear on the objective, the Marines must have looked like something out of a nightmare. Their tactical and technical proficiency gave none of the civilian contracted security any reason to believe this was anything but.

Aidan popped his hatch in order to get a better visual of the enfolding battle and, in doing so, exposed himself to an ambiguously uniformed enemy combatant, whose expression of surprise was as evident as his own. After what seemed like an eternity, the two were frozen staring at one another, attempting to anticipate what the other would do. Finally, the "merc" had enough and raised his rifle to negate the threat. Aidan was faster, pulling his Smith and Wesson .40 quickly from his thigh holster, doing just as he was trained. Putting two rounds center mass and one in the head, the contractor dropped lifelessly to the ground, dust floating from the impacts on his chest protector, and blood filling the space his helmet once occupied.

Aidan reached into the TC to grab his rifle, wishing to avoid anymore "OK Corral"-style situations in the future. He would dwell on the gravity of what just occurred later. They still needed to create a breach lane, and those skirmishers were waiting for orders.

Jumping down from his TC hatch, Aidan chanted repeatedly into his comm helmet, "OCD, go!" The modern comm helmet was Bluetooth enabled, so the transmission should have gone through. He only hoped that in his haste to rally on his platoon, that he hadn't exceeded the range of the wireless capability.

As the ramps of the Weapons Platoon vehicles began to lower, he knew his command had met its intended audience. Two corn-fed Marines emerged from one of the ACVs—one egressing port, the other starboard. Like something out of a 1980s action flick were

firing their M27-A2 light machine guns from the hip. Had he not already known them, with all of their gear, equipment, and sheer size, Aidan would have thought them twins. The weapons that they held—like they were made of plastic—were the M27-A2, the "newest" version on the squad automatic rifle. Instead of being magazine fed like its predecessor, the A2 was able to support a 200-round drum. Looking like two goons out of some 1990s gangster flick, these two tree trunks laid down a volume of fire that would have made most 0331 machine gunners jealous. Eventually dropping to the prone position and employing their weapons systems in a doctrinal fashion, Aidan could see that there was a still a significant contingent of AST personnel rallying around what looked to be the "front gate."

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"I need that thing down ASAP," Aidan shouted to the OCD squad leader.

Nodding in the affirmative, he turned and barked some orders back into his track and three Marines came running from within the steel beast. As five 30mm cannons, with accompanying 7.63mm coaxial machine guns, continued their barrage on the AST fortifications, two Marines—one carrying two 4-foot long rods and another carrying what looked like a 7-cube rectangular box—ran into the smoke and obscuration that engulfed the center of the compound. Through the chaos, Aidan could see the first Marine thrust the two rods into the ground and then fall back behind the second Marine. The second Marine dropped his rectangular box and, pulling two cables from the 7-cube attached them to the two rods buried in the ground. Reaching back to the box, he turned a dial located on the top of the box and Aidan could feel the ground underneath him begin

to shift. This skirmisher, clearly satisfied that his equipment had survived the movement from the ship, gave a nod to his team leader and then gave the nob a full crank. Seismic technology was still relatively new, but its application in mine clearance was evident early on. The persistent problem with "earth shakers" was that there was very little stand off for the seismic projectors, so that meant that Marines had to push through enemy fire to get them in place. Needless to say, these guys relied heavily on combined arms to do their jobs. Luckily for Aidan and his OCD team, that's exactly what SSgt Washington's section was providing.

The seismic projections were focused via the two rods emplaced earlier. Depending on how they were positioned, the ground activity could either be directed toward a specific location or pulsed outward like a shock wave. In this case, the OCD team focused it directly toward the entry control point in the hopes that the rapid shifts in the foundation would force whatever held the "draw bridge" up to release its hold on the compound's entry way.

Unfortunately, the seismic activity did nothing to the reinforced ECP, but it did successfully negate the threat of the AST personnel attempting to make a final stand around the entry way. All seven of the mercs laid sprawled out, unconscious on the ground surrounding the ECP's control center. Aidan, thinking this was his moment to be a hero—run in, hit "the button" lowering the ECP's barrier, and save the day—was quickly denied as burst from one of the few remaining mercs splashed in front of his feet. Aidan dove back to his original position, realizing that whoever was left from AST was going to go to the grave to keep that bridge up.

Barking at the OCD SNCOIC, Aidan shouted, "We need something else!"

He just nodded and a Marine harnessing some sort of focused emitter came running out of their ACV. With a large metallic box draped over his shoulders supported by shoulder and belt harnesses, Aidan full well expected the Marine to start turning a crank on the side playing calliope music while a

monkey danced for loose change. The device, affixed to his chest, was supported by a harness system which went around his waist and over his shoulders. The Marine, focused solely on delivering this weapon to its desired target, ran past Aidan as if he weren't there. Experiencing the same volume of fire that Aidan was just privy to moments ago, the Marine just stood, staring forward pointing his "chest box" at the ECP. Based on the size and tint of the Marine's sunglasses, which were more like visors than sunglasses, Aidan thought that maybe the Marine wasn't able to actually see the incoming fire, thus making him seem like the most hardcore motor scooter on the battlefield. But as the box began to shake violently, launching a blinding white light of focused electromagnetic energy, Aidan realized that those glasses were not the manifestation of some weird fashion statement, but an absolute necessity in order for the Marine to employ his direct energy weapon without burning out his retinas. What appeared to be lightning flashed from the box and instantly struck the ECP's sentry station, sending a current of pulsed electromagnetic energy through all of the electrical components of the ECP's guard post and retracting bridge.

Sparks flew from control panels and junction boxes as the burst of energy short circuited the electrically powered mechanisms holding the bridge in place. The heavy passageway lurched as it became free from the ECP's hold. The safety locks attempted to keep the bridge in place, but as gravity took hold, it eventually succumbed to weight of the massive platform. Chains snapped and housing brackets were pulled from the surrounding wall. As the bridge fell with an audible "BOOM," the skirmisher, still maintaining his position in the event that the ECP required an additional volley, simply turned around and ran back to his track. Passing Aidan as he jogged by, the engineer nodded in the lieutenant's direction as if to say, "mission accomplished."

Not wanting to dwell on the odd mannerisms of the combat engineers, Aidan stood to rally with his platoon and regroup in order to prevent what



Obscuration fires began to rain on the fortified position; the northern sector was enveloped. (Photo by Cpl Paul S. Martinez.)

ever contingent of the AST personnel were left from digging in and drawing out this battle any longer. A burst from one of the remaining posts along the wall keyed Aidan to one of the locations the defenders were bunkering down. Sighting in through his weapon's optics, he could see the silhouette of multiple mercs moving within the structure. Aidan saw one of them "pie-ing" through the open entrance, and just as he squeezed the trigger of his XM8, the post exploded in a fury of sand and fire.

Embarrassingly, Aidan wondered for a brief moment, "Did I just do that?"

Before he had time to explore that train of thought, ACVs from the rest of Aidan's company began pouring in through the breach lane.

Currently ...

Aidan snapped quickly from his thoughts as Capt Prophet's voice boomed nearby.

"Hollywood!" Mack shouted as he emerged from the main entrance of the task force's ultimate operations center (or UOC).

"There you are! I've been trying to get you on the hook for an hour now, and no one seems to know where you went off to. Come on, I need those range cards, so I can get that company fire

plan sketch up to higher, and we can get those on-call targets plotted and set. Those NGO folks aren't gonna get this 'drinking fountain' going until we can ensure their safety. So I need to you get off of your good side and get your folks set in." He shouted, trying in his own way to sugar urgency with levity. "You did good here today," he added, his overt expression of praise taking Aidan back a bit. "You're my guy. I need you in the fight, so finish that 'square' and hop to it. And for God sakes, stop looking like someone just ran over your puppy."

After all that they had been through—his platoon in particular—Aidan just looked up at his company commander in disbelief. But after seeing the expression in Mack's eyes, he realized that this bravado wasn't just some misguided projection of his leadership style, but a real personification of who Mack was. Aidan regained himself, took a long drag.

"Roger that," he uttered simply, standing up and making his way back to his platoon position.

He couldn't tell if he loved to hate that guy or hated that he loved him.

USMC