

The Gates of Fire

by the Officers of 1st Battalion,
6th Marines

Orientation

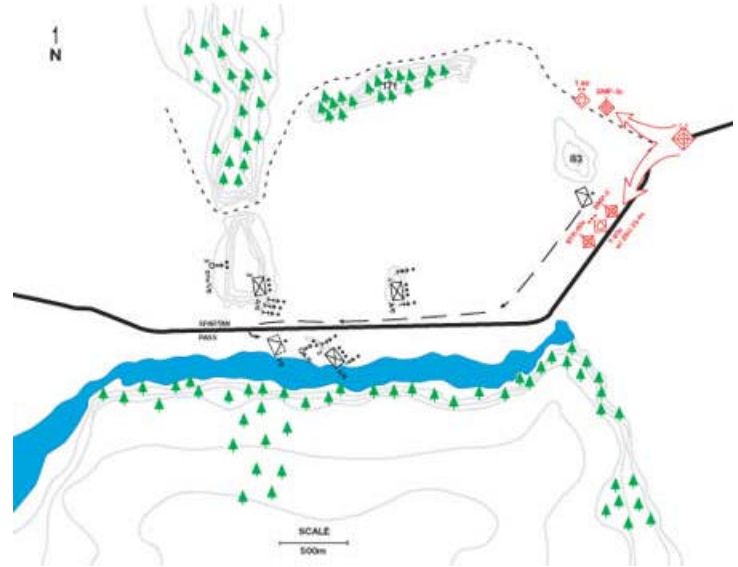
You are the Company Commander, Company A (Reinforced), 1st Battalion, 6th Marines. One combined antiarmor team (CAAT) squad, one Javelin squad, a section of the 81mm mortar platoon, and a section of AH-1s are in general support of your company. The battalion moved into Kurdistan yesterday in accordance with the 6th Marine Regiment's mission of securing two forward operating bases for the 2d Marine Division's use in the impending double envelopment of Iraq by forces driving in from Turkey and other forces coming up the Persian Gulf coast from Kuwait.

Your company was inserted by helicopter at Spartan Pass—30 miles from the Kurdistan border with Iraq—this morning to secure it in support of the battalion's unimpeded movement southeast toward the Iraq-Kurdistan border. The pass itself is oriented east to west, covering approximately 300 meters in length and 400 meters in width from north to south. On the north side is a vertical face 50 meters high followed by a rocky slope that climbs 250 meters and then evens out in an extensive north to south ridgeline. The south side is marked by a steep ravine 50 meters in depth and 200 meters in width that parallels the main supply route (MSR) for over 3,000 meters. Two hundred meters to the east of Spartan Pass, on the south side, is a small knoll, while 300 meters farther east, on the north side of the MSR, is a rocky hill that is 100 meters high. This hill is nicknamed Persian Point. To the north and northeast of Persian Point are two more substantial hills. The one directly north of Persian Point is Hill 171. The hill to the northeast of Persian Point is Hill 83. Heavy forests cover Hill 171 and begin about 500 meters to both sides of Spartan Pass on the north to south ridgeline. The low-lying terrain is covered with scrub vegetation and washouts on both sides of the MSR. Cover can be found among the rocky outcroppings of the high ground; concealment can be achieved by using washouts and the vertical terrain features to mask and/or break up movement. Visibility is over 10 kilometers from the high ground and 4 to 5 kilometers in low-lying areas, depending on your position.

Situation

You were inserted at the pass 2 hours ago. The CAAT immediately punched forward to the vicinity of Hill 83 to set up its screening position. By direction of the S-3 (operations), you occupied the point shown on the map with your rifle platoons. At Hill 83, the Javelin squad set up to support a rifle platoon and its attached machinegun squad. On the north side of Spartan Pass you attached two assault squads and a machinegun squad to another rifle platoon. Two hundred meters to the east of Spartan Pass, behind the knoll on the south side of the MSR, you set up your 60mm mortar section and attached an assault squad and one machinegun squad to the rifle platoon setting in there. The 81mm mortar section set up on the west side of Spartan Pass using the north to south ridgeline to provide defilade concealment.

An hour after you were inserted, the CAAT reported a sizable dust cloud moving your way. They were unable to make out any vehicles or the size of the formation. You request, through your assigned forward air controller, that the AH-1s be launched. By the time the AH-1s arrived—approximately 30 minutes later—CAAT was able to report that a reinforced Iraqi mechanized



Assets

Rifle company. Table of organization strength to include one AT-4 per fire team and 800 rounds for each squad automatic weapon. The machinegun section has 4,000 rounds of 7.62mm ammunition. The assault section has two shoulder launched multipurpose assault weapon rockets per team and one demolition kit per squad. Your 60mm mortar section has 100 high-explosive (HE) rounds, 20 rounds of white phosphorous, and 20 rounds of illumination ammunition.

CAAT squad. Includes two heavy machinegun (HMG) trucks and two TOW trucks. Each TOW truck has seven missiles. The HMG trucks have 1,000 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition and 240 rounds of 40mm HE each. Three Marines man each truck with one AN/VRC-88 per vehicle.

Javelin squad. Includes one command and launch unit per team and two MSRMs per team (four MSRMs total). Additionally, the Javelin squad has one demolition kit and one AN/PRC-119F.

81mm mortar section. Includes four tubes with 200 rounds of HE, 30 rounds of red phosphorous, and 30 rounds of illumination ammunition. Additionally, the section has 2 M240G machineguns with 800 rounds total. The section has two AN/PRC-119As, an AN/PRC-119F, and an OE-254.

AH-1W section. Each gunship has two TOW missiles, two full pods of 2.75-inch rockets, and a full complement of chain gun ammunition.

battalion, in battle formation, was moving toward your position from the east. The enemy formation seemed to include two companies of BMP-2s (Soviet mechanized infantry vehicles), a company of BTR-60s (Soviet armored vehicles), and a reinforced platoon of T-80s (six tanks) with two ZSU 23-4s (Soviet self-propelled anti-aircraft guns) about 10 clicks away. One click in front of this formation is a reinforced platoon of BRDM-2s (Soviet combat reconnaissance patrol vehicles) with AT-5 missiles mounted on them. You had just radioed in a situation report to the battalion when a 5-minute barrage of 152mm artillery shells hits Spartan Pass. When the dust clears, no one is hurt, but the OE-254 you had at your command post has been destroyed, and you cannot raise the battalion on the radio. As you try to relay information to the 81mm mortar section to pass to the battalion, you hear multiple explosions to the east. CAAT comes up on the radio and reports that they have destroyed the BRDM-2 platoon with five TOW shots but are pulling back because they are taking anti-tank fire from the BMP-2s that are within 4,000 meters of the CAAT's position. You are concerned, but you feel confident that you can canalize the enemy and hold him if you can get more air support.

Situation Update

As CAAT withdraws into Spartan Pass, the enemy formation splits at Hill 83. The company of BTR-60s, a platoon of T-80s with the ZSU 23-4s, and a company of BMP-2s head toward Spartan Pass by way of the MSR. More disconcerting is the company of BMP-2s heading north of Hill 83 toward Hill 171. The Cobras report seeing a 50-meter wide cut in the ridgeline about 500 meters north of your position at Spartan Pass that you hadn't been able to see from the approach to the pass. A quick look at your map reveals no cut, but you know that it is there. To make matters worse, the Cobras think they have spotted an old dirt lane that leads from the cut to the north side of Hill 171.

No one expected a preemptive Iraqi attack. You now face an attack by a superior mechanized force moving down two separate avenues of approach, and you don't have reliable communications with the battalion. If you don't hold here, the timeline for the entire buildup and invasion will be thrown off.

Requirement

In a time limit of 10 minutes, come up with your scheme of maneuver, fire support plan, and tasks for your subordinate units. Provide an overlay of your scheme of maneuver with the rationale for your actions.