

TACTICAL DECISION GAME

SOLUTION: COMMITMENT ISSUES

Major Matthew Rolls

In Tactical Decision 2 (TDG 2), you are the Commanding officer (CO) of 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment (1 RCR), advancing to contact against DONOVIAN forces as part of division-level offensive operations. The brigade reconnaissance squadron (bde recce sqn) is leading the bde's advance with 1 RCR's reconnaissance platoon (recce pl) behind them followed by The Duke's Company (Coy) as the vanguard. YIGA is occupied by what is assessed as a pl- to coy-sized element by the Bde G2, and a coy-sized element has been reported 3 km beyond YIGA. As the bde's advance guard, you need to clear resistance from the bde route. The bde's posture is such that it contacts the enemy with the smallest element possible to preserve freedom of action.¹ This formation prevents the bde from becoming decisively engaged in a series of engagements that would rob the commander of their freedom of action.

To commit or not to commit

The first decision that the CO must make is whether to commit the main guard to a battle group (BG) attack or to task the vanguard to clear YIGA. This decision is contingent on assessments of enemy strength in conjunction with terrain and time considerations.

The enemy strength is currently estimated to be between pl- and coy-sized. This assessment, however, is based on previous enemy actions and electronic warfare intercepts, so it is fair to say that there is significant uncertainty surrounding the strength of the enemy within YIGA.

Furthermore, the CO has just been informed that there is another enemy mechanized rifle coy 3 km NORTH. While this contact is not immediately relevant to the fight for YIGA, at 3 km' distance, it could arrive to influence the battle within 10–15 min. While the bde recce sqn is between that coy and YIGA, as a screening force it is not organized to block or delay an enemy counterattack, and any attempt to do so would sacrifice its reconnaissance mission. The potential for the enemy mechanized (mech) coy to influence the fight for YIGA needs to factor into the CO's decision making.

Another factor is the terrain. The urban terrain of YIGA is Soviet-style reinforced concrete. Urban fighting can offer many advantages to a defender, and solid concrete construction can enhance those benefits by turning every such building into a potential strong point. Even if the DONOVIANS in YIGA have not had much time to prepare their defence, the concrete construction will simplify the development of survivability positions.

Time is also a critical factor in deciding whether to commit the main body or not. Mounting a BG hasty attack is inevitably going to take longer than tasking the vanguard to conduct the attack alone. The main body will need to close with YIGA. Once in the area, there is an increased number of vehicles that need to move about, requiring further time. Following the attack, the consolidation and reorganization, as well as the reorienting of the BG onto the axis of advance, will

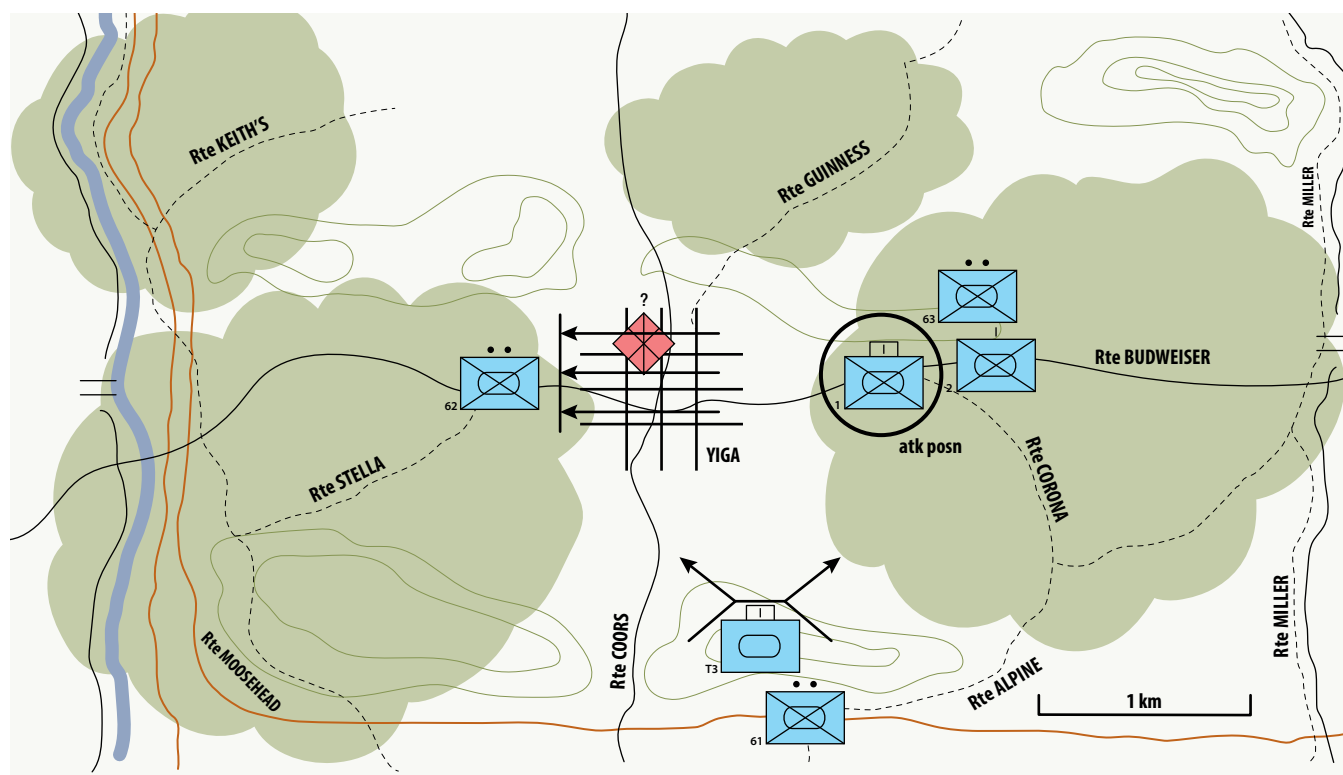


Figure 1: Right Flanking Option

require significantly more time. Those considerations need to be balanced against the costs in time, let alone casualties, if the CO underestimates the strength of the enemy in YIGA and the vanguard's attack fails. In such a case, the time lost in mounting and consolidating a BG attack could be offset by the time lost if the vanguard's attack becomes protracted because of a lack of combat power or even fails. Based on the analysis above, the discussion will continue assuming that the BG CO chose to commit the BG to the engagement in YIGA.

Options to CLEAR YIGA

There are two major approaches to completing 1 RCR's task. The first is to conduct a direct assault on YIGA to CLEAR or DESTROY the enemy within the town. This could be broken down into three different approaches, which many readers will be familiar with, and for which the recce pl is working to establish conditions. That would be a frontal or a left or right flanking. Arguably, these are the obvious solutions to this problem and are likely the courses of action that the enemy has prepared. They are also the most straightforward to understand in terms of estimating the likely time required to clear YIGA.

The second solution would be to infiltrate past YIGA to arrive behind it and then establish attack by fire and blocking positions to ISOLATE the enemy. This would deny the enemy the ability to reinforce and resupply the element inside the town and interfere with, if not deny, their ability to withdraw in an organized manner.

Similar to the decision on whether to commit the main body or not, enemy strength and morale and time are significant factors in deciding whether to assault the town or attempt to force the enemy to surrender or withdraw under unfavorable conditions.

Even if the enemy within YIGA is only a pl, the advantage of the urban defence could mean that an assault on the town could still be very costly in casualties and time even against the complete BG. Furthermore, an assault on the town is the course of action that the enemy most likely suspects and has prepared for. By assaulting the town, we are likely conforming to the enemy's plan. The mech coy to the NORTH further strengthens the enemy position because of their ability to reinforce or counterattack in a short period of time.

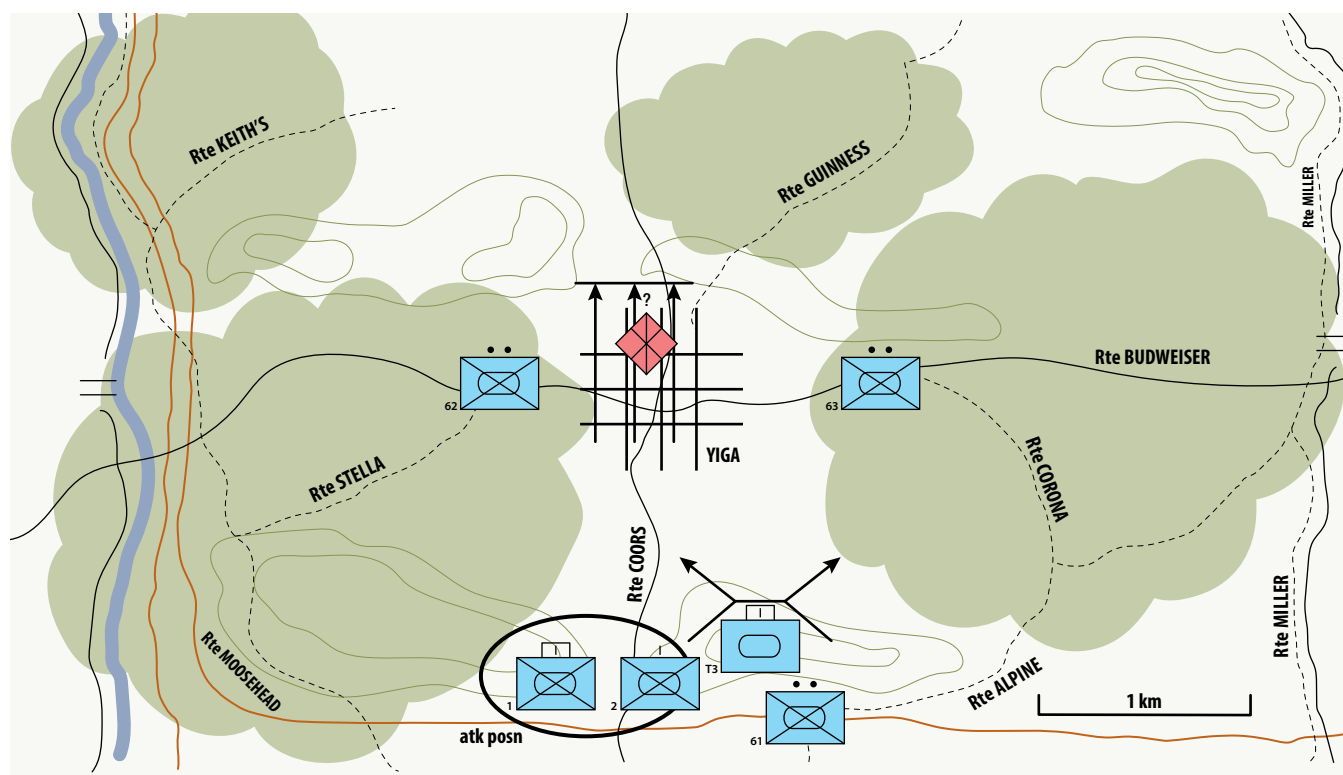


Figure 2: Frontal Option

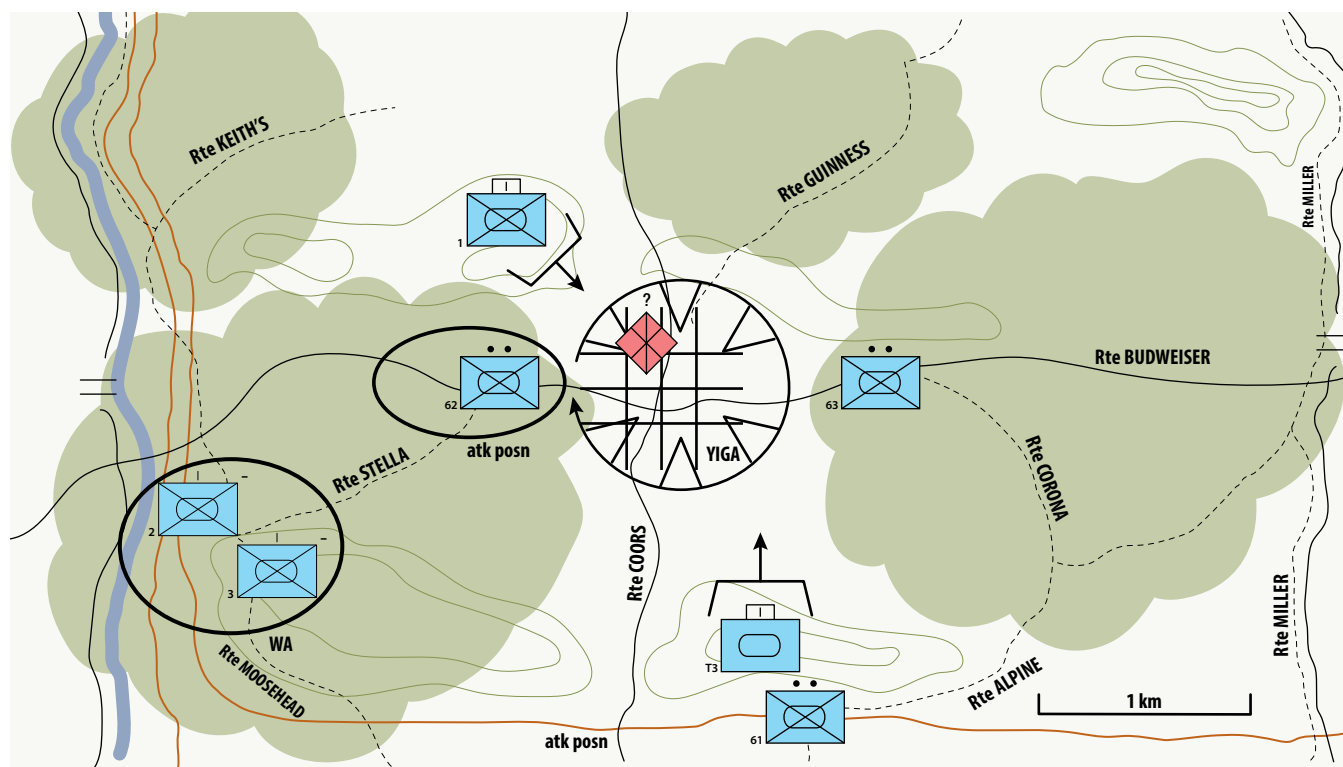


Figure 3: Bypass and Isolate Option

A tactical concept we could be considering in this scenario is dislocation. Dislocation is one of three means (the others being pre-emption, and disruption) that the Canadian Army (CA) uses to attack an enemy's will, cohesion, and understanding in a manoeuvrist approach to operations. *Land Operations* describes dislocation as denying the enemy "the ability to bring his strength to bear... Its purpose is to render the strength of elements of the force irrelevant. It seeks to avoid fighting the adversary on his terms. This is done by avoiding and neutralizing his strengths so they cannot be used effectively."² William S. Lind in the *Maneuver Warfare Handbook* has an analogy for isolating YIGA instead of assaulting it directly. He called it "surfaces and gaps," writing: "The term surfaces and gaps is derived from a German term, *Flaechen und Luekentaktik*, which means simply, the tactics of surfaces and gaps, the surfaces being the enemy's strong points, which we avoid, the gaps being the weak points that we go through."³ In this case, YIGA is a surface, while the tracks around it are gaps allowing us to get behind the enemy to a position of advantage where they will be dislocated both physically and psychologically. The enemy wants us to try and close with YIGA and then fight to clear it room by room, and then they want to withdraw to live to fight another day. If we want to dislocate the enemy's strength, as described in our own doctrine, then we could look for the means to avoid an assault into YIGA and to prevent the mech coy to the NORTH from coming to the aid of the enemy occupying the town.

When the BG moves into the enemy's rear, they are faced with a dilemma. They are now cut off from supply and from help. Their ability to withdraw is now significantly disrupted. Arguably, they have also failed in their mission. The BG has located a bypass route, and large elements of the bde could just carry on NORTH past YIGA. In a worst-case scenario, where the enemy neither surrenders nor withdraws in a timely manner, YIGA would eventually have to be cleared to open the bde's main supply route and ensure that the F echelon can continue to fight, but with each subunit having roughly 24 hours of supplies in their F and A1 echelons, the bde has some time before this becomes a major concern. That time could be used for finding a bypass suitable for B vehicles or even improving the routes that already exist so that they could transit them. In the event that a direct attack must be made, The Duke's Coy combat team (cbt tm) is also well positioned and organized to execute a rear attack with the other coys being available to follow The Duke's from the WEST.

Assaulting from the rear while fixing from the front would present the enemy with a difficult situation where it would be forced to split its forces, diluting their effect.

The dilemma in which the enemy finds itself makes surrender or disorganized withdrawal more likely, but there are also intangible psychological aspects that are likely to be imposed upon the enemy. Figure 4 illustrates some of the potential mental states that the enemy commander and soldiers may find themselves experiencing.

Isolating YIGA accounts for mental models 1 and 2. If the enemy tries to break out, it will likely suffer losses from The Duke's Coy in its dominant position and, in the process, will vacate YIGA, which is what the BG wants anyway. If it calls for reinforcement from the mech coy to the NORTH, then The Duke's Coy's troop of tanks and coy of light armoured vehicles will be well positioned to meet that attack. If they surrender or withdraw, then that also meets the BG CO's objectives. Mental model 3 is more problematic but, ultimately, the enemy can only remain in YIGA for so long without resupply. Other risks associated with mental model 3 will be discussed later.

This dilemma is highly likely to impose surprise and shock upon the enemy, which is what leads to mental models 1, 2, and potentially even 3. Surprise and shock are separate phenomenon but are highly related, with surprise being able to impose shock as well.⁴ The relationship is proposed by Jim Storr and can be seen in Figure 5.

Each is a psychological state that results in the enemy being less able and less inclined to resist. Ultimately, defeat is a mental state; it is a decision, and surprise and shock both lead to reduced participation in combat and hence to defeat.⁵ Storr provides a model for this at the individual and collective level that is reproduced below in Figure 6.

Linked to achieving surprise is denying the enemy of an understanding of the situation. In the case of YIGA, it is reasonable to assume that the enemy's plan sees a defence of the hamlet to delay the BG. When The Duke's Coy appears to the enemy's rear and an assault does not immediately follow, the enemy will be faced with a very different situation than that which it had expected. As per Storr's model, this is likely to lead to individual surprise and reduced participation, followed by collective surprise and potentially shock, and then tactical success.

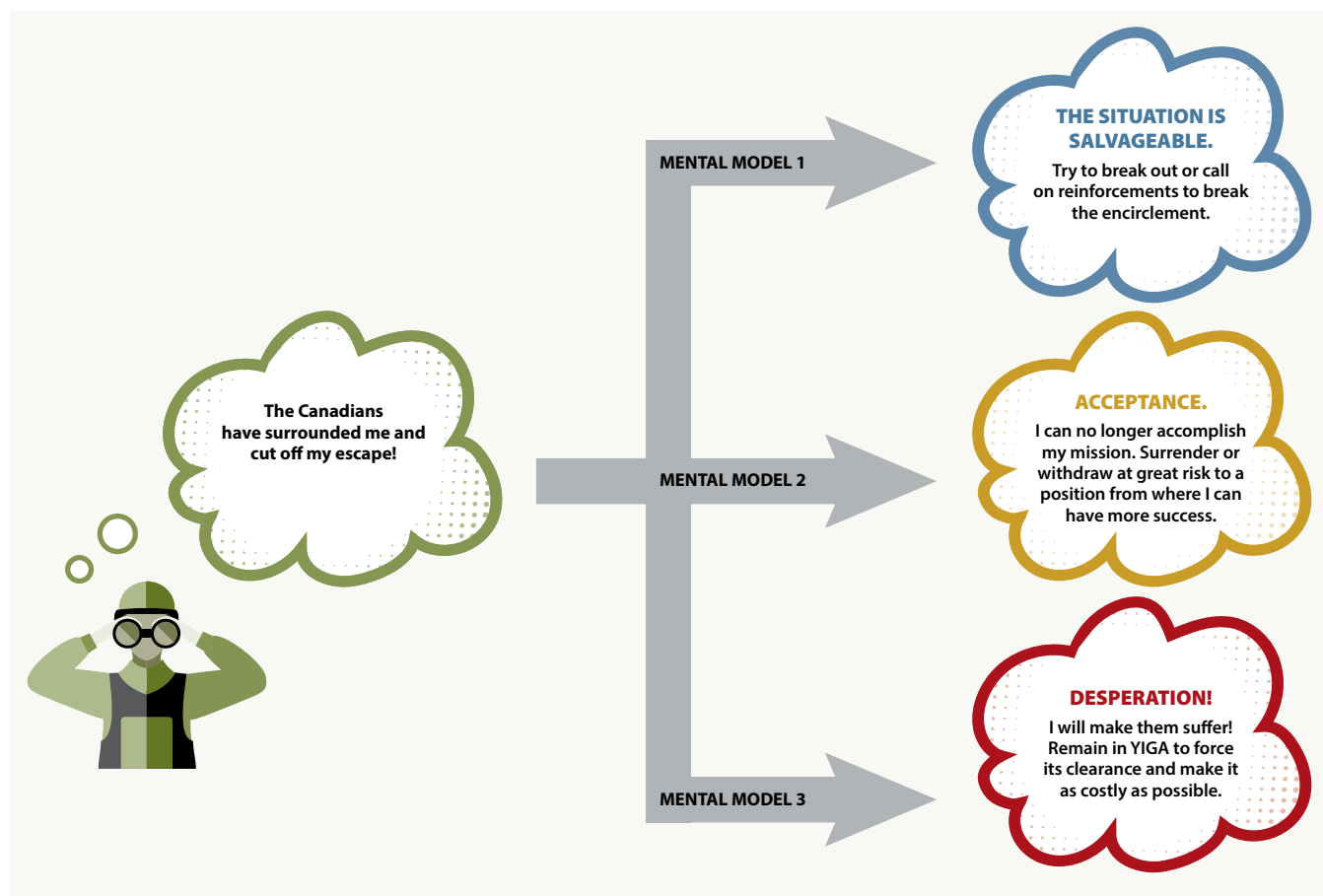


Figure 4: Conceptual Enemy Mental States if Isolated by the Battle Group

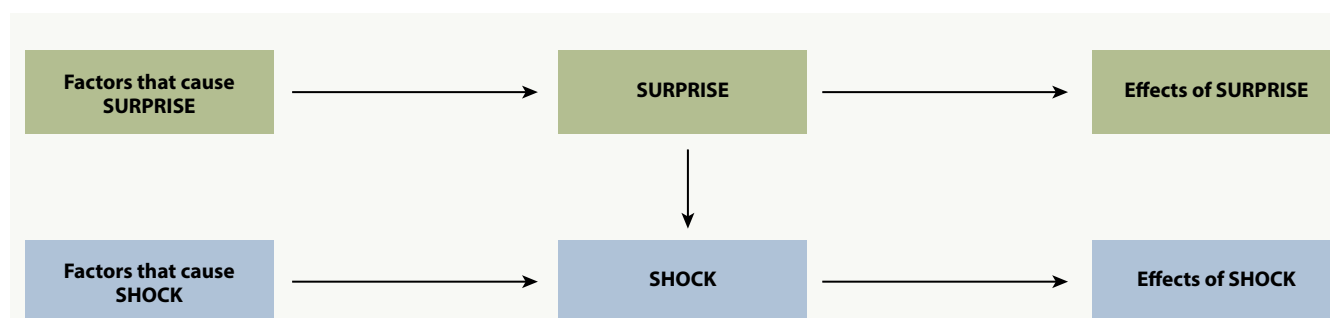


Figure 5: Jim Storr's Depiction of the Relationship Between Surprise and Shock⁶

There are two-time aspects to this scenario: duration and sequence. Duration is critical, as the bde needs to advance as quickly as possible. Assaulting the town will clear it directly; meanwhile, isolating relies on the enemy deciding that it is in its best interests to either surrender or withdraw. It is tempting to believe that an assault will take less time or at least will be more understandable in terms of the time that will be required to complete the clearance. The reality is, however, that it is unknowable

how long it would take to clear YIGA versus how long it would take for the DONOVIANS to surrender or withdraw. If YIGA must be assaulted, then the best chances of a rapid and low-cost clearance is to enter the town from the rear.

In this scenario, "sequence" refers to whether The Duke's Coy cbt tm should immediately move to its attack by fire position (posn) or wait for the arrival of the main body to

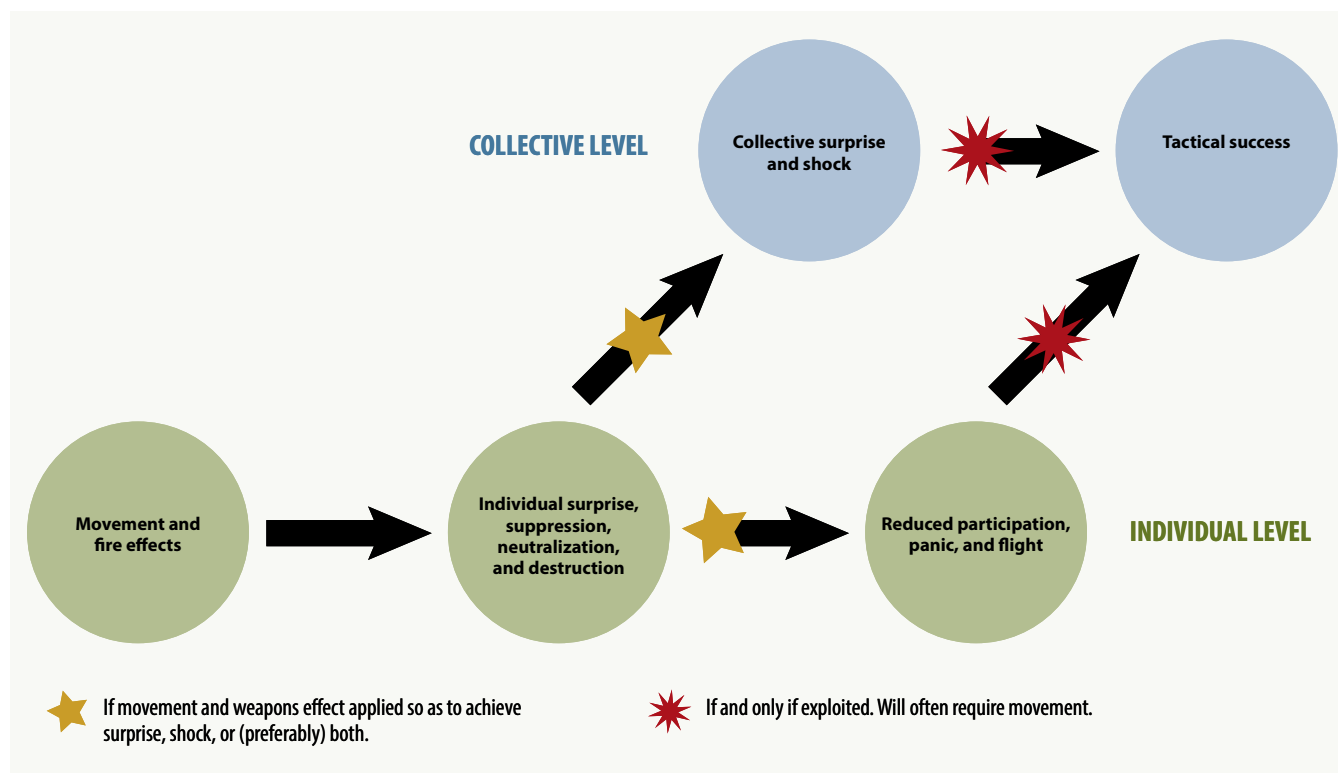


Figure 6: Storr's Revised Model of Tactical Land Combat⁷

enable a simultaneous commitment of The Duke's Coy and C Sqn. Surprise and shock are on the BG's side in isolating YIGA, whether both coys are committed simultaneously or not. A simultaneous commitment may increase the level of shock that the enemy experiences and increase the chance of an early surrender or withdrawal; however, the arrival of The Duke's Coy alone may be enough to achieve that, in which case the most time is saved by an immediate commitment. The sequential approach in this case features some of the risks that often accompany piecemeal commitment. The enemy could react quickly and try to break out in a direction not yet covered, or they could try to counterattack The Duke's Coy, particularly if the enemy in YIGA is stronger than what has been assessed. Ultimately, the sequence will be a matter of the CO's assessment of the likelihood that an early commitment of The Duke's Coy could break the enemy's will to resist and result in an early surrender or withdrawal.

Historically, isolating YIGA has a good pedigree of success. Capt W. E. Harrison, speaking of his experiences of fighting in Italy during the Second World War, said

The theory of attack of a small town or village is to work groups around the flanks, cut the retreat, and move in with patrols. In this hilly country, however, we have found that, where there is any high ground behind the town which dominates both the town and the line of retreat, the best way is to work the entire force around the town under cover, seize the high ground in rear, and firmly establish ourselves with 60-mm mortars on that dominating high ground. We take enough food and ammunition with us to last 24 hours, and the Germans usually pull out during this time.⁸

LCol Freeman made similar observations also from his time in Italy. "We learned at ALTAVILLA to avoid the direct attack of towns. It's too costly. We now work around to the rear with a large force and seize the dominating ground in rear."⁹ Nor is this a phenomenon limited to Italy or the Allies. One of the critical capabilities of the Japanese that Field Marshal Slim had to deal with in Burma was their ability to manoeuvre around his columns through the thick jungle and then establish road blocks to their rear, which cut them off from support.¹⁰ Ironically, after a training program to enable his formations to move and fight in the jungle, his own divisions would adopt similar tactical forms.¹¹

Risks

Isolating YIGA is not without risks. First is geometry of fires. Figure 3 makes clear that fires between The Duke's Coy and C Sqn could be problematic. Having said that, the fact that they will be firing from elevated posns at targets below them, and the fact that YIGA has a reinforced concrete construction, largely mitigates this risk.

Second is the requirement to be able to accept a large number of surrendering troops. Poorly executed detention operations could have a significant delaying effect on the bde and BG, particularly with the requirement for some of them to receive medical treatment. This will need to be prepared for by the BG Combat Service Support Coy, the Svc Bn, and the MPs.

Lastly, if the enemy does not surrender or withdraw in a timely manner, then the BG CO's and the bde comd's hand will be forced and YIGA will have to be assaulted. In Figure 3, the attack position (atk posn) for a left flanking remains so that Bravo and Charles Coys can move out of the Assembly Area and flow through the atk posn in the assault. As mentioned earlier, The Duke's Coy could lead this attack from the rear of the village to achieve the break in. It is likely that the enemy will have used this time to better prepare its defences, which leads to two conclusions. First, the CO needs to have a deadline at which time they will want to commit to the assault. This needs to provide time for the enemy to withdraw or surrender but not provide so much time that the enemy's defence could stiffen to such a point that benefits of having isolated YIGA are lost. Second, there would likely be a requirement for regrouping for the attack.

Conclusion

Infiltration is a form of manoeuvre that could offer an increased likelihood of dislocating the enemy and thereby achieving surprise and shock. The CA needs to be looking for opportunities to instruct this during training. It is conjecture, but it seems likely, based on how the CA trains and assesses officers, that most officers when seeing the original scenario would intuitively understand the options to attack from the left, centre, and right, but would miss the opportunity to isolate the objective to dislocate the enemy's plan. Training needs to be designed so that options like the isolation of YIGA become second nature for more officers. Hopefully Tactical Decision Game 2 is a step in the right direction.

About the Author

Major Matthew Rolls enrolled in the Canadian Armed Forces in 2006 as an infantry officer and later joined The Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR). Major Rolls has spent all of his regimental time with 2 RCR, having been 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 Program. 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 Canadian Special Operations Forces Command. 🍁

1. This idea of gaining contact with the enemy with the smallest element possible is much more explicit in US doctrine. However, it is clear that the principle applies in the Canadian context as well. See Department of the Army, ATP 3-21.20 *Infantry Battalion*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2017), 2-51, 2-56; Col Brian J. Harthorn, and LTC Michael S. Farmer, "Infantry Attacks at NTC Part 1," *Infantry*, (Jan-Mar 2017): 27. [https://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/magazine/issues/2017/JAN-MAR/pdf/1\)Farmer_InfAttack.pdf](https://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/magazine/issues/2017/JAN-MAR/pdf/1)Farmer_InfAttack.pdf)
2. Canada, B-GL-300-001/FP-001, *Land Operations*, Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2007, 5-67-5-68.
3. William S. Lind, *Maneuver Warfare Handbook*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 73.
4. Jim Storr, *The Human Face of War*, (London, UK: Continuum, 2009), 84.
5. *Ibid.*, 51-52.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Jim Storr, "Manoeuvre and Weapons Effect on the Battlefield," *RUSI Defence Systems* (2010): 63.
8. Department of the Army, *Combat Lessons Number 2: Rank and File in Combat: What They're Doing, How They Do It*, (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army), 7.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Field Marshal Viscount Slim, *Defeat into Victory*, (London, UK: Pan Books, 2009), 135-136.
11. *Ibid.*, 409.