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Mountain Cavalry Recon in Built-Up Areas

by Captain Rich Rouleau

The mounted scouts moved forward into the edge of the town in what was supposed to be a reconnaissance mission. Aero-scouts overhead probed forward of the ground elements, two recon platoons moving along independent routes, trailed by the squadron headquarters. The right flank platoon entered the killing zone of a near ambush that eliminated half of the unit in the initial blast and fires. The remainder of the platoon was pinned, some jammed up in their vehicles, others caught in the open. Their sister recon platoon could not offer any support and the aero-scouts were not armed for that precise a mission. The platoon soon died in the street.

"Apache" Troop is the ground cavalry troop of the 3rd Squadron, 17th Cavalry, 10th Mountain Division (LI) at Fort Drum, New York. It is one of four divisional light ground cavalry troops in the active Army and National Guard today. The National Guard also has several separate light ground cavalry troops. In addition, there is the active duty 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment. Each of these light, ground cavalry forces has its own specific MTOE.

Because of its unique MTOE, "Apache" troop has developed its own tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) for movement and reconnaissance in built-up areas (BUAs). The TTPs that will be discussed in this article can be adopted or modified by other cavalrymen. They are not intended to be the only solution, but to illustrate how one troop gets the job done.

In addition to Apache Troop, the squadron has a headquarters troop, two OH-58D air cavalry troops, and an aviation maintenance troop. In its primary role, 3-17th serves as the division's "eyes and ears." If required, the squadron can be task-organized to support an infantry brigade in the division with additional corps or division aviation lift and aero-medical assets, including UH-1s, UH-60s and CH-47s.

Because of these diverse requirements, Apache Troop must be a multifunctional troop capable of operating as part of the squadron or in independent missions down to platoon level. Apache

Fig. 1. Room-Clearing SOP

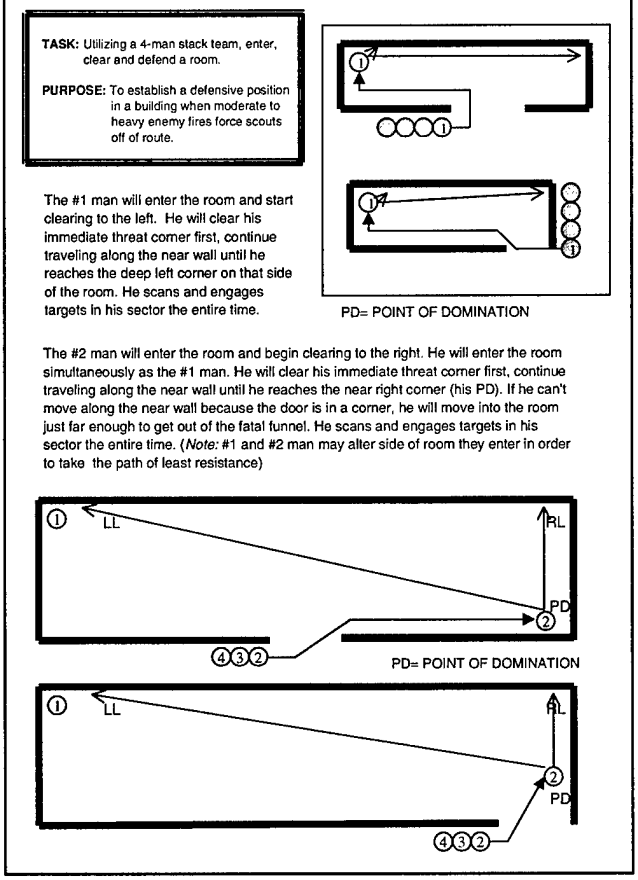


Fig. 2. Room-Clearing SOP

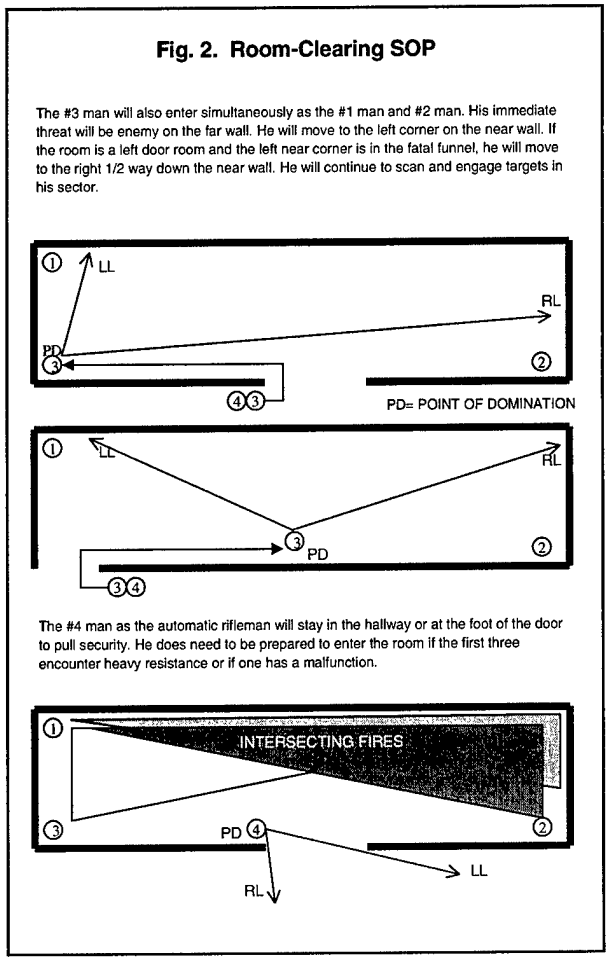
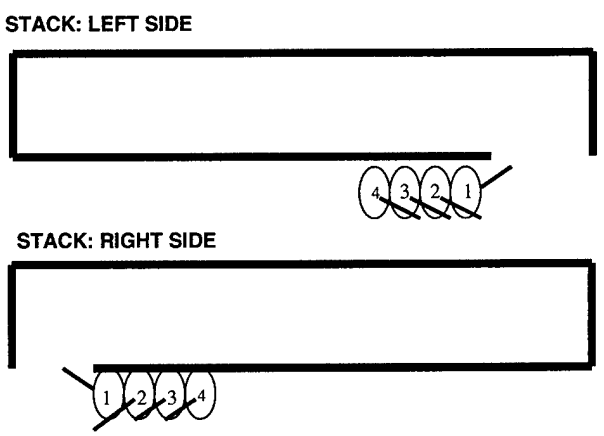


Fig. 3. Stacking

Stack: A unit, usually four men, in a posture ready to enter and clear a room, move down a hallway, up a stairwell, etc.



The #1 man's weapon is always oriented on the point of entry.

Troop currently has four scout platoons and a headquarters section. The scout platoons each have three M1025A2 HMMWVs with two M2 HBs, one MK-19, and three M240s. There are also two M966 TOW HMMWVs with two TOW II Bs, two M240s, and 15 scouts. The headquarters section has an M1025A2 with an M2 HB for the troop commander, and two M998s with one M240 for the 1SG and supply sergeant. The troop also habitually gets a maintenance contact team, communication team chief, and medics with vehicles from headquarters troop. Scouts can conduct all required tactical operations. They can operate mounted, sling load vehicles into their area of operation on a CH-47, or be inserted on foot by UH-60 with OH-58Ds in support.

Since its activation in 1988, Apache Troop, as part of 10th Mountain Division (LI), has conducted real-world MOUT in Somalia and Haiti. Selected leaders have also deployed to Bosnia and Macedonia. Using this in-house experience, and lessons from the Mountain Leaders Close Combat Certification Course (MLC4), Apache Troop developed a scout SOP for reconnaissance in BUAs.

The SOP was developed with the following guidance:

Operate within published Division MOUT SOPs. Twice a year, the 10th Mountain Division (LI) conducts a hands-on, three-week MOUT leaders course to "train the trainers" to the division's standard. It also updates them on the newest TTPs and technology. All four platoon leaders and senior scouts attend this course. Their training serves as the foundation of the troop SOP.

Avoid a fight, but be capable of room clearance. Reconnaissance normally means avoiding fights, especially decisive engagements. Regardless of the type of reconnaissance being conducted, the scouts understand that they should always be ready for room clearance operations to gain and maintain contact, or bypass the enemy. If necessary, the scouts break contact and get off the streets to await relief. The intent is to take rooms for security, not seize buildings (see Figs. 1, 2, & 3).

No more than nine scouts dismounted and one vehicle in support per platoon. This requirement supports existing division SOPs, allowing easy integration with infantry battalion task forces and the basic stack formations trained in the MLC4 (see Figs. 4 and 5). Restricting vehicles in the area to one per platoon provides mobility and increased firepower without the congestion normally associated with BUAs. This tactic allows the troop to bound and move across danger areas or streets yet maintain basic stack formation and rear security.

Maintain an EVAC/QRF team with OH-58Ds in support. This allows the platoon, if compromised, to extract with adequate firepower and vehicles in support without congesting the extraction route. This platoon sergeant leads EVAC. His vehicle is armed with a MK-19 that can deliver devastating firepower. By acting in concert with the lead support vehicle, the platoon sergeant can EVAC the entire platoon and/or casualties to the casualty collection point or platoon rally point.

Many rehearsals show that OH-58Ds best support the troop by scouting in the BUA one phase line ahead of the lead platoon. They should only engage those targets clearly marked with an AIM-1 laser or colored smoke. Using the OH-58D's weapons in MOUT is dangerous and requires great care; collateral damage is often excessive. On the other hand, OH-58Ds are great at identifying potential hazards and assisting platoons maneuvering through the BUA. They also can assist with the cordon, and when the ROE permits, isolate targets.

Coordinate with follow-on forces. In any reconnaissance mission, the scout platoons must coordinate battle handover with their follow-on forces. But in urban areas, they must maintain continuous coverage on any urban area they have just cleared. The reason is simple; the cover and concealment offered in a BUA makes contact more likely. It is also easier for the enemy to blend with the locals. People will be moving along the cleared route in an urban setting. That makes it much harder to spot enemy soldiers who might be laying a minefield, for example. Therefore, a BUA requires more constant surveillance than a semi-deserted rural area.

Urban areas are usually NAIs or at least key terrain. An infantry squad or platoon should accompany the scouts whenever possible. That will allow the cavalry to continue with its reconnaissance while the infantry holds the ground and establishes security. Such task organization benefits all. The cavalry leader has a combined arms team, adding flexibility in dealing with obstacles and direct fire contact. It also allows the cavalry to continue with its mission and not wait for follow-on forces. By participating in the BUA clearance, the infantry is much more aware of its surroundings when setting up security on the key terrain.

Troop organization. During a route reconnaissance of a BUA, the troop is organized into five elements. Two scout platoons (RECON 1 & 2 respectively) stagger on opposite sides of the

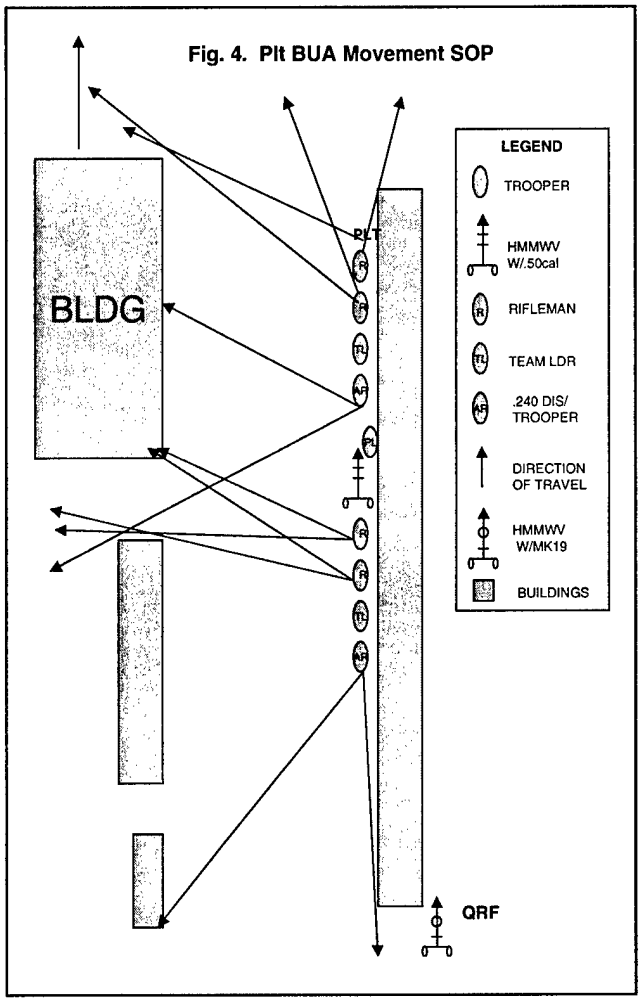


Fig. 4. Plt BUA Movement SOP

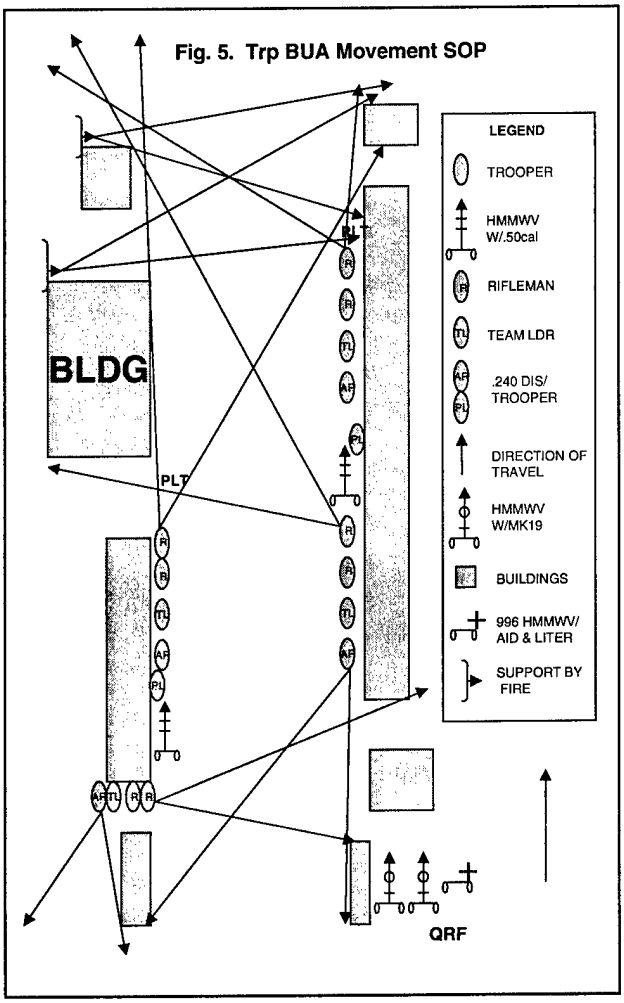


Fig. 5. Trp BUA Movement SOP

street with an aero-scout section in overwatch. The cordon platoon, with an aero-scout section, maintains a semi-cordon of the main avenues of approach to prevent anyone from leaving and entering the built-up area. A platoon with medics is designated as the troop EVAC/QRF. It cordons the troop's entrance and displacement route. The QRF is also prepared to occupy a support-by-fire position that would allow RECON 1 and 2 to break contact and displace. The cache element under control of the 1SG secures all the remaining troop vehicles under the protection of the troop trains (see Fig. 6).

The mission. There are many techniques for planning, marking, quartering, and executing reconnaissance of a built-up area. I will focus here on movement techniques and the incorporation of aviation assets into the mission, rather than the MDMP, TLPs, or IPB. The first stage is the earliest possible placement of the cordon element and a section from the QRF to watch the BUA's avenues. They identify any patterns or key areas of concern. They should move into place without aero-scout support to avoid compromise. Once they are in place, aero-scout sections move into position. Team 1 supports the cordon on that platoon's internal net. Team 2 supports RECON 1 and 2's movement. They operate initially on troop command net but drop to the appropriate platoon net when contact is made.

RECON 1 and 2 move offset from each other by one phase line (see Fig. 6). This allows mutual support without committing the entire element. They can bypass without compromise or loss of momentum. It does not congest the area. Their positions along the buildings may mask the size of the RECON element to the enemy. As each platoon moves forward, the platoon sergeant trails a phase line behind to avoid being drawn into a fight. Yet his drag position allows him to establish a SBF with his MK-19 and to support EVAC. Should the lead teams come under contact and become decisively engaged, they are equipped and trained to knock down a door and clear a room. The QRF would then establish an SBF position to allow displacement, EVAC, or bypass operations. Once the route reconnaissance is complete, the troop consolidates and reorganizes outside the built-up area. If required, the cordon element maintains continuous coverage of the BUA until handoff is complete to the follow-on battalion scouts, military police, or a convoy moving through the BUA.

Refinements. All operations can be improved. Equipment shortages, or lack of the proper tools, is not new. It happens in the Army today. Those needs often stimulate force development. For example, sniper rifles would add greatly to the success of such operations. They provide excellent overwatch with minimal risk of collateral damage. Another shortfall is marking systems for ground to air assets. The AIM-1 laser provides a higher density light than the AN/PAC-4C and can be distinguished with the trained eye. It, however, is not the cure for all lasing tasks.

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Conclusion. The days of bypassing all built-up areas greater than 1 kilometer are gone. Even in the Third World, urban sprawl and modernization has made MOUT a fact of military life. Cavalry scouts will lead units into and through those areas. Doing so requires the careful application of DTLOMS by unit leaders. This brief article showed how one unit maintains its combat edge by using all the available tools at hand. Apache Troop draws on the experience of its combat veterans, seasoned in operations in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia. Much of that experience has gone into the creation of the MLC4 and the unit leaders make sure that all troopers benefit from that combat course training. Finally the unit never stops refining its TTPs in combat drills that improve the unit's ability to meet the challenges of MOUT.

The following troopers provided valuable input and deserve the lion's share of the credit: 1LT Kevin Scott, 1LT David Spence Sales, 1LT Wade Birdwell, and 1LT Toby Austin. Without input from my former platoon leaders this article may still have been sitting on my hard drive.

CPT Richard R. Rouleau enlisted in the Army National Guard in 1982 and transferred to active duty in 1984 as an M60A1 armor crewman. His previous enlisted assignments include the 133d Engineer Battalion; 2-6 Cav; 2-72 Armor; and HQ USAG, Fort Drum. In 1991, he was commissioned in Armor from Niagara University. He has served as a tank platoon leader, company XO, and BMO in 2-37 Armor, 3ID, and A/S3, S4 and troop commander of A/3-17 Cavalry, 10th Mountain Division. He is currently assigned to the Joint Readiness Training Center as an observer/controller.

Fig. 6. TRP BUA Movement SOP Setup