

## Chapter 5

# Assault Breach

The assault breach allows a force to penetrate an enemy's protective obstacles and destroy the defender in detail. It provides a force with the mobility it needs to gain a foothold into an enemy defense and exploit success by continuing the assault through the OBJ. The assault breach is conducted by company teams and platoons assigned the mission of assaulting an OBJ as part of a larger force's attack. The nature of combat during the assault phase requires a different application of the SOSR breaching fundamentals than that used during in-stride and deliberate breaches. The TF commander still provides the company team or platoon with the support, breach, and assault assets it needs to accomplish the mission. However, he also task organizes his own support force to suppress the enemy during the breach and isolate the assault OBJ area.

Every attack ends with some form of assault unless the enemy position is destroyed by gunfire or the mission allows bypassing the position. When the enemy has a prepared defense complete with protective obstacles, conducting an assault breach becomes an implied task essential to mission accomplishment. The assault breach may be conducted to support either amounted or dismounted assault. A mounted assault is the preferred technique if the enemy is very weak. However, the commander must weigh the advantages of conducting amounted assault against the danger of sustaining heavy casualties from just a few dismounted close-range antiarmor weapons.

The company team or platoon commander plans, prepares, and executes an assault breach when the—

- Enemy has had time to prepare protective obstacles around or within its positions.
- Company team or platoon has been assigned the mission to assault an enemy's defense as part of a larger force's actions on the OBJ.

### NATURE OF THE ASSAULT

The nature of enemy fires and obstacles within a prepared defense makes the assault the most dangerous and confusing phase of any attack. The nature of the enemy defense requires the attacker to fight through extensive protective obstacles and fortifications covered by interlocking small-arms fires and close-range antiarmor weapons. Typically, a Soviet-style defender emplaces protective obstacles 50 to 500 meters in front of its positions and between its forward platoons and companies. These obstacles are designed to prevent a mounted assault and to fix or break up a dismounted

assault. Close-in obstacles are a combination of wire, AP and AT mines, fortifications, and entrenchments. All are well-covered by heavy machine-gun fires. Mines may be surface-laid but are probably buried and well-camouflaged. Mines can also be deployed with antihandling devices or can be trip-wire activated.

The attacker initiates the assault by massing overwhelming combat power at a point that cracks the integrity of the defense. Once a foothold is gained, the attacker continues the assault by seizing squad- and platoon-sized OBJs, clearing infantry trench lines, and destroying bunkers. With each OBJ, assaulting squads and platoons will encounter protective obstacles; footpath lanes are required to continue the attack. The attack quickly becomes a decentralized fight, with the momentum of the assault being carried by squad and platoon actions.

Maintaining the momentum of the assault is critical to preventing the defender from reinforcing the point of penetration. The defender knows the ground and organization of his defense and can quickly shift his fires or reposition his forces in reaction to a penetration. The assaulting force cannot afford to be fixed or delayed by protective obstacles that will allow the defender time he needs to react to the attack. Maintaining the momentum of the assault prevents the defender from having the time to effectively organize and launch a counterattack from within his position that would threaten the attacker's foothold.

The human reaction to battle and immediate enemy contact hampers the leader's ability to command and control his assaulting forces. Once lead soldiers of an assaulting platoon or squad engage, their attention becomes focused on the fires and movement of the enemy. The span of command and control of a leader in contact quickly shrinks to those forces in his immediate area of personal influence (squads and platoons). Directional control of formations becomes more difficult as assaulting squads and platoons move into, around, and through close-in obstacles and fortifications.

### ASSAULT BREACHING FUNDAMENTALS

The decentralized nature of the assault is reflected in the application of the SOSR breaching fundamentals in the assault breach. Company team and platoon assault breach planning, preparation, and execution focuses on the platoon and squad. The assault force commander allocates engineer sapper teams, breaching equipment and demolitions to squads and platoons providing breaching capability

throughout his force. A squad or fire team within a squad provides suppressive fires with their organic weapons while another squad or fire team assaults through the footpath breach. In general, the protective obstacle's close proximity to the enemy position makes it impossible to secure the breaching site by force. In short, maneuver during an assault is done by platoons with squads, and assault breaches are conducted by squads under the control of platoons.

### **Suppress**

Suppression is used during the assault breach to neutralize enemy positions bringing fires on the breaching site and to fix enemy forces attempting to reinforce the point of penetration. Effective suppression during an assault breach, therefore, occurs at two levels. The commander planning an assault must dedicate a force to focus supporting fires on subsequent OBJs. For instance, a company team commander may use his BIFVs or supporting tank platoon to attack by fire on the next platoon OBJ while his dismounted infantry assaults. The primary mission of the support force is to isolate the breach from reinforcements. The second level of suppression is provided by the assaulting force itself. The platoon encountering the obstacle executes an action-on-contact drill and returns focused volley fires on the enemy positions firing on the breaching site.

### **Obscure**

Mortars are the primary means of obscuration in the assault breach. Like suppression, smoke is used to hamper the ability of the enemy to bring effective fires on the assault breach. It also conceals the location of the breaching effort, delaying the enemy's decision to counterattack. It is difficult to use smoke to obscure enemy fires on the obstacle during the breach because of the close proximity to friendly troops. Using a combination of HE and smoke as the last rounds completed during an artillery preparation on the assault OBJ is a good technique. This establishes a haze within the OBJ, offering some obscuration to conceal the assault. Mortar smoke is then executed "on order" just before assaulting forces reach protective obstacles. If wind conditions are favorable, the support force may establish a smoke line using smoke pots. Mortar fire is shifted from the initial assault OBJ and a combination of HE and smoke or just smoke is freed on subsequent platoon OBJs. The assault force employs hand-held smoke grenades and smoke pots as part of their breaching drill.

### **Secure**

The assault breach is usually secured by fires rather than by force. An assault force breaching a protective obstacle is typically receiving intense small-arms fires from nearby enemy positions. The assault force cannot afford the time

and combat power required to bypass the obstacle and secure the far side by force. Security is achieved by heavy volumes of fire delivered by the platoon and squad weapons of the assault force in close overwatch and the support force in far overwatch. Again, the support force focuses on the far side, isolating (securing by fire) the breaching site from enemy reinforcement.

### **Reduce**

Reduction in the assault breach refers to creating dismounted lanes in protective obstacles, reducing fortifications, and widening lanes to support mounted forces. Dismounted breaches are created in protective obstacles by dismounted engineers and infantry in the assault force. The commander task organizes the assault force with sufficient assets to breach a minimum of one lane per assaulting platoon. This rule of thumb is the same for either a mounted or dismounted assault. An engineer squad supports an assaulting platoon and breaches a dismounted lane in the protective minefield while the platoon lays a base of fire.

As the platoon gains entry into the enemy's fortifications, the engineer squad splits into two sapper teams maneuvering with the two lead squads. This gives the lead squads, which are clearing a trench line, a dedicated force to neutralize booby traps and destroy enemy fortifications and equipment.

## **ENGINEER INTEGRATION INTO THE ASSAULT FORCE**

Engineers contribute to the assault in four major areas. They—

- Conduct decentralized obstacle reduction to maintain the mobility of the assault force and momentum of the attack.
- Reduce fortifications with demolitions, making them unusable by enemy forces.
- Widen initial assault breaches to permit follow-on mounted forces to move on or through the OBJ.
- Hand over assault lanes to follow-on forces for widening and for improved marking.

Engineers are integrated into the assault force to provide decentralized, responsive support at the lowest possible level within assault forces. This is a sharp contrast to the in-stride and deliberate breach, where engineer platoons operate as a unit under the control of the platoon leader. Limited visibility, concentrated direct and indirect fires, and the confusion of dismounting and assaulting an OBJ all hamper command and control. There is insufficient time and command and control at the probable line of deployment (PLD) to reorganize engineers and other equipment for an assault breach. Therefore, engineers supporting an assault force move already task organized; engineer squads move mounted or dismounted as part of the infantry platoon they

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will support. When dismounted, the assault force commander may choose to have his engineer squads split into sapper teams, each moving with a squad. However, this may reduce responsiveness at the breach as the two sapper teams link up to effect a breach in a minefield.

After breaching footpath lanes through protective obstacles, engineers and assault platoons continue to fight through the defensive position. At this point engineers are decentralized, with sapper teams supporting the squads. The sapper team moves directly behind the clearing team. It assists in neutralizing bunkers using bangalore torpedoes, pole and satchel charges, and combat demolition charges (primed blocks of composition 4 explosives (C4) or trinitrotoluene (TNT) carried in rucksacks or demolition bags). The sapper team uses its M203 to mark bunker targets for supporting CEVs. As the clearing team neutralizes each bunker, the engineers destroy the bunker and equipment. If the clearing team encounters booby traps, the sapper team is in a position to quickly respond. When assaulting in military operations on urbanized terrain (MOUT) the sapper team uses demolitions to assist the clearing team in gaining entry through walls, doors, floors, roofs, and so forth.

### CONSOLIDATION

The final stage in the assault is improving the initial lanes through protective obstacles to allow follow-on mounted or dismounted forces to penetrate the position and attack the next OBJ. The assaulting engineer plans to hand lanes over to follow-on engineer forces as soon as possible. The follow-on engineer then widens and marks the lane to help guide the passing unit to and through the lanes. Dismounted engineers from the follow-on force travel immediately behind the assault force to begin their tasks without delay.

During consolidation of the assault force, the priority of engineer effort is to mark lanes and bypassed minefields in order to help with consolidation and passage of follow-on forces. This is an extremely important phase. In the aftermath of an assault, forces are scattered throughout the OBJ. Consolidation is critical to reestablishing command and control as well as effecting casualty evacuation and resupply. A force's ability to move within the OBJ with little risk of sustaining additional mine casualties depends on well-marked breaching lanes and bypasses. Furthermore, forces carrying the fight to the next OBJ must be able to quickly move through and around protective obstacles and initiate their own assault with command and control intact.

### HEAVY COMPANY TEAM ASSAULT BREACH SCENARIO

The TF commander designates Team A as the TF assault force for the TF deliberate breach (see *Figure 5-1, page 5-4*). Team A's mission is to attack to seize OBJ Green. The team

is task organized with two mechanized platoons, one tank platoon, and a platoon of mechanized engineers. The situation template indicates an MRP-sized force in a well-prepared defense on OBJ Green, complete with protective obstacles and entrenchments. Team A's commander plans and prepares his company team to conduct an assault breach as part of his actions on the OBJ.

Team A assaults through the lanes in the enemy tactical obstacles and begins its assault on OBJ Green. When Team A reaches its PLD, the tank platoon immediately begins volley fire on OBJs Green 1 and 2. Each of the two infantry platoons arrives at the PLD already organized with a mechanized engineer squad that maneuvers as part of the platoon formation. As the infantry and engineers dismount, the engineers split into two sapper teams, and each of them joins a squad formation. The BIFVs from the 2nd Platoon join the tanks as a support force suppressing OBJs Green 1 and 2. The other platoon's BIFV provides overwatch for the dismounted assault. As the preparation fires lift, Team A (minus) begins its assault the support force shifts fires to OBJs Green 2 and 3.

The lead platoon encounters a mine and wire obstacle and is engaged by heavy machine-gun fire. Using his own tracer fire, the 1st Platoon leader directs the fires of two squads and an M60 machine gun. An M203 red smoke designates the target for the overmatching BIFVs to suppress. The sapper team sets charges on the POMZ-2M AP mines and breaches a footpath through the mines and wire. The platoon leader gives the command for one of his squads to assault through the lane and gain entry into the trench. Before the enemy has time to shift forces, OBJ Green 1 is cleared by the 1st Platoon. The 2nd Platoon moves through OBJ Green 1 with its attached engineer squad split into sapper teams. These teams then breach into the next trench work and clear OBJ Green 2.

### LIGHT-HEAVY TASK FORCE ASSAULT BREACH SCENARIO

TF Light has the mission to attack to seize OBJ Zulu as the brigade's initial main effort. The brigade and TF intelligence collection confirms that the enemy on OBJ Zulu is an MRC (plus) defending from well-fortified positions. The TF S2 and engineer revise their template based on the available hard intelligence. TF Light is task organized with two light infantry companies (A and B), a tank-heavy team (Team Tank), and a light-heavy engineer team (Team Sapper).

The TF Light commander and staff develop several COAs. After considerable war-gaming, the commander adopts a COA as his scheme of maneuver (see *Figure 5-2, page 5-5*). TF Light infiltrates Companies A and B to an assault position using the infiltration lane. Team Tank attacks on Axis Strike and occupies ABF position 07, orienting on OBJ 1. Company B occupies ABF position 08, orienting on OBJ 1, while

Company A assaults OBJ 1 (main effort). Team Tank shifts fires to OBJs 2 and 3 as Company A crosses PL Bayonet. On order, Company B passes through OBJ 1 and becomes the main effort assaulting OBJ 2; Team Tank shifts fires to OBJ 3. On order, Team Tank passes through OBJs 1 and 2 and seizes OBJ 3.

Based on the situation template and TF scheme of maneuver, the engineer recommends organizing Companies A and B for an assault breach. A light engineer platoon is attached to both Companies A and B. Team Tank is task organized with a heavy engineer platoon to provide mobility along Axis Strike and to breach enemy tactical obstacles into OBJ 1.

Company A's mission is to seize OBJ 1 to gain a foothold for the TF attack on OBJ Zulu. To accomplish the mission, Company A must assault breach the enemy's protective obstacles, gain entry into the enemy trench line, and defeat the MRP in detail. The company commander plans to simultaneously assault OBJs 1A and 1B with the 1st and 2nd Platoons respectively. This enables him to exploit the element of surprise and rapidly gain entry into OBJ 1 (see Figure 5-3). The 3rd Platoon attacks by fire and "on order" attacks through OBJ 1B to seize OBJ 1C. The commander cannot afford the delay of a deliberate breach at the protective minefield; he chooses to task organize each of his platoons with a light engineer squad for an assault breach.

The company's mortars will establish a firing position at PL Bayonet.

The commander of Company A coordinates his assault breach plan with Team Tank, Company B, and the TF FSO. He knows that artillery fires will shift from OBJ 1 when he crosses PL Bayonet. The commander coordinates with the FSO for the mortars to fire a combination of HE and smoke on OBJ 1 as artillery fires lift. These mortar fires obscure and suppress the enemy during his assault breach. He coordinates with Team Tank and Company B to concentrate their fires on any enemy movement in OBJs 2 or 3 threatening a counterattack on OBJ 1.

The commander focuses his unit's breaching preparations at the platoon level. The engineer platoon links up early, attends the OPORD, and cross-trains breach and bunker-reduction drills with the infantry squads. The engineer platoon leader constructs an AP and AT minefield similar to the one encountered in a previous attack for platoon rehearsals. One platoon arranges itself in a defensive position while the other platoons rehearse their assault breach and trench-clearing drills. All rehearsals are conducted by combined arms. Engineer squads are included in platoon rehearsals of actions on contact, actions on the OBJ, and casualty evacuation. With platoon rehearsals complete, the commander receives a final back brief from key leaders and conducts a company rehearsal.

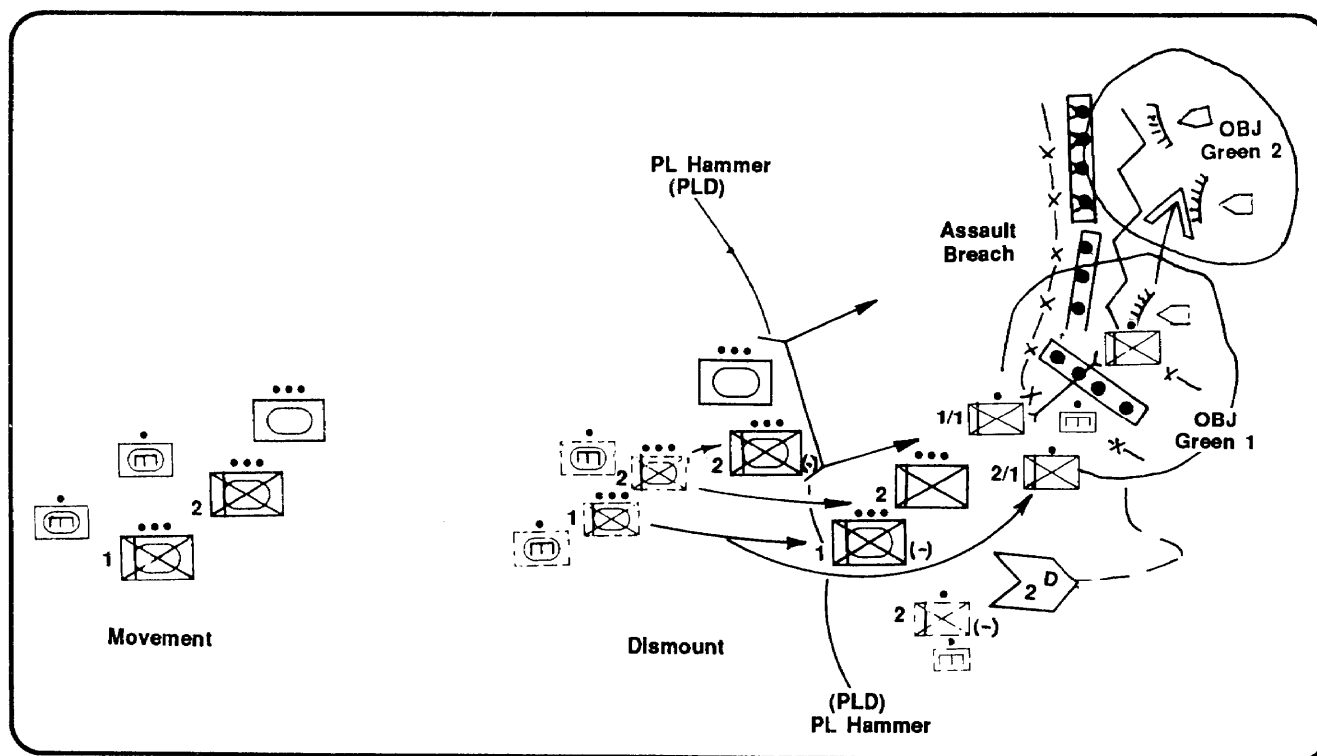


Figure 5-1. Assault breach by a heavy company team.

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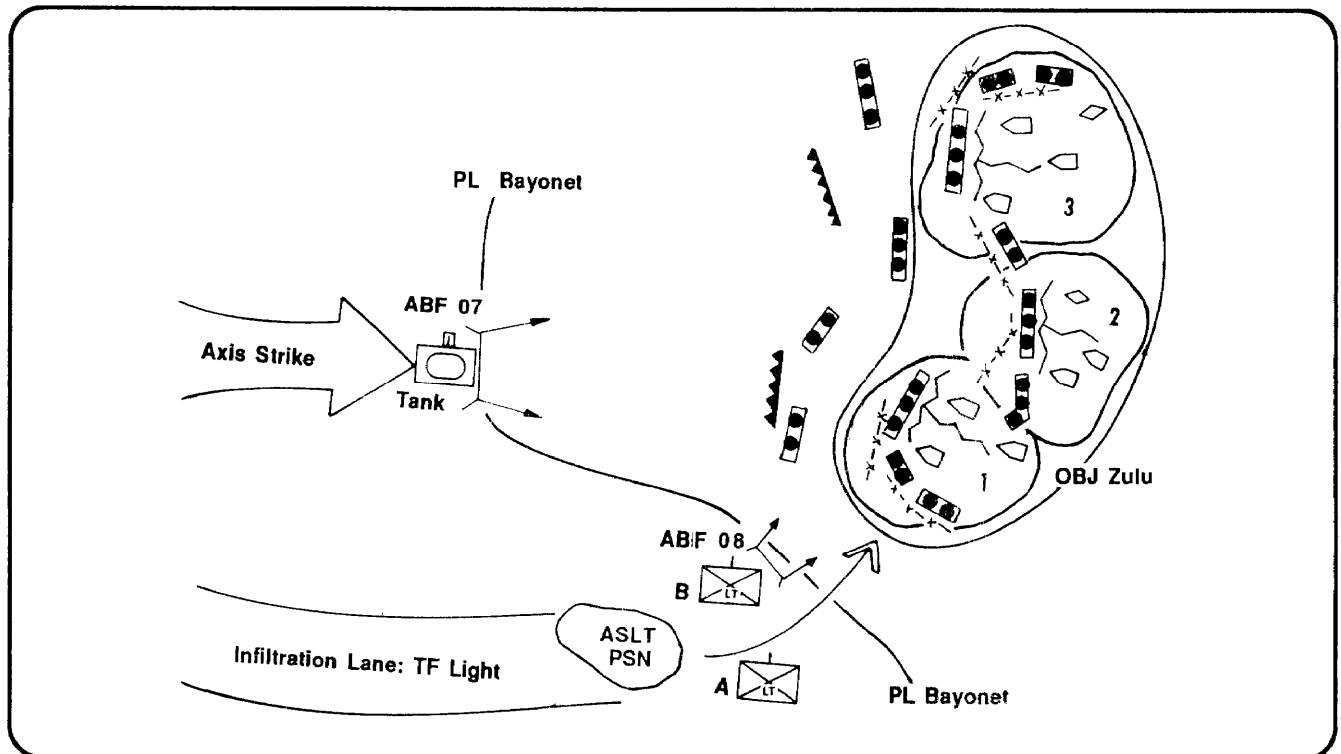


Figure 5-2. Assault breach by a light-heavy task force.

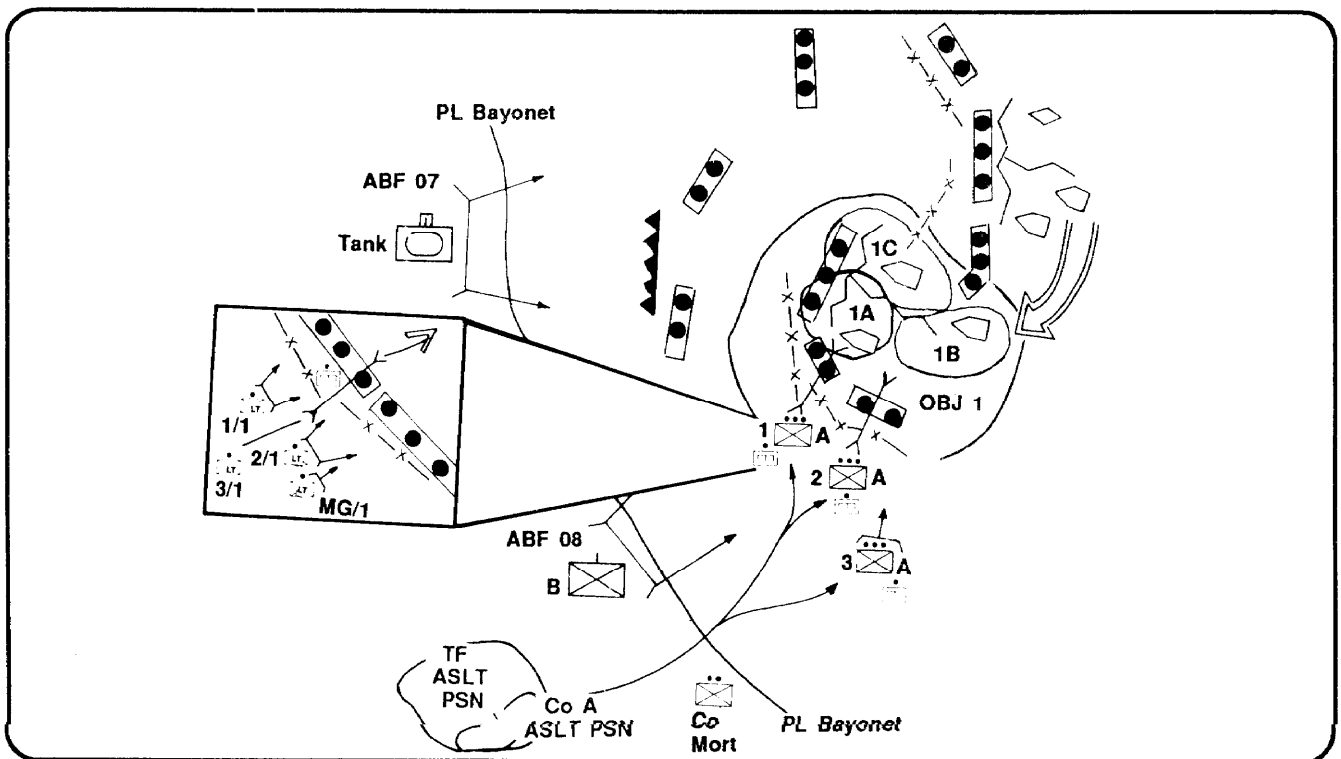


Figure 5-3. Company A's scheme of maneuver and assault breach plan.