

TACTICAL DECISION GAME

SCENARIO: RAID GONE BAD

Lieutenant-Colonel Matthew Rolls

You are 9 Platoon Commander, M Company (Coy), 3rd Battalion (Bn), The Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR). Your platoon is organized as a light infantry platoon with three rifle sections and a weapons section. You have also had an additional weapons section with two modern medium-range anti-armour weapons from your company's weapons platoon attached to your operational command (OPCOM).

3 RCR has been operating in the complex terrain areas of Atropia for several months now. Earlier today, 3 RCR seized three crossing points over a major river obstacle to allow an allied formation to conduct a forward passage of lines. M Coy seized one of those crossings. Delays have meant that the formation is not expected to begin its crossing for another 24 hours, so M Coy has consolidated to protect the crossing and is now conducting defensive routine. The officer commanding (OC)'s efforts to turn M Coy's position into a coherent defence are being hamstrung by the requirement to reorganize following the attack and conduct casualty evacuation, in addition to the fact that he is doing it in the dark. As you are preparing your position, you spot the Coy Second-in-command approaching.

"33," he calls, "OC wants to see you about a task. Coy command post ASAP."

You grab your map, field message book and signaller and head for the command post. When you arrive you find the OC,

the Company Sergeant-Major, and the Coy's Forward Observation Officer (FOO) gathered around the small screen connected to an uncrewed aircraft system (UAS). Peering at the screen between their shoulders, you can see two enemy tanks in a clearing.

"33, I've got a task for you," says the OC. "As you know, our task here is to retain this crossing to enable the forward passage of lines of the following allied formation. Due to unforeseen events, this has been delayed, and I don't expect lead elements of that formation for at least another 24 hours. This presents the enemy with a great opportunity to disrupt our crossing. Also, I don't expect M Coy to be defensible until final preparations are made after first light, about 12 hours from now. The rest of the Bn is in a similar situation to us, with them also consolidating on their respective crossings to enable the formation to cross once they're ready."

The OC continues, "A few minutes ago Golf detected these two enemy T-55s in a clearing not far from here. The UAS has a few more minutes on station, and I'll let you sit with Golf shortly to start filling your info gaps." You look intently at the screen, trying to discern other enemy in the location and what the terrain looks like, as the OC speaks: "I suspect that these two tanks are making ready to launch a counterattack on our position, probably for first light. I can't allow this threat to the crossing to exist, particularly before we're ready for it."

The OC then turns to look you directly in the eyes and says, “33, your mission is to destroy this enemy to protect M Coy’s defensive preparations and the crossing of the multinational formation. I say again....” The OC repeats the mission, and you acknowledge your assigned task. The OC continues, “I think you can leverage the coverage of darkness and the dense vegetation to your advantage to close with the old T-55s. I’m going to attach one of the sections from the Coy’s weapons platoon to you for this task OPCOM. However, I don’t have much else to offer. The Brigade is not currently the main effort, and the air situation is not favourable for close air support. The UAS has only a few more minutes left on station. I’ll let you sit with Golf, then come back to me to confirm you understand your task and with any questions or requests you might have.”

You plunk yourself down with the FOO as the UAS completes a final revolution of the objective and begins its return. The T-55s appear to be staged in an open area along the route, and there were no indications of the crews’ locations nor any supporting infantry. You saw no other tanks. As the UAS makes its way back to its operators, it shows that the vegetation around the tanks and between you and them is as thick as it was on the way to M Coy’s objective. Also, the bridge just before the clearing is made of what appears to be concrete; is fairly narrow, only allowing a single vehicle at a time to cross, and about 15–20 metres in length; and there is a small clearing around it of about 50 metres on either side of the bridge, confirming your map reconnaissance (recce). The UAS provides little information on the water feature. You return to the OC, provide him with a confirmation brief on your understanding of the task, then pose a question.

“Do we assess that it’s only the two tanks? Will they counterattack with only two T-55s in terrain like this?”

“It’s certainly not how I’d do business,” replies the OC, “but the enemy has been known to conduct unsupported tank attacks. They are also hurting for more modern platforms after the first few months of this war. They may feel squeezed for time, kinda like I do, and may feel that the advantage of attacking with only a small force, by night, might be worth the risk. Having said that, they could be waiting there for reinforcements. Who knows! But the sooner we act, the better to pre-empt whatever it is they’re up to.”

You acknowledge the OC’s point on the importance of time and promptly begin conducting a rapid analysis of the situation. Based on your experience in country thus far, and your map recce, your detailed time estimate leads you to believe that you can occupy the objective rendezvous (ORV) in about 3 hours, conduct recce and actions on the objective in about 2 hours, and then return to M Coy’s location in another 3 hours, leaving plenty of time before first light in the event that the return takes longer due to the requirement to move casualties and/or prisoners. You rapidly assemble your platoon for orders and, with your platoon warrant officer, you get Charlie section reorganized into security elements and the navigation team. You keep the remainder of the platoon in their standard organization, deciding that any further task organization will take place in the ORV once the leader’s recce confirms some elements of the objective.

The movement to and occupation of the ORV go smoothly, and the clear night and full moon assist the navigation team in staying on course. You move up to the stream, noting that its steep banks make it completely impassable to vehicles but not an issue for foot traffic. You have now established your vantage point and left a security element in place. While there, you note the two T-55s but see no other enemy presence. B and C Security Elements radio in shortly thereafter to advise you that they are in location at their cut-off positions. You and your section commanders then proceed to conduct the leader’s recce and make your way back through the release point and into the ORV. En route, the Coy CP sends out a consolidated sitrep explaining that O and N Coys are in a series of intermittent engagements with counterattacks against their respective crossings. Each attack includes tanks, and the attack on N Coy also includes infantry.

As you cross the stream, A Security radios in: “31, this is the vantage point, we’ve got movement on the objective. Looks like the crews are out and they’re prepping the vehicles to move.” You realise that time is of the essence and you increase your pace. You also radio your platoon warrant officer to ensure that everyone is ready to move when you arrive back in the ORV. Five minutes later, you hear a C9 let loose with a long burst, followed by additional small arms fire from the north, where your B Security Element is positioned. You radio B Security but get nothing. As you arrive back in the ORV, the vantage

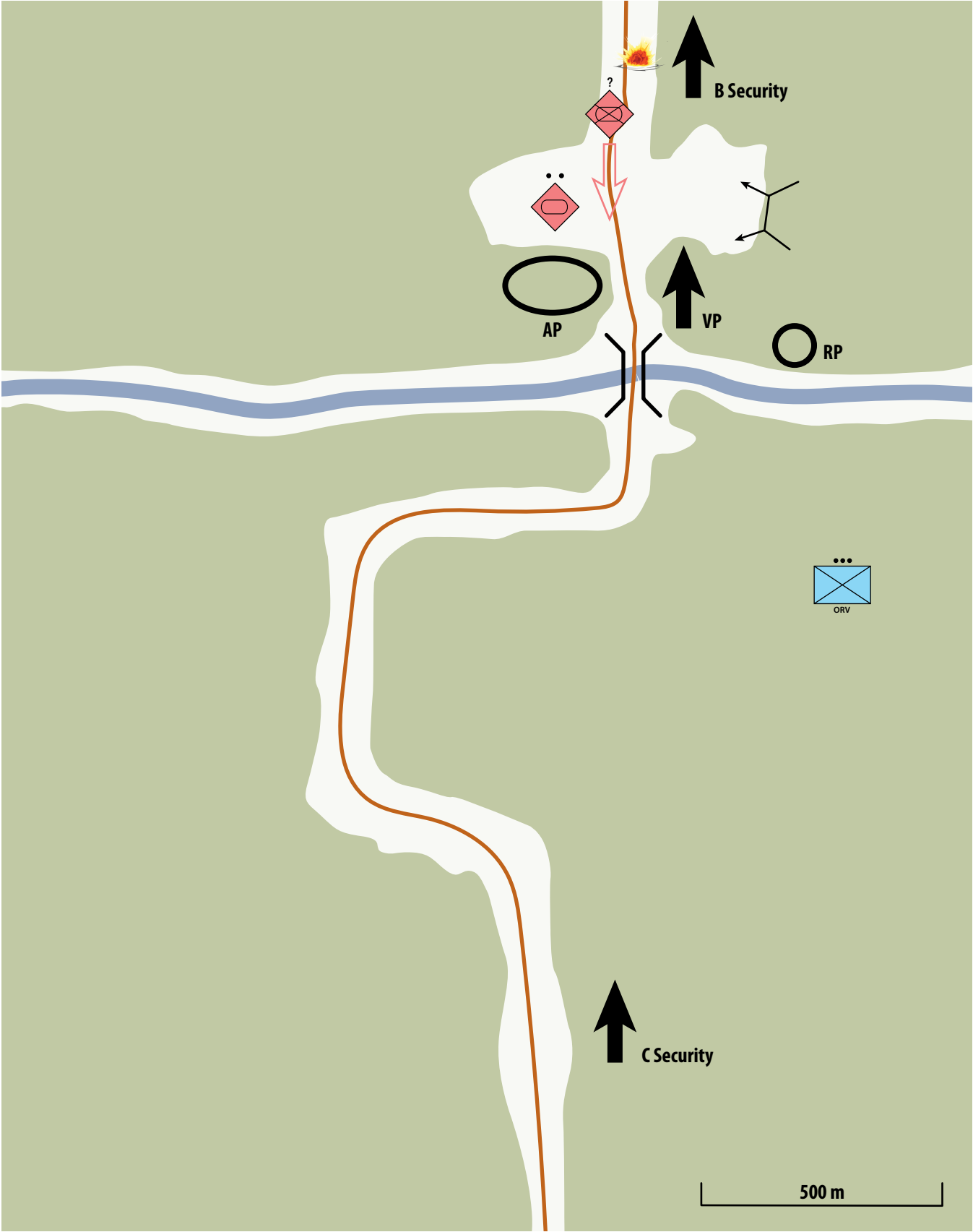


Figure 1: Current Situation



point radios back in: “31, this is the vantage point. Another two T-55s have just arrived on the objective, along with two large trucks. Looks like they have a few wounded, and the guys from the tanks are talking to the guys who jumped out of the lead truck.”

You are out of communications with Bravo Security and have a larger force in the objective area, now to include two more tanks. Your mind races through the possibilities and the uncertainty of the situation.

What now, Lieutenant?

In five minutes, determine what your course of action will be. Your response should be in the form of direction to your subordinates, task organization, a diagram, and any reports you would attempt to send to higher. 🍁

About the Author

Lieutenant-Colonel Matthew Rolls enrolled in the Canadian Armed Forces in 2006 as an infantry officer and later joined The Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR). He spent all of his regimental time with 2 RCR, as a platoon commander, company second in command, assistant operations officer, adjutant, and rifle company and admin company officer commanding. He deployed as a rifle platoon commander with both the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team and 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group, on TF 1-10, and in Latvia for Operation REASSURANCE as a rifle company officer commanding. He graduated from the US Marine Corps Expeditionary Warfare School and the Joint Command and Staff Programme. He has a bachelor’s degree in Political Science and a master’s degree in Defence Studies and Military Studies. He is currently employed in the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff (VCDS) – Chief Combat Systems Integration cell.