Chapter 6

Covert Breach

The success of a light or light-heavy attack depends on the ability of the commander to conserve his combat power for decisive action. He must protect his force from the enemy's fires while he maneuvers them into a position from which he can launch a violent assault. Stealth, surprise, and an assault with overwhelming forces are critical to the maneuver plan. Light and light-heavy breaching operations, therefore, must achieve stealth and surprise. The breach must support the force infiltrating through enemy tactical obstacles and passing dismounted infantry through protective obstacles. The breaching response is the covert breach.

The covert breach is a special breaching operation used by dismounted forces during limited visibility. It is silently executed to achieve surprise and to minimize casualties. The covert breach relies on stealth, quiet manual lane-reduction techniques, and dismounted maneuver. The TF commander plans to conduct a covert breach when his mission specifies infiltration through enemy forward, lightly defended obstacles to attack an objective deeper in the enemy's sector. The commander may also use the covert breach during an assault when the need for surprise outweighs the need for overwhelming suppression. The covert breach may support amounted attack. In this case, the force conducting a covert breach creates and secures lanes designed for follow-on mechanized forces.

The covert breach applies some characteristics of in-stride, deliberate, and assault breaching operations; however, the planning and execution of SOSR breaching fundamentals are significantly different. Because of these differences, the covert breach is planned as a separate type of breaching operation. Only through distinct separation from the other breaching operations can the covert breach be planned and executed properly.

The breaching tactics and techniques presented thus far have focused on immediate application of overwhelming combat power at the point of enemy resistance over an obstacle. The covert breach, however, takes advantage of surprise to prepare lanes and position support and assault forces without drawing enemy attention. This delays enemy resistance until after lanes are opened and the assault is launched.

The covert breach supports the element of surprise. Breaching the enemy's obstacles without being detected allows the force to bypass enemy resistance or to assault at an unexpected time and place. The covert breach is ideally suited for the light forces. The disadvantage alight force has in combat power is overcome through employing the principle of surprise. Through surprise, the commander conceals his own capabilities and intentions and creates the opportunity to strike the enemy unaware or unprepared.

The commander chooses to conduct a covert breach when—

- Undetected movement is key to infiltrating through enemy tactical obstacles and forward defenses.
- Surprise is essential for breaching enemy protective obstacles and assaulting enemy positions.
- Surprise is essential for breaching enemy tactical obstacles to support a follow-on mounted attack.
- Limited visibility and terrain present the opportunity to silently reduce enemy obstacles.
- Overwhelming combat power is not required to support the breach for an assault.

COVERT BREACHING FUNDAMENTALS

The main difference in the covert breach and other breaching operations is the execution of the SOSR breaching fundamentals. The TF commander task organizes his force to support breach, and assault the obstacle. In the covert breach, suppression from the support force is a "be prepared" task upon detection of the breach force or "on order" with initiation of the assault. Execution of man-made obscuration is an on-order task that supports the breach force if it is detected. Security is achieved through stealth. Combat forces are positioned to secure the breaching sites by observation. This provides breach, assault, and support forces with early warning of enemy detection. With the need for stealth outweighing the need for speed, the breach force reduces the obstacle.

A force executing a covert breach for a mounted attack must mark, secure, and guard the lanes until the assault. They should be organized into breach, assault, and support forces. The principal mission of the assault force in this case is to move through and guard lanes for the attacking force.

Suppress

Suppression is always planned for the covert breach. Since surprise is essential until the assault suppressive fires are on-call and only executed when the—

- Lanes are open and the assault is initiated. Supporting fires provide suppression to isolate the assaulted objective.

- Covert breach is discovered in mid-breach. In this situation, suppression must be rapid, violent, and powerful enough to allow the covert breach force to complete the breach or to disengage and change breaching locations.
- Covert breach force completes lane reduction and detonates the charges to clear mines and obstacles in the lanes, signaling direct and indirect suppressive fires for the assault through the obstacle.

Obscure

Obscuration is a necessary condition for covert breaching, whether it is natural or man-made. Covert breaches are best conducted during naturally reduced visibility such as darkness, snowfall, rain, or fog. Under these conditions, thickening the reduced visibility with artificial smoke can cause adequate obscuration without arousing suspicion. This must be done with great care. A sudden application of smoke on a breaching site attracts more attention and enemy fires than an unobscured dismounted breaching attempt. Recurring interdictory artillery fires and smoke on several potential breaching sites can build complacency over a period of days. It trains the enemy to accept the necessary condition of obscuration without abnormal alertness or suspicion of covert breaching attempts. Normally natural obscuration is used. However, smoke must be planned for and available in case the breaching attempt is discovered.

Secure

Security is provided by a portion of the breach force that is organized into a security team. The function of the security team is to cover the withdrawal of the reduction team if it is discovered. If the obstacle is protected by outposts, the security team may silently eliminate them before the breach is attempted. The security team may also establish ambushes to guard against enemy patrols and engage them at a distance from the breaching effort. Deception can also play a major role in securing a covert breaching effort. If a feint or demonstration attack is launched against another defending unit, it can attract attention away from a covert breach. Securing the passage of the force is accomplished by guarding the lanes once they have been completed. This can be done by a large security force on the enemy side of the obstacle, but it generally consists of establishing a well-hidden observation post (OP) to watch the lane until the attack. The OP provides warning if the enemy discovers the lane.

Reduce

The obstacle is reduced by using silent techniques such as—

- Marking mines.
- Cutting wire.
- Cutting down the sides of an AT ditch with shovels.
- Setting explosive charges and waiting to detonate them at a predetermined signal.

The size and organization of the breach force depends on the maneuver mission the covert breach supports. For the covert breach supporting an infiltration, engineer support is often decentralized to support the infiltrating elements. If a covert breach supports the assault on a defensive position, engineers are consolidated under centralized control to reduce protective obstacles. Because surprise and undetected movement are critical, only the breach force consisting of breach and security elements are forward at the obstacle. The assault force is held back until the lanes are open. Once lanes are open, the breach force guides the assault force through.

The commander must be prepared to transition to an assault breach if the covert breach is detected. Assault platoons would then move forward to the breaching site and control transitions to decentralized execution, as in an assault breach.

The need to maintain silence during the breach increases the difficulty and the time required. The breach force must plan to begin reducing obstacles early enough to accomplish the breach in time for the assault and must also plan for the additional equipment required to execute a quicker, alternate breach in case the covert breach fails.

The number and width of lanes depends on the composition of the assault force that will pass through the obstacle. A minimum of one lane is required for each dismounted assault platoon. If the covert breach supports a mounted attack, then two lanes per passing TF are required. It is important to have a carefully arranged lane-marking and reporting system. The work of the covert breach force must be accurately conveyed to follow-on units.

TASK FORCE COVERT BREACH

The TF is the principal unit to conduct a covert breach. The covert breach requires a level of detailed planning, intelligence collection, and command and control that is beyond the capability of a company. On the other hand, a brigade is simply too large to maintain the level of stealth necessary to conduct a covert breach. The TF combines the detailed planning afforded by a well-trained combined arms staff, the command and control of a seasoned commander, and flexibility of the company team.

Planning

The TF commander will organize his lead company to conduct a covert breach during the infiltration to quickly overcome unexpected or lightly defended obstacles that cannot be bypassed. The TF commander will allocate the necessary resources to the lead infiltrating company. The

company commander is then responsible for synchronizing the SOSR breaching fundamentals applied to the covert breach. The TF commander uses the characteristics of an in-stride breach to organize for the covert breach.

The force planning the covert breach must analyze the METT-T conditions to determine when a covert breach is practical. The mission must allow sufficient time for deliberate planning, preparation, and reconnaissance. Limited visibility provides the optimum conditions for execution of a covert breach. Terrain must provide concealment for movement to the breaching sites.

Reconnaissance, as in any attack, is key to the covert breaching operation. Reconnaissance must confirm the plan to move undetected to breaching locations, select the most favorable breach and assault locations, confirm the support force location, and complete all requirements undetected.

Preparing

Preparation for a covert breach involves the same procedures as other breaching operations. It becomes more critical in a covert breach, since synchronization of SOSR breaching fundamentals can be based on a primary and/or a contingency plan.

Preparation in the assembly area for covert breaching should include practice to hone platoon battle drills as well as company team and TF breaching actions. The unit preparing to conduct a covert breach rehearses against the expected obstacles in similar terrain and conditions. Rehearsals include all key leaders of the combined arms team. The rehearsal includes the following plans: covert reduction undetected, actions to be taken if covert reduction is detected in midbreach (especially fire control measures), and possible transition to assault breach.

In the assembly area, the force distributes and prepares breach-specific equipment: wire cutters, cloth to muffle the sound of wire being cut, probes, mine markers, lane marking material, and backup breaching equipment for a failed covert breach. They review SOP items such as lane marking, signals, and code words to ensure that all personnel are familiar with them. The PCI is a critical event during preparation. The commander uses the inspection to ensure that subordinates know the plan and what to do if they are detected. The commander looks at broken equipment and removes or ties down any equipment that creates noise. This prevents detection of the breach, support, and assault force activities at the obstacle.

TASK FORCE COVERT BREACH SCENARIO

The TF commander receives the mission from the brigade to conduct a passage of lines and infiltrate to destroy an MRC (minus) defending OBJ Red. The TF must seize OBJ Red under the cover of darkness and be able to pass TF Mech through to the brigade OBJ. The enemy's first echelon is less than 50-percent strength and constitutes the limited forward hasty defense. Based on the situation template, the commander expects only a COP with supporting tactical obstacles along his infiltration lane. The infiltration lane offers restricted terrain up to OBJ Red. OBJ Red is a choke point defended by an MRC (minus) continuing to prepare its positions. The commander has 36 hours to conduct planning and reconnissance before the attack.

The TF commander sends his scouts and combat patrols out on reconnaissance missions that evening. The scouts infiltrate into OBJ Red and report that MRC (minus) has emplaced extensive protective obstacles around its position. The scouts also reconnoiter the infiltration lanes and report that all lanes provide excellent concealment into OBJ Red.

The commander develops a plan that is designed to achieve surprise. The cover of darkness and restricted terrain enable the force to infiltrate into support and assault positions to attack a flank of OBJ Red. In order to maintain the surprise of the attack, the commander must use a covert breach against the enemy's protective obstacles. The commander masses his engineers in the breach force. The breach force must also have infantry to establish security around the breaching site while engineers execute silent breaches in the wire and AP minefield. The support and assault forces are prepared to execute their missions if the breach is detected. Once the lanes are open, the assault force moves through the lanes and assaults the OBJ Red. Simultaneously, the support force opens fire to support the assault (see *Figure 6-1, page 6-4)*.

The light TF begins its attack by conducting a passage of lines and infiltration. Companies A and B are in the south, and Company C (minus) is in the north. The scouts locate bypasses of the COP obstacles and position themselves in both the north and south. Companies A and C (minus) are prepared to conduct a covert breach of unexpected obstacles or of the COP obstacles, if required during the infiltration. The commander attaches the engineer platoon (minus) to Company A (initially the main effort) for the covert breach of OBJ 1 and the assault to secure OBJ 1. The commander attaches one engineer squad to Company B. Company C (minus), the support force, has no engineer support and organizes its elements into support, breach, and assault forces for the infiltration.

The brigade has been conducting interdictory fires, smoke, and illumination the previous two nights and continues these fires during the TF infiltration. Company C (minus) occupies the ABF position as Companies A and B move into the assault position. Interdictory fires lift as Company A moves forward out of the assault position to begin the breach. Because the interdictory fires have been sporadic, lifting and shifting to surrounding positions do not create enemy suspicion.

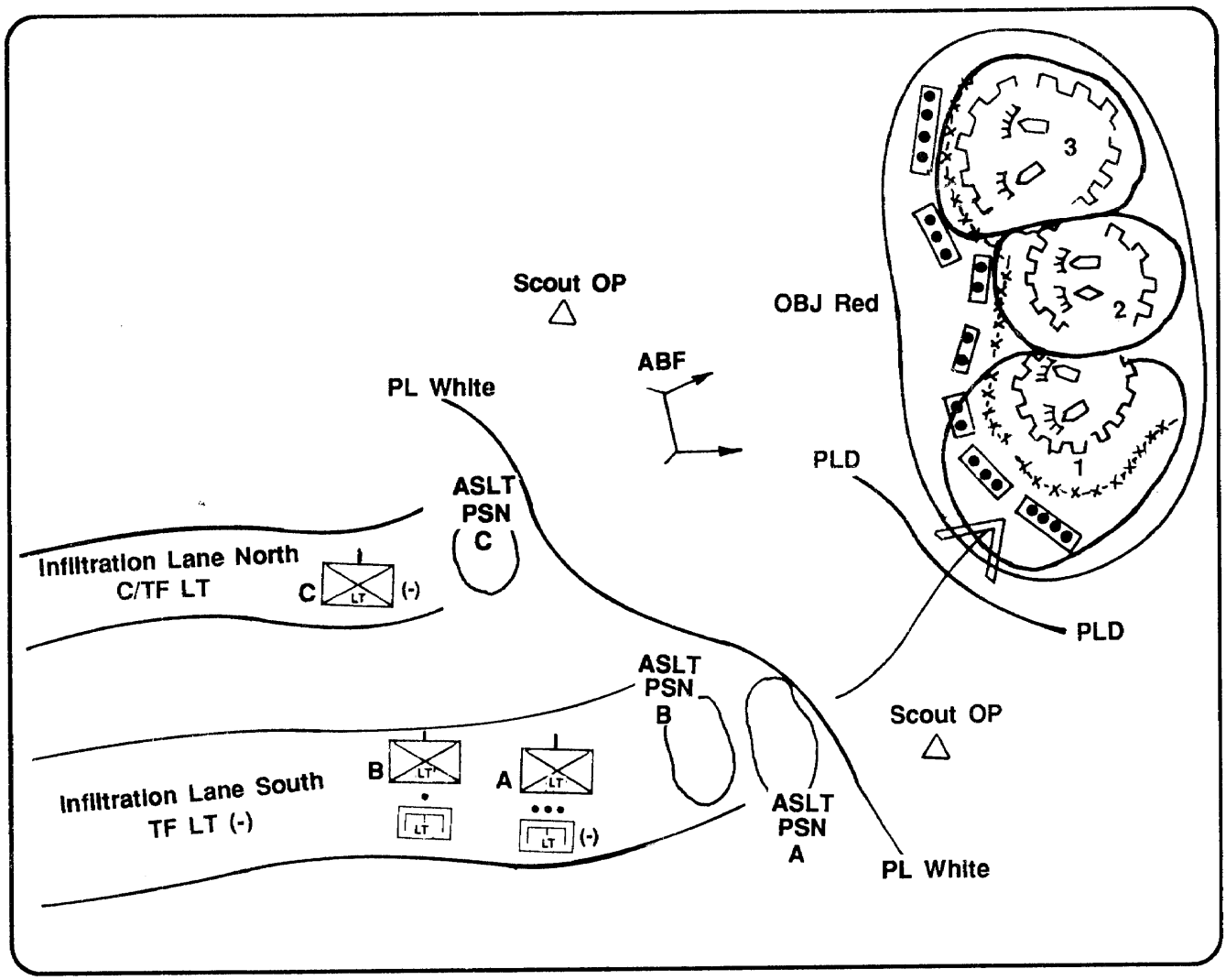

Figure 6-1. Light task force scheme of maneuver.

Company A moves out of the assault position to the selected breaching location (see *Figure 6-2).* Company A organizes its forces into a breach and security force consisting of two engineer squads and an infantry platoon and an assault force of two infantry platoons. The breach force reduces the protective obstacles in two locations separated by 50 meters. The engineers probe a path through the minefield and cut the wire. They position bangalore torpedoes short of the breaching sites as a contingency for a failed covert branch. Company C (minus) is prepared to execute direct and indirect fires and smoke on OBJs 2 and 3 to isolate OBJ 1 if the covert breach is detected. The assault on OBJ 1 initiates direct and indirect fires and smoke on OBJs 2 and 3 from Company C (minus). After Company A secures OBJ 1, support fires lift and Company B passes through Company A to seize OBJs 2 and 3.

One engineer squad remains at OBJ 1 breaching sites to guide Company B through. The other engineer squad assaults with Company A to provide engineer support on the OBJ. Company B's engineer squad provides assault breach and demolition support on OBJs 2 and 3.

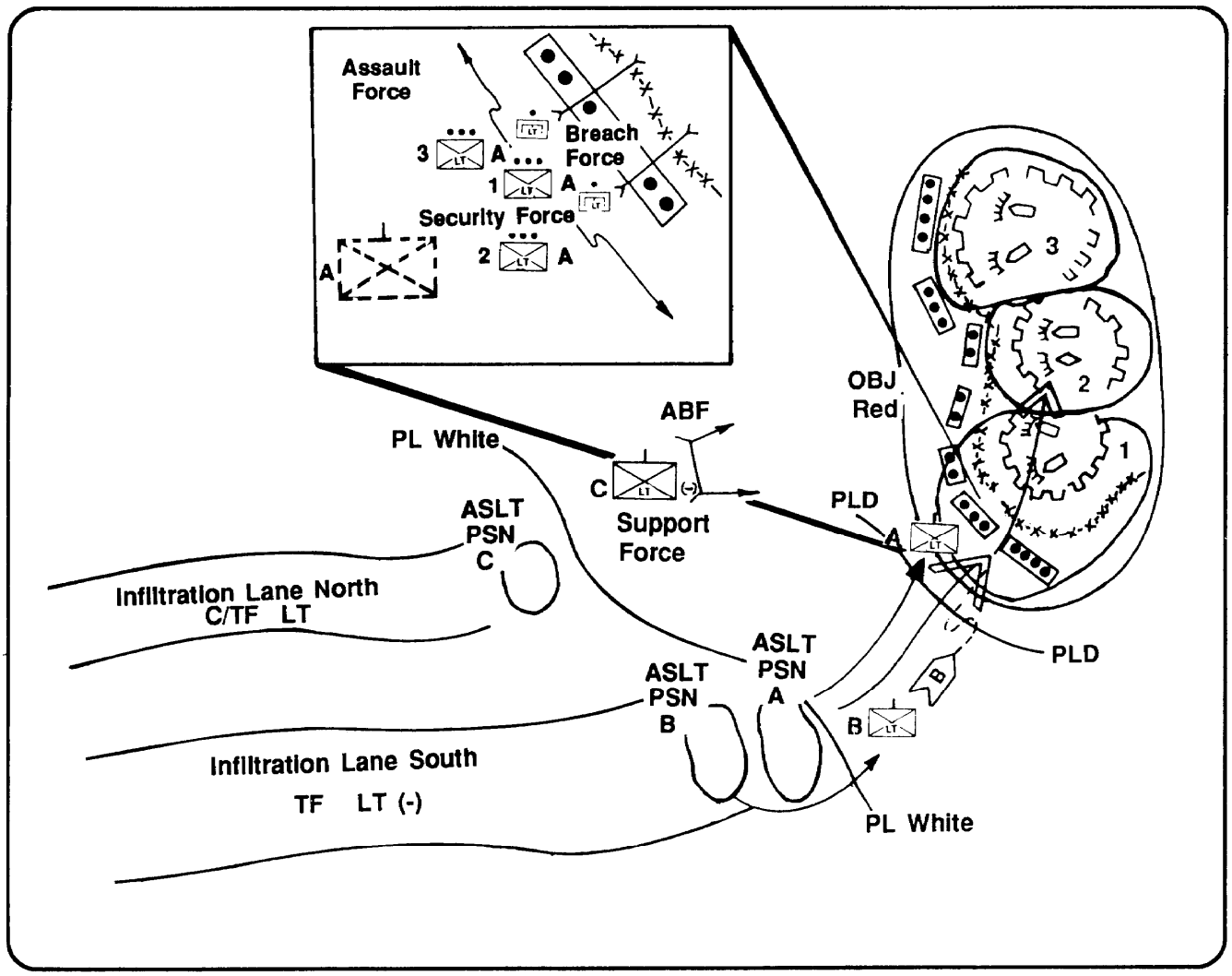

Figure 6-2. Light task force covert breach execution.