

Captain Matthew S. Hanks, USMC  
with Williamson Murray, PhD



# KHAOS COMPANY

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A Commander's Account and Lessons Learned  
from the 2019 MAGTF Warfighting Exercise

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*3rd Battalion 8th Marines*



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# FOREWORD

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For many years, we have been conducting integrated combined arms exercises at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC), Twentynine Palms, California. The emphasis has always been on live fire, combined-arms integration with maneuver to practice the most difficult and dangerous operation in the Marine Corps' repertoire. The ability to combine every means of providing fire support for maneuver forces that are either defending or closing with and destroying enemy forces is the hallmark of a professional military force and the only place we can put it all together is at MCAGCC.

While remaining tremendously valuable, these exercises have also engendered a mindset that could have proven detrimental to the Corps in a conventional fight. That mindset was that all operations are conducted like lane training and according to a set script. It may seem like I am overstating the description of this mentality, but I am here to tell you that I have seen it in action in our training venues and it cannot continue to exist. I



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commanded MCAGCC from 2016 to 2018, after returning from a yearlong deployment to Iraq, where I was the target engagement authority supporting Iraqi forces as they tried to retake portions of their country from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Based on my experiences in Iraq, what I saw happening on the desert floor there at Twentynine Palms bothered me. As I studied the fighting in the Ukraine, I became even more troubled by what I was seeing. Lastly, after I read a monograph from the U.S. Army's Combined Arms Center, Combat Studies Institute titled *We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War*, I came to the conclusion that we were setting ourselves up for failure with the approach we were taking to Marine Corps training.<sup>1</sup> While combined arms proficiency remains necessary, it was nowhere near sufficient for our training and readiness needs.

During the summer of 2017, I began discussions with the Tactical Training Exercise Control Group (TTECG) regarding our ability to modify the Integrated Training Exercise (ITX) to include a nonlive fire force-on-force exercise. I also visited the U.S. Army's National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, their Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, and their Joint Multinational Readiness Center at Hoenfels, Germany. I watched the conduct of their force-on-force

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<sup>1</sup> Matt M. Matthews, *We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War*, Long War Series Occasional Paper 26 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, 2008).

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exercises, as well as the instrumentation that they use to record every aspect of an exercise in order to play it back to the exercise force in the way of in-stride and post exercise after action reports. These visits left me with the impression that we, as a Marine Corps, were way behind the curve with regard to how professionally we approach training. I then made a visit to the Ukraine and spoke with their armed forces about what was happening in the eastern portion of their country. While much of what they identified as problematic related to their relatively low level of readiness and professional abilities, which they are working hard to overcome, we would have problems with some of the tactics used out there also. For example, when they described the situation of having an armored infantry battalion commander keying a handset to communicate and, within two minutes, having rockets land on their position and wipe out the majority of the battalion, I pictured in my mind all the times I have seen our own commanders holding long discussions over the radio nets.<sup>2</sup> All of this convinced me that the Marine Corps had to change, and it had to happen fast.

The change started with the detailed planning required to find room in the ITX schedule without adding more time to the overall exercise due to concerns regarding increased operational tempo demands on the Fleet. The planning also entailed identifying how we

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<sup>2</sup> Patrick Tucker, "Hacker Shows How to Break into Military Communications," *Defense One*, 7 August 2014.

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might go about providing the necessary instrumentation, as well as how we might develop a professional adversary force that could offer a peer challenge to our exercise forces. I described the overall concept as trying to develop the “NFL-like” ability to provide a thinking, opposing force, as well as recording every aspect of the exercise, and then professionalizing how we played it back to the exercise force to enable the type of learning that we so badly needed. Through the great work of the staff from the MAGTF Training Center and TTECG, we were able to put a plan together that was briefed and approved at an executive offsite (EOS) in late 2017. The plan still included the live fire combined arms training that remains critical to our readiness, while also providing a scrimmage of sorts against a thinking, opposing force.

Using a boxing analogy, instead of just training against a heavy bag that cannot hit back, we were now getting into the ring with a skilled sparring partner. As for who that sparring partner would be, we considered trying to go the professional opposing force route that the Army uses, but we could not afford that as a Marine Corps.<sup>3</sup> What we could do was entice other units to participate as adversary forces against the exercise force and, since Marines love competing against each other, we have never had a shortage of units willing to participate in this manner. We have even had our cousins from

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<sup>3</sup> Todd South, “Does Training Money Help Readiness?: Here’s Why the Marine Corps Can’t Really Say,” *Marine Times*, 16 April 2019.

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the British Royal Marines participate, which sharpens the edge of the exercise even more.<sup>4</sup>

These events led to the development of the first force-on-force, free-play exercise to be held at Twentynine Palms in many years. It was conducted in May 2018 before I left MCAGCC to move to Training and Education Command at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia. While it was far from perfect, it was a solid start and achieved the goal of inducing friction on the exercise forces that had not previously been present. TTECG coyote “paints”—descriptions of what the exercise forces would be seeing if it were a real scenario—cannot compare with the knowledge that there is an adversary force commander out there working very hard to beat you.<sup>5</sup>

Since that first exercise, the program at Twentynine Palms has continued to develop and improve. While it still has far to go to reach the expectations that we have for the overall program, it is making steady progress. Probably the most encouraging aspect of this

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Shawn Snow, “A New PFT?: Why the Corps Might Adopt the Royal Marines’ Fitness Test,” *Marine Times*, 12 February 2019; Alex Hollings, “May the Best Marines Win: U.S. Marines Set to Take on UK’s Royal Marines in Force-on-Force Exercises,” SOFREP, 19 November 2018; “Royal Marines on Exercise with Their American Counterparts,” RoyalNavy.mod.uk, 6 February 2019; and Sgt Melanie A. Wolf, “U.S. Marines, British Commandos Train Together at Exercise Red Dagger,” Department of Defense, 18 May 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Cpl Jose A. Figueroa, “Coyotes Keep Watch, Prey on Unsafe Tactics,” Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, 19 October 2000.

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process was the way the commanding general of the 2d Marine Division, Major General David J. Furness, took ownership of the MAGTF Warfighting Exercise (MWX, a step up in size and complexity from the basic ITX) and, with the help of all the agencies under MAGTF, including Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron 1 (MAWTS 1), Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group (MCTOG), Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group (MCLOG), and TTECG, turned it into the challenging scenario depicted in this work by one of its participants, Captain Matthew Hanks. This young officer came to my attention as a student at Expeditionary Warfare School, Marine Corps University, during the 2018–19 academic year when he volunteered to participate in an extracurricular reading seminar hosted by eminent historian Dr. Williamson Murray. This seminar has been taking place for eight years and Dr. Murray frequently highlights to me those students who really stand out in the seminar. Captain Hanks was one of these officers.

The exercise consisted of more than 15,000 participants and spanned the entire training area at Twentynine Palms, which is big enough to accommodate all of our other Marine Corps bases combined within its boundaries. The fog and friction depicted by Captain Hanks in the pages that follow are real. The lessons identified at the end of each chapter are essential. In other words, everything that we had hoped this type of exercise would produce with regard to valuable training and increased readiness were described by Captain Hanks. It needs to become required reading for all those who are preparing

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their units for combat as well as for any who think the Marine Corps has reason to rest on its laurels. Captain Hanks and the other exercise force units succeeded at some things and failed at others. They worked hard to outthink their opponent despite the cold and accumulated fatigue from limited-to-no sleep and almost continuous operations during the course of five days. The proverbial “Murphy” was alive and well, as always, and Hanks’ description offers only a microcosm of all that went on during that exercise. To say that it yielded a full return on the investment made to make the exercise happen would be an understatement; but as I have said previously, we have a great deal more to do to get the Marine Corps where it needs to be.

The Marine Corps prides itself on being the most prepared when the nation is least ready. The exercise described by Captain Hanks is likely one of the most significant developments in ensuring we live up to that motto since before the events of 11 September 2001 (9/11). Some of the participants have claimed it was the most valuable exercise they have seen in more than 30 years of service. That may be true, but it will never be good enough. Training and Education Command remains committed to ensuring the continued development of the force-on-force training capability at Twentynine Palms, but also intends to extend it to other bases and stations as well. Exercising against the opposing will of a peer adversary force coupled with the instrumentation necessary to enable learning must become the standard every exercise strives to achieve. It will take several more years of development, but we will

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never waiver in our commitment to get there. As long as we have Marines in our ranks such as Captain Hanks, I am confident that we will get where we need to go.

*Major General William F. Mullen III*  
*Commanding General*  
*Marine Corps Training and Education Command*

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# PREFACE

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Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Warfighting Exercise (MWX) 1-20 was one of the largest and most comprehensive exercises conducted by the 2d Marine Division (2d MarDiv) throughout the last several decades. The concept was to test how the Marine Corps would fight a future conflict against a peer adversary. The participants divided into two groups: an exercise force built around 2d MarDiv and an adversary force built around 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division. Both forces contained multidomain and all-spectrum capabilities from elements across the Marine Air-Ground Task Force and encompassed multiple units and personnel from the Joint force and several North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-ally coalition partners. The exercise took place 1–9 November 2019 at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, California. It was facilitated by the Marine Corp Tactics and Operations Group and Tactical Training Exercise Control Group, and was largely



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free play to facilitate the most realistic conditions and series of events possible.

This work is not an analytical discussion of MWX. There are likely to be many articles written by far more intelligent people and subject matter experts who will dissect and assimilate lessons learned from this exercise. Instead, *Khaos Company* offers a short story written with the intent to provide Marines with the perspective of what it is like to operate and fight at the company- and small-unit levels in operations of such large scale and scope. All of the events herein are based on the actual sequence of events that occurred during the exercise, and the conversations are generally expressed how they occurred but should not be taken as direct quotes.

If MWX is a rarity that represents closest approximation the Marine Corps can create to simulate major combat operations against a peer and pacing adversary, then the goal of this work is to serve as a guide for audiences to walk in another's shoes, learn from their mistakes, empathize with these situations, and find value that helps them build their teams and prepare their Marines for future conflict. Every lesson learned throughout the exercise were lessons already known, but for one reason or another were discovered only through practical application. This is likely due to the fact that our doctrine, our professional military education (PME) practices, and our model for capturing lessons learned cover almost everything we need to know as professional warfighters, but lack one essential quality: the human element. To accomplish the intended goal, *Khaos Company* was written to include, and draw out,

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the thoughts, emotions, and conversations that make up the human dimension of the exercise. Ideally, readers will “live” as we did and “experience” the lessons we learned in a manner as close to the real experience as possible. This is a story about how a small yet cohesive company of Marines experienced chaos, friction, uncertainty, surprise, failure, success, relationships, and executed the maneuver warfare principles outlined in our doctrinal warfighting philosophy.

Finally, this narrative is written from one infantry company’s perspective; the other 14,900 Marines, sailors, airmen, soldiers, and contractors who participated in this event likely had different experiences, all of which hopefully come to light at some point in the future. The lessons learned that are identified in each chapter are not all-inclusive, but instead offer some of the more prevalent ones that came to fruition for the company commander and their team. Hopefully, readers will find many more lessons and failures in this story than what is drawn out here.



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No effect has a purely singular cause. Many people contributed to the creation of this work and I would be remiss if I did not mention them. To my wife, Deaven, who sacrificed a normal life for one wrought with unique challenges and physical separation, yet provides an unremitting foundation of support that I rely on dearly. To my parents who raised me well and to my brothers of the greatest caliber. To a host of mentors and friends I have served alongside, below, and above during the last decade who have shaped the officer I strive to be. To the general officers who have endowed trust in and empowered me and my fellow company grade leaders. To Wick Murray and his red pen for educating me about the art of writing. To Angela Anderson and Marine Corps University Press for making this work a reality. And finally, to the Marines of Khaos Company and to the many other phenomenal Marines and sailors I have had the privilege to serve with; you are a direct representation of the greatest facet of this country and it continues to be my greatest honor to share this endeavor with you.



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# INTRODUCTION

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Williamson Murray, PhD

Military organizations spend significant amounts of time producing lessons learned. Cold and for the most part unimaginative, they record the supposed lessons of combat, exercises, and inspections, but rarely do they provide a sense of what they really should be reporting—the uncertainties, ambiguities, and confusion of decision making under pressure. Moreover, the lessons disappear from organizational memory almost from the moment that they are written and published. Military history during the past century suggests that, for the most part, lessons-learned processes have achieved little in improving the organizations that spend so much time preparing and then distributing them. From the point of view of military historians, they are enormously useful in reconstructing the past and in understanding the culture of particular military organizations. Yet, the suspicion among those who study them remains that they are rarely useful to the organizations themselves, because they are rarely internalized and used to question or examine what really occurred.

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The crucial element, then, in military effectiveness would seem to be the ability of organizations and individuals to internalize their experiences and, by so doing, learn from them. The real problem seems to be the failure of individuals, officers, and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) not only to learn from others, but to learn from their own experiences. In the cannon of military history, Captain Ernest D. Swinton's *The Defence of Duffer's Drift* stands out in its chapters as a series of dreams that force Lieutenant Backsight Forethought to consider again and again how he should go about the defense of Duffer's Drift.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, nearly a century later, in *The Defense of Hill 781*, James R. McDonough led the reader through an imaginary effort to examine the defense of a particular piece of terrain at the Fort Irwin National Training Center in the Mojave Desert.<sup>7</sup> Both titles involve the learning processes that one would like to think most young officers go through and experience as their careers progress. They represent guideposts from the past for those in the present to examine their own experiences and learn from them.

Perhaps the foremost example that we have of an individual internalizing their experiences is that of Field Marshal William Slim, commander of the British 14th Army in the Burma campaign during the Second World War. Forced to confront the results of the grim defeat of

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<sup>6</sup> Capt E. D. Swinton, DSO, RE, *The Defence of Duffer's Drift* (Washington, DC: U.S. Infantry Association, 1904).

<sup>7</sup> James R. McDonough, *The Defense of Hill 781: An Allegory of Modern Mechanized Combat* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988).

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his forces in the retreat from Burma and by a fierce and effective opponent in the Japanese Army, Slim sat down and ruthlessly addressed the mistakes that he had made in the dismal retreat out of Burma, rather than those of his soldiers and his subordinates. What he recognized was that before they changed—as indeed they had to—he had to change. As he noted after the campaign: “For myself I had little to be proud of; I could not rate my generalship high. The only test of generalship is success, and I had succeeded in nothing I had attempted.”<sup>8</sup> What made Slim such a great leader was his ability to ruthlessly examine his mistakes as well as his successes, internalize them, and then ensure that he learned from them.

It is clear that one of the major factors in the success of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps in their preparation for the eventual war in the Pacific had to do with the rigor with which they examined the Fleet exercises they conducted during the interwar period. At the completion of each one of these exercises, the senior participants critically and honestly examined the performance of the contending fleets and commanders. With that ability to examine themselves as well as their subordinates and learn from their experiences, the naval forces, as learning organizations, were able to crush the proud Imperial Japanese Navy and recover from the disasters of the war’s opening months.

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<sup>8</sup> Field Marshal Viscount William Slim, *Defeat into Victory: Battling Japan in Burma and India, 1942–1945* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 120.



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Captain Matthew Hanks participated in MAGTF Warfighting Exercise (MWX) 1-20 in November 2019 as a company commander. What makes the account of his and his unit's participation in the exercise so interesting is that he provides much more than a chronology of what happened during the exercise. In particular, he provides a Clausewitzian picture of decision making under pressure and of the confusion and friction that military exercises must possess if they are to attempt to replicate the problems that combat will raise.<sup>9</sup> But the most impressive part of Captain Hanks's story is the analyses that follow each chapter, as he attempts to come to grips with what he needs to learn from these experiences. Having taught Captain Hanks last year in a seminar at the Expeditionary Warfare School, I am not surprised by the results presented here. In effect, admittedly at a much lower level than Slim, he has exhibited an ability to internalize his experiences and learn from them. In every sense, this study of an individual's learning processes should serve as an example to his fellow officers.

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<sup>9</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

# KHAOS COMPANY



*3rd Battalion 8th Marines*



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# CHAPTER ONE

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## The Calm before the Storm

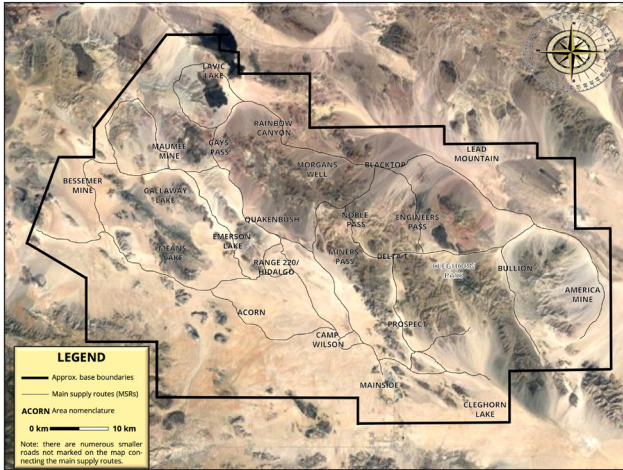
“Captain Hanks, Sir, is that you?” A noise came from outside Captain Hanks’s sleeping bag. It was just past midnight. Captain Matthew Hanks, company commander for Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, opened his bag and took a look around his area under the cloudless night in the desert on board the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, roughly two hours east of Los Angeles in the Mojave Desert of California (figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The Marine Corps likes to test this theory that the human body can get accustomed to anything after a while. The stars in the desert are more than enough light to see by, and he quickly counted the Marines in their bags around him.

Captain Hanks was the only one awake in his company, except for the two Marines on fire watch (guard

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the history and austere nature of the base, see Col Verle E. Ludwig, USMC (Ret), *U.S. Marines at Twenty-nine Palms, California* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1989).

**Figure 1.** Map of Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, CA.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

duty), huddled in poncho liners by the radio. He had been in his sleeping bag for less than 30 minutes, and already the edges of the tarp near his face were covered in icy frost. It was going to be another cold night. He, and the rest of his Marines, learned quickly that ranger graves (fighting holes), aside from offering moderate protection against enemy fire, also offer protection from the wind. With wind and the other environmental elements being the chief protagonist at the moment, the whole company was spread out in sporadic holes in a small ravine cut in the side of a mountain. *At least it was too cold for rattlesnakes tonight*, Captain Hanks thought

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to himself. Besides, 1st Platoon already killed two of them yesterday. How many more could be in their area?

“Yeah, what’s up, brother?” Captain Hanks asked, turning his attention to the Marine standing near his ranger grave.

“Sir, regiment said they need you at their command post [CP] ASAP,” the Marine replied.

Captain Hanks looked at his watch—0034. He replied, “Are you sure they were asking for me?” This request was a strange and unexpected occurrence.

“Yes, Sir. Tarawa said to have Captain Hanks come to regiment ASAP, and Major White told me where you were,” the Marine answered.

“Okay. Did they say what it was about?” Captain Hanks asked.

“No, Sir,” the Marine replied.

“Okay, thanks. I’m coming,” Captain Hanks replied. Now, he was awake; he must have fucked something up. Regiment would not call for him this late at night if it was good news. Sleeping with boots on in the bag certainly encourages efficiency, and Captain Hanks was out of his bag in a few seconds. He threw on his body armor, grabbed his rifle and Kevlar, and made his way to the battalion command post to see what was going on. It only took a few minutes to get to the combat operations center (COC), and once inside he found the battalion executive officer (XO), Major Christopher C. Caldwell, and a few Marines supporting COC operations.

“Sir, do you know what this is about?” he asked Major Caldwell.

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“Not a clue. Major White is outside in the Joint light tactical vehicle [JLTV] on blue force tracker [BFT] trying to figure it out,” Major Caldwell replied.

“Thanks, Sir,” Captain Hanks said and walked around the outside of the tent to the JLTV. Major Joshua White, the battalion operations officer, was in the passenger seat typing away at the BFT.

“Sir, I heard the regiment called for me. Do you have anything else on this?” Captain Hanks asked Major White.

“No, I asked why they needed you, what you needed to bring, and a number of other questions. They haven’t responded. Here, see for yourself,” Major White said, pivoting the BFT toward him.

Captain Hanks leaned into the JLTV and took a look at the BFT traffic. White was right, nothing available. “All right, do we have a vehicle ready or do you need me to drive my own?” Captain Hanks asked.

“All our drivers are asleep. We’d have to go wake one up,” Major White replied.

“Okay, don’t worry about it, Sir. I’ll take my own. Do you mind telling them I’m on my way?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Yeah, I’ll let them know,” he replied.

“Thanks. I’ll back brief you when I return,” Captain Hanks said and made his way back into the COC tent to grab his gear.

“I have no idea what this is about, but my best guess is you’ll need to find a new company commander by tomorrow,” Captain Hanks told Major Caldwell sarcastically.

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“Good luck, brother. I’m sure it’s nothing like that,” he replied.

Captain Hanks smiled and made his way back toward his company area. The white lights of the COC obliterated normal night vision. There was a tricky hill he had to get over to get to his company assembly area. Too stubborn to use his red lens flashlight and break light discipline, he stumbled the 200 meters to the position only to realize that he needed to get to the JLTV, not his CP. Another 200 meters, and a few stumbles later, he made it. He could see several coyote brown cocoons, the Marine Corps-issued bivouac sacks for sleeping, in a few ranger graves about 30 meters in front of the JLTV. Which one was Corporal Miguel “Oli” Oliveros, his driver? Maybe he was inside the vehicle. Captain Hanks opened the door and found a cocoon in the driver’s seat.

“Oli, is that you?” Captain Hanks asked. The cocoon shivered and moved around a little bit in response, but no comprehensible words came out.

“Who is this?” Captain Hanks asked again.

“Marty,” the cocoon replied.

“Marty, it’s Captain Hanks. Get out, I need the vehicle. Where’s Oli?” Captain Hanks asked.

The cocoon hatched, and Corporal Andrew Martinez, the company intelligence Marine, emerged. Corporal Martinez was small in stature, but what he lacked in size, he made up for in aptitude. He had matured significantly during the last few months, particularly in his duties as the company information and intelligence chief while executing the Marine Corps Warfight-



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ing Lab's (MCWL) Project Metropolis II (ProMet II) in August.<sup>2</sup> Kilo Company, reinforced by elements all across the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF), was chosen to help MCWL answer how the Marine Corps would fight and win against an asymmetric and peer adversary threat under modern battlefield conditions with tomorrow's equipment in the urban environment. It was almost 30 days of continuous fighting in all domains, and Corporal Martinez synchronized information, intelligence, and operations through a modified dynamic targeting cycle. He was a lance corporal then; he is a meritorious corporal now, and he earned it.

"Sir, he's up by the CP," Corporal Martinez replied.

"Okay, can you go grab him and let him know we have to move ASAP?" Captain Hanks said.

"Yes, Sir," Corporal Martinez said as he shed his cocoon and moved away into the darkness. Captain Hanks looked around and saw the handful of other cocoons still around the JLTV. Captain Hanks had been at Twentynine Palms a few years ago when a Marine was crushed by a vehicle at night, and he decided he was not going to chance it.<sup>3</sup> The Marines' sleep was not worth their lives. He woke up the Marines and moved them to a location outside the vehicle's perimeter. As he finished,

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<sup>2</sup> For more on Project Metropolis II, see Gina Harkins, "Inside Project Metropolis, the Marine Corps' Plan to Wage War in the Cities of Tomorrow," *Task & Purpose*, 24 June 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Aylworth, "Investigators Finally Release Details of Chico Marine's Death," *Chico (CA) Enterprise-Record*, 6 January 2014.

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something told him to look inside the back of the JLTV. Among the meals ready to eat (MRE) boxes and water jugs lay another cocoon. Captain Hanks woke it up.

“Hey, wake up. Who is that?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Rabbit,” the cocoon replied.

“Rabbit, get the fuck out. The vehicle is moving soon.” Captain Hanks was getting impatient. Marines are sleeping all around and in his only vehicle. No one seemed to understand the sense of urgency he needed, and all of them seemed too tired to care. Kilo Company, known as “Khaos Company,” 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, had been out at Tactical Assembly Area (TAA) Grizzly for five days preparing for MAGTF Warfighting Exercise 1-20. They had been training at Twenty-nine Palms for several weeks before that, maximizing the training value of the live-fire ranges offered on this Marine Corps base. At TAA Grizzly, though, times had been good and the tempo relatively easy.

The company had started off at TAA Grizzly with a sunrise hike five days ago, hiking to the tallest peak in the area before the sun came up. Building on the culture within the company by breaking bread together on a mountain peak as the sun rose over the vast range of Johnson Valley was more important than any rehearsals they could have done (figure 2).

Khaos Company currently consists of 83 officers, enlisted Marines, and sailors. The company recently participated as the main exercise force in the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab’s Project Metropolis II, an experiment designed to answer how the Marine Corps

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**Figure 2.** Khaos Company's mountaintop sunrise hike and breakfast.



Courtesy of the author

infantry should staff, train, equip, and fight in the most complex and demanding environments of the future against peer adversary threats. This month-long experiment greatly aided in the development of the company. Shared hardship and challenging training environments deliver cohesion because it allows leaders and Marines to demonstrate their worth. However, the training alone was not why this company was, and is, so successful. More important than the staffing, training, or equipping of the unit was the culture it generated and fostered. Culture is the key to the successful implementation of its maneuver warfare philosophy, and the small

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unit leaders are the gatekeepers.<sup>4</sup> Leaders demonstrate their worth when they are proficient enough to cover the gap of their subordinates' failures, but they have built a culture where subordinates grow through their failures. Failure is a stressful and emotional event but is an invaluable tool for growth and development. To fulfill this theory, Captain Hanks divested an enormous amount of trust to his subordinates, and targeted the noncommissioned officers (NCOs) as his bid for success in implementation. As a result, the NCOs ran Khaos Company. From the very beginning, the NCOs were given authority, and they trained and educated themselves on how to most effectively apply that authority. They built Khaos Company from the bottom up: recreating its logo, call sign, etc., while being coached, mentored, and supported by the officers and staff noncommissioned officers (SNCOs). There was no magic formula that created Khaos Company, just a willingness and deliberate effort to accept, understand, follow, and adopt Marine Corps doctrinal and warfighting philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

After the company completed its cohesion-building event during the mountaintop sunrise breakfast, they spent three days and nights rehearsing defensive and offensive scenarios. It was back to the basics, which are easy to forget if not constantly reinforced. They needed

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<sup>4</sup> See *Warfighting*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> *Warfighting*.

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to get to a point where every Marine could answer a series of questions:

- What is my purpose?
- What is the commander's intent?
- Who/what do I shoot?
- Where do I shoot?
- When do I shoot?

The most important of these questions is the first: every Marine must know the *why*. Failure to give them this destroys the entire paradigm of the Marine Corps maneuver warfare philosophy.<sup>6</sup> To further build trust, these questions could not just be limited to the tactical sense either. Why are they at Twentynine Palms away from their family? Why are they in Johnson Valley, subsisting on MREs, while other Marines are eating at the chow hall in Camp Wilson? Why are they out training while others are sleeping? Why must they observe this sector? Why must they keep their weapon clean? Why do they maintain the suffering of the infantry while there are so many that will never know the pain? These answers, if understood by the young Marines, maintain the ethos of the Marine Corps to serve and support the American way of life.

Captain Hanks calmed down by thinking about this while standing in the cold desert air waiting for his Marines to respond. It was only natural to want instant responses with quick and accurate action, but having

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<sup>6</sup> *Warfighting*, 74.

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patience is a critical requirement for leaders when developing Marines. Finally, a figure comes half running, half stumbling down the ravine to the JLTV—Corporal Oliveros. Corporal Oliveros was the Khaos Company radio operator, acting headquarters platoon sergeant, and the company's only JLTV driver. He did not have much time left in the Marine Corps. This was actually his last field exercise before his end of active service process. But he had proved time and again to be a reliable NCO and extremely capable in the field.

“Oli, sorry for waking you. How long until you can get this rig ready to go?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Two minutes, Sir. What’s going on?” Corporal Oliveros asked.

“I have no idea. Regiment came over the net 20 minutes ago saying I needed to be there. Are you comfortable enough with blacked out driving?” Captain Hanks asked. Blacked out driving is just how it sounds: driving at night with no lights on. The driver and assistant driver utilize night vision devices that help them see better at night; but it is a far cry from normal driving with headlights on.

“Yes, Sir,” Corporal Oliveros replied.

“Okay, I’ll ground guide you out,” Captain Hanks said.

It takes about two minutes for a JLTV to start up if it is in strap down mode. Apparently, this is supposed to ease the tension on the suspension and reduce maintenance requirements. To Captain Hanks, it just added seconds to a startup procedure that could mean life or death if you needed that vehicle to move immediately.

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For those without JLTV experience, the engine is almost as loud as a jet engine. The cocoons around the JLTV were definitely awake as the JLTV roared to life. The vehicle provides many perks and upgrades from the HMMWV, but it does have some downsides.<sup>7</sup>

Corporal Oliveros had no issues navigating the JLTV blacked out. Once you find tire tracks in the desert, they are pretty easy to follow. The trip to regiment took only 10 minutes. Captain Hanks laughed to himself thinking how a 10-minute ride took almost 45 minutes to execute when you factored in the time it took to get the message to him, the time it took to organize a response, and the time it took to actually drive to the final destination. Captain Hanks and Oliveros found a spot at the edge of the regimental vehicle staging area.

“Go ahead and get some rest. I have no idea how long this will take,” Captain Hanks told Corporal Oliveros. He staged his combat kit in the JLTV, grabbed his rifle, and made his way up to the regimental COC. He was surprised to see that the tent was completely full. *Something bigger has to be going on*, Captain Hanks thought. He saw Lieutenant Colonel Patrick V. Lavoie, the Regimental Combat Team 2 (RCT 2) operations officer, sitting in his seat across from Colonel Brian P. Coyne, the regimental commander. Colonel Coyne sat in his corner seat peering over a map on the table. He

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<sup>7</sup> Todd South, “The Newly Fielded Joint Light Tactical Vehicle Was Briefly Deemed ‘Not Operationally Suitable,’” *Military Times*, 22 February 2019.

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looked deep in thought but appeared to be listening to the multiple conversations buzzing around the room. Captain Hanks had been in the COC several times in the last few days, and he gathered that Colonel Coyne was a reserved but very calculating commander. Captain Hanks had read the notes from the regimental operational planning team (OPT) the other week, which had portions written entirely by Colonel Coyne to ensure his thoughts and intent were clearly communicated across the force. Captain Hanks was anxious to figure out why he had been called in, so he made his way to Lieutenant Colonel Lavoie.

“Sir, I got here as quick as I could,” Captain Hanks said.

“Great, thanks for coming,” Lieutenant Colonel Lavoie said and shook Captain Hanks’s hand. Captain Hanks had primarily worked directly with Lieutenant Colonel Lavoie and his British regimental assistant operations officer, a foreign exchange officer, for coordination, tasking, and employment of Khaos Company as the RCT reserve. Both of these officers were level headed, easily approachable, and eager to plan and execute. So far, Captain Hanks had enjoyed working with the RCT 2 team and felt at home.

“So, this is the deal: exercise control [EXCON] just let us know that the adversary force [ADFOR] can use mainside as an avenue of approach if they secure these mountains along Range Road. That leaves a pretty significant gap in our defense; 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, can’t secure it without taking forces away from their main engagement area in Delta T. So, we’re committing



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the reserve, you guys, to block that gap,” Lieutenant Colonel Lavoie said. Delta T was a major road intersection that connected the valleys in between the mountain ranges onboard MCAGCC.

The official start of MWX was still several days away, but planning and replanning was in full swing. In the scenario, 2d MarDiv was tasked to support allied countries through theater security cooperation exercises that would deter the host nation’s hostile adversary to the north and east. If deterrence failed, and the adversary force—known as Dakotians—crossed into allied territory, 2d MarDiv would serve as the blunt force.<sup>8</sup> Critical in their task would be to maintain security on the prepositioning (PP) caves located in the vicinity of Hidalgo City. These caves housed an enormous amount of combat power and equipment. Theoretically, should a response be required, elements of a larger Joint force would rapidly travel to these caves, gather the equipment, and form the majority of the surge force that counters adversary aggression. However, this would take several days for those forces to mobilize, deploy, and aggregate with the equipment. This meant that 2d MarDiv would have to hold out on its own with limited support until follow-on forces arrived.

Should hostilities occur, 2d MarDiv assessed that the adversary would make all haste to gain control of the caves and prevent allied forces from massing significant combat power. The enemy in the area was fur-

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<sup>8</sup> The Dakotians are a fictional enemy force designed to portray the characteristics of potential U.S. adversaries in the future.

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ther assessed to be a mechanized corps reinforced with a significant amount of armor and aviation. In reality, 2d MarDiv knew the adversary force consisted of 2d Battalion, 4th Marines; 3d Battalion, 7th Marines; 45 Commando (a British Royal Marine unit); a tank company; a reconnaissance company; a light armored reconnaissance company; multidomain enablers; artillery batteries; and a whole host of fixed-wing, rotary-wing, and unmanned aerial system (UAS) aviation. The 7th Marines would serve as the overarching adversary headquarters, but they would be assisted by the adversary threat group—an organization of men and women with years of military experience who specialize in understanding and employing asymmetric and adversary tactics. Coincidentally, this adversary threat group provided the same capabilities against Captain Hanks and Chaos Company during ProMet II, so he knew just how proficient they were. Although all of these forces were smaller than 2d MarDiv, the rules of MWX gave them multiple lives so that they would replicate the numbers and combat power of an actual enemy mechanized corps. Conversely, 2d MarDiv Marines and sailors only had one life to give in the game, which put the numerical advantage in the adversary's favor.

As a precaution for hostilities, 2d MarDiv made a contingency plan with the forces at hand. Major General David J. Furness, commanding general of 2d MarDiv, conceptually divided the division's battlespace into a spatial framework using a rear area, close area, and deep area. The rear area, designed to sustain the force, stretched from Johnson Valley to Barstow, California.

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The close area contained most of the western half of the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, while the deep area extended to the eastern half. The close area was further divided and allocated to the two regimental combat teams—RCT 2 in the center and south and RCT 3 to the north. As the blunt force, 2d MarDiv did not need to win the war. They only had to hold on to the caves and provide buffer space for staging to enable the larger Joint force to surge combat power and overwhelm the enemy.

Traditionally, one would not want to spread the defense out so thin. However, it is difficult to predict what a free-thinking enemy will decide to do. Critical for the decision on the battlespace framework was the assumption that moving forces around the area of operations (AO) would be extremely difficult due to the fact that the enemy had dominance in the air domain. This assumption was such a driving factor that Major General Furness refused to deploy his light armored reconnaissance units in the deep area near the enemy. He instead deployed them in the close area in direct support of the regimental security missions. This decision served two purposes: first, it mitigated the need to move a security element under enemy air threats; and second, it increased security around the caves, ultimately directly fulfilling the purpose to 2d MarDiv's mission. To be seen or sensed is to be targeted in this fight. RCT 3, consisting primarily of 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, and 2d Tank Battalion (2d Tanks), would have maneuver space in the north and was tasked to block the enemy in zone, while still maintaining a posture to conduct a reinforce-

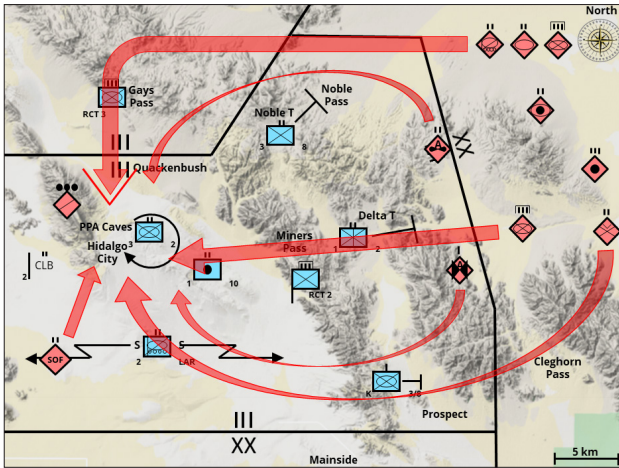
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ment or counterattack. RCT 2 was assigned the largest area with the task of retaining the PP caves. To complete this task, Colonel Coyne tasked 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, to retain the PP caves; 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, to block enemy forces in Noble Pass; and 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, to block enemy forces in the Delta T. The concept of this defense was trading space for time. To engage the enemy early, often, and far away from the PP caves would likely delay their actions long enough for the surging Joint force to travel and arrive in country.

Khaos Company had to this point been dedicated as the RCT 2 Reserve and had been deeply involved in the RCT 2 planning process. Captain Hanks had a good understanding of the battlespace and also recognized the gap this new information revealed. Specifically, the gap was two points in the Prospect Mountain Range that could be crossed with infantry and small vehicles. Once crossed, the ADFOR had an open avenue of approach to Hidalgo City and the cave complexes that houses all of the combat power in the region. This combat power must be retained until follow-on forces arrived in theater and could take over the equipment. The closest battalion to the new gap in the RCT 2 AO was 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, but their engagement areas rested primarily in the Delta T area. As a result, 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' battlespace was enlarged, and Khaos Company was attached to 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, effective immediately (figure 3).

“We typed up a new FRAGO that outlines all of this. We’ll be pushing it out in a few hours; but if you want to take a look at it first, go ahead,” Lieutenant

**Figure 3.** The enemy's most likely course of action (assessed) and RCT 2's scheme of maneuver.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

Colonel Lavoie said as he handed Captain Hanks a two-page order.

In the original operations order, Khaos Company was supposed to have a platoon of assault amphibious vehicles (AAVs) attached to it. Additionally, the company was tasked to detach a squad to Task Force Miners. Task Force Miners was a small platoon-size element consisting of infantry and low altitude air defense (LAAD) teams assigned to securing Miner's Pass. Captain Hanks had detached one of his best squad leaders and his squad, Sergeant Sean Goode with Khaos 3-1 (3d Platoon, 1st Squad), to this task yesterday.

"Sir, we have no issues. It's pretty straightforward,"

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Captain Hanks said after reading it. “The only question I have is whether the attachments and detachments remain the same.”

“Yes, that all remains the same. We still need that squad. And you should still have the track platoon. They should be coming to you first thing this morning. Before you go, I’d like to get you on a phone conference with 1st Battalion, 2d Marines’ OpsO so you guys can get on the same page,” Lieutenant Colonel Lavoie replied.

Lieutenant Colonel Lavoie and Captain Hanks stepped outside to set up the phone conference. Lieutenant Colonel Lavoie and Major Dennis A. Graziosi, 1st Battalion, 2d Marines’ operations officer spoke for a few minutes on the adjusted battlespace boundaries before handing the phone off to Captain Hanks.

“Matt, how’s it going, brother?” Major Graziosi asked.

“Good, Sir. I heard I’ll be working for you guys now. What are your thoughts?” Captain Hanks asked.

“You’re tracking the two infiltration points, right?”

“Yes, Sir. The regiment S-2 [intelligence shop] made some products on it,” Captain Hanks replied.

“Okay, we’re thinking about putting you there to block any infiltration. We might also look to have you put a platoon across the way on the east side of Prospect.”

“That will spread my guys out pretty thin,” Captain Hanks said skeptically. “Are you just looking for me to stop light infantry infiltration, or are you thinking

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about me contributing in an armored fight if they try to go south to north through the valley?”

“Primarily the light infantry,” Major Graziosi said confidently. We’ll have a combined antiarmor team [CAAT] platoon from 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, in your area to delay armor, but we want to have that fight farther up in the Delta T. We can work all this out tomorrow. I don’t need anything from you tonight, I just wanted to touch base and give you a heads up.”

“Sounds good, Sir. Will you be over here later today or tomorrow?”

“Yeah, Lieutenant Colonel Diana and I will be there for the 1500 commander’s huddle. We’ll get there a little early to coordinate with you.”

“Okay, Sir. I’ll be there. See you then.” Captain Hanks hung up the phone and put it back on the MRE box that Lieutenant Colonel Lavoie had found it on. Lieutenant Colonel Lavoie had slipped back into the COC tent while Captain Hanks was on the phone, so he went back inside to let him know he was all set and thanked him for the help. With nothing else needed, Captain Hanks returned to the JLTV and drove to TAA Grizzly. When he got there, he figured he would check in with the OpsO and XO to keep them in the loop. The COC was empty except for the radio watch. Captain Hanks realized that it was almost 0200 and everyone was probably already asleep, so he made his way back up to his company assembly area. On that short walk, Captain Hanks reviewed everything that had happened in his mind.

All of the rehearsals the company had completed

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in the last few days were based on likely employment of the RCT reserve: link ups with adjacent battalions, hasty defenses, and rapid offensive exploitation attacks using mechanized infantry tactics. The new orders in hand called for a deliberate defense; that is, a defense with specific parameters to defeat an enemy infiltration in a mountainous environment. He was a little disappointed to be put into a static defense; offense under mechanized conditions came with much more promising adventure.<sup>9</sup> Regardless, Captain Hanks figured this was the nature of MWX, and likely war—neither are what you plan for. He felt confident his team would nonetheless thrive with these new orders. When he made it back to his sleeping bag, he set down his gear, found a comfortable rock to put his head on, and went to sleep.

The 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, was supposed to insert into their defense at Noble Pass the next day and was up early starting its actions. The battalion had transportation locked on for this because they had no organic lift.<sup>10</sup> Khaos Company was also supposed to leave that day but would be heading to the Delta T and Prospect to link up with 1st Battalion, 2d Marines. Khaos Company theoretically had its own organic lift with its attached AAVs. The only problem was the

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<sup>9</sup> For more on deliberate and static defense, see *Corps Operations, Field Manual (FM) 100-15* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1996), chap. 6.

<sup>10</sup> For more on organic lift, see *Air Mobility Operations*, Joint Publication (JP) 3-17 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2019).



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AAVs had not yet arrived. Lieutenant Colonel Lavoie had told Captain Hanks that the track platoon would depart Camp Wilson to link up with them first thing in the morning. Having no reason to think they would not, Captain Hanks felt confident that things were on schedule. He briefed his leadership team on the updated situation and new mission and told them to keep everyone relaxed for the day. Captain Hanks fully expected some long days and nights in the near future, so he figured they should get the rest while they can.

At breakfast, Captain Hanks found Lieutenant Colonel Neil R. Berry, the commanding officer of 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, and decided it was time to break the bad news of the update. The battalion was understrength to begin with, and losing Khaos Company as it served the RCT Reserve position further reduced the battalion's combat power—a fact that Lieutenant Colonel Berry was well aware. Now instead of acting as the reserve, Khaos Company was attached to another battalion, a battalion that already had significantly more personnel than 3d Battalion, 8th Marines. However, Lieutenant Colonel Berry had been a coyote at Twentynine Palms years ago and knew the terrain pretty well. Hanks felt confident that he would be able to accomplish his mission with the forces he had.

“Sir, I had a late rendezvous with regiment last night,” Captain Hanks said, holding a steaming hot canteen full of coffee.

“Yes, I heard. What was that all about?” he asked.

“Well, it looks like I'm no longer the reserve. We're

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attached to 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, effective immediately.”

Lieutenant Colonel Berry looked at Captain Hanks for a second, then looked off in the distance. The coffee the two were drinking must have been good enough to distract from the issue, because the moment passed and he turned back around. “Well, it is what it is,” Lieutenant Colonel Berry said calmly. “I guess they need you more. Lieutenant Colonel Diana is a smart guy. You’ll like working for him.”

Captain Hanks and Lieutenant Colonel Berry spoke for a few more minutes. Clearly, Lieutenant Colonel Berry’s mind was already focused on the actions necessary to insert the battalion into the defense. He had consistently stressed that you cannot win the fight in the rear area with our traditional view of winning, but you can certainly lose it. The battalion still needed work on its tactical assembly area operations and displacement drills, but they were definitely improving.

As the afternoon approached, Captain Hanks made his way back over to regiment for the commander’s huddle. He found Lieutenant Colonel Gabriel L. Diana, the commanding officer of 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, and Major Graziosi before the huddle started.

“Sir, I heard I’m attached to you now,” Captain Hanks said to Lieutenant Colonel Diana.

“Matt, good to see you. Let’s talk really quick,” Lieutenant Colonel Diana said, shaking Captain Hanks’s hand. “These two infiltration points are becoming a big deal. Bottom line is that I want you to block

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enemy infiltration in this area. My intent is that there is no penetration through your zone. Additionally, if they go the armored route, I want you to be able to hit soft targets in the rear of their columns as their support units come up. To me, this looks like quick, combined arms attacks against 7-tons, trucks, enemy AAVs, etc., using indirect fire and your AAVs. We'll keep your tracks with you, so you retain your mobility if you have to move or reinforce regiment. With you committed, there's no dedicated reserve, so it will have to be the least engaged unit. We'll talk more on this later, but is that enough for now?"

"Yes, Sir, mission and intent. We got it," Captain Hanks said.

"Good. Well, I look forward to working with you and your guys."

That would be a decision point Captain Hanks would have to talk about with his team: Under what conditions would they stay in a defensive posture? What are the conditions to conduct an attack? If they commit to an attack, do they still have the capability and capacity to accomplish the mission of blocking enemy infiltration? It is anybody's guess, at this point, what the enemy will do. They did not have any intelligence on actual enemy activity, only intelligence on possible actions. Knowing that he might not be in the information loop with all the activity in the division's AO, Captain Hanks would have to wargame multiple situations so that the company would have clearly defined triggers and engagement criteria for their defense.

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Colonel Coyne came into the room and everyone went silent to start the meeting. They reviewed the full commander's update brief and highlighted the changes in the situation, spending particular attention on the new infiltration points the enemy could use to open up a southern avenue of approach to Hidalgo City and the PP caves. Afterward, Colonel Coyne grabbed all of the commanders and walked down to the terrain model to wargame and synchronize their schemes of maneuver one last time.<sup>11</sup>

Relevant to Captain Hanks's involvement in the plan, 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, planned for an area defense. Alpha and Charlie Companies would create a main engagement area just west of the Delta T to block the enemy. Bravo Company would occupy the highest mountaintops to the east of the Delta T and provide observation on the other side of the mountains. The CAAT platoons would establish hunter-killer positions near the Delta T, with fallback positions in the main engagement area. Task Force Puma (or "prepare to unmask artillery") consisting of Headquarters and Service Company, 2d Assault Amphibian Battalion, would set up a deception engagement area on the Delta T. Khaos Company would block enemy infiltration across the

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<sup>11</sup> For more on nondigital wargaming, see Maj Walter E. Kretchik, "The Manual Wargaming Process: Does Our Current Methodology Give Us the Optimum Solution?" (master's diss., School of Advanced Military Studies U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1992).

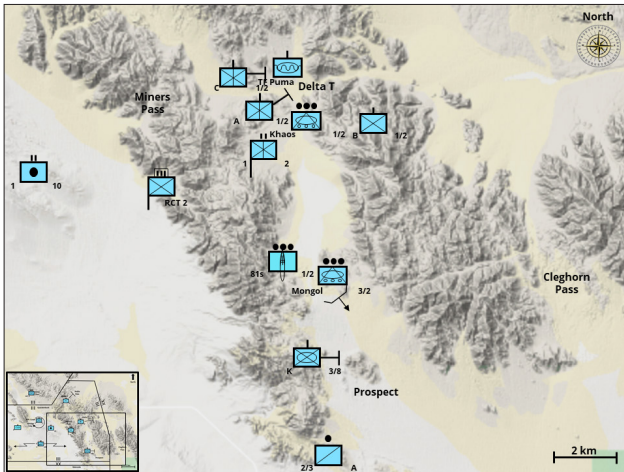
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Prospect Mountains to prevent the conventional enemy forces from linking up with Special Operations Forces in Hidalgo City. In direct support of Khaos Company was 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' 81mm mortar platoon, their sniper platoon, an electronic warfare support team (EWST), and a ground sensor platoon team (GSP). In addition, a CAAT platoon from 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, was also in direct support to Khaos Company, who would delay the enemy from south to north along the Prospect corridor. The entire defense was designed to block the enemy approach through the Delta T and surrounding areas, trading space for time and facilitating the conditions for the regiment or division to conduct counterattacks (figure 4). Specifically, the conditions required for the counterattack included:

1. Air parity or air superiority over the counterattack avenue of approach,
2. Three days of supply for the counterattack force, with one additional day of supply with the combat logistics battalion following in trace,
3. One enemy brigade tactical group destroyed with one enemy brigade tactical group only able to mass a company-size attack, or two brigade tactical groups only able to conduct platoon-size attacks,
4. One friendly artillery battalion capable of supporting, and
5. Enemy BM-30s and Smerch destroyed.

The commanders all went their separate ways af-

**Figure 4.** 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' scheme of maneuver in the Delta T/ Prospect area.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

ter the huddle on the terrain model. Captain Hanks headed back to TAA Grizzly to see the last remnants of 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, leave to insert into their defense. He did not see any tracks.

“Did the tracks not show up?” Captain Hanks asked First Lieutenant Brian P. Baldini, the company executive officer.

“No, Sir, I haven’t heard anything about them. I was hoping you heard something while you were at regiment,” First Lieutenant Baldini replied. First Lieutenant Baldini was an extremely effective XO. His attention to detail and ability to manage the company allowed Captain Hanks to actually command the com-

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pany. Captain Hanks trusted him entirely, and he was thankful to have such an officer in his company. Staff Sergeant Hector Villalobos was the third element of the company command team. He was the acting company first sergeant and acting company gunnery sergeant, as he was the only organic Khaos SNCO. And he did all those jobs very well. The actual company first sergeant, who was also a spectacular member of the company, was currently attending formal professional military education school. The company gunnery sergeant was on temporary orders to a training organization outside the battalion. Despite being absent from MWX, these two SNCOs greatly contributed to the development and success of the company, and it was evident that their presence had a lasting effect on the organization.

“Yeah, they actually told me they should be here. I’ll follow up, maybe something happened,” Captain Hanks answered. He returned to the JLTV and got on regimental TAC 1.

“Tarawa, this is Khaos,” Captain Hanks radioed in.

“Khaos, this is Tarawa.”

“Tarawa, Khaos, the AAV platoon that was supposed to attach to us today is not here. Can you confirm that they are on their way?”

“Khaos, Tawara. Standby.” After a few minutes and no response back from regiment, Captain Hanks handed the radio off to Corporal Oliveros and told him to let him know if they came back over the net.

“So, what do you want to do with the guys?” Staff Sergeant Villalobos asked. He had staged the company

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in stick order (separated in groups specific to each vehicle) in preparation for the tracks' arrival. They were all still waiting on their packs, and it was getting dark out.

"Well, I have no idea where they are. I would keep the guys where they're at, but let them get their sleeping gear out. We've done enough night training the last few nights, so I'm not expecting the guys to do anything. Besides, once the tracks show up, I want to get right on the road." Captain Hanks said.

"Okay, Sir, sounds good. I'll let them know," Staff Sergeant Villalobos said, and moved to inform the platoons. Captain Hanks returned to the JLTV.

"Anything?" he asked Corporal Oliveros.

"Nothing, Sir," Corporal Oliveros replied.

"Okay, let me get in there," Captain Hanks said, and grabbed the radio set.

"Tarawa, this is Khaos."

"Khaos, this is Tawara."

"Tarawa, is the battle captain available?"

"Standby."

"Khaos, this is Tarawa battle captain."

"Tarawa battle captain, this is Khaos 6. Looking to see if you guys have any updates on our track platoon."<sup>12</sup>

"Khaos 6, yeah I do. They're still at Camp Wilson."

Captain Hanks did not understand why. They

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<sup>12</sup> The numerical designation refers to a commander at company level and up. The XO would be designated 5, the gunnery sergeant/operations chief as 7, and the first sergeant as 8.



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should have left Camp Wilson first thing this morning. It is 1900 now.

“Why are they at Camp Wilson?” he asked.

“Apparently, there was some confusion. They were planning on leaving this morning and got in touch with the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines. They told them that the battalion already moved out and there was nobody at TAA Grizzly anymore. Is that not true?”

“Well, technically yes, because we’re detached from the battalion. So 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, probably thought they meant 3d Battalion, 8th Marines. But no, we are still very much at TAA Grizzly.” Captain Hanks replied. He was a little frustrated by this situation. It would not be until after the exercise that Captain Hanks would fully understand the context of the issue. As a result of route restrictions due to a separate live fire combined arms training event, the AAV platoon could not link up with Khaos Company for another 24 hours. Concurrently, communication between RCT 2 and Alpha Company, 2d Assault Amphibian Battalion, was limited as the AAVs did not have a full communication suite. Nonetheless, this now meant that Khaos Company would have 24 fewer hours to prepare their defense.

“Okay, well we’ll let them know to come link up with you tomorrow, that’s the earliest they can leave.”

“Roger, you still have our location, right?”

“Yup, we’ll pass it on. Sorry about the confusion.”

“No worries, not your fault. We still have time as long as we get out tomorrow. We’ll stay on this net if there are any updates.”

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“Roger, tango. Tarawa battle captain out.”

First Lieutenant Baldini and Staff Sergeant Villalobos were sitting on their packs behind the JLTV. Captain Hanks approached them with the updated information.

“Well, good news is the guys get to sleep tonight. Bad news is that tracks aren’t coming until tomorrow,” he said.

“What happened?” First Lieutenant Baldini asked.

Captain Hanks ran them through what Tawara told him.

“Seriously? That’s fucking stupid.” First Lieutenant Baldini said.

“Yeah, but it’s not the end of the world. Shit happens, and we can’t change that fact. Let’s plan for a Khaos session tomorrow morning. We’ll dive deeper in the scenario while we wait for the tracks,” Captain Hanks said.

“Sounds good, Sir. Do you need us to do anything tonight?” Staff Sergeant Villalobos asked.

“Nope. Get some sleep.”

Captain Hanks returned to the JLTV and brought the book he was reading: *Killing Rommel* (2008) by Steven Pressfield. He was reading as much as he could about desert warfare. Although this book was historical fiction, there were many things he pulled from it. The British Army’s Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) accomplished some truly spectacular things in North Africa during World War II—things that Captain

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Hanks had been adopting into the company.<sup>13</sup> He was extremely impressed with the LRDG's ability to outfit their vehicles to maximize survivability and extend their culminating points, so Captain Hanks instilled a bit of that creativity into his own JLTVs. They built external shelves on the outside of their JLTV using pallets and 550-pound paracord that allowed them to each hold an additional 12 water and 4 fuel jugs. Internal shelves were rigged on the ceiling of the highback using the rest of the MRE pallets, allowing for the storage of 16 boxes of MREs. Casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) material, a poled stretcher, and a sled stretcher were strapped to the sides of the internal walls. Semipermanent high-frequency antennas were built on the roof. Camouflage netting was tied to the top and sides. Concertina wire was rigged to the hood. All of this resulted in an overloaded JLTV that was capable of providing command and control, logistics, CASEVAC, and transportation capabilities for the company. And, it could be rapidly hidden from enemy sensors. These alterations extended the company's culminating point and provided it with greater flexibility in operations.

Captain Hanks took much more from Pressfield's book, too, because it offered something uniquely different than an after action report or a list of tactics, techniques, and procedures. *Killing Rommel* was a

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the LRDG, see Gavin Mortimer, *The Long Range Desert Group in World War II* (Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2017); and John W. Gordon, *The Other Desert War: British Special Forces in North Africa, 1940–1943* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

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first-person account of fighting a superior enemy in the desert environment. It captured the emotions, thoughts, feelings, and conversations that traditional educational material lacks. After a few hours of reading, Captain Hanks put the book down and fell asleep.

When the sun rose the next day, the squad leaders, platoon sergeants, platoon commanders, company staff, and other key personnel gathered for the Khaos session. Khaos sessions have their roots in the origins of Khaos Company. When Captain Hanks first checked into the company, he removed all the furniture and cubicles in the main room of the company office. In its stead, they built a giant U-shaped table that could accommodate every squad leader, platoon sergeant, platoon commander, and member of the company staff. Their call signs were etched into their spots, instilling the fact that everyone was an owner of the legacy of the company and the Service. A gathering of this group was called a “Khaos session.” This sense of ownership, coupled with the many sessions and discussions held at the table, empowered small unit leaders who then would lead the company from the bottom up. Leaders developed and mentored their subordinates constantly. Captain Hanks guided the company through intent and mission-type orders, but the NCOs were, and continue to be, the base unit by which the company truly operates from. By applying trust and flattening their decision and communication architecture, Khaos Company was able to focus on broad, unifying commander’s intent that generated aggressive decision speed and initiative-based actions. This ultimately created a culture of trust, respect,

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and a passion to become better professional warfighters. This culture was the reason why the company was so successful at ProMet II, and why it continues to thrive in the face of chaos, uncertainty, friction, and all the other facets of war.

The air was still cold at 0800, but the warm desert sun had crested the small mountains to the east. The Khaos session convened. “Marty looks pretty cold. Everyone take off your blouses and shirts,” Captain Hanks said to the group. They collectively looked at him with confusion and grins. Sometimes you have to inject a little crazy into the situation to keep things interesting. Captain Hanks took off his blouse, and the rest followed suit.

“Okay, that’s better. Anyone cold?” Captain Hanks asked. The whole group, shirtless, was smiling but not shivering. As Captain Hanks looked around, he could not help but admire the team he was privileged to work with. Standing next to him was First Lieutenant Baldini and Staff Sergeant Villalobos—a crack team that Captain Hanks trusted implicitly to run the company. Next to them was First Lieutenant Malcolm G. Lindley, Khaos 1 actual and the commander for 1st Platoon.<sup>14</sup> He was easily the most compassionate leader in the company and possessed great charisma. His Marines loved him, and he was respected throughout the entire

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<sup>14</sup> The term *actual* refers to the person in charge of the headquarters, which is typically only used at the platoon level when the platoon commander refers to themselves. The term *main* refers to the combat operations center (COC), which is usually an operator.

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battalion for his devotion, attitude, and skills as a Marine infantry officer. Next to First Lieutenant Lindley was his first squad leader and acting platoon sergeant, Sergeant Brandon Burroughs. What First Lieutenant Lindley showed in passion, Sergeant Burroughs had in aggression. He was part man, part bull; this was somebody you would want on your team in a firefight. He trained his Marines hard.

Then came Second Lieutenant Nolan Wise, the 2d Platoon commander. Coincidentally, his name reflected his greatest attribute: he was probably the smartest Marine in the company and easily the most intelligent officer. He balanced that with a pit bull style of leadership: he was aggressive and ran his platoon like one from the Marine Corps Infantry Officer Course. His first squad leader and acting platoon sergeant, Sergeant Andrew Decker, call sign Khaos 2-1, was also an interesting figure. But in reality, he is a top-notch MOS 0365 infantry squad leader, and when you see him in action, he puts all others to shame. He knows his material inside and out, and he runs a tight outfit through discipline, passion, and professionalism.

Standing next to Sergeant Decker was Second Lieutenant Aaron Porcarelli, Khaos 3 actual. Second Lieutenant Porcarelli was a quiet officer but extremely capable in the field. He constantly taught and practiced the tenants of maneuver warfare with his platoon. The 3d Platoon was certainly the most creative and outside-the-box unit of the company, and much of that was due to Second Lieutenant Porcarelli's leadership. They were also extremely capable due to their first squad leader

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and acting platoon sergeant, Sergeant Sean Goode, who was at this time absent and attached to Task Force Miners. Sergeant Goode is the iconic squad leader—0365 infantry squad leader, the most cohesive squad in the battalion, which actually placed second in the division squad competition after only being together for two weeks. Sergeant Goode and Khaos 3-1 have held the Khaos Hammer—given out each quarter to the squad that wins the company squad competitions—for the last three quarters.

Next to Second Lieutenant Porcarelli stood First Lieutenant Nicholas A. Castans, the weapons platoon commander and fire support team (FiST) leader. First Lieutenant Castans was a kind soul, almost too nice to be considered an infantry officer. He took on the role as FiST team leader quickly and has integrated his FiST team into a very capable unit. His team consisted of several recent joins to the company: Second Lieutenant Jameson J. Flynn, the artillery fire observer; Staff Sergeant Paul Hoffman, a Joint terminal air controller (JTAC); and two radio operators. Captain Hanks had been considering the idea of splitting the FiST team into two elements—alpha and bravo—to give the company more flexibility and capacity to observe and control fires. First Lieutenant Castans would take control of FiST Alpha with Staff Sergeant Hoffman, while Second Lieutenant Flynn would be in control of FiST Bravo with the two radio operators. Captain Hanks's assembled group was something legends were made of. Nobody here was perfect, but they were all American citizens who pledged to defend and support the U.S.

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Constitution and American way of life. They were heroes in Captain Hanks's mind, and he would not trade them for the world.

The Khaos session lasted a little more than an hour. They reviewed the situation and wargamed multiple scenarios. Many of the Marines offered insight that Captain Hanks had not considered. A diverse opinion is critical, especially in the business of warfighting. Captain Hanks realized early in command that it was not his job to come up with the answers; the collective wealth of knowledge and diversity in his team was far greater than anything he could do alone. But this resource can only be tapped under the right conditions. Captain Hanks's chief responsibility as a commander was not to push down and teach the ideas of the Marine Corps warfighting philosophy; the Marines have all learned that enough in their respective schools. Rather, his chief responsibility was to build and foster a cultural environment in which that philosophy could flourish and maintain that atmosphere through encouragement and collective growth. The jewel and success of the organization is, and always will be, in the hands of the young Marines, NCOs, and officers that lead and operate at the grassroots level.

After the Khaos session, the company returned to its preparation for link up with the AAVs. The platoons briefed their Marines, and the company staged in their packs. After 1400 rolled around and no AAVs appeared, Captain Hanks became concerned that something was wrong. He went over to the JLTV and got on regimental TAC 1.



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“Tarawa battle captain, this is Khaos 6.”

“Khaos 6, Tarawa battle captain.”

“Khaos 6. Just looking to see if there’s any updates with the tracks that are supposed to link up with us.”

“Roger. Standby.”

After a few minutes, Tarawa came back on the net.  
“Khaos 6, Tarawa battle captain.”

“Go for Khaos 6.”

“Hate to be the bearer of bad news, but the tracks fucked up again.”

“What’s the deal?”

“They got a hold of 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, again and asked where they were. They were told Noble Pass. So, your track platoon went all the way up to Noble Pass.”

“Seriously? Are they still there?”

“No, after they arrived, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, told them you were attached to 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, in the Delta T. So, they are on the move heading down there now.”

“Are you in direct comms with the tracks?”

“Yeah, we told them you were still at TAA Grizzly all the way out here in Johnson Valley. They rogered up and said they were going to head this way, but it will take a while. They probably won’t be here until midnight.”

“Okay, well at least we have confirmation. How did this all happen?” Hanks asked in frustration.

“I have no idea. Tarawa 3 is about to call the AAV battalion OpsO and find out where all this confusion came from.”

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“Sounds good. Well, we’ll be here. Let me know if you need anything from us.”

“Roger. We’ll keep you posted. Thanks for the patience. Tarawa battle captain out.”

Losing yesterday was frustrating though understandable—things happen. But losing a second day was significantly more irritating as Captain Hanks started to feel the pressure of time. A defense takes time to build, and if done right, consumes a lot of personnel effort. With time fleeting, ultimately the young Marines would have to work twice as hard to get the company to where it needs to be in preparation for the start of MWX; an effort that will likely reduce the alertness of the company. Captain Hanks would probably need to rethink his priorities of work, but he wanted to see the terrain before he made any major changes. Right now, however, there was nothing else he could do. He brought the company leadership in and briefed them on the update. A fire watch was set with thermals and specific instructions to wake up the company when they observed tracks in the valley. Captain Hanks then got his book out and read some more about German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel and his *Afrika Korps*. It was relieving to read that surprises, shortfalls, and miscommunication was commonplace for both Rommel and Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery’s forces. Captain Hanks was in good company and eventually he nodded off to sleep.

“Sir, Tarawa is on the net for you,” Corporal Oliveros said, waking Captain Hanks. It was 0530, light from the rising sun was just starting to illuminate the

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valley. Looking around at the empty desert, he realized that the tracks had never showed up. He returned to the JLTV and grabbed the handset.

“Tawara, this is Khaos 6.”

“Khaos 6, Tarawa battle captain. The tracks called over and said they were at the TAA. Have you linked up with them?”

“Negative. I’ll take a look. Maybe they’re around the corner somewhere.”

“Okay, I’ll let them know you’re coming on BFT.”

“Thanks, I’ll let you know if I find them.” Captain Hanks got out of the truck and went over to the fire watch.

“Have you guys seen any vehicles moving through the valley in the last few hours?” he asked.

“No, Sir, it’s been pretty quiet. We just got on watch 30 minutes ago, and the last group didn’t say anything,” the Marine replied. Captain Hanks thanked him and told Corporal Oliveros to get the JLTV ready to go find the tracks. He made sure to grab the thermals. A few minutes later, he and Corporal Oliveros were 2 kilometers (km) down in the valley, and they could make out a few dark shapes at one of the intersections.

“Oli, stop here,” Captain Hanks said. He opened the door and activated the thermals. Thermal optics do not work through glass. With the optics, he could make out a group of vehicles that looked like AAVs.

“I think that’s them. Let’s head over there,” Captain Hanks told Corporal Oliveros. A figure jumped out of the lead track as they approached. Corporal Oliveros stopped the JLTV and Captain Hanks got out and

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made his way over to the Marine. He could see gunnery sergeant chevrons on the Marine's uniform as he got closer.

"Hey, Gunny, I am sure glad to see you. Captain Matt Hanks," Captain Hanks said in introduction, extending his arm to shake the gunny's hand.

"Hey, Sir, Gunny Rick Acosta. Yeah, we traveled all night to get here and finally stopped when we couldn't find you."

"No worries, did your guys get any sleep then?"

"About an hour or so, but we're ready to go."

"You sure?"

"Absolutely, Sir, this is good training. Where do you want me to head?"

"We're down the valley just south of here, tucked away at the base of that mountain. I'll head up there and leave the JLTV lights on. You can just pull right up to it."

"Do you want a tactical spread or administrative load?"<sup>15</sup>

"Admin—make it easy and fast. We've been waiting to get out of this place for the last two days." Since they were in the division rear area, Captain Hanks felt confident he could use their security to rapidly displace from the area.

"Sounds good, Sir. I'll be up that way in 30 min-

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<sup>15</sup> *Commander's Tactical Handbook*, Marine Corps Reference Publication 3-11.1A (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1998).

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utes. We just need to fix one of the tracks and we'll be on our way."

"Perfect. See you then," Captain Hanks said. He jumped back into the JLTV and headed back up to TAA Grizzly. Staff Sergeant Villalobos had gotten the company up after Captain Hanks left and put them in stick order. By the time Captain Hanks returned, most of the company was ready for pick up.

Gunnery Sergeant Acosta and his AAV platoon arrived at TAA Grizzly 20 minutes later. It took about an hour to get all the introductions done, Marines in the tracks, gain and confirm accountability of the newly combined team, and fill radios with crypto and operational-check them. By 0800 though, the company was ready to move, and Captain Hanks was not going to wait any longer. It was time to get into the fight.

## LESSONS LEARNED

**1** *Culture is the foundation for success.* The right culture is the most fundamental requirement necessary for units to live and fight in accordance with the Marine Corps warfighting philosophy. Culture can only be cultivated over time, and the ideal culture is cultivated by a cohesive group of individuals that share the same experience under challenging circumstances and project the right characteristics—both individual and collective. Critical variables include *trust* up, down, and across the chain of command; an infused sense of individual *purpose* and collective *ownership* across all ranks; and a *challenging* environment where *growth* is accepted

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in all forms—failure *and* success. A cohesive team will generate the right culture.

**2** *“Expect the unexpected” is not a cliché.* Adaptability is key, as situations will continuously change and what you have planned for is no longer valid. Having a resilient thinking model that allows you to understand the situation in as much entirety as possible with flexibility enough to implement your own changes and variables into the system is critical. Captain Hanks’s plan continuously changed as his missions and situations changed from performing roles as the regimental reserve, to establishing a deliberate defense with 72 hours of preparation, to establishing a hasty defense with less than 24 hours. He did not wait until the last minute to plan but evolved his plan as needed and found that the plan itself was not important. The planning *process* is what allowed him and his subordinate leaders to understand the situation and make the most appropriate decisions.

**3** *Real people fight wars.* If war is inherently a human phenomenon, then human faults must be inherently expected. You can try and negate all mistakes, but they are bound to happen. So, the important part is not preventing mistakes (of course, you should try to avoid them), but instead careful deliberation must be taken for how you react to mistakes. A zero-tolerance mentality generates mistrust and retards growth, for failure is an incredible teaching tool.



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## CHAPTER TWO

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# The Defense of Prospect

Captain Hanks did not give Gunnery Sergeant Acosta a specific route to take. All he said was to get to check-point 39 near the Delta T with a pit stop at Range 111 before they arrived. Captain Hanks was testing out the skills of the track platoon. It is important to know the capability and limitations of subordinate units. Anyone can say they can do something, but it was always best to have them show you. Captain Hanks was impressed with the route selection, speed, and discipline with which the track platoon conducted itself. They made it to Range 111 in great time. Range 111 had something precious that Captain Hanks knew they needed: water. Montgomery, Rommel, and anyone who has operated in the desert environment understands the value of this resource. Captain Hanks did not think this was cheating; it was no different than using the natural water wells in the Tunisian desert in the 1940s. You had to use the terrain to your advantage to thrive in this environment. With water containers filled to capacity, Khaos



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Company could operate freely for at least the next 48 hours. They pushed on through Miners Pass and into 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' area of operations (AO). At checkpoint 39, Captain Hanks asked Gunnery Sergeant Acosta to stop so he could link up with 1st Battalion, 2d Marines. Captain Hanks called over on 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' battalion TAC 1.

"Typhoon, this is Khaos 6."

"Khaos 6, this is Typhoon 3."

"Typhoon 3, Khaos Company is at checkpoint 39. Wanted to link up with you and see if there are any updates before we push down to our defense."

"Khaos 6, Typhoon 3. Yes, we have a few updates, but I wanted to reiterate the game plan before we go. Standby for FRAGO."

Typhoon 3 proceeded to give Captain Hanks the FRAGO over the radio. As he copied it down, he realized that there were no noticeable changes from the last meeting a few days ago. He rogered back up, repeating his task over the radio to ensure it was understood, and he let Typhoon 3 know he was pushing down to his defensive area. Gunnery Sergeant Acosta got the company down to the AO quickly and stopped in the vicinity of Dime Dingo—a distinct land feature in the valley that marks the high point between the north and south—so Captain Hanks could link up with Mongol actual. Mongol was the call sign for the combined antiarmor team (CAAT) platoon from 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. First Lieutenant Lucas Aaron, the platoon commander, drove his ultralight tactical vehicle (UTV) over to Captain Hanks's track when they arrived.

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“Sir, are you Khaos 6?” he asked.

“Sure am. Captain Matthew Hanks. I heard you surveyed this area already. What do you know?”

“Yes, Sir. We checked out the two infiltration points. They’re definitely foot mobile, and you could probably get UTVs and Vikings through them.<sup>1</sup> There’s only two of them. I could show you if you want,” Aaron offered.

“Yeah, I do. We’re running short of daylight, and I want my guys to get a visual. Can you take us to the closest one?”

“Yes, Sir. You want to follow me?”

“Yeah, we’ll follow you.”

First Lieutenant Aaron jumped back in his UTV and accelerated quickly. Those vehicles could move fast and created only a small signature. Captain Hanks had used them in ProMet II and found them to be of tremendous value to the expeditionary light infantry. *The Marine Corps needs to invest in more of these*, he thought, and he wished he had some at his disposal. First Lieutenant Aaron guided Khaos Company to the northernmost infiltration point. It took a little while for the tracks to navigate through the washes to get to the last possible dismount point. Knowing that they would establish a defense near this position, Captain Hanks had asked Gunnery Sergeant Acosta to take the tracks as deep as they could so they would not be an easy target.

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<sup>1</sup> A UTV is the military version of a Polaris side-by-side off-road vehicle. A Viking is a small tracked vehicle used by the British Royal Marines. Both vehicles are very versatile in off-road conditions.

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Gunnery Sergeant Acosta had asked if he could emplace his tracks in a defensive posture before dismounting and set up a hasty security perimeter.

It was almost dark by the time the tracks set up in a defensive posture. Although Captain Hanks wanted to do a leader's reconnaissance (recon) in the light, he had to deal with the current situation. He had no more time to play with; he needed to see the terrain and confirm the defensive scheme of maneuver. When they dismounted, Captain Hanks and the leaders of Khaos Company went their separate ways to conduct a recon of their zones. They identified some significant issues.

The two infiltration points, which Captain Hanks dubbed the "hot gates" to the north and the "low gates" to the south at the last Khaos session, appeared on the map to have gently sloping terrain all the way up to the infiltration points themselves. In reality, the terrain is laced with multiple draws, washes, and fingers, many of which could hide entire companies. The doctrinal approach to this problem would have been to establish a defense at the natural choking point generated by the terrain.<sup>2</sup> But here is the problem: the enemy knows Marine Corps doctrine too. Facing a smart-thinking enemy in force-on-force action, one has to apply the "I know that they know theory." I know how to doctrinally approach this problem. But I know that they know this too. But I also know that they know that I know. And I

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<sup>2</sup> *Infantry Company Operations*, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-11.1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2014).

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can assume that they know that I know that they know that I know. So, what do you do? This is where doctrinal *tactics, techniques, and procedures* become subservient to doctrinal *principles*; specifically, the principles outlined in *Warfighting*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, and *Tactics*, MCDP 1-3.<sup>3</sup>

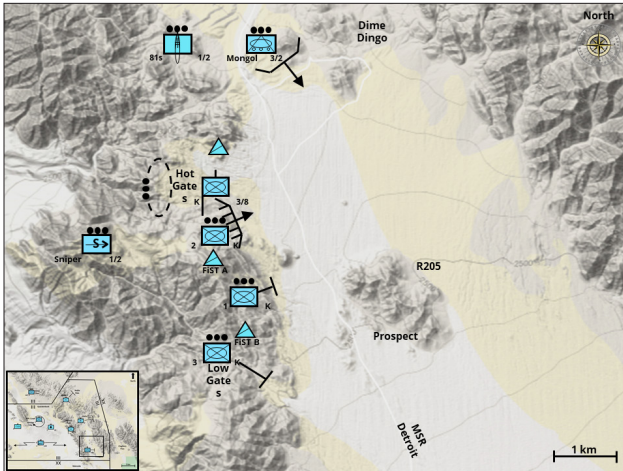
Captain Hanks had neither the capacity to defend everywhere, nor could he afford to mass his forces in a centralized defense with the adversary force (ADFOR) air and artillery capabilities available. But he had to accomplish his task, which tied him to specific geography. However, he decided to use this geography differently than one would expect. The sergeants in the company came up with an idea of a distributed network of ambushes. In other words, this would put the enemy in a dilemma that if they intended to gain an advantage against one ambush position, the enemy would be exposed to a different ambush. Rather than defend the hot and low gates themselves, Khaos Company would ambush all the avenues the enemy could or would take to get to the gates. All of the positions, as dispersed as they likely were, must also be flexible enough to support three main engagement areas if the company needed to focus all the combat power at a single place and point in time.

The network of ambushes concept was conceived while the company was still at TAA Grizzly. At that

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<sup>3</sup> *Warfighting*, MCDP 1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997); and *Tactics*, MCDP 1-3 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997).

**Figure 5.** Khaos Company's scheme of maneuver for Prospect defense.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

time, they all thought they would have a few days to prepare a series of complex ambushes in-depth. However, with the late arrival of tracks, Captain Hanks's three-day defensive preparation plan compressed to less than 24 hours. He did not want to be caught developing the defense during game play, when the enemy would be able to observe, so he decided to reduce the depth of the defense and focus on only the chokepoints, using surprise and information as a center of gravity over actual material defense (figure 5). After all, if the enemy could gain information on the defense, they would gain a strategic advantage.

In terms of the contextual fight, the company had to be prepared for everything from light armored re-

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connaissance (LAR), tanks, British Vikings, UTVs, dismounted infantry, and air assaults, any and all of which would likely involve information operations (IO) and electronic warfare (EW). Recognizing what Khaos Company could and could not do, Captain Hanks worked a game plan with his direct support units. Mongol would delay and draw armor up through the pass beyond Dime Dingo. Khaos Company would let this armor pass and hit softer targets in the main body through indirect fire and short but violent mechanized infantry strikes. If a dismounted infantry attempted to infiltrate, Khaos Company would let them come into their engagement area. Both Khaos Company and Mongol were prepared to reinforce 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, in the Delta T if the enemy attacked from the east.

With Captain Hanks satisfied that his intent was well understood, Khaos Company set into their defense at sunrise on 3 November 2019. MAGTF Warfighting Exercise (MWX) did not officially start until later that night. The company capitalized on this time, prepared their positions, and rehearsed the plan. When the sun came up, Captain Hanks conducted a deeper leader's recon of the hot gates. While he was out in the mountains, First Lieutenant Baldini came over the net and told him that Typhoon 6 and 3 just stopped by the JLTV looking for him.

“Sir, they want us to place our platoons in the actual gates in a blocking position,” he said.

“Did you explain to them our thought process for why we established our defense this way?” Captain Hanks asked.

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“I tried, Sir, but I don’t think I convinced them. Also, they want us to move all of our tracks over to their main engagement area. They want the Delta T to look stronger than it is,” he said.

“When did they want to do that?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Now. I already told Gunny, and he’s getting his guys ready to move,” First Lieutenant Baldini said.

“Negative. Hold off on making any moves. I’m coming back. Get the Joint light tactical vehicle [JLTV] ready. I’m going to go do a face to face with the commander,” Captain Hanks said, and he took off toward the JLTV.

Lieutenant Colonel Diana had tried to get online with a face to face with Captain Hanks twice now in two days. It was Captain Hanks’s turn to go to him. He was a little concerned that they were playing a telephone game, and he wanted to tell him personally his thought process for their scheme of maneuver, the risks associated with them, and his concerns. He caught up with them at the Delta T.

“Sir, good to see you. I’m sorry I missed you back there, but I didn’t want to miss an opportunity to get on the same map as you,” Captain Hanks said.

“No worries, Matt. Thanks for coming,” he replied. They broke out a map on his Humvee.

“So, I was talking to your XO. I’m concerned with these two points.”

He pointed out the hot gates and the low gates.

“It looks like the best way to defend it is to block

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the choke points in the mountain passes themselves,” Lieutenant Colonel Diana said.

“Sir, I agree that these are the two most likely points of infiltration in this region. But I walked through those areas last night and this morning. The map doesn’t do the terrain justice. There are multiple washes and avenues the enemy could use once they get inside the mountain range. It’s too much to cover with just my company. The best way to defend against an infiltration here is to hit them where they have to go to get to the passes. They’ll be far more vulnerable there.”

Captain Hanks pointed to his current disposition. “If they choose to go to the hot gates, they have to pass through this open ground and gain access to this major wash. I assess this as the most likely course of action. To block this, I’ve set up a series of ambushes with two major engagement areas that enables me to bring to bear at least three-fourths of my combat power. The low gates are unlikely, but I have my 3d Platoon nested in a position to physically stop their approach. I’ve placed 1st Platoon in a position to defeat any attempts to gain the high ground and get behind our defenses. Worst case, if they go the long way around to the north, they’ll be in wide open observation, in which case I will use indirect fires and apply Mongol to delay and route my platoons to their alternate positions in the gates themselves. Bottom line, I think the enemy would expect me to defend at the passes themselves, so I don’t want to execute the enemy’s assessment of our most likely course of action,” Captain Hanks finished.



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“Well, I trust that you know the terrain, and you are the man on the ground. But you know my intent and concerns, right?” he asked.

“Yes, Sir, I do. I am confident that any attempt to infiltrate will be blocked with my scheme of maneuver,” Captain Hanks replied.

“Okay. No infiltration or penetration through your zone. How you do it is your call. Just let us know how we can support,” he said.

“Sir, my XO mentioned something about bringing my tracks up to the Delta T. I’m concerned about this. First, it exposes our position with their travel to and from our defenses; and second, it reduces our mobility capability. If those tracks get stuck up here or, worst case, get hit by aviation or artillery, we are stuck foot mobile 14 clicks from your position,” Captain Hanks said.

“I want the Delta T to look like a hard target while your position looks like a soft one. I don’t want them to know you’re there. That’s why we were thinking about bringing your tracks up,” Lieutenant Colonel Diana said.

“Sir, the tracks are dug in deep. The only way they’ll see them is through aviation, and even that is a maybe. Those tracks are hidden, and I’ll need their firepower and mobility in this fight. Currently, as they are, I think we meet your intent with the soft target idea,” Captain Hanks insisted.

“Okay, you sold me. Keep the tracks. Anything else?” he asked.

“No, Sir, I think we’re good,” Captain Hanks replied.

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“Okay, brother, we have to keep moving. Thanks for coming out here, and good luck,” he finished.

Captain Hanks finalized coordination with Typhoon 3 and hopped back in the JLTV. When he got back, he ran into First Lieutenant Baldini.

“So, what happened?” First Lieutenant Baldini asked.

“Nothing. I explained our plan, the decisions behind it, and he supported it,” Captain Hanks said.

“I don’t know how you do it, Sir,” he said.

“It’s a captain thing, Brian. You’ll understand one day,” Captain Hanks finished with a grin. Hanks knew that Lieutenant Colonel Diana, like all good commanders, weighed the opinions of subordinate commanders heavily in his decisions. There is a certain element of assumed trust between commanders, and this trust can be rapidly built on and won by the subordinate through even limited interactions. The few interactions Hanks had with Lieutenant Colonel Diana were positive, so it was likely that he trusted Captain Hanks’s explanation more so than the one from a lieutenant executive officer he had never met—this is only natural. Additionally, due to his lengthier experience in the Marine Corps, and his recent experience at Expeditionary Warfare School, Captain Hanks was probably better able to articulate the methodology of the plan using doctrinal lexicon and cognitive application models, balancing the art and science behind the design.<sup>4</sup> Captain Hanks only wished

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<sup>4</sup> *Warfighting*.

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he had spoken to Lieutenant Colonel Diana sooner to prevent this miscommunication. It was his responsibility as the subordinate to “control” his superior through information and feedback. Captain Hanks’s failure to adequately do so is what caused the small breakdown in the doctrinal command and control construct.<sup>5</sup>

After the brief conversation with First Lieutenant Baldini, Captain Hanks spent the rest of the day walking the lines and speaking to the Marines and the small unit leaders. He wanted to ensure that they knew his intent and had the latest information and situation updates from the rest of the battlespace. He also wanted to get firsthand observation of what the defense looked like before the actual exercise started. Because Captain Hanks decided to use surprise as a center of gravity, key to accomplishing their mission was their ability to remain undetected.

When MWX officially started at 2100, the skies filled with unmanned aerial systems (UAS), and the company realized that remaining undetected would be harder than they thought. Everything they owned was under camouflaged nets, and the Marines were using their tarps as thermal shields. The unnerving part about red air is that you do not know for sure what they see,

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<sup>5</sup> *Command and Control*, MCDP 6 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1996); and *Joint Maritime Operations*, Joint Publication (JP) 3-32 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018).

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or what they are going to do.<sup>6</sup> You can only guess based on their patterns. All night, several fixed-wing UAS ran patterns over the hot and low gates, passing over their forces each time. At one point, a rotary-wing UAS launched from R205—Range 205 is a small series of buildings behind a terrain feature within the Prospect area—and hovered close to their positions. Captain Hanks was certain they saw them, and he waited for enemy indirect fire to follow. But it never came.

Just prior to midnight, a crackle came over the radio. “Khaos main, this is Khaos fire support team (FiST) Bravo.”<sup>7</sup>

“FiST Bravo, go for main,” Staff Sergeant Villalobos replied.

“Main, we just saw four [Bell Boeing V-22] Ospreys fly by to the south of us. They were heading from east to west and were flying really low. We lost track of them behind the mountains.”

Everyone around the speaker box in the command track suddenly perked up. As they sat intently quiet, they could hear the faint but distinct sound of Ospreys

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<sup>6</sup> The term *red air* refers to air defense warning red or of an imminent attack by hostile aircraft and/or missiles. This means that hostile aircraft and/or missiles are within an air defense division/sector or are in the immediate vicinity of an air defense division/sector with high probability of entering the division/sector. See *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020), 11.

<sup>7</sup> The term *main* refers to the combat operations center (COC), which is usually an operator; the term *actual* refers to the person in charge of the headquarters, which is typically only used at the platoon level when the platoon commander refers to themselves.

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in the distance. It sounded like it was coming from directly west of their position behind their defense. This could be a huge problem. Captain Hanks gestured to Staff Sergeant Villalobos to grab the radio.

“Roger, FiST Bravo, we hear them now. Break break. Longshot, this is Khaos 6,” Captain Hanks said, trying to reach the sniper platoon that should be able to see over the other side of the mountain from their observation position. There was no response.

“Longshot, Longshot, this is Khaos 6. Radio check, over.”

Still nothing. This did not necessarily mean something was wrong. Communications always fail when you need it most; but, more than likely, Longshot had their radio off to conserve battery power. They did not have a planned radio check for another 45 minutes.

First Lieutenant Castans and his FiST team were not on the top of the mountain, but they were several hundred feet higher than Captain Hanks in elevation and likely had a better vantage point.

“FiST Alpha, Khaos 6. Can you get a better angle on where those Ospreys are heading?” Captain Hanks asked First Lieutenant Castans.

“Khaos 6, FiST Alpha. Roger, working it out now.”

A few minutes passed by as Captain Hanks let First Lieutenant Castans and Staff Sergeant Hoffman figure out where the aircraft were. Ospreys are assault support aircraft, and four of them could carry a decent portion of a rifle company, medium caliber weapons, and small vehicles. The adversary was undoubtedly inserting a force somewhere on the other side of the mountains,

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but the question was where and why? There were only two likely possibilities. The first possibility, which was the division's assessed adversary's most likely course of action, was an air assault straight into Hidalgo City. This would pose a problem to RCT 2, but not a dilemma, especially if 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, and 2d LAR were expecting it. The other possibility was far more dangerous for Captain Hanks. If the adversary inserted forces on the opposite side of the mountain passes with the intention to secure the infiltration points from the rear, they would be seriously exposed. The entire company defense was a series of ambushes facing the east and on lower ground. If this was true, Captain Hanks knew he could put up a little bit of resistance, but he would be at a significant disadvantage and would have to think of, and execute, a branch plan rather quick.

"Khaos 6, FiST Alpha," First Lieutenant Castans came back over the radio.

"Go ahead, Nick," Captain Hanks replied.

"Sir, we're pretty positive they kept going west and to the north. The noise was pretty consistent in dissipating, until it finally stopped. We think they might have gone into Hidalgo City, and we also think we just saw them way to the north flying away."

"How sure are you that they didn't land just on the other side of the mountains?"

"Not 100 percent but pretty close."

"Okay. Thanks. Khaos 6 out."

Shortly after the Ospreys flew behind the company, the rest of the aircraft left the area, and it became quiet. In those few hours, Captain Hanks thought hard about

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potential reactions. If the enemy observed him and knew where his positions were, they were sitting targets just waiting for enemy artillery to get in range, air to check on station, or an enemy company to roll over the mountains if First Lieutenant Castans was wrong. Should they move positions now that the UAS are gone? Or should they hold fast and hope they did not see them after all? All of his forces were already spread thin, and he thought that they had relatively good camouflage. UAS intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) is good, but it cannot be good enough to see everything. Even if they saw one or two positions, the enemy would probably assume that they were observation posts or reconnaissance positions, not an entire company. After all, the logical and doctrinal thing to do would have been to defend the hot gates themselves, not the routes leading up to them.<sup>8</sup> Captain Hanks decided not to make any moves.

Shortly after sunrise, Captain Hanks heard Mongol on the radio reporting enemy movement southeast of their location. He immediately communicated with FiST Alpha to slew (turn on axis) to that location.

“Khaos 6, FiST Alpha. It looks like an entire company coming out of the mountains.”

“Can you get a grid?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Affirmative.”

“Call it in, and get mortars on it. If they get much closer, they’ll be able to get behind Mongol in the Dime Dingo.”

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<sup>8</sup> *Infantry Company Operations.*

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First Lieutenant Aaron and Captain Hanks did not have the chance to talk about this type of situation during their face-to-face meeting yesterday. But they had done enough coordination that Captain Hanks felt comfortable organizing a hasty attack with him. He was aggressive, confident, and competent. Captain Hanks called him over the net. “Mongol, Khaos 6. We got eyes on. I’ll work the fires, you get your guys where you need to them to kill them with your heavies.”

“Roger, Khaos,” he replied.

The 1st Battalion, 2d Marines’ 81mm mortar platoon was very responsive. A fire mission was on the enemy company within five minutes. That set conditions for Mongol to go to their hot positions. The enemy company, which turned out to be Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, was put in the iconoclastic combined arms dilemma every Marine learns about in basic training: stay where you are and get hit by indirect fire, or move and get hit by direct fire heavy machine guns.<sup>9</sup>

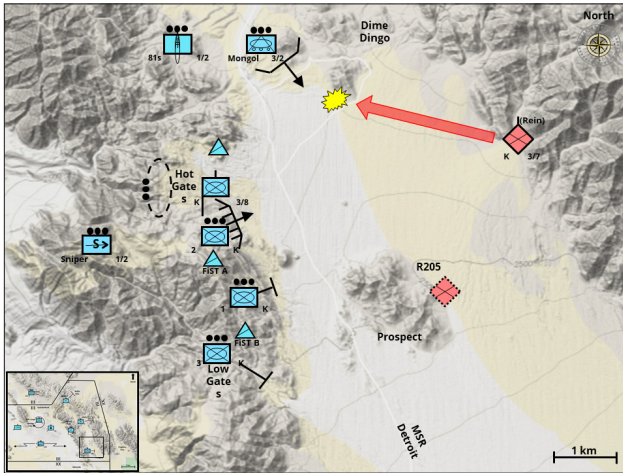
However, the adversary had some aces up their sleeves. Mongol was hit by two FGM-138 Javelin missiles. That was all they managed to get off until a local timeout was called to sort the battlefield damage assessment. The coyotes—Marines assigned to Tactical Training Exercise Control Group (TTECG) and the ones responsible for refereeing the exercise—used “local

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, B. A. Friedman, *21st Century Ellis: Operational Art and Strategic Prophecy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2015); and *Tactics*.



Figure 6. Prospect engagement one.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

timeouts” as a means to determine the results of an engagement. In these local timeouts, the units in the area would not be allowed to take any actions, and eventually they would be briefed on how many casualties each side had sustained and what the follow-on actions would be from there. Typical follow-on actions would include resetting the forces back a few terrain features so that they could reengage a different way. Additionally, this was the time when the ADFOR would be given additional lives to represent a larger force. So, Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, was not actually a company; instead, it represented three to four companies (figure 6).

The coyotes determined that Kilo Company, 3d

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Battalion, 7th Marines, was destroyed and it was sent back a few terrain features to the south to reset. This reset process took some time, and no further action was observed that day. Mongol did a quick sweep of the area for tactical site exploitation and discovered that Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, was the lead element for a larger force that would arrive later that night. Captain Hanks assumed that this likely meant the rest of 3d Battalion, 7th Marines. Khaos Company maintained vigilance in that area throughout the night.

When night came, so did the enemy's aviation. Blinking red lights mixed with the white stars in the night overhead while the company hunkered down. Captain Hanks still believed a large ground force was coming, so the company kept a heavy watch on duty. On several occasions, they spotted small elements of people on foot and a few vehicles moving from south to north on the eastern side of the valley. The vehicles appeared to be supporting a movement, approximately the speed of somebody walking. Captain Hanks suspected it to be a mortar section based on where and how it was positioned.

"FiST Alpha, Khaos 6. See if you can run a mission on those three Humvees," Captain Hanks radioed over at around 0200.

"Khaos 6, FiST Alpha. Roger, Sir. I see them. I'll get it done," Staff Sergeant Hoffman radioed back. Captain Hanks had worked with him before when he was part of a Marine Expeditionary Unit maritime raid force. He was an extremely capable joint terminal air controller

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(JTAC), and Captain Hanks had full confidence in his abilities.

A few minutes and one fire-for-effect mission later, the three vehicles had their hazards on to identify that there had been casualties.<sup>10</sup> Captain Hanks still had not seen enough to determine where the main force was located. But there were certainly enough indicators that a force was planning to, or already had, moved into the company's AO.

Around 0430, Khaos Company's embedded coyote painted an enemy artillery sweep in zone mission in the hot gates. *Sweep and zone* refers a massive artillery mission designed to saturate a specified area with indirect fire.<sup>11</sup> Had the company been there defending the gates in a traditional defense, they would have experienced many casualties. That told Captain Hanks that the ADFOR knew the company was in the area, but they did not know its exact disposition. That also further telegraphed their intentions, because the ADFOR would not unmask their artillery lightly; an attack was coming, and they intended on going through the hot gates.

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<sup>10</sup> *Fire-for-effect* refers to the use of position-locating systems or laser devices that are operating from known locations to enhance target location. *Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Observed Fire*, Field Manual (FM) 6-30 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1991), 8-16.

<sup>11</sup> A *sweep in zone* artillery mission consists of identifying a zone for artillery to saturate with rounds. Zones are normally large and require the artillery battery to transition from one area to the next until all areas within the zone have received fire. *Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for the Field Artillery Manual Cannon Gunnery*, MCWP 3-16.4 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1999), H-9.

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Captain Hanks waited until 0500 to stand too. He had sufficient security already, 50 percent on watch, and did not want to make a lot of movement immediately after the enemy's artillery mission. The area was likely saturated with enemy observers looking for battlefield damage assessments. He wanted to wait and give the adversary a false sense of security. Around sunrise, Khaos Company's observation posts spotted an adversary company moving from R205 toward the hot gates.

"Khaos 6, Khaos 2. Sir, we've got an enemy company that just crossed checkpoint 37 and is about 900 meters away from our main engagement area," Second Lieutenant Nolan Wise reported.

"Good. I don't think they know where we are. Let them get closer, and we'll open up when it's too late for them to have any options other than to fight from an impossible position or surrender," Captain Hanks replied. Even as he directed Second Lieutenant Wise, he knew it was unnecessary. He had been very clear in his intent that he wanted to execute a series of complex and close ambushes, not execute the traditional HA-MA-LA defense.<sup>12</sup> He did not have the assets to go head-on against a battalion reinforced with artillery and aviation. He knew Second Lieutenant Wise would hold and wait until just the right moment to spring his ambush.

The company held weapons tight as the adversary approached until they were just at the crest of its defense, one small terrain feature away. The adversary

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<sup>12</sup> *HA-MA-LA defense* refers to HA or heavy antiarmor weapons; MA or medium antiarmor weapons; and LA or light antiarmor weapons.

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company established a hasty rally point and launched a leader's recon. As the leader's recon crossed the last small terrain feature, Khaos Company opened fire. The 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' 81mm mortar platoon ran several fire missions, Khaos Company's medium machine guns opened up from their bunkers, four of the company's assault amphibious vehicles (AAVs) opened up with eight heavy machine guns at point-blank range, and two of the company's AAVs opened up with high-angle Mk 19 40mm automatic grenade launchers on the adversary in the dead space. Captain Hanks was not sure how the paints were going to go, but he could not risk the adversary gaining a foothold in this area.<sup>13</sup> He decided to commit 1st Platoon to reinforce 2d Platoon.

"Khaos 1, Khaos 6. Go ahead and displace to reinforce 2d Platoon. Use the dismounted route, and go undetected. I may need to send you all the way back to the hot gates if they break through Nolan's position. How long will it take you?"

"Sir, we started moving 2 minutes ago; 15 minutes max until we're there," First Lieutenant Malcolm Lindley replied.

Captain Hanks appreciated the fact that with no communication, First Lieutenant Lindley understood the problem, as well as potential future problems, and had already taken the initiative to provide a solution. As Second Lieutenant Wise executed the *method* of Hank's commander's intent, First Lieutenant Lindley used the

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<sup>13</sup> *Paints* refer to the results of an engagement as articulated by the referees (coyotes).

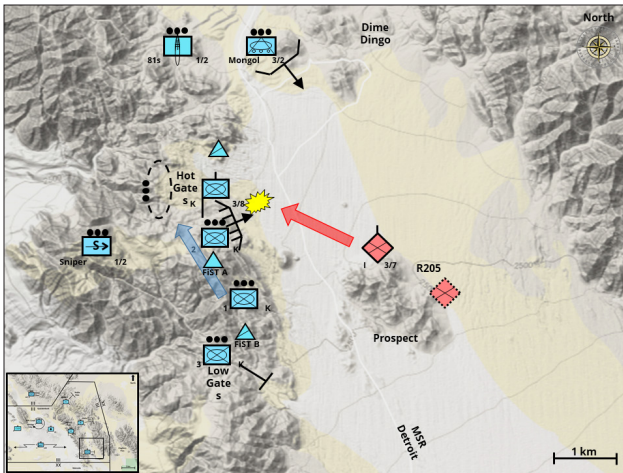
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*purpose* portion. He knew that ultimately the company could not allow any penetration through the hot gates, and he used that intent to start moving to reinforce 2d Platoon without asking permission. Ten minutes later, First Lieutenant Lindley and his platoon were behind 2d Platoon and ready to reinforce.

There were not enough coyotes to paint the full effects of the engagement, but the overall results were clear once the coyotes called a local timeout. India Company, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, took 80 percent casualties. Captain Hanks took the opportunity to do a quick face to face with the adversary company commander, who turned out to be a fellow Expeditionary Warfare School classmate. The 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, had been moving almost all night and through the mountains—a tremendous feat. Their tactics might have been a gamble, but the toughness of 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, was not. Since the battalion was representing a regiment, India Company was pushed back to Prospect to reset and get back into the fight (figure 7).

The enemy now knew where at least one of Captain Hanks's platoons were located, as well as the site of one of his engagement areas. He made the assessment that they would not try that same route again but rather they would seek the high ground south of the company using the terrain in between Prospect Hill and the rest of the mountain range. However, they did not know that 1st Platoon was placed in that precise location to prevent this from happening. Captain Hanks considered displacing 2d Platoon to their supplementary positions to avoid being targeted from indirect fire and posturing

Figure 7. Prospect engagement two.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

them to support 1st Platoon if necessary, but he wanted to see what the platoon commander thought.

“Nolan, what do you think about our next move?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Well, Sir, they know where we are, so it’d be stupid to stay. I can move my guys all the way back to the hot gates now if you want,” he replied.

“I’m not sure if I want to commit you all the way back there just yet. That takes away our flexibility if they attack north or try to break through Gray’s position.” Captain Hanks mulled over the situation as Second Lieutenant Wise continued.

“What if I keep Sergeant Decker and half his squad to the north to observe and delay if they go north. I can

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keep the rest of the platoon back here in cold positions on call to move where they need to,” he suggested.

“Okay, let’s roll with that. We just need to be clear on what conditions call for which actions. If you see them make a move south, get to the high ground behind Gray. If they go north, parallel their movements on the internal lines of communication and get to the hot gates. Sergeant Decker has to hold for at least 15 minutes. That should buy us enough time to bring Gray back up and push most of your forces into blocking positions,” he told First Lieutenant Wise. Captain Hanks felt confident that First Lieutenant Wise had a firm grasp on the situation, and he would be able to make these decisions without his direct orders.

Captain Hanks gave Typhoon a situation update over the radio, and Typhoon 3 modified Khaos Company’s tasking statement. The company was now tasked to defeat 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, in zone. Considering the situation, this changed Captain Hanks’s tactics only slightly. By this time, he had observed enough to know with confidence that there were at least two adversary companies in vicinity of R205, with one adversary company somewhere near Dime Dingo. Captain Hanks did not want to give 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, any breathing room to reset and find gaps to exploit. After all, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, had the numbers and firepower advantage. So, he tasked Gunnery Sergeant Acosta to take three AAVs and conduct a spoiling attack on the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, staging area.

“Gunny, you feel like taking the fight to them?” Captain Hanks asked.



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“Hell yeah, Sir. When do you want it?” he replied.

“As soon as this local timeout is done. What kind of hell can you raise?” Captain Hanks asked.

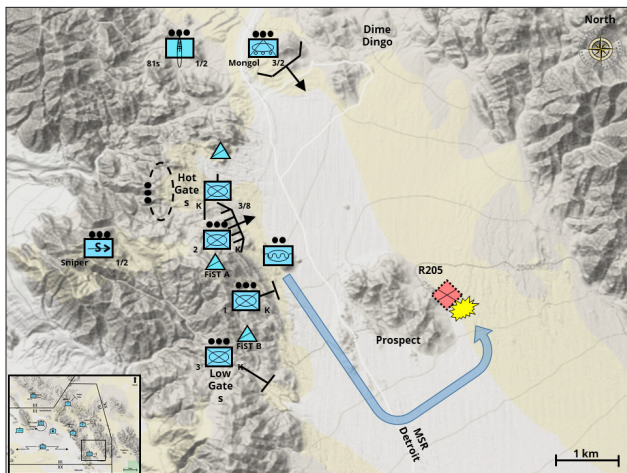
“I can take my track and these two tracks, since the enemy already knows where they are, make a pass around R205 with heavy machine guns, and link back up here. It’ll take 15 minutes,” he said.

“Sounds good to me. Hit them hard and fast, don’t give them any time to understand what’s going on, and then get back,” Captain Hanks said.

Captain Hanks’s intent was to push the decision makers of 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, off-balance so they would make a rash move to attack again without having all of their conditions and sequences properly established. He wanted to stay inside their decision-making loop, but his options were limited in the defense. He was not going to risk his entire force, but a few highly mobile assets carrying six heavy machine guns could certainly meet his intent. Worst case, if he lost all three tracks, he would still have the means to lift his entire company with the remainder. At 0800, the local timeout ceased, and Gunnery Sergeant Acosta went into the attack (figure 8).

What Captain Hanks did not factor into his decision was the likelihood of 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, carrying antitank weapons with their main body. He knew there were some with the northern adversary company from the earlier engagement with Mongol. He judged 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, to have a similar manning problem as 3d Battalion, 8th Marines: they are not fully staffed with antiarmor specialists. So, he

Figure 8. GySgt Rick Acosta's spoiling attack.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

assessed that 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, put their antiarmor assets with their lead element versus keeping them back with their main body.

Captain Hanks miscalculated.

Gunnery Sergeant Acosta made one run on 3d Battalion, 7th Marines' main body with his heavy machine guns, but he was hit by a volley fire of Javelins. He and all three tracks were painted as casualties and were out of the fight.

The company took a hit. It was not the loss of the tracks Captain Hanks regretted; it was the loss of Gunnery Sergeant Acosta. Staff Sergeant Jaime Granados, his first section leader, instantly stepped up. But the lesson Captain Hanks mentally noted was the significant

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impact losing a leader could have on a unit. Captain Hanks took a moment to empathize. Had this been real, where would his mind be? What would be the mindset of the company? Or his track platoon? Combat leaders have written plenty about the psychological effects of loss and how to act in these situations.<sup>14</sup> Get back on mission and worry about the rest later. This is easier said than done, but practicing it in force on force builds the habit.

Captain Hanks did not have a good way to judge the effect of Gunnery Sergeant Acosta's spoiling attack. This was another shortfall of the hastily constructed plan. He had to assume it had minimal impact, and 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, was preparing for another attack to rout his defense. Not long after, 1st Platoon came on the radio.

"Khaos main, this is Khaos 1-1. We see the enemy setting up machine guns and a mortar position toward our front. We think they see us, but we haven't engaged yet. We have our two tracks ready to engage with high-angle 40mm. Waiting on your call."

About the same time, Captain Hanks heard reports over 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' net. Mongol reported that the adversary company near the Dime Dingo was now alive, and they were close to their current position.

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<sup>14</sup> Some examples include LtCol Dave Grossman and Loren W. Christensen, *On Combat: The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and in Peace* (Milstadt, IL: Warrior Science Publishing, 2008); and LtCol Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Little, Brown, 2009).

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Captain Hanks had his FiST Alpha run 81mm mortar fire missions to support Mongol and called back to Khaos 1.

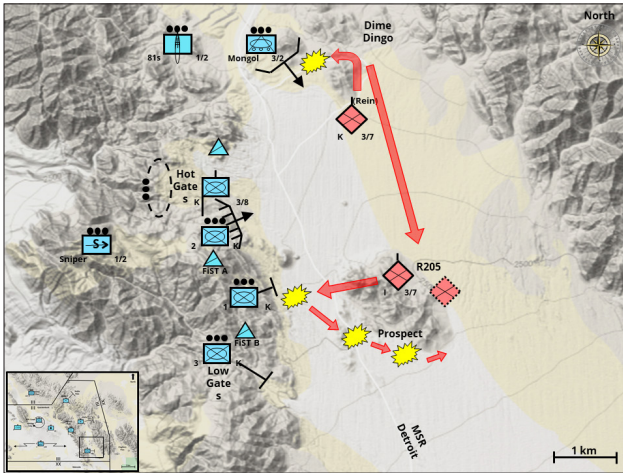
“Khaos 1, Khaos 6. We’re hitting the northern company near Mongol with 81s. You’re cleared to engage the southern company. My intent is to keep them off-balance and destroy their morale. They’ve got to be tired, and they know coming after us is going to be hard. Hit them until they displace. Once they take their packs off and get comfortable in their new position, hit them again. As soon as the 81s are done with the northern company, I’ll push them over to you.”

The 81mm mortar missions against the northern company were effective. Within 10 minutes, FiST Alpha observed the adversary company get their packs on and begin displacing toward R205 with the rest of the battalion.

The southern company displaced three more times due to Khaos 1’s fires. After each fire mission, Khaos 1 would wait until the enemy got into a comfortable position in “protected” terrain and hit them again. They had no eyes in the sky and no way to see where Khaos Company’s high-angle 40mm was coming from. Eventually, this company was pushed all the way back to Prospect Hill, and Khaos 1 lost contact. This portion of the engagement lasted a little more than an hour (figure 9). Captain Hanks sent these reports up to Typhoon.

Over the radio, Typhoon tasked Mongol to pursue the northern displacing company. To do so, Mongol would have to cross the intersecting line near Dime Dingo. Mongol obliged and crossed.

Figure 9. Prospect engagement three.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

“Can you see the fleeing enemy?” asked Typhoon 3.

“Negative, NEGATIVE! The enemy is still here. We are taking heavy fire!” Mongol 3 actual reported over the radio.

At this point, Captain Hanks was utterly confused. He personally observed the enemy company displace to R205, but there was no denying an enemy force was heavily engaging Mongol. All he could think was that his reports had led to the death of Mongol, and Khaos Company was not in any position to support them other than observing indirect fire.

It turned out that Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, was not alone at Dime Dingo. A dismounted

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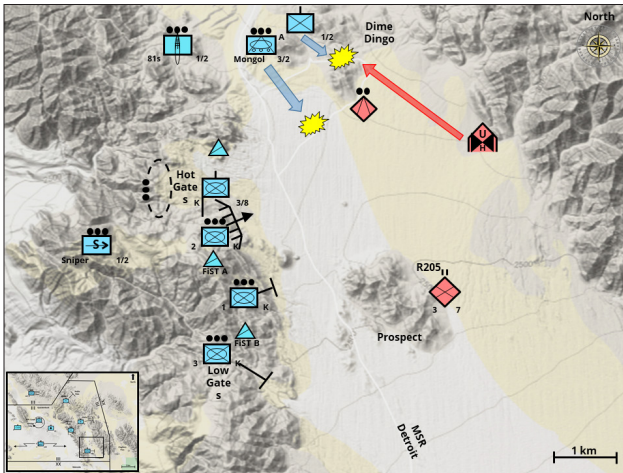
CAAT section was hidden from Khaos Company's view and had dug in defensive positions to provide covering overwatch. Mongol had run right into them in pursuit of the displacing adversary company. Khaos's FiST ran several more fire missions into the reported enemy positions given by Mongol; but without Marines on the deck, there was no way to confirm that Dime Dingo was clear. The lesson was obvious: just because you see *something* does not mean you see *everything*. Do not be in a rush to believe what appears obvious. Take the time to confirm or deny the reports from multiple sources; it was tempo Captain Hanks needed, not just speed. That lesson cost Captain Hanks both Mongol and the vital combat power in the AO.

The 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, attempted to regain Dime Dingo by tasking Animal Company to clear it.<sup>15</sup> It took some time for Animal Company to come out of their defensive posture near the Delta T and prepare to attack south. Animal Company approached in their trucks and dismounted about 4 km to the north of Dime Dingo to avoid the enemy's antiarmor weapon systems. But just as Animal Company got into position, enemy rotary-wing aircraft checked back on station, and they were wide open to aerial attack. Animal Company put some damage into whatever enemy elements were left on the Dime Dingo; but at the end of the engagement, Animal Company was combat ineffective and the enemy still held the ground. Khaos Company was officially

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<sup>15</sup> "Animal" is Alpha Company's call sign, similar to "Khaos" Company for Kilo.

Figure 10. Prospect engagement four.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

cut off from the rest of 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, but not by much. They still had enough on food, water, and ammunition to hold out another 12 hours, but Captain Hanks knew that they would have to make a breakout for resupply at some point that night. Resupply was a problem for later. Right now, he still had the majority of 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, staging in R205 (figure 10).

Captain Hanks knew 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, was in a dilemma but not an impossible one. Khaos Company was dug in deep; owned the high ground, low ground, and all the approaches to both the hot and low gates; and had clear observation across the entire corridor. The human factors (e.g., physical, emotional,

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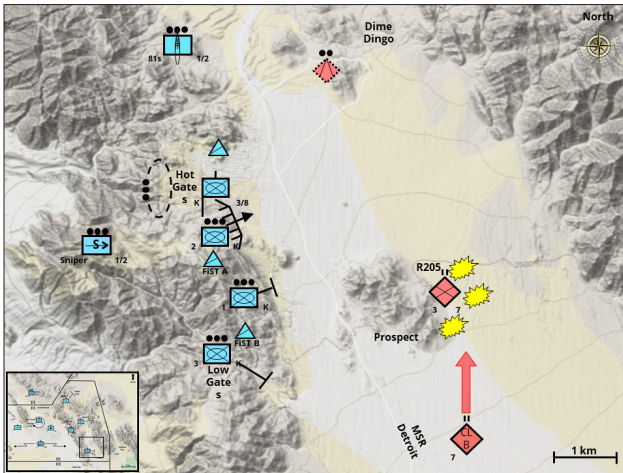
etc.) associated with their long night movement were probably taking effect. To defeat Khaos Company, the adversary would need artillery, aviation, and vehicle assets. But the adversary had already lost one artillery battery and to unmask another battery put it at risk for counterbattery fires. It was highly unlikely that Khaos Company, an infantry company, was on their unmasking criteria or high payoff target list. Their aviation was busy prosecuting higher value targets all day farther to the north in 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' main engagement area. That left just the vehicle option.

Around 1400, FiST Bravo observed approximately 30 vehicles pull into 3d Battalion, 7th Marines' staging area near R205. The 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' 81mm mortar platoon was currently displacing after getting hit from enemy aviation, so the company's only option for indirect fire was regimental artillery. With an entire infantry battalion (which was simulating a regiment) and what appeared to be a combat logistics company or battalion all staged in a single location, Captain Hanks felt confident that they met criteria to unmask the regiment's artillery. FiST Alpha called for a "battery 6" (or all artillery guns within the battery firing six times each) and added an immediate repeat mission afterward. The effects on the enemy were devastating: 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, would not be fighting anymore this day (figure 11).

The price for this ground proved too costly for 3d Battalion, 7th Marines. However, defeating them did not eliminate the threat. Shortly after their artillery fire mission, a mixed rotary-wing section flew over Captain



Figure 11. The final engagement of Prospect.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

Hanks's command post at 100 feet. They had found them. At this time, their command post consisted of their command track, their JLTV, and the electronic warfare support team's (EWST) Humvee. On the second low pass, Khaos Company engaged the rotary-wing section with their heavy machine guns and personal rifles. This appeared to have an effect, as the pilots withdrew back behind Prospect. Captain Hanks knew this action had bought them only a few minutes but that might be just enough.

Captain Hanks understood the enemy had aviation and hiding from it was a commonsense key task. But he did not fully appreciate what it was like to be hunted

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by air until he had two adversary helicopters armed to the teeth hovering over his head. There was nowhere to go, and his options were limited. He knew he did not want to go out in the open. He had two choices: hide or fight. Running only invited a chase, and the helicopters had the weaponry and speed to win that game. Thinking quickly, he figured his best bet was to hide, but to do so in a position where he could put up a desperate fight. Hanks did not have enough time for a complex plan; first, he had to separate the vehicles as much as possible to overload the enemy aircraft sensors or the pilots themselves, as the vehicles would be the aircraft's primary targets.

"Brian, take the JLTV up the wash and hide it around a corner! I'm moving the track west. We only have a few minutes until they get a 9-line on us and get cleared hot," Captain Hanks yelled over to First Lieutenant Baldini.<sup>16</sup>

"Staff Sergeant Granados, get your track as deep in this side wash as you can. Ram it into a corner with the highest walls and put your guns up high," Captain Hanks instructed.

Within two minutes, the headquarters section was fully broken down and moving. Captain Hanks went with his command track, so that if they got hit, First

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<sup>16</sup> A *9-line* refers to the doctrinal report consisting of nine pieces of information required for ground units to coordinate close air support: initial position/battle point, heading/offset, distance, target elevation, target description, target location, type mark/terminal guidance, location of friendlies, and egress. *Close Air Support*, JP 3-09.3 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014), V-25.

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Lieutenant Baldini could still command the company from the JLTV. Staff Sergeant Granados found a perfect spot—30-foot walls on all sides—and the track was wedged in a tight S-turn. It was at such an angle that the only viable final attack headings would be from north to south, which was directly back into 3d Battalion, 7th Marines. This would present a difficult situation for the adversary air controller, and it may prevent them from clearing hot.

*WHOOSH.*

They flew over the track slow at 50 feet.

Captain Hanks realized they had one shot at this. But he knew where they would come from, so there was a chance to make it out of this alive.

Second Lieutenant Wise still had most of his platoon in this area with two machine gun teams. Captain Hanks let him know what he needed to do. “Nolan, when they come around, open up with everything we have.”

The helicopters came around low and slow. They came into sight at about 100 feet in altitude and only 200 feet in distance. The company opened fire with two heavy machine guns, two medium machine guns, a rifle platoon, and half the headquarters element at point-blank range. Captain Hanks was not sure what the official results were, but the aircraft never came back. He refused to take any more chances though, and he displaced the headquarters section for a third time deeper into the wash.

There was a lull now in the AO. The 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, was administratively extracting from R205

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in addition to Animal Company and Mongol. First Lieutenant Baldini reminded Captain Hanks that their logistics were running low. *Time for a logistical breakout*, Captain Hanks thought.

“Staff Sergeant, can you make a blacked out run through Dime Dingo to link up with 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, and get us enough logistic supplies to last another two days?” Hank asked Staff Sergeant Villalobos.

“Yes, Sir, how much do you want me to get?”

“Fill the JLTV with water, chow, and ammo—as much as you can carry. Ideally, enough to last us another 48 hours. I don’t think we’ll be here that much longer, but I want to be ready to go if we get called. If they attack again, we might be fully isolated. I want to be able to fight for a few more days unsupported if we get pushed into the hills. Oh, and don’t get killed. There’s still enemy on Dime Dingo. Think of this like a ‘thunder run,’ only you don’t have guns, so it’s more like just a ‘run’.” Captain Hanks said.<sup>17</sup>

Staff Sergeant Villalobos laughed and responded, “Got it, Sir.” He was on the move a few minutes later.

After 1st Battalion, 2d Marines’ commander’s sync on the radio, Captain Hanks finished his reports and told First Lieutenant Baldini that he was going to get some sleep. At this point, Captain Hanks had probably only 1 hour of sleep in the back of the AAV during the

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<sup>17</sup> The term *thunder run* refers to a military tactic of high-speed attack intended to scatter and overcome an enemy. See, for example, David Zucchini, *Thunder Run: The Armored Strike to Capture Baghdad* (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

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last 24 hours. His gear was set up right next to the command track; but not 10 minutes after he climbed into his sleeping bag, First Lieutenant Baldini woke him up.

“Sir, Typhoon 3 says he wants to talk to you specifically,” he said.

“Great. Thanks, Brian.” Captain Hanks got up and moved over to the radio. Despite being deep in a wash with a mountain in between, they were getting good VHF communication with Typhoon. Other than mobility and firepower, the next greatest feature of the AAVs are their amplified communication systems.

“Typhoon 3, Khaos 6.”

“Khaos 6, Typhoon 3. How long would it take you to get off the hills and start moving to Hidalgo City?” Typhoon 3 asked over the net.

Captain Hanks instantly knew that this question meant somebody needed reinforcing somewhere, so he considered his response carefully. It would be easy to say an hour, because everything only takes an hour when someone asks, but he knew the company was probably dead tired. With it being dark, he would want some time to get good accountability of all their gear before they left. Plus, he would rather be ahead of his forecasted time than behind.

“Ninety minutes,” Captain Hanks responded.

“Okay, I’ll get back to you. We may need you to go reinforce 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, in Hidalgo City.”

Ten minutes later, Captain Hanks got the official task: Khaos Company will reinforce 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, in Hidalgo City. Captain Hanks recommended that the company wait until later in the night, as the

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enemy still had aviation assets in the skies and a mechanized column would be a ripe target. With Typhoon 3 in agreement, Captain Hanks sent orders to the company to begin preparatory actions.

It was a good thing Captain Hanks argued to wait until later to move, because the company was not ready in 90 minutes. The loss of the three tracks required the company to execute a bump plan, but with elements of 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, still in the area, it was unsafe to move around a lot.<sup>18</sup> This required Khaos 1 and Khaos 3 to share two tracks, which resulted in a very tight squeeze. But it worked, and by 2300, all personnel and gear were accounted for and staged in the AAV, and the sky looked clear of enemy aviation.

“Let’s roll, Staff Sergeant,” Captain Hanks called over to Staff Sergeant Granados.

Khaos Company was getting pulled into the city.

## LESSONS LEARNED

**1** *Commanders must be controlled.* Effective command and control requires two basic things: clear intent and guidance from the commander to subordinate and adequate feedback from the subordinate to the commander to inform their decisions. Failure in the former increases the risk of subordinates making decisions that are not in harmony with the larger plan. Failure in the

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<sup>18</sup> *Bump plan* refers to ensuring that essential troops and equipment are loaded ahead of less critical loads in case of aircraft breakdown or other problems. *Commander’s Tactical Handbook*, MCRP 3-30.7 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2018).

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latter increases the risk of a commander making uninformed decisions that could be detrimental to their intent. Lieutenant Colonel Gabriel Diana provided clear intent and guidance to Captain Hanks originally. But Captain Hanks failed to provide adequate feedback to Lieutenant Colonel Diana until they had the face-to-face meeting near the Delta T, which led the lieutenant colonel to make a decision for the placement of Hanks's troops and the movement of his tracks. Both of these decisions, if not modified by providing Lieutenant Colonel Diana with adequate feedback, likely would have led to greater casualties and potentially mission failure.

**2** *Careful deliberation must be given when generating commander's intent.* This is a critical tool that enables the execution of the maneuver warfare philosophy. To be useful though, it must be clear, simple, and above all well understood. In some instances, the platoon commanders and squad leaders made decisions based on the method portion of commander's intent, such as developing and executing trigger lines and engagement criteria. In other instances, subordinates made decisions based on the purpose or end state portions, such as committing to support an adjacent unit or developing branch and sequel plans as the situation developed. The key point is that these decisions were made rapidly with no communication or direction, and had they not been made, would likely have led to the adversary gaining the advantage.

**3** *Do not let doctrine become dogma.* Doctrinal prin-

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ciples are important and simple in theory but difficult to fully understand and quickly translate into tangible action. Doctrinal tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) are a helpful starting point. In today's world, however, these TTPs are easily understood by both friend and foe. So, it is not enough to just apply TTPs and standard operating procedures (SOPs); units and commanders who wish to apply maneuver warfare philosophy must devote themselves to a study of their profession. Only true enlightenment can bring forward the vision to translate philosophy to action. We must not underestimate our opponents, and we should acknowledge that they are professionals themselves with the means to study our way of war as well. In this, we must apply the "I know that they know that I know theory." To be successful, one must have vision in order to outthink their opponent.

**4** *Resiliency enables reactions and counteractions.* Never underestimate the negative impact of losing a key member of your organization. This event will significantly reduce the spirit of the unit, in addition to reducing its proficiency. An effort must be made by commanders to measure and understand the spiritual health of the unit, implement ways to increase the unit's individual and collective resiliency, and have contingency plans in place should the circumstances warrant. This revelation came to Captain Hanks when Gunnery Sergeant Acosta was painted as a casualty, but this could be just as valid for a suicide or car accident back in garrison as it would be in a combat scenario. Even the best units



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must train for resiliency because despite doing everything right, bad things can still happen. The enemy has a vote, and chance is always a reality. Good resiliency enables rapid and accurate response as well as adaptability.<sup>19</sup>

**5** *Just because you see something does not mean you see everything.* Do not be in a rush to believe what you want to think, which is known as confirmation bias.<sup>20</sup> Take the time to confirm or deny the reports from multiple sources. Failure in this lesson cost Captain Hanks Mongol and vital combat power in the AO.

**6** *Heavy weapons and explosives kill people the most.* In all of the engagements that occurred in this chapter, indirect fire and heavy machine guns, coupled with surprise, were often the deciding factor. It is interesting how every Marine is a rifleman, but the riflemen did not carry the day in Prospect. Those with radios supported by those dropping mortars and artillery shells did, however. Perhaps more thought and effort should be given to enabling Marines to employ combined arms, with a

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<sup>19</sup> Lisa S. Meredith et al., *Promoting Psychological Resilience in the U.S. Military* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Raymond S. Nickerson, "Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises," *Review of General Psychology* 2, no. 2 (1998), <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.2.175>. *Confirmation bias* means seeking or interpreting evidence in ways that support existing beliefs, expectations, or hypotheses.

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mentality that rifles are used for security and to accomplish the mission.

**7** *Never settle for subpar camouflage.* Once you are found, it is difficult to be unfound, and you will be targeted. This concept works inversely as well; surprise and information are more important than weapons systems—if you cannot see/do not know, you cannot use them. Pay particular attention to camouflage from aviation; because if they find you, they bring a savage wrath of fury and fire that will quickly induce fear in the ranks. Movement is much easier to detect than static positions. Had they not become complacent with camouflage, the company might have avoided detection from enemy aviation. Additionally, it will likely be impossible to hide from every collection capability peer adversaries possess. A good counter to this is attempting to stay under the adversary's high payoff target list, specifically communication and control nodes and groups of large assets. Use dispersion, and if you cannot hide something, make it look like something less valuable.

## NOTES

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## CHAPTER THREE

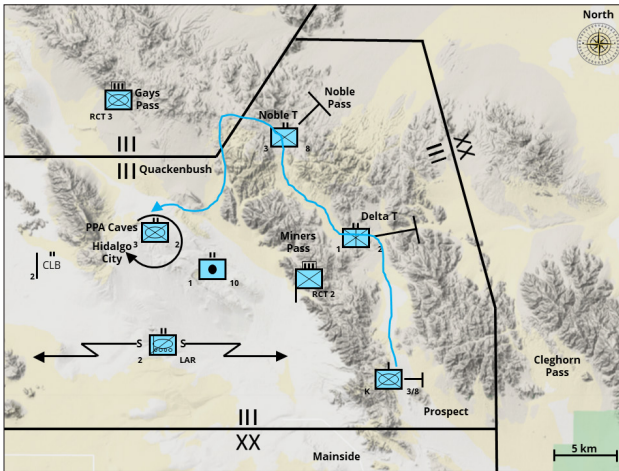
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# The Long Night Movement

The moon had already set; it was a dark but starry night. Captain Hanks, in the lead track, kept the speed low to about 10 miles per hour as they drove blacked out. The transit through 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' defensive lines was pretty uneventful (figure 12). Captain Hanks kept them aware of his position as they moved so that there would be no confusion or blue-on-blue (friendly fire) incidents, but there was still the occasional frantic call on the battalion TAC 1 about mechanized vehicles moving through the engagement areas. Captain Hanks dropped off the electronic warfare support team (EWST) and the scout sniper platoon at the Delta T and continued along the route.

After about an hour, Captain Hanks gave a final radio call to 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, "Anbar, Khaos 6. We're passing through checkpoint 39 and leaving your [area of operations] AO. Thanks for the work, and good luck."

**Figure 12.** Khaos Company's route (in blue) for the long night movement.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

Cutting through Miner's Pass would have significantly reduced the time it would take to get to Hidalgo City, but because it had been hit hard by adversary aviation, it was not advisable. On an optimistic note, though, this meant that Captain Hanks would have to go through 3d Battalion, 8th Marines' battlespace. Maybe he would get to see some of his friends. He had his radio operator roll the radio to 3d Battalion, 8th Marines' nets, and Captain Hanks heard familiar voices. From the sounds of it, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, just finished up a good fight in their engagement area.

"Grizzly, this is Khaos 6, approaching from your south along [main supply route] MSR Detroit with five

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tracks and one JLTV. I'll be at the contact point in 20 minutes."

"Roger, Khaos 6. Hero 5 will meet you there and take you through the lines," Captain Gene A. Harb, the battalion's assistant operations officer, replied back.

As the company reached the contact point, Captain Hanks saw a tank wrecker and a tank crew working on a downed tank on the side of the road. Off in the distance, he could see the reflection of pyrotechnics in the vicinity of the forward engagement areas. And sitting in the middle of the road was First Lieutenant Prather (Hero 5), waiting to escort.<sup>1</sup> The scene was reminiscent of one of the stations in *Apocalypse Now* or *Heart of Darkness*.<sup>2</sup> Khaos Company was going deeper up the river.

Challenge and pass were exchanged, and after a quick face to face, the company was back on the move. At one point, they had to shift to the side of the road to allow several 7-tons escorting casualties back to the rear. Eventually, they stopped at the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines' command post to link up with Grizzly 6. Captain Hanks jumped off the track as he approached. Lieutenant Colonel Neil R. Berry and Sergeant Major Rico L. Moss came up to the assault amphibious vehicle (AAV).

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<sup>1</sup> Every effort has been made to verify the names and ranks of participants. Due to the passage of time, it was not possible in all cases.

<sup>2</sup> *Apocalypse Now*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola (San Francisco, CA: American Zoetrope, 1979), 147 min.; and *Heart of Darkness*, directed by Nicholas Roeg (Atlanta, GA: Turner Pictures, 1993), 100 min.

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“Hey, Matt, I’m proud of what you guys did down there. I was listening to it on the radio,” Lieutenant Colonel Berry said, extending his arm to shake Captain Hanks’s hand.

“Sir, the Marines performed well. We got it done,” Captain Hanks replied.

“Good. We’re doing well here too; the enemy is blocked. But don’t stay here long, you got to move. There’s a few enemy elements around the wire, an entire adversary tank battalion reinforced with 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, to our front. Our rear checkpoint was just ambushed.”

After another minute of battlefield updates and a good handshake, Khaos Company was on the move.

They only traveled about another 900 meters along the road before Captain Hanks stopped the track again. Just off the side of the road sat a Joint light tactical vehicle (JLTV), which looked out of play. What caught his attention was the figure standing outside the door. Through his night vision goggles, the figure looked a lot like Captain Phil Richard, the Lima Company commander. Captain Hanks took this opportunity to stop and do a link up. He may not get a chance like this again to review the details of what happened.

“Phil, is that you?” Captain Hanks yelled out.

“Oh hey, it’s Khaos 6! What are you doing here?” Captain Richard replied and started walking over to Captain Hanks’s AAV.

“We’re pushing through your lines to go reinforce 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. Hang on, I’ll come down,”

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Captain Hanks said, taking off his helmet and climbing down from the AAV. He met Captain Richard with a handshake.

“Why are you coming all the way up here? You should have used Miners Pass. It would have been much shorter,” Captain Richard wondered.

“Regiment didn’t want us using it. They made a deliberate decision to deny the use of Miner’s Pass for night movements, particular for mechanized units carrying infantry. The road is fairly degraded, and some of the slopes are in excess of 45 degrees. The risk to force exceeded the risk to mission. Anyway, I think the adversary dropped notional air ordnance making it technically impassable for exercise use unless we put engineers on it,” Captain Hanks replied.

“Makes sense.”

“Is this your defense?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Ha! No, it’s not. I’m dead,” Captain Richard replied with a laugh.

“What? You’re kidding me. What happened? Is Mike dead too?” Captain Hanks asked incredulously. Captain Michael M. Siani was the company commander for India Company, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines.

“No, Mike’s still very much alive. How much time do you have?” Captain Richard asked.

“A few minutes. We’ve been on the road for a few hours now. I don’t think it would hurt to give the guys a break to rest. Hang on one second,” Captain Hanks replied. He walked over to the other side of his AAV. Staff Sergeant Granados lifted up one side of his

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helmet so he could hear and leaned out of the AAV.

“We’ll take a short halt, 5–10 minutes. Can you pass the word?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Sounds good, Sir,” Staff Sergeant Granados replied. He put his helmet back in place and started communicating with the rest of his team. With that settled, Captain Hanks walked back to Captain Richard and pulled out his map on his tablet.

“Okay, let’s hear it,” Captain Hanks said to Captain Richard.

“All right, so we’ll start from the beginning,” Captain Richard began. “We got here a few days before the start of [MAGTF Warfighting Exercise] MWX. After looking at the terrain, we set up three engagement areas and prepared the positions. As soon as MWX officially started, there were [unmanned aerial systems] UAS and enemy aviation all over the place. We could also hear [ultralight tactical vehicles] UTVs and assumed it was enemy reconnaissance elements going into position. That significantly reduced our ability to move around, so we pretty much limited it to night security patrols around the perimeter. We had pretty good indications and warnings of potential enemy infiltrating through the mountains.”

“What made you think that?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Well, if we were going to see enemy, there was only one of two ways: they would attack in the open along the MSR and our engagement areas, which we would be able to see, or they would infiltrate our positions and



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attack from the flank or rear, which we might not be able to see. And at that time, we hadn't seen anything significant," Captain Richard explained.

"So, your indications and warnings of enemy actions was a lack of indications and warnings of enemy actions?" Captain Hanks asked with an eyebrow raised.

"Yeah, ironic isn't it?" Captain Richard retorted.

"Yes, but it actually makes sense. Sorry, continue," Captain Hanks said.

"Okay, where were we?" Captain Richard said, looking out into the distance. He snapped his gaze back down to Captain Hanks's tablet. "Right, so that first night, we really didn't see anything but kept a heavy patrolling effort. But the next day, we saw vehicles several kilometers to our north on the east-west running MSR. It looked like small groups of wheeled vehicles and a few tracked vehicles. They were going both ways at times. They were too far away for us to do anything about them directly, and they were out of range of our mortars. We figured that the enemy was probing 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, farther to our northwest or looking for positions to get around our defense at Noble Pass. This went on all day. Sometime after sunset, my [fire support team] FiST team reported seeing a company of AAVs move near our engagement area and establish a giant coil," Captain Richard said.

"A company *of* AAVs or a company *in* AAVs?" Captain Hanks interrupted. The two descriptions are dras-

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tically different in combat power, especially when what they can carry is considered.<sup>3</sup>

“A company *of* AAVs, carrying a battalion worth of enemy. We didn’t really understand it at the time, but because of the respawning rules, the enemy has to replicate larger forces. That battalion we saw dismount was actually equivalent to an enemy regiment. We tried to send up an artillery mission, but it didn’t meet the artillery unmasking criteria,” Captain Richard explained.

“Yeah, we experienced a little bit of that too. I think the Marine Corps is still working out how much risk it’s willing to take when it comes to using fire assets in an environment, where the very use of those assets will instantly make them targets—and against an enemy that

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<sup>3</sup> Though the specific number of troops in units may vary from Service to Service, in general, the organization is composed of a team: 4 Marines assigned to a specific team; squad: three teams assigned to a specific squad (12+ people); platoon: three squads assigned to a specific platoon (36+ people); company (or battery): three platoons assigned to a company (or battery) (108+ people); battalion: three companies/batteries assigned to form a battalion (324+ people); regiment: three battalions form a regiment (or brigade) (972+ people); division: three brigades make up a division, which can be between 10,000 and 25,000 troops; and the Marine Corps: three or more divisions. The Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) is composed of a command element, ground combat element, aviation combat element, and combat service support element. MAGTFs range in size from a Marine Expeditionary Unit to a Marine Expeditionary Force (2,200–48,000). See Michael Moran, “Modern Military Force Structures,” Council on Foreign Relations, 26 October 2006.

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has the capability and capacity to act on those instincts. Bottom line: it forced us to be far more reliant on our own organic indirect fires capabilities rather than relying on higher capabilities,” Captain Hanks said.

“I agree, but the problem with that was our indirect fires were out of range, so we missed a huge opportunity to destroy, or at least put a lot of damage into, an entire enemy battalion acting as a regiment,” Captain Richard replied. “So, after that, we weren’t sure what the enemy was going to do. We lost sight of them behind terrain, and from their last known location, they could either attack us from the east or bypass us altogether. Around 0900 the next day, they came out of the low grounds from the east and started hitting Mike’s southern position. One of my platoons from my defensive line could engage the enemy, but the rest of my forces weren’t in a good position. So, I decided to move them to counter the enemy’s attack. I picked up two platoons and headed over to Fuck You Mountain,” Captain Richard said.

“Wait, what is ‘Fuck You Mountain?’” Captain Hanks asked with a laugh.

“Oh, it’s the giant mountain over that direction covered in rocks that you will trip on every 20 feet and goes up at like a 45-degree incline. The climb alone will kick your ass, even if you don’t break an ankle or fall on your face,” Captain Richard explained.

“Okay, the name makes sense,” Captain Hanks responded.

“Right, so anyway, I take my two platoons up Fuck You Mountain to conduct a counterattack. Once we got up there, we had excellent plunging fire over the entire

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enemy force, which was about the size of a company. The counterattack worked, and the coyotes let us know that we had essentially destroyed that company. That is when we learned that they were going to go several terrain features back and be reset. Our side, however, needed to evacuate our casualties, and they were not going to be replaced. We were also running really low on ammunition. I was down to about 30 Marines up on top of Fuck You Mountain, and I think Mike had about 55–60 Marines left in his company. He considered that disengagement criteria and began conducting a rearward passage of lines [RPOL] with the elements of my company I left back. As he was doing his RPOL, the enemy company started attacking again.<sup>4</sup> This time they were much more deliberate in their use of combined arms and maneuver. They knew what hill we were on, and we started getting hit pretty hard with enemy mortar fire. I could see enemy forces moving around our flank but quickly lost sight of them behind other terrain features. I knew they would try to take this hill, but if I left it, and they took it, they would be able to pour devastating fire all over Mike's forces pulling back. So, for Mike's sake, I decided to stay," Captain Richard said.

"You're a god damned hero," Captain Hanks said,

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<sup>4</sup> The term *rearward passage of lines* refers to a defense or retrograde operation, maintaining enemy contact while allowing for recovery of security or other forward forces. See *Offense and Defense*, Field Manual (FM) 3-90 (Washington, DC; Department of the Army, 2015), chap. 16.

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in a somewhat joking manner due to the nature of this being a training exercise.

“Yeah, well, I’m god damned dead. So, just as I expected, about two enemy platoons crested the hill to our flank and close to our rear. We put as much fight in as we could and tried to delay them as long as possible, but the coyotes came and painted us as casualties, myself included,” Captain Richard said.

“Well, clearly, you did what you needed to do. Mike’s still alive,” Captain Hanks pointed out.

“Yeah, and I told him he owes me a cigar for that,” Captain Richard said with a laugh. “Anyway, around the same time I got hit on Fuck You Mountain, another enemy company moved into Mike’s old positions. All of this happened over the course of a few hours, so by around 1300 yesterday, the enemy had a decent position of advantage from several different pieces of high ground overlooking the rest of our defense. Our forces were spread pretty thin. We were already down one company, since you were chopped out to regiment, and after my engagement I only had like two squads left, which Mike took control of. The enemy had a good opportunity to exploit our composition, but I think 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, kind of culminated at that point, because nothing significant happened since then. They fired a lot of indirect fire missions on our positions, but they weren’t really effective. And there were never any maneuver elements that followed the fire missions. So anyway, that’s where we are now in somewhat

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of a Mexican standoff,” Captain Richard finished.<sup>5</sup>

“Damn. So is the enemy just over that hill?” Captain Hanks asked, pointing toward the direction of the main engagement area.

“Yeah, as far as we know. They’re probably observing us right now,” Captain Richard replied.

“Well, shit man, you should have let me know. I bet my AAVs are getting spun up as targets as we speak,” Captain Hanks said.

“You’re probably right. Sorry, I didn’t think about that, you know, being dead and all,” Captain Richard replied with an exhausted smile.

“No worries, man, but I’m going to head out of here all the same. If you see Mike, send him my regards, and tell him not to get himself killed,” Captain Hanks said.

“Absolutely, brother, and good luck out there. By the way, you never even told me what happened down your way,” said Captain Richard.

“That’ll have to wait. But don’t worry, I have a story to tell,” Captain Hanks replied, shaking Captain Richard’s hand.

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<sup>5</sup> The term *Mexican standoff* refers to a confrontation where no strategy exists that allows any party to achieve victory and initiating aggression might trigger their own demise. At the same time, the parties are unable to extricate themselves from the situation without suffering a loss. The expression came into use around the last decade of the nineteenth century; some sources claim the reference is to the Mexican–American War or postwar Mexican bandits of the period.

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Captain Hanks walked back to his AAV and climbed up the side into his hatch. All of the engines were off, as Staff Sergeant Granados was using this halt as an opportunity to cool them. The driver was dead asleep in his seat. Captain Hanks put on his helmet and turned the communications on.

“Are we ready to go, Staff Sergeant?” Captain Hanks asked.

“We can be in 30 seconds, Sir. Let me get the guys ready,” he replied. He switched the communications net to the internal channel, and in about 30 seconds, all of the AAVs started up at the same time—an old technique that prevents prying ears from counting how many engines they hear start up. About a minute later, Staff Sergeant Granados came back on the net.

“Okay, Sir, we’re ready to move,” he said.

“All right, Staff Sergeant, let’s roll,” Captain Hanks replied. And Khaos Company continued their movement through 3d Battalion, 8th Marines’ lines.

Near 3d Battalion, 8th Marines’ last checkpoint—the one previously reported to be killed—a red light flashed, stopping the company. Thinking it was the coyotes signaling that their tracks were just ambushed, and they were now also on the casualty list, Captain Hanks took off his helmet and sighed.

“Well, Staff Sergeant, it was a good run. We almost made it,” he said.

“Yeah, Sir, it was bound to happen at some point!” he responded.

After a few moments, no one approached the vehicles, and Captain Hanks suspected something was off.

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So, he jumped off his track and went over to the group of Marines.

“How’s it going, fellas?” he asked. There were about six of them sitting or standing on the side of the road.

“Good, Sir,” they replied.

Captain Hanks looked around and did not see any coyotes or exercise control (EXCON), so he asked why they flashed them to stop.

“Oh, we just didn’t want you to hit us,” the Marine with the light said.

“What happened here?” Captain Hanks asked.

“A couple of [adversary force] ADFOR vehicles pulled up about 30 minutes ago and shot us. The coyotes said we were all dead.”

“Where did they go?”

“Over that direction. We haven’t seen them since.”

“So, are all of you dead?” Hanks wondered.

“Yes, Sir.”

“Well, I’m not, so we’re going to get out of here. On the bright side, I heard they have ice cream back at Camp Wilson. Good luck, guys.”

Captain Hanks shook each one of their hands, jumped back in his track, and they were off again. As they left 3d Battalion, 8th Marines’ battlespace, he rolled the radio to 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance’s (LAR) radio nets.

“Destroyer, this is Khaos, radio check, over,” Captain Hanks called. He repeated this several times and tried several alternate radio stations with no luck. This made him a little nervous. He knew LAR was out there somewhere, hunting for vehicles that looked just like



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Captain Hanks's AAVs. LAR's thermal optics are extremely capable, and they would see Khaos Company long before Khaos Company even knew it was being watched. But Captain Hanks did not have the time to move cautiously. It was already almost 0330 in the morning; regiment tasked them to reinforce 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, almost eight hours ago. Captain Hanks had to keep a steady pace forward, but was this a risk he could mitigate somehow? Or was it a gamble that he had to just roll the dice on? Probably the latter, but only a few minutes ago he thought he was dead, so what does he have to lose? Besides, he knew the LAR company commander who was hunting these grounds personally, and he knew him to be an extremely competent commander. *If you're out there, Rob, don't shoot us*, Captain Hanks thought to himself. And they continued forward.

It took about an hour of blacked-out driving to enter 3d Battalion, 2d Marines' battlespace. Lance Corporal Jones adjusted the radios to their net and Captain Hanks started hearing some chatter. As they crossed observation position (OP) Left, they gained visual contact with Hidalgo City and the northern combat outposts.

Just as they reached the link-up point, two white star parachutes went up in the sky, and three machine guns opened fire.<sup>6</sup> From Captain Hanks's perspective,

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<sup>6</sup> The term *white star parachute* refers to the M127A1 signal illuminant white star parachute that is primarily used for surface-to-air distress signaling, location signaling between troop emplacements, and battlefield illumination.

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it looked like they were engaging Khaos Company, so Staff Sergeant Granados and his tracks took evasive measures. Captain Hanks had not been able to contact 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, yet so he told Staff Sergeant Granados to hold his fire, not knowing what their disposition was. Finally, after a few tense minutes, Staff Sergeant Granados got the tracks into a wash and cover from the machine-gun fire. Captain Hanks heard a clear voice on the radio and tried to get in contact with them.

“Bastards, this is Khaos, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines,” he keyed over the radio in response.

“This is Bastard 6. Who did you say you are?” Lieutenant Colonel Brian J. Donlon, the commanding officer of 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, asked.

“Khaos Company, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, here to reinforce you. I have a mechanized rifle company ready to go. We’re currently [in the vicinity of] IVO [command post] CP 14. We see the contact IVO [command operations post] COP 1.”

“I haven’t heard anything about being reinforced. Prove you are who you say you are. If you’re from 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, you must know their logo on their shield”

Captain Hanks was a little concerned if 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, was questioning their legitimacy in the middle of an attack. The fight here in Hidalgo City must be much different than the fight in the passes; the Royal Commandos electronic warfare must be effective if 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, did not trust that their communications equipment and nets were secure. But

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Captain Hanks was still under the impression that they were getting shot at, so there was no time to argue.

“Fortune Favors the Strong” he replied.

“What is it in Latin?” the battalion commander responded back.

Even if Captain Hanks had not been awake for two straight days, he would not know that answer. “Honestly, Sir, I have no idea.”

“Well, I believe you. If you were British, I would have heard your accent by now.”

Captain Hanks, a little annoyed and fully exhausted at this point, decided that two-way authentication was required. How did he know this is actually the battalion commander of 3d Battalion, 2d Marines?

“Sir, I’m going to need you to prove your identity. What haircut does your weapons company commander have, and what is his wife’s name?”

“Jason Brock. He’s bald and his wife is Wendy. You’re you, and I’m me! We’re about to get overrun in COP 1. I need you to counterattack immediately.”

“Roger that, Sir. We see machine-gun fire in the direction of the COP, roughly 225 degrees from my position. Can you confirm that’s you guys?”

“Confirmed. We have personnel in COP 1 who just received artillery fire, people in the mountains to the west, and elements in the city. The enemy is coming from [forward operating base] FOB 1 and the southwest. I’ll let you work out a game plan with our [operations officer] OpsO; he says he knows you.”

“Sounds good, Sir.” It would not be until much lat-

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er that Captain Hanks learned that the situation was so dynamic and fast-paced in Hidalgo City that RCT 2 decided to commit the reserve without the luxury of fully communicating this with 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. Because the battalion headquarters got hit so often, and as a result was consistently moving, it was not able to operate with continuous communications to RCT 2.

“Khaos 6, Bastard 3.”

“Jay, I heard you were the OpsO. It’s great to hear your voice. What do you need, brother?” Captain Hanks was not really concerned with breaching radio protocol at this point; it was just nice to connect with a familiar voice. Captain Jay T. Snelling was a fellow Expeditionary Warfare School classmate, an extremely competent Marine officer, and a good friend. They quickly worked out the details for a hasty counterattack. At this point, the sun was just rising. Captain Hanks sent a message to all the tracks to wake everyone up and prepare for a hasty counterattack. Within 10 minutes, the company was ready and in position to launch the counterattack. But 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, got one last fire mission on the attacking enemy with great effect. As dawn came and 3d Battalion, 2d Marines’ final rounds made impact, the attack fizzled out. Coyotes painted the enemy attack repelled. This gave Captain Hanks and Khaos Company a minute to think about follow-on actions in the city.

## LESSONS LEARNED

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*Use caution when conducting passages of lines. A pas-*

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sage of lines seems like a simple evolution, but it can be a dangerous maneuver and simple miscommunication can lead to friendly casualties. In two instances, Captain Hanks's convoy was confused as a potential enemy convoy while passing through 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' defense. These situations were only diffused because the sentries radioed up inquiring about the movement rather than shooting their engagement criteria. Captain Hanks had a smooth passage of lines with 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, because they had a well-established passage of lines procedure, and Captain Hanks was able to conduct rehearsals with them while at TAA Grizzly.<sup>7</sup> The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, was not informed at all about Captain Hanks's movements until he was already there, and this, compounded with the fact that the enemy had breached their "secured" communications, could have led to a blue-on-blue incident. The official challenge and passes were confusing, and they had to resort to modified ones that only they would know, even though they were not previously established. If a passage of lines is occurring, commanders need to be on the radio, and weapons discipline must be enforced. It is better to not shoot until you know for sure than shoot and regret. Fratricide is one of the worst things to occur to a unit. It destroys trust, cohesion, and morale—in your command, in the individual Marines, and in their adjacent units. It is self-inflicted maneuver warfare tac-

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<sup>7</sup> See "Passage of Lines," in *Field Service Regulations: Operations*, FM 100-5 (Washington, DC: War Department, 1941), chap. 16.



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## CHAPTER FOUR

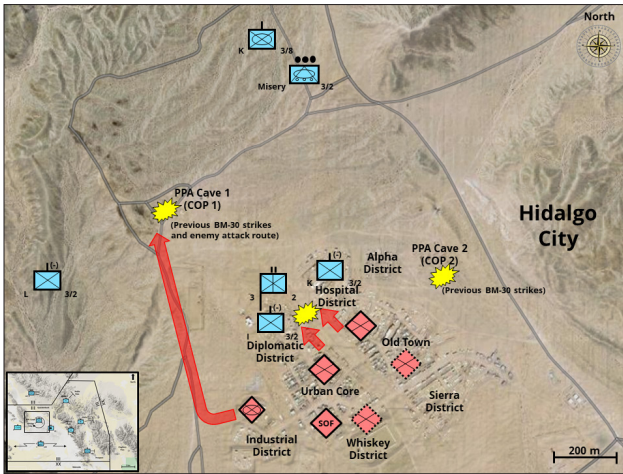
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# Hidalgo City, Part I

The situation in Hidalgo City was not good. Enemy Royal Commando and Special Operations Forces (SOF) units applied an extremely effective combination of conventional and unconventional tactics against 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, only had a few strongpoints left in the city, and all the forces that were put inside the cave complexes had been destroyed by enemy artillery. The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines' relative combat power was probably down to one-third or less (figure 13).

Captain Hanks had a more detailed conversation and battlefield update with Bastard 6 once things calmed down. Lieutenant Colonel Donlon's intention was to build a task force around Khaos Company by adding tanks, his remaining CAAT platoon, and the remnants of Lima Company, 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. It would be Captain Hanks's task to regain control of the two cave complexes and then establish an outer cordon around them. Their conversation was cut short as

**Figure 13.** The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines' situation in Hidalgo City on the morning of 6 November 2019.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

his command post was attacked by a Commando force. Lieutenant Colonel Donlon subsequently handed the fight over to Voodoo 6, call sign for the commander of Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 2d Marines.

RCT 2 had committed a tank company (-) to reinforce 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. Captain Hanks decided that he would wait for these assets before he committed his to a major attack. He dispatched Khaos 2-1 with one of Staff Sergeant Granados's assault amphibian vehicles (AAV) to link up with them.

Captain Hanks realized that time was precious. The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, did not have the capacity to launch an attack and maintain their strongpoint defens-



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es at the same time. Command operations post (COP) 2 was the closest cave complex. Reports from Voodoo 6 confirmed that it was undefended but had no enemy presence. Captain Hanks decided to make a move on COP 2 with minimal force to gain a foothold quickly before the enemy recognized the gap.

“Voodoo 6, Khaos 6. I plan to send Khaos 1 supported by Misery [3d Battalion, 2d Marines’ CAAT platoon] to clear COP 2. They’ll establish isolation in the alpha sector once it’s clear to prevent enemy forces from gaining access.”

“Khaos 6, Voodoo 6, roger. Let me know how I can help,” Captain Evan F. Keel, company commander of Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, said.

By this point, most of his squad leaders and up had gathered around Captain Hanks’s track gaining situational awareness. He looked over to Sergeant Burroughs.

“Can you guys gain a foothold in alpha sector?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Yes, Sir.”

“Okay. Your task is to isolate COP 2 in order to prevent the enemy from gaining control of it. My intent is that you gain a foothold in alpha sector so you can tie into 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, for support or serve as a foothold for us to flow more forces in.” Captain Hanks said.

“Roger that, Sir,” Sergeant Burroughs said and jumped off the track.

“Burroughs, what’s your task?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Seize alpha sector!” he replied.

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Captain Hanks stopped him, calmed him down, and repeated the task and intent. Captain Hanks did love the aggressiveness though.

“Don’t rush to your death. Take a minute, digest the task, formulate a plan, and communicate it. We want tempo, not just speed. Where is Lieutenant Lindley?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Honestly, Sir, I don’t know. He was here this morning, but I haven’t seen him in the last 10 minutes,” he replied.

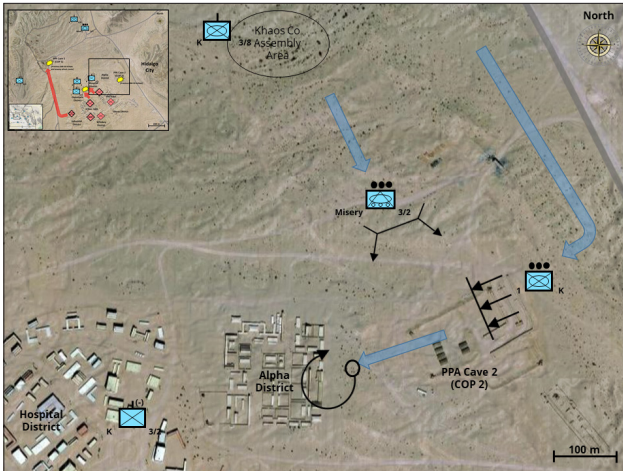
Captain Hanks looked around and asked the other lieutenants if they had seen him. Nobody had seen him recently. *This could be a problem*, Captain Hanks thought, but it was a problem they would have to sort out later. Time was fleeting, and the enemy could be capitalizing on this lull to position forces in COP 2.

“Go brief your guys. We’ll find Lieutenant Lindley,” Captain Hanks told Sergeant Burroughs.

Captain Hanks had Staff Sergeant Granados call all the tracks to either confirm or deny Lieutenant Lindley’s location. He was not in any of the tracks here. That left two possibilities: 1) he is lost and wandering around the desert, or 2) he is in Khaos 2-1’s track linking up with the tanks. Of course, they had just lost comms with this track. Captain Hanks called Sergeant Burroughs back over.

“Lieutenant Lindley is gone. I suspect he’s with the other track, but we don’t have time to go find him. You are now Khaos 1 actual. Are your guys ready?” Captain Hanks asked. This was significant. Sergeant Burroughs was now the platoon commander. This is why the Ma-

**Figure 14.** Khaos I and Misery's attack on COP 2, scheme of maneuver.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

rine Corps stresses training Marines to handle the responsibilities of their superiors in extreme cases. They are only one bullet—or one lost lieutenant—away.

“Yes, Sir,” Sergeant Burroughs replied.

“Okay, you step in five minutes.”

Captain Hanks radioed over to Misery actual, the CAAT platoon commander, to work a coordinated attack. Misery would establish a support-by-fire position to the north as Khaos 1 would attack COP 2 from east to west and continue to alpha sector. Captain Hanks told them not to get decisively engaged, and if necessary, to pull back to their hasty defense (figure 14).

As Sergeant Burroughs completed final checks with

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his Marines, Captain Hanks noticed another lieutenant nearby that he did not recognize.

“Who are you and what do you do?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Sir, Lieutenant Osko. I’m the engineer platoon commander. I have about 26 guys left and two [logistic vehicle system replacements] LVSRs. We were told to come over here but nothing after that,” he replied.

“Do you have ammo?”

“Yes, Sir,” he replied.

“Good. Get your guys over to those two tracks. You are now our 4th Platoon. Callsign Khaos 4. Get your guys ready for an attack, let me know what you need and be back here in 20 minutes so we can game plan.”

“On it, Sir,” he said before he ran off to get his Marines.

“Misery, this is Khaos 1-1 . . . err, I mean Khaos 1 actual. We are stepping now,” Sergeant Burroughs called over the net.

Misery stepped off and set into position. Immediately, Captain Hanks knew something was wrong. He could see the lead vehicles over the intersecting line make a quick reversal and go back behind cover.

“Khaos, this is Misery. Three of our vehicles were just hit by [tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided] TOW and Javelin missiles. There is an enemy antiarmor platoon inside of COP 2. We are displacing now.”

“Khaos 6, this is Khaos 1 actual. We are just shy of alpha sector and now in a local timeout. Recommend an immediate suppression mission as soon as the timeout is over. There are at least five enemy vehicles inside

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COP 2. They hit us the same time they hit CAAT, and we have multiple casualties,” Sergeant Burroughs called over.

The enemy must have moved undetected into COP 2 during the fight for COP 1 a few hours ago. First Mongol, now Misery and Khaos 1; that was twice now that the same lesson cost Captain Hanks’s Marines.<sup>1</sup>

The local timeout bought Captain Hanks some time. Tanks were already 45 minutes behind their estimated time of arrival (ETA). Captain Hanks spotted some dust clouds in the distance to the northeast, but they were still too far away to say for sure what they were. He radioed back up to regiment.

“Tarawa 5, Khaos 6. Is there an updated time for Ironhorse link up?” Captain Hanks asked.<sup>2</sup>

“Khaos 6, Tarawa 5, they should be there in 15 minutes,” the regimental executive officer (XO) replied.

About 15 minutes later, four tanks came into Captain Hanks’s hasty defensive position. Captain Hanks waved down the command tank, and the tank commander jumped out and they shook hands.

“Hey, brother, Captain Matt Hanks, Khaos 6,”

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<sup>1</sup> Lesson (reiterated): do not blindly trust reports; they might have missed something. Reconnoiter before you attack, you must always factor it in, no matter how pressed for time you think you are or how trustworthy the reports seem. And you have to force your subordinates to do the same. See, for example, *Ground Reconnaissance Operations*, Marine Corps Warfare Publication (MCWP) 2-25 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> *Ironhorse* refers to the battalion-level call sign for the friendly tank unit.

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Captain Hanks said, introducing himself and extending his hand.

“You can call me Charlie 6. I’m the company commander,” he replied.

“Are you bringing a full company?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Two platoons, eight tanks. My four here and then another four coming up soon,” he said.

“Okay, are you tracking the situation?”

“Not a clue,” he responded.

Captain Hanks laughed and said, “Okay, good, well here’s the deal—”

“YOU JUST SAW A TANK MAIN GUN ROUND GO BY YOUR HEAD!” the coyote standing next to them screamed over the sound of the tank engine.

Captain Hanks swung his gaze over to where he saw the dust clouds a few minutes ago. Several tanks were in attack formation with guns oriented toward them. He looked back at Charlie 6.

“We’ll finish this conversation later!” Captain Hanks yelled over to him. He ran back to their assembly of AAVs.

“Get in the tracks! We’re displacing to get out of view of these tanks,” Captain Hanks yelled over to the platoon commanders and threw on his helmet.

“Let’s get behind OP Left. It’ll keep us out of view of the tanks and the enemy in the town,” Captain Hanks told Staff Sergeant Granados.

Staff Sergeant Granados radioed over to the other tracks, and within two minutes, they were all on the

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move. Captain Hanks took a minute to consider the situation. He had assumed that the dust clouds were friendly tanks reinforcing their position. If those were enemy tanks closing in on the city, that meant an adversary breakout in one of the passes must have occurred. The COPs are going to have to wait. This alligator is much closer to the boat, and they pack a much heavier punch.

Charlie 6 brought his tank near Captain Hanks's track behind OP Left. He jumped out of his tank and went over to him.

"What happened?" Captain Hanks asked.

"Those were my tanks—the rest of my company. They thought we were enemy armor. Good thing is, we only lost one tank," Charley 6 replied.

Captain Hanks took a moment to look at him, and he quickly dismissed his immediate response with the realization that the tank company just shot themselves (and his Marines). This is why they train. And it did not help that the enemy tanks were the exact same ones the friendly forces had. This is the downside to force on force: you do not get to actually use adversary equipment. However, in reality, if this were a coalition fight, there would likely be friendly T-XX model tanks in their formations, so that must be a consideration.<sup>3</sup>

"Okay, so back to where we were," Captain Hanks took his map out and continued, "3d Battalion, 2d Marines, is in a tough spot. They only have a few pla-

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<sup>3</sup> Several American allies use variants of the Russian T-model tanks (e.g., T-80 main battle tank used by South Korea, Ukraine, etc.).

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toons left in a strongpoint here in the Hospital District and here in the Diplomatic District. They have some elements of CAAT here with me on the outskirts, an 81mm mortar platoon to the northwest, the remnants of Lima Company in the hills to the west, and snipers in OPs here and here to the north. I currently have five AAVs and one Joint light tactical vehicle (JLTV). I'm down to about two rifle platoons, one engineer platoon, one machine-gun squad, one mortar team, and one assault team. We have two tasks: clear enemy IVO COP 2, and then subsequently block the enemy from the west, north, and east."

Captain Hanks continued, "The enemy has been using a lot of antitank weapons—TOWs and Javelins. They've had great effect on our vehicles so far. There are still a few enemy vehicles in COP 2. My game plan is pretty simple. Call for a duration suppression mission from 3d Battalion, 2d Marines' 81mm mortars, which will allow you to set up a support-by-fire position to the east. Once you're established, I will attack with two tracks and a platoon to clear COP 2 from north to south. Once cleared, we'll extract and pull back to defensive positions. If we stay too long on COP 2, the enemy will use their artillery. How's that sound?" Captain Hanks finished.

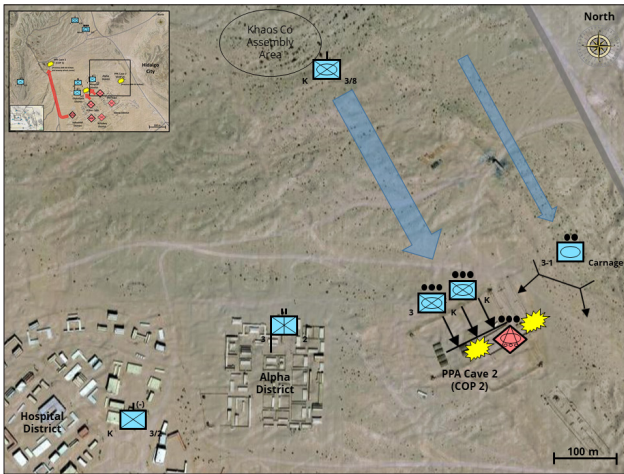
"Sounds good. I'll give you two tanks; they'll be ready to go in 10 minutes," Charley 6 replied.

"Okay, I'm going to pull my guys in again and brief them the scheme of maneuver. We'll initiate on my call," Captain Hanks said (figure 15).

With a solid handshake, they got back in their ve-



**Figure 15.** Khaos Company's supported attack on COP 2, scheme of maneuver.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

hicles and pulled out. Once back at the hasty assembly area, Captain Hanks pulled the leadership back on top of his track for a quick huddle to brief them on the game plan. Captain Hanks noticed that Second Lieutenant Wise was not there.

“Where’s Nolan?” he asked.

“Sir, his track was hit by a Javelin when the tanks attacked,” First Lieutenant Lindley said.

“Well first off, Gray, it’s great to see you. I thought we lost you. Unfortunately, I think we lost your platoon. Last I heard from them, they were in a local timeout from an enemy surprise attack. I don’t know what

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their situation is. Second, what do you mean a Javelin hit them?" Captain Hanks asked.

"The coyote said that they didn't find proper cover in their track, and the enemy shot at them from the city," he replied.

Captain Hanks took a second to consider Lindley's report and then stopped thinking about it. They were currently in good cover from the city. He would sort the rest out later. Captain Hanks did smile at the idea of how pissed off Second Lieutenant Wise must be. He was sure that he had a counterargument that went well into depth about angle of fire, distance, likelihood of a kill, what the real paint should be, the fact that the enemy would likely target a tank instead of an AAV, etc. Second Lieutenant Wise was a very smart officer, maybe too smart. Captain Hanks could already see him complaining, shaking his head, and telling the coyote what bullshit that was. But force on force cannot be perfect, and Captain Hanks chalked this up to chance: the unpredictable variable is always present on the battlefield.

"Okay, so let's reorganize the forces. Sergeant Decker, your squad now belongs to 3d Platoon. Aaron, that gives you a full platoon. You'll be the assault force for this attack on COP 2. Gray, go try and make contact with Sergeant Burroughs. I heard him on the radio a few minutes ago. I don't know for certain what his situation is. Best case, there are a few of them left. Worst case, you're what's left of 1st Platoon." Captain Hanks finished briefing the scheme of maneuver. With no immediate questions, he told them to brief their Marines, as they would step off in five minutes.

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“Khaos 6, Bastard 3. Shot duration suppression mission. You have five minutes of suppression starting in 30 seconds,” Captain Snelling called over the net.

“Roger, pushing tanks up now. It’ll take them three minutes to get to their support by fire position,” Captain Hanks replied.

“Carnage 3-1, Khaos 6. Push to support by fire position. You have five minutes of suppression from 81s,” Captain Hanks called over to the tanks.

At this time, First Lieutenant Baldini came up to Captain Hanks’s track.

“Sir, I think we need to stop and gain accountability. We have people all over the place, no one knows what’s going on, and we just need to game plan and sync up,” he said.<sup>4</sup>

Captain Hanks looked at his watch. Four minutes and 30 seconds of suppression left. Tanks are two and a half minutes away from their position. They needed to move. Captain Hanks realized that he synced up with all the squad leaders and commanders, but not his XO.

“Brian, we just synced up. I don’t have time to fill you in, we need to start pushing. Gain accountability of who is here, and we’ll sync up when I get back,” Captain Hanks said.

“Sir, we really need to sync,” Baldini urged. Captain Hanks could tell in his face and voice that he was frustrated. Baldini, like Captain Hanks, had been up

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, SSgt Melissa McGaughey, “Face of Defense: Soldier Puts the Count in Accountability,” Department of Defense, 10 July 2015.

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almost two days straight supporting the company in its fight and preventing it from reaching its culminating point. Moreover, he had done the long night movement blacked out in the JLTV behind a track, meaning he could probably only see the road half the time, while the other half of the time he was probably trying not to drive off a cliff. But this was not the place or time to stop and reset things.

“Brian, not now,” Captain Hanks yelled over the sound of the AAV engines. It was not the way he wanted to leave this conversation with his XO and second in command, but there simply was no time.

Captain Hanks looked over to Second Lieutenant Aaron Porcarelli’s track and saw Marines trying to hook their packs on the tracks. He could tell that his sense of urgency was not translating to the rest of the troops. He climbed on top of my track and yelled over to him.

“Aaron, leave that shit here. We’ll pick it up after. Get the guys in the track now!”

“Sir, we’re still waiting on four to come over from the other track. We only have 16,” Second Lieutenant Porcarelli said.

“Well then, you’re going with 16! Get the guys in the fucking track and close it up!” Captain Hanks turned around, ending the conversation, and got back in his command hatch.

“Khaos 6, Carnage 3-1. In position, engaging enemy vehicles. You have effective suppression,” the supporting tank section radioed over battalion TAC 1.

“Roger, Carnage, we’re moving,” Captain Hanks replied.

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“Staff Sergeant, start moving. Head over that way, stay masked behind the terrain,” Captain Hanks pointed toward the direction of COP 2. He looked behind and saw that First Lieutenant Porcarelli had gotten the message. His track was buttoned up and they were in trace.

They were about 400 meters away from COP 2 when Captain Hanks told Staff Sergeant Granados to stop. He looked at his watch: 30 seconds left of 81mm mortar suppression. Good.

“Khaos 6, Bastard 3. Rounds complete duration suppression mission,” Captain Snelling called over.

“Roger, we’re set at the [minimum safe line] MSL. Waiting for splash, then moving to dismount point,” Captain Hanks replied.<sup>5</sup>

Thirty seconds later, the last rounds impacted.

“Punch it, Staff Sergeant. Get these guys right in front of the [concertina] C-wire,” Captain Hanks told Staff Sergeant Granados.

“On it, Sir,” he replied.

Staff Sergeant Granados accelerated the AAV so quickly that Captain Hanks could have sworn that they went airborne over the small hills. They closed the distance in seconds, and after a few more, Second Lieutenant Porcarelli and his platoon were dismounted and breaching the concertina wire.

“Sir, this is Coyote 32W. The tanks and 81s de-

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<sup>5</sup> The *minimum safe line* refers to the closest distance a unit can get to the impacts of friendly rounds without incurring significant danger of fratricide.

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stroyed the enemy on the objective. You don't need to attack anymore," Coyote 32W radioed over to Captain Hanks on battalion TAC 1.

Even though this was force-on-force simulated combat, it was still training. There was no value in stopping the attack just because the enemy was painted dead. In reality, Captain Hanks would not have an observer controller telling him that the enemy on the objective was dead. They would still need to put boots on the deck and clear it, gaining whatever tactical site exploitation they could. It was important to follow through and not give in to human factors. "Thanks, brother, but we're going to finish this attack for the rep," Captain Hanks replied.

The attack went smooth. Khaos 3 aggressively assaulted through. Captain Hanks coordinated fire support with Carnage, and within 10 minutes the objective was clear. Captain Hanks pushed Carnage 3-1 back to his company to establish the defense, then picked up Khaos 3 in the tracks and sent them back to the assembly area. Captain Hanks could see some Marines in desert camouflage uniforms walking around the alpha sector. He knew that 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, said they were establishing their new command post there, so that was probably them. Now that COP 2 was in friendly hands, Captain Hanks had some breathing room. Remembering the lesson from his early interactions with Lieutenant Colonel Diana and 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, face-to-face discussions were always best. So, Captain Hanks decided to take a detour and headed over to the suspected command post. He jumped

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out of the track, went into the building with a bunch of antennas sticking out of it, and found Captain Snelling.

“Jay, great to see you, brother,” Captain Hanks said and gave him a hug. Captain Hanks could tell he had been through the ringer and probably had not slept in days.

“Same here, man,” he replied.

“Is Bastard 6 around?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Yeah, he’s in here,” he replied, and he walked Captain Hanks into an adjacent room in the building.

“Sir, Khaos 6 is here,” Captain Snelling said to Lieutenant Colonel Donlon. Lieutenant Colonel Donlon was busy looking over a map and reading some reports on a computer. As he looked up, Captain Hanks walked over to shake his hand.

“Sir, first, I have to apologize about the comm. I know it’s shit. I’ve been dancing with it for the last few days,” Captain Hanks said. The communications headset in his AAV was truly difficult to work with. Captain Hanks had to hold it just the right way at the right angle, literally screaming over the noise of the AAV, and maybe the other end might be able to hear him. Bastard 6 had previously commented on it, trying to get Captain Hanks to obtain better comms in their initial rendezvous.

“Don’t worry about it. Good to meet you. Thanks for coming. You really helped us out,” he said, completing the handshake.

“Sir, we actually met a few months ago at a School of Infantry graduation before you took command. I’m

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in 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, with Lieutenant Colonel Berry,” Captain Hanks said.

“That’s right, well it’s good to see you again,” he replied.

“Yes, Sir. We just finished up the attack on COP 2. I figured we had the time to get on the map together and see what you needed,” Captain Hanks said.

Lieutenant Colonel Donlon continued to give Captain Hanks his perspective of the battlespace, and he refined his intentions for Khaos Company. Captain Hanks was tasked to establish a defense on the west, north, and east of the COPs to prevent the enemy from gaining control of them. Captain Hanks would retain the forces that were attached for the counterattack (e.g., tanks, CAAT, Lima Company, engineers) and had to be prepared to reinforce Kilo or India Company, 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, in the city or conduct subsequent counterattacks.

Captain Hanks left the CP about 10 minutes later to link back up with the company.

“How are we looking, Brian?” Captain Hanks asked First Lieutenant Baldini when they arrived.

“We’re okay, Sir. We have everybody we’re going to get. Gray is the only one left from 1st Platoon, and we haven’t been able to contact or find Sergeant Burroughs, so we think they’re all dead. We still have what’s left of 2d Platoon, combined with 3d Platoon. And the engineers are ready to go. Tanks have already set up in their defensive positions you worked out earlier,” he said.

“Good. Are you feeling a little better about the situation now?” Captain Hanks asked, as if he was mentally



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reflecting on the gravity of what First Lieutenant Baldini just said. He had lost a platoon, where at best they were cut off somewhere in the city, or at worst they were all casualties. Would he so nonchalantly take this information the same way in real life? Of course not. Would he try to conduct an immediate rescue mission using every means available? Probably. But this would be counter-productive to what Lieutenant Colonel Donlon needed in the larger fight for the city. Certainly, Hanks realized that he should have stopped and assessed the situation a little further before sending Sergeant Burroughs and Misery in for the hasty attack. Captain Hanks realized that he had succumbed to the threat of time, thinking that speed was what he needed. He now knew that it was not speed he needed; it was tempo. He should have conducted the first attack the way that he conducted the second attack, bringing the extra firepower and setting conditions. Again, reinforcing the lesson of reconnaissance and information, first and foremost he should have established better situational awareness before he committed forces.

“Yes, Sir, sorry about that. There was just a lot of shit going on, and I didn’t want us to rush to our death,” First Lieutenant Baldini replied.

“Yeah, I know exactly where you were going. Turns out, that was a spectacular attack. I just didn’t have the time to stop and reset. I could have used your advice in the first attack. Funny how things happen like that,” Captain Hanks said.

“I know, Sir,” First Lieutenant Baldini said. He looked tired but under control.

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“Okay, let’s bring everybody in and talk follow-on actions. Can you tell them all 1100? Say 15 minutes?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Yes, Sir, I’ll let the guys know,” First Lieutenant Baldini said.

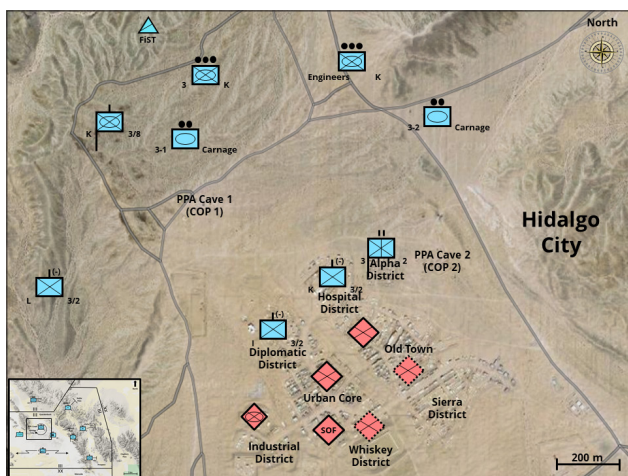
As the leadership of the aggregated company converged on the JLTV, Captain Hanks went to the back to grab a meals ready to eat (MRE). A box was already open; but after a night and morning like the one he had, Captain Hanks was not messing around with just any old MRE. This morning rated a pizza MRE. So, Captain Hanks ignored etiquette and opened a new box to grab the one he wanted. He went back to the passenger’s seat of the JLTV, opened it up, and ate it. It was worth every bite.

Looking over the map with the leadership team, they recognized that the area to cover was too large for a traditional area defense. So, Captain Hanks decided to strongpoint a few locations most likely assessed to be infiltration points and to maintain a mobile reserve that could rapidly fill in gaps or exploit opportunities as they arose. It was a pretty loose plan, but Captain Hanks trusted the platoons to get it done with little explicit guidance. Satisfied that everyone had a good understanding of the situation, and with the plan disseminated, the company departed to occupy its defense (figure 16).

The headquarters section had only just set up their camouflage net over the command track when Bastard 6 came across the radio.

“Khaos 6, Bastard 6. Change of plans. I want you to

**Figure 16.** Khaos Company and 3d Battalion, 2d Marines' disposition for the defense at noon on 6 November 2019.



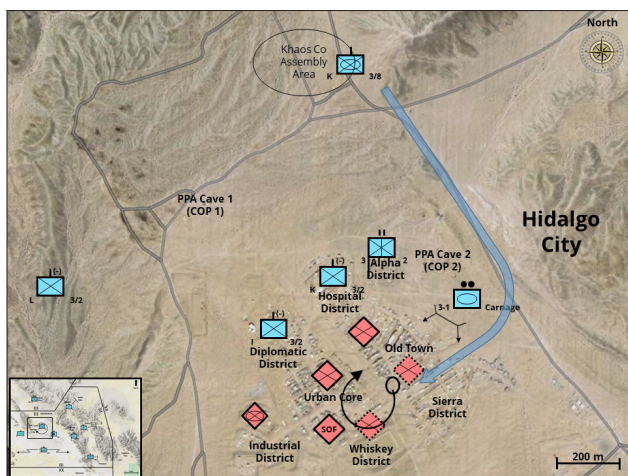
Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

do a spoiling attack. I think this is the time frame that the enemy is in a rest cycle. They've been up all night, and over the last few days we've had no action in the early afternoon. I think there is a pattern here. I'm going to coordinate with regimental fires to get you artillery. There are a few known enemy strongpoints that I will hit soon. I want you to get in hard and fast behind their lines after the fire missions," he said.

Captain Hanks was in the back of his command track peering over the map as Lieutenant Colonel Donlon talked.

"Roger, Sir, I'm thinking about a thunder run; guns hot through [main supply route] MSR Boris east to west

**Figure 17.** Khaos Company's reinforced spoiling attack in enemy rear, scheme of maneuver.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

until we get to the center of the urban core. There, I'll strongpoint and raise hell where I can," Captain Hanks replied. That was pretty much the entire plan: hit the known areas hard with indirect fires, use the speed and shock power of armor to penetrate to the urban core, and establish a foothold to cause chaos in their rear (figure 17).

"Perfect, when can you go?" he asked.

"It'll take a minute for me to get my tanks together. They're low on fuel and requesting to refuel now. Charlie 6 estimates it will take 90 minutes at best until he is in the fight again. Otherwise, he won't have the fuel to fight inside the city," Captain Hanks replied.

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“Roger. Regiment is giving us another tank platoon. They should be here sooner than that. You can use them,” he said.

“Roger, we’ll start staging now,” Captain Hanks replied. He called over to First Lieutenant Baldini, who was at the JLTV helping Corporal Oliveros and the rest of the headquarters platoon unload the supplies to create a cache site.

“Brian, don’t bother with that shit. Load it back up. We’re going into the attack,” Captain Hanks said, when First Lieutenant Baldini came over. He looked at Captain Hanks for a second with a confused look on his face, then smiled and shook his head.

“Roger, Sir, we’ll get this stuff loaded back up. What are we attacking?” he asked.

“We’re going to aggregate every piece of combat power we can and punch a hole in their rear. It should fuck these guys up good enough to give 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, a break from their attacks for a while,” Captain Hanks said.

“Sounds good, Sir, I’ll let the other platoons know.”

It took a little bit longer than expected, but by 1300 the company was aggregated back at its previous assault position. As they were waiting for the rest of the force, Captain Hanks could hear 3d Battalion, 2d Marines’ Headquarters and Service Company talking about an ammunition resupply on battalion TAC 1. Captain Hanks thought he could use some extra ammunition for the attack, considering he had no idea how long he would be in the city once they inserted. And from the chatter on the radio, it was hard enough to get a resup-

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ply into the friendly areas of the city. Captain Hanks was going deep into the enemy's rear, so resupply would likely never happen.

"Bastard 3, Khaos 6. Any way we can get our hands on some of that ammo?" Captain Hanks asked.

"Khaos 6, Bastard 3. Yeah, man, just call over to Hotel 6. They're trying to resupply people," Captain Snelling replied.

"Thanks, I'll get a hold of them. Break. Hotel 6, Khaos 6."

"Khaos 6, Hotel 6."

"Hotel 6, Khaos 6. Heard you guys have ammo. You want to drop some off with us?"

"I'm not sure. We drew this ammo from CLB 2, and we need to give it to 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. I'll need to coordinate with Bastard 3."

"Yeah, I just talked to Bastard 3; he said to talk to you."

"Okay, well the other issue is that CLB 2 wants the ammo back. They just asked for it."

"Break break. Hotel 6, Bastard 3. We're not giving that ammo back. Go link up with Khaos and give them whatever they need," Captain Snelling said over the net.

"Bastard 3, Hotel 6. Roger that. Break. Khaos 6, where are you guys located?"

"We're at our assembly area, about 400 meters northwest of OP Left. I think I see you guys over that way. We're in a bunch of tracks. Can you see us?"

"Yeah, I see you. Heading your way now. What did you need?"

"What do you have?"

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“Only 7.62, 10,000 rounds.”

“We’ll take it all.”

First Lieutenant Baldini facilitated ammunition resupply from 3d Battalion, 2d Marines’ Headquarters and Service Company. The company broke down the 7.62mm crates and carried the ammunition to their respective tracks. At this point, Captain Hanks was just waiting on tanks. The scheme of maneuver was briefed, indirect fires series were coordinated, and the company was staged to depart by 1445. Charlie 6 came over the net and said that his tanks were delayed, and they might not be there for another hour. Captain Hanks reached out to Captain Snelling.

“Bastard 3, Khaos 6. What takes priority on this—mission or time?” Captain Hanks asked.

“The [commanding officer] CO really wants to get this attack in soon, so I say time,” he replied.

“Okay, if that’s the case, we’ll have to go inside the city without tanks. They’ll stay outside of the city and provide fires on our ingress. When the other tank platoon shows up, they can follow in trace,” Captain Hanks said.

“Roger, sounds good. Can you hit a [time on target] TOT of 15?” Captain Snelling asked.

“Affirm. Set it,” Captain Hanks replied.

“Roger, TOT of 15 established.”

Captain Hanks briefed his team on the adjustment and got back in the tracks. His watch read 1507—eight minutes until launch. He passed the “five-minute until departure” hand and arm signal at 1510.

At 1511, Captain Snelling came back on the net.

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“Khaos 6, Bastard 3. Stand down on the attack,” he said.

“Bastard 3, Khaos 6. Confirm you want me to stand down the attack,” Captain Hanks queried back. *This could not be right. Something is up.*

“Confirmed,” he replied.

“Are we rolling TOT or is the attack canceled?” Captain Hanks asked. He thought maybe artillery was not ready or the CO decided to wait for the tanks after all. There was no way this could be canceled; everything was ready to go. The longer they waited, the more likely the enemy would gain the initiative and advantage again.

“Canceled. Regiment doesn’t want us to take the chance and lose more forces,” he said. Captain Hanks could hear the frustration in his voice.

“Seriously?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Yeah, seriously. For now, head back to your defense positions. I’ll get you word when I can,” he said.

“Sounds good, man. Let us know if that changes,” Captain Hanks said and took off his helmet. He was just as frustrated as Captain Snelling. Lieutenant Colonel Donlon knew what he was doing in the city. If they continued to sit in the defense, the same thing would occur: the enemy will attack, attrite friendly forces, and gain ground. That was why he wanted to continue this attack. Sitting in the defense meant accepting a battle of attrition; one that 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, and Khaos Company could not afford to fight. Time was the end goal. With time, the follow-on forces could gain access to the caves, get the equipment, and bring the real fight to bear. The regiment’s fear of losing forces paralyzed



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their ability to attack, ultimately inviting an even greater risk of losing forces, and potentially a greater risk of losing the caves themselves. But by the tone of Captain Snelling's voice, Captain Hanks could tell that he had probably already explained all of this to regiment and had gotten the same answer. There must be something more that Captain Hanks was not privy to. This was not the time for him to go rogue and attack regardless, though he did consider it for a brief second. He resigned to trust in the judgment and decisions of higher headquarters.

Captain Hanks jumped off the track and gave the "kill the engines" hand and arm signal to the company behind him. He made his way over to the JLTV and gave the "leaders up" hand and arm signal. As the leaders gathered around the JLTV, Captain Hanks briefed them on the update. He could see the disappointment on their faces, as they were probably thinking the same thing. Even after everything they had been through, they were ready, even hungry, to attack. As Captain Hanks finished with the update, 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, came back on the net.

"All stations, this is Bastard main. Stop all actions, we need 100 percent accountability of all personnel. The Dakotians claim to have captured six U.S. military personnel and are threatening to execute them unless all U.S. forces withdraw from Hidalgo City immediately. Additionally, the mayor of Hidalgo and the police chief have been killed, and it is being reported that they were killed by U.S. airstrikes."

*So, this is going to change things,* Captain Hanks

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thought. This had to be why regiment stopped the attack, or at least it must have been linked somehow. First Lieutenant Baldini rapidly gained accountability of the company and its attachments, and he reported it up to Bastard main. Technically, their previous defensive positions were not inside the city, so Captain Hanks pushed the company back out to reestablish the cordon.

It took about half an hour, but eventually the rest of the units in 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, rogered up accountability and Bastard main came back on the net.

“All stations, this is Bastard main. We are now in suspension of battlefield effects. All units are to remain in place. Units are authorized to send resupply vehicles for logistics. Additionally, units are authorized to go to [forward operating base] FOB 3 and reclaim your casualties. Report back when your units are 100 percent fully accounted for.”

Captain Hanks and First Lieutenant Baldini were both by the radio in the command track when this came over the net.

“So, is that it? Are we done for now?” First Lieutenant Baldini asked.

“Yeah, I think so. I’ll go figure out what this means for us. Let the other guys know and tell them to hang tight. If you think you can, get the company aggregated here.” Captain Hanks jumped in the JLTV for a face to face with 3d Battalion, 2d Marines.

“Jay, is this the big reset [pause exercise] PAUSEX?” Captain Hanks asked Captain Snelling when he got there.

“Yeah, I think so. They’re transporting the casual-

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ties back from Camp Wilson. There's supposed to be a FRAGO for tomorrow's actions, but division is pretty adamant that everyone get some sleep tonight. Apparently, there's been a few incidents already," he said.

"Sounds good, man. I'm going to go find my guys. What else do you need from us?" Captain Hanks asked.

"Nothing, man. I'll keep you updated with the FRAGO when we get it. Sorry about the confusion with that attack earlier," he said.

"No worries, man. What was the deal anyway?" Captain Hanks asked.

"Regiment didn't want us do it. They thought that if it failed, or we took too many casualties, we would have to evacuate the city. Lieutenant Colonel Donlon tried explaining to them that we were just attriting casualties in the defense and that attacking was the only way to get a handle on the situation. But they didn't think it was worth the risk in the larger picture."

"Well, it would have been a good attack. I'll hit you up over the net," Captain Hanks said, and he went back to his JLTV. By this time, the sun had set. Captain Hanks and Corporal Oliveros headed to FOB 3, assuming that was where Khaos 1-1, Khaos 2 actual, and their guys were. They had to navigate through parades of casualties heading back to their units on their way. Once they arrived at FOB 3, it looked abandoned already. Captain Hanks was about to get the thermals out to confirm, when a few lights and an AAV flashed from the corner. Captain Hanks headed over and found his guys.

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“Nolan, what happened?” Captain Hanks asked Second Lieutenant Wise.

“Sir, they said we got hit by a Javelin, and the coyotes told us to come here. We’ve been sitting here ever since,” he said. He had a glimmer of humor in his eyes. Captain Hanks could see that Second Lieutenant Wise had already exhausted his analysis of poor observer controller paints to anyone who would listen, and now he just found the situation funny.

“And Sergeant Burroughs?” Captain Hanks asked.

“He’s over there,” he replied.

“Okay, good. Well, pack up. You’re alive again. I can bring some of you back, but I’ll have to return with another track to grab the others,” Captain Hanks said.

Sergeant Burroughs walked over, and Captain Hanks did not miss the opportunity to give him a hard time.

“Sergeant Burroughs, you were the platoon commander for two minutes and you killed your whole platoon. What do you have to say for yourself?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Sir, the Marines did well. We got some pretty crappy paints,” he replied solemnly. Captain Hanks could tell that Sergeant Burroughs took this seriously and did not read the sarcasm in his voice. He decided to soften it up a little bit.

“Yeah, I know that’s the case. To be honest, I didn’t set you up for success. The failure’s mine, so don’t blame yourself. I think there were a lot of lessons learned from that one. If it makes you feel better, we found Lieutenant Lindley,” Captain Hanks said.

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“Good, I’m sure he feels worse than I do,” he replied.

“Yeah, but we got the job done. I’ll get you up to speed when we get back. In the meantime, throw as many guys as you can fit in the JLTV. I’ll take them back now,” Captain Hanks said. There is a saying about 7-tons and how many Marines can fit in one—one more. The high-back JLTV in this circumstance fell in that category. Sergeant Burroughs piled his Marines in the back, and Captain Hanks took off back to the company.

As he approached their command post, he saw more AAVs than when they left an hour ago. One of them was covered in camouflage netting, likely Gunnery Sergeant Acosta’s AAV. Captain Hanks jumped out of the JLTV and gave him a bear hug.

“Damn, Gunny, it’s fucking good to see you,” Captain Hanks said.

“Sir, I’ve been trying to get back to you guys all day. The checkpoints wouldn’t let me move. Finally, I told them I’m going to link up with my guys so you can call whoever you want, I’m leaving, and left,” he said.

Captain Hanks had only been working with Gunnery Sergeant Acosta and his team for a few days. But he realized that, in those few days, Gunnery Sergeant Acosta’s team and Khaos Company formed such a strong bond that they were now family.

“Well, I mean it, Gunny. It’s good to have you back,” Captain Hanks said earnestly. “Do you mind sending one of the trucks to pick up the rest of the casualties in FOB 3?”

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“No problem, Sir. I’ll drive there myself,” Gunnery Sergeant Acosta said. Without saying another word, Captain Hanks and Gunnery Sergeant Acosta climbed up in their track and headed back down to FOB 3 to pick up the rest of Khaos Company.

The impact an experienced gunnery sergeant has on a unit, regardless of their military occupational specialty, cannot be overemphasized. Their presence alone is a force multiplier that you cannot replace with just any other person.

With the whole force accounted for at the assembly area, Captain Hanks put the company to rest.

## LESSONS LEARNED

**1** *Moralities are a blessing and a curse.* General Charles C. Krulak’s concept of the “three-block war” grows ever more complex in modern conflict.<sup>6</sup> The three-block war in Prospect was far different than the one in Hidalgo City. Additionally, as Americans represent the “good guys,” the enemy often has the opportunity to transition between blocks well before we do. Thus, in the urban environment, the critical decision for commanders is when to transition to the third block our-

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<sup>6</sup> *Three-block war*, created by Krulak to prepare the Marines for urban combat, means that you have provided enough security for reconstruction to take hold and that reconstruction activities have created the political and economic means that allow the indigenous government to gain the legitimacy and stability that it will need to defeat the insurgents. Gen Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three-Block War,” *Marines Magazine*, January 1999.

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selves. The enemy executing a three-block war against a two-block war in an urban environment will have the advantage. The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, spent the majority of their time fighting a one- and two-block fight, trying not to inflict damage on the civilian population. The adversary forces, however, were using indirect fire on the city, conventional mechanized forces, and special forces to wage an elevated level of conflict. The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, was at a significant disadvantage under these conditions, and until Lieutenant Colonel Donlon decided to apply three-block tactics, were systematically losing the fight.

**2** *Nathaniel Fick had a point.* It is important to train and educate subordinates to execute the responsibilities of the billets above them.<sup>7</sup> One bullet, broken leg, or lost Marine can force subordinates to elevated positions of authority. And by that time, it is too late for training—they will only have the training they received prior to that to rely on. Sergeant Burroughs had to fill in as the platoon commander in First Lieutenant Lindley's absence, and he had only minutes to plan and execute a platoon-supported attack.

**3** *Just because you know something, does not mean you know everything.* (reiterated from chapter 2) Do not

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<sup>7</sup> Nathaniel C. Fick, "Officer Development for Counterinsurgency," in *Counterinsurgency Leadership in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Beyond*, eds. Nicholas J. Schlosser and James M. Caiella (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2011), 77–84.

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blindly trust reports; they might have missed something. Reconnoiter before you attack, because you must always factor it in, no matter how pressed for time you think you are or how trustworthy the reports seem. And you have to force your subordinates to do the same. Information is more important than weapons systems, for information shapes how to employ forces.

**4** *Link ups among different units can be a dangerous event and result in blue-on-blue incidents if the proper procedures are not established.* Regiment had published a link-up procedure as part of their smart pack, however, the tank company that came to reinforce Captain Hanks was not part of the regiment and did not have a copy of it.<sup>8</sup> This, along with likely a lack of situational awareness of friendly and enemy disposition in vicinity of Hidalgo City, led to the tank blue-on-blue incident.

**5** *Do not become a victim of time.* Speed naturally becomes the first instinct to counter time impositions; but tempo supersedes speed, and to generate tempo, a commander must gain an assessment of the situation, generate clear intent, establish the conditions for success, and then allow subordinates to act. Bypassing one of these steps will lead to disaster, as seen in the case of Sergeant Burroughs and 1st Platoon.

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<sup>8</sup> *Infantry Company Operations*, MCWP 3-11.1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2014), 11-20.





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## CHAPTER FIVE

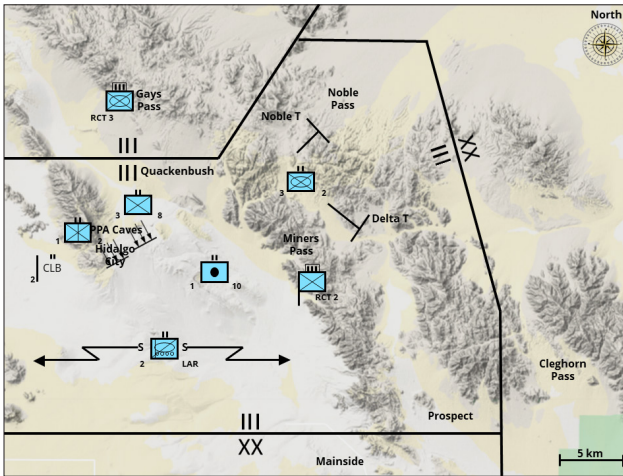
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# Hidalgo City, Part II

The next morning, Captain Hanks arrived at the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, command post and read the Regimental Combat Team 2 (RCT 2) FRAGO. It tasked 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, to conduct a relief in place (RIP) with 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, and 3d Battalion, 8th Marines. The 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, and 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, were tasked to clear Hidalgo City and to stage in Tactical Assembly Area (TAA) Tarawa in the meantime. To say this change in orders resulted in a lot of moving parts was an understatement. Khaos Company was designated as the RCT 2 strike force, with orders to be ready to go at 1800 (figure 18). There was also a commander's huddle at 0900, which Captain Hanks decided to attend. He left the company with orders to rest, refit, rearm, and be ready to move when he returned.

All of the battalion commanders and most of their operations officers were at the commander's huddle.

**Figure 18.** RCT 2's scheme of maneuver, following suspension of battlefield effects.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

Captain Hanks linked up with Lieutenant Colonel Berry and heard how great 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, had performed. They had held the pass. A more detailed brief with Major White revealed that Captain Michael M. Siani (Spartan 6) almost single-handedly held the pass. Apparently, after Captain Phil Richard was killed, Captain Siani took command of both companies and held the line. He coordinated reinforcements from 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, and 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, to do so. At one point, he was firing a 60mm mortar system in the handheld mode. There had to be more to the story, and Captain Hanks was looking forward to

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getting the back brief from the company commanders themselves.

When all the commanders arrived, Lieutenant Colonel Lavoie broke out a map and lay it over the hood of Colonel Coyne's Humvee. They were already short on time, so Lieutenant Colonel Lavoie gave an abbreviated recap of the FRAGO and turned the brief over to Colonel Coyne.

"I have several pages of notes I wanted to share with you guys, but we just don't have the time. So, I'm going to go over a few key bullets. I want the enemy cleared out of Hidalgo City," ordered Colonel Coyne as he continued with his intent. "I'm less concerned with collateral damage by artillery now. If we face problems, we use it. The prize is still the caves. We must have them in order to support follow-on forces into the region."

As Colonel Coyne was finishing up with his intent, Captain Hanks saw a Marine covered in dust wearing a bandanna over his face approach the group. He thought that the regimental sergeant major would have a field day correcting this, right in front of the senior leaders of the regiment. If there was one thing sergeants major are exceptionally renowned for, it was ensuring that Marines always looked like an esteemed professional. Just then, he recognized who it was: Sergeant Sean Goode. Captain Hanks stepped away from the group and approached the Marine.

"Goode, it's great to see you. Take that shit off your face," Captain Hanks said.

"Sir! Hey, sorry," Sergeant Goode said, removing

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the bandanna. “It’s just impossible to breathe in the back of the 7-ton without something like this.”

“Yeah, I get it. I just saw you and the bandanna, and considering the crowd around here, didn’t want another Muscatatuck bandanna incident.<sup>1</sup> What are you doing here?” Captain Hanks asked.

“We just got pulled back from Miners Pass. The rest of the guys are in the back of the 7-ton over there. I was honestly hoping to find somebody to ask what’s next, then I saw the Khaos logo on the [Joint light tactical vehicle] JLTV and knew you were here,” Sergeant Goode said.

“Are you guys done with Task Force Miners?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Yes, Sir, as far as I know.”

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<sup>1</sup> Capt Hanks refers to an incident where combat camera personnel were embedded with Khaos Company during their month-long ProMet II experiment in 2019. One of the videos posted on Marines .mil included an interview of some machine gunners with shirt sleeves on their heads as bandannas. Although they wore them to remove sweat, as the company was testing prototype helmets, many senior officers and staff noncommissioned officers saw the video and commented on how undisciplined the unit appeared. Capt Hanks took exception to the criticism given the situation and the context of the video. Their range cards, sector bags, etc., were clearly visible in the images. Hanks did not forget that lesson: perception is reality, even if it is not reality, and information can be more impactful than actions. Ironically, in the wake of COVID-19, face coverings are now required on all bases. *MARADMIN 218/20, U.S. Marine Corps Disease Containment Preparedness Planning Guidance for 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19): Marine Corps Guidance on the Use of Cloth Face Coverings* (4 June 2020).

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“You feel like coming back to the company?” Hanks asked quickly.

“Absolutely, that’s what we were going to ask for.”

“Okay, I’ll work that out after this to get you guys over to Hidalgo. Just hang tight for now. I can’t wait to hear how you guys did.”

Sergeant Goode made his way back to the 7-ton, and Captain Hanks returned to the circle of commanders around the Humvee. The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines’ intelligence officer was giving a good description of the fight in the city. The enemy was using a combination of conventional and unconventional forces—snipers, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), mines, heavy weapons, artillery—they were using it and using it effectively. The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, had a small foothold to the north, but the heart of their resistance lay in the center of the old town area and the urban core.

Lieutenant Colonel Berry spoke up, “Sir, I’m a little concerned that I don’t have enough combat power to accomplish the tasks at hand. If we had Khaos Company back, we would be good.”

“Okay, I think we can work that out. [Operations officer] OpsO, can you swap them with a company from 3d Battalion, 2d Marines?” Colonel Coyne asked.

And that was it. Khaos Company was home again in 3d Battalion, 8th Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Berry worked it out so that the company would retain its mechanized capability. Lima Company, 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, would be designated as the RCT strike force instead.

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After the meeting, Captain Hanks spoke briefly to Lieutenant Colonel Berry. “Sir, what are you thinking for a game plan?” Captain Hanks asked.

“I’m thinking we have a lot of deception operations in the south, and you gain a foothold in the alpha sector to flow the rest of our combat power through,” he said.

“Simple enough, Sir. I’ll have a plan ready when we link up again,” Captain Hanks replied. With things wrapped up, Captain Hanks returned to Sergeant Goode and coordinated his drop-off in Hidalgo City. Afterward, Captain Hanks and Corporal Oliveros mounted their JLTV and headed back to the company.

When they arrived, Captain Hanks brought the entire company and its attachments together for a battlefield update, the updated tasking for the company, and thanked them for the level of effort and intensity they had contributed the last week. Captain Hanks asked them for another 48 hours. They unequivocally responded with such passion that Captain Hanks forgot all of his complaints, pain, and fatigue. These Marines are why Captain Hanks serves in the Marine Corps. This is why leaders in the Marine Corps want to lead. It is why commanders put up with all the issues associated with command—a moment like this. It is cohesion in action.

Within 30 minutes, the company was on the move to their tactical assembly area. They made a pit stop on the eastern side of Hidalgo City to pick up Sergeant Goode and his long-lost squad from 3d Platoon. Khaos Company was now at 100 percent.

The 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, decided to establish

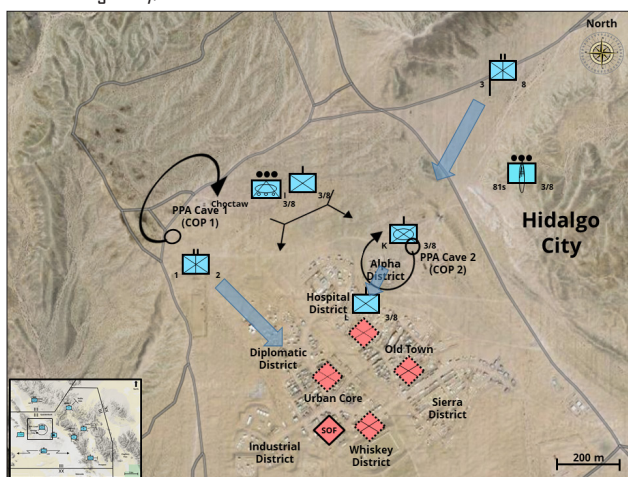
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a TAA outside of the RCT 2 assembly area. The traffic jams caused by all the moving units trying to position themselves extended for kilometers, so it was a good decision. Khaos Company reached the TAA shortly after nightfall and established a defensive perimeter on the north side.

After a quick reunion with the rest of the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines' team, Captain Hanks got to business. A terrain model had been built, and Lieutenant Colonel Berry gathered all the key leaders for a hasty rehearsal of concept. The plan was simple but effective: 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, clears the eastern half of Hidalgo from north to south, while 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, clears the western half in the same direction. Task Force Hammer would provide a deception to the south. Spartan Company (India Company, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines) would establish a support-by-fire position with Choctaw (3d Battalion, 8th Marines' combined antiarmor team [CAAT] Platoon) to the north to support 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, and initiate a closure series on command operations post (COP) 2 to allow Khaos Company to close with and establish an internal base of fire from the east. Khaos Company would seize the Alpha District. Savage Company (Lima Company, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines) would flow through Khaos Company and seize key terrain (H3D, the largest building in their assigned sector) in the Hospital District. Spartan Company would then back clear the remainder of the Hospital District. With the northern one-third of the city in friendly hands, the enemy would have a difficult time controlling or influencing the caves (figure 19).



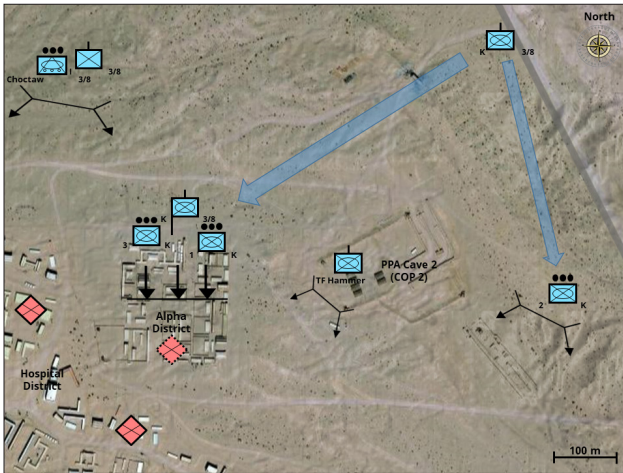
**Figure 19.** The 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, and 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, clear Hidalgo City, scheme of maneuver.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

The company's scheme of maneuver would go something like this: once the closure series began, Khaos 2 would establish a support-by-fire position east of COP 2. Khaos 3 would seize a foothold in the northwest portion of Alpha District, and Khaos 1 would seize a foothold in the northeast portion. Headquarters platoon would seize a foothold in the central northern portion to conduct command and control. Khaos 3 and Khaos 1 would clear from north to south, advancing as far as possible as quickly as possible. Gunnery Sergeant Acosta and Staff Sergeant Granados would shadow lead trace on the center road for supporting arms, being pulled by Khaos 1. If the company ran into trou-

**Figure 20.** Khaos Company's attack on Alpha District, scheme of maneuver.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

ble, Khaos 2 would reinforce to form three platoons on line, at which point the company would conduct phase line battle drills.<sup>2</sup> They would clear all the way until the southernmost buildings in Alpha District, consolidate, and prepare to flow the other companies through. That was the plan (figure 20).

The plan was already atrophying as the company staged in its vehicles at the assembly area. The 1st

<sup>2</sup> *Phase line battle drills* refer to deliberate actions to advance positions within the urban environment. Created and codified during the Vietnam War, they are best described in Nicholas Warr, *Phase Line Green: The Battle for Hue, 1968* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013).

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Battalion, 2d Marines, had significant delays in repositioning their forces, but 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, was losing time. The decision to go without the entirety of 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, was made and, after a few shouts of “I don’t care, get in the fucking truck now or you’re getting left behind” coming from Lima Company’s area, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, was on the move by 2100.

The movement to Hidalgo City was at a steady pace and blacked out. A vehicle in front of Captain Hanks appeared lost, and he bypassed it. Over the net, Captain Hanks heard that Task Force Hammer had seized COP 2 with no resistance.

“Grizzly Fires, Khaos 6. Copy that, COP 2 is now friendly. Cancel series closure,” Captain Hanks said to Captain Tom Fields, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines’ weapons company commander and fire support coordinator. By canceling series closure, Captain Hanks terminated all of the planned artillery and mortar fire intended to precede his attack on that position.

“Copy, series closure canceled,” he responded.

By 2200, Khaos Company was pulling into the assault position just outside Hidalgo City. Through night vision goggles, Captain Hanks could see several tracked and wheeled vehicles along the road that had been halted by the checkpoint. While they definitely were not 3d Battalion, 8th Marines’ personnel, they had not shot at Captain Hanks yet, and Choctaw had moved through this position not 10 minutes ago. As they approached, a figure stepped out of one of the stationary Humvees.

“Staff Sergeant, go ahead and pull off here. Let’s see

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who this is first,” Captain Hanks said to Staff Sergeant Granados. The figure came up to the side of Captain Hanks’s track.

“What’s up, Captain Hanks?” the figure yelled up.

“Zach, is that you?” Captain Hanks replied. It was Captain Zachary A. Pinkerton, a combat engineer company commander who had attended The Basic School and Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS) with Captain Hanks. They had run into each other about two weeks ago briefly at Camp Wilson and joked about the likelihood of seeing each other during MAGTF Warfighting Exercise (MWX). Pinkerton is considered a “water-walker” in the combat engineer community. He performed quite well at EWS in 2019, earning several awards and continuing to make a great reputation for himself.

“Yeah, man!” Captain Pinkerton replied.

“What are you doing out here?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Well, we just finished the deception to the south, so now we’re awaiting further instructions,” Captain Pinkerton said.

“You have some guys in COP 2, right?”

“No, all my Marines are here.”

“Copy. What’s your callsign, Zach?”

“Clydesdale 6.”

“So, who’s in COP 2?” Hanks asked in confusion.

“I have no idea. I wasn’t tracking anyone in the city yet,” Captain Pinkerton replied.

Captain Hanks considered this for a second, and he decided to wait and confirm that COP 2 was friendly

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before pushing the attack. This decision could have significant effects if it was not the case.

“Grizzly, Khaos 6, I am with Clydesdale 6 and he says no one is in COP 2. Can we confirm that COP 2 is friendly?” Captain Hanks called over battalion TAC 1.

“Khaos 6, Grizzly 3, confirmed that TF Hammer is in COP 2. TF Hammer is Lima Company from 3d Battalion, 2d Marines.”

There were too many “task forces” on the battlefield. Captain Hanks had previously thought that TF Hammer was the engineer company; at least, this cleared it up. Captain Hanks reached out to Spartan 6 at the support-by-fire position on the radio to get a more complete battlefield update.

“Spartan 6, Khaos 6. What do you see in the Alpha District?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Nothing. The only contact I’m seeing is in the Hospital District and some farther south in the urban core,” Spartan 6 replied.

With COP 2 confirmed in friendly hands, and no change to the assumed enemy situation, Captain Hanks only had to adjust his plan slightly. Khaos 2 would establish their support-by-fire position farther south of COP 2 and isolate alpha sector. Everything else remained the same. He quickly spoke to Staff Sergeant Granados and asked him to communicate the change to Khaos 2 and their tracks.

“So, elements of 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, are in COP 2,” Captain Hanks responded back to Captain Pinkerton. “Are you looking for work?” he asked.

“Absolutely, brother. I have two [M1150 assault

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breacher vehicles] ABVs with [mine-clearing line charges] MICLICs, and two platoons of engineers. What do you want to do?”

“Be on standby. With TF Hammer in COP 2, I have enough to get a foothold in the city. Beyond that though, I may need to pull you in if I get in a pinch,” Hanks said.

“We’ll be here, man. What net are you on?”

“550.”

“Okay, I’ll monitor that,” Pinkerton said.

“Sounds good. Great seeing you again. I’ll let you know how it goes.” Captain Hanks reached down, gave Captain Pinkerton a firm handshake, and then jumped back into the troop commander’s hatch.

Captain Hanks gave the signal, and Khaos Company pushed into the attack. Hanks was in the lead track, and even under the blackout conditions, they moved quickly to close the distance to the release point. They had to go under one downed bridge and navigate around the series of concertina wire outside of COP 2. Because of the speed with which they approached, they overshot the dismount point by about 20 meters, slightly exposing themselves to the Hospital District. Khaos 3 and Khaos 1 entered and dismounted with no issues. Both platoons immediately began clearing operations, and Captain Hanks established a headquarters node in the first building they entered.

“Sir, we were just told that these three tracks were killed by Javelin shots,” Staff Sergeant Granados yelled over to Captain Hanks.

“What? From where?” Captain Hanks asked.

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“Somewhere in the city. They didn’t say,” he responded.

“Okay, well hang tight, and let the other tracks know to stay out of sight from the other districts,” Captain Hanks replied.

Captain Hanks followed behind Khaos 1. Other than the three downed tracks, the clearing operations were going smooth. They met minimal resistance inside Alpha District, but they found themselves engaged with machine guns in the Hospital District a few hundred meters away.

“Northern third of Alpha District clear,” Captain Hanks said, keeping Grizzly informed of their progress.

“Northern half of alpha clear,” he said 15 minutes later.

“Northern two-thirds of alpha clear, estimated 10 more minutes until the sector is fully clear. Fifteen minutes until we are ready to flow forces through,” Captain Hanks reported to Grizzly.

“Grizzly, Khaos 6. Alpha District secure. Ready to flow forces,” Captain Hanks reported about 35 minutes after their initial insert into the city.

“Roger, Savage has dismounted and is coming your way,” Grizzly 3 responded.

First Lieutenant Macguire, Lima Company’s executive officer, came over the net.<sup>3</sup>

“Khaos 6, this is Savage 5. We’re heading toward

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<sup>3</sup> Every effort has been made to verify the names and ranks of participants. Due to the passage of time, it was not possible in all cases.

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your position now. Where should we link up?" he asked.

"Savage 5, Khaos 6. On the northeast side of Alpha District, you'll see my JLTV. Head toward that and link up with Khaos 5. He'll direct you to me. Right now, we have all of alpha secured. Most of my forces are on the southern edge of alpha," Captain Hanks replied.

"Roger, Khaos 6, we'll be there in 10 minutes," he said.

Not too long after this radio call, Captain Hanks saw a group of Marines clearing the buildings between his marshaling area control officer's (MACO) gate and his current position. *This has to be Lima Company*, Captain Hanks thought. He went out to meet them.

"Is this Savage Company?" Captain Hanks asked the lead group of Marines.

"Yes, Sir," one Marine replied.

"Okay, good. All of this area is clear, so keep your guns down. We have friendlies in all of these buildings. Go ahead and occupy this building here. Where is Savage 6?" Captain Hanks asked.

"I don't know, Sir, but Savage 5 is right over there," the Marine replied.

Captain Hanks called over to First Lieutenant Macguire. "Where's Savage 6?" Captain Hanks asked.

"His truck broke down, so he didn't make it," he replied.

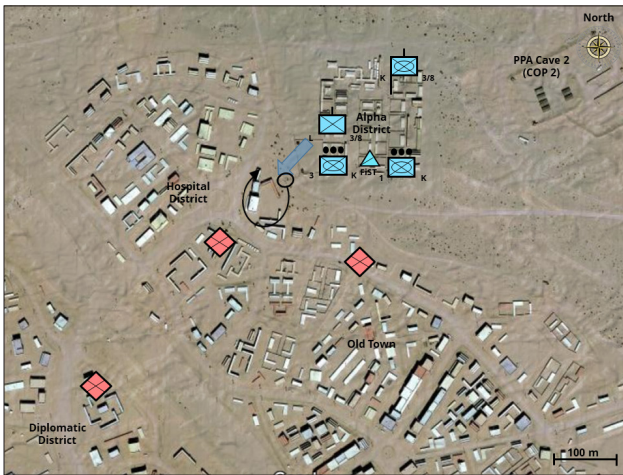
"So, is he coming at all?" Captain Hanks asked.

"I don't know, Sir. He said to push on without him," he said.

"Okay, well do you have everyone else you're supposed to have?" Captain Hanks asked.



**Figure 21.** Lima Company's passage of lines and game plan.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

“Yes, Sir, it was only him and the JLTV driver that didn’t make it,” he replied.

“Okay. So, here’s what we got.” Captain Hanks pulled out a map and continued (figure 21), “I have Khaos 1 here oriented south, Khaos 3 here oriented southwest, and Khaos 2 in reserve ready to support you if you need it. Your best route to your objective is through Khaos 3’s position. Link up with Lieutenant Porcarelli. He will give you the support you need to cross. Let me know if you run into issues. My fire support team (FiST) is in position to provide you fires, and if you really need it, I can push Khaos 2 over your way.”

“Got it, Sir,” he replied and went back to brief his Marines.

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Captain Hanks gave Second Lieutenant Porcarelli a heads up that Lima Company would be linking up with him and crossing into the Hospital District, and told him to give First Lieutenant Macguire whatever support he needed. It took a little longer than Captain Hanks expected for Lima to get into position, but when they were ready, they crossed Main Supply Route (MSR) Hawaii toward their objective building. They got into some contact, but had the building secured shortly thereafter. Savage 5 did not have good communications with battalion, so Captain Hanks helped relay.

“Grizzly, Khaos 6. Savage has secured H3D. They have five cherry pickers, but enough forces to hold the building. What is the ETA for Spartan Company?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Khaos 6, Grizzly 3. Funny story . . . the trucks that went back to pick up Spartan Company got lost, and now we can’t get a hold of them. We don’t know where they are, so we don’t know when Spartan Company is coming,” he responded.

*How do you get lost on a route you just took? There was nothing they could do about that now,* Captain Hanks thought. He knew he still had the five tracks, but they were all low on fuel and could not make that run and back without refueling, and there were no tankers nearby. The fighting had slowed down significantly after Lima Company took H3D, so maybe the enemy was on their rest cycle. This meant that 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, had an opportunity to exploit, but not enough forces to execute without giving up the ground they had

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already taken. Captain Hanks' 2d Platoon had not been committed yet, so maybe they could use them.

"Well, I still have Khaos 2 in reserve. Do you want me to push them over to the Hospital District to gain some more ground?" Captain Hanks asked.

"Yeah, that sounds like a good plan if you can do it. Let us know what you need from us," he said.

"Nothing right now, but I'll let you know. Khaos 2 will be pushing in 10 minutes," Captain Hanks said.

Captain Hanks briefed Second Lieutenant Wise on the updates. Second Lieutenant Wise planned to link up with Savage 5 at H3D and then push across MSR Hawaii to gain another strongpoint deeper into the district.

Khaos 2 stepped off and had no issues reaching Savage 5. At this point, a random JLTV showed up in Alpha District. Captain Hanks had no idea who it was. A single Marine emerged and headed in his direction just as his radio crackled to life.

"Khaos 6, this is Savage 6. I'm in Alpha District looking to link up," Captain Richard said.

"Okay, I see you. Stop, look up. I'll flash you," Captain Hanks said and gave him the infrared flash.

"All right, I see it. I'll be up in a second," Captain Richard replied.

When Captain Richard arrived at Captain Hanks' position, he gave him the battlefield update and sent him off to his company. When Captain Richard crossed MSR Hawaii, he came to the outside of the building occupied by Khaos 2. He approached a window and asked for Khaos 2.

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“Where is Savage 6?” Second Lieutenant Wise thought he heard Richard say. At this point, he could only see a figure and was not sure who was asking.

“Hey, man, Savage 6 isn’t here. His truck broke down,” Second Lieutenant Wise said.

“Wise, I am Savage 6! Where is my company and how can I get to them?” Captain Richard replied with obvious irritation.

“Oh hey, Sir! Sorry, I didn’t know who you were. They’re one building over. You can get to it through this building. Welcome to the fight!” Second Lieutenant Wise responded.

Meanwhile, Captain Hanks saw a few more Marines walking through his lines in the Alpha District. He did not recognize them.

“Hey, who are you guys with?” Captain Hanks called out.

“Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 2d Marines. We’re all dead and were told to walk in this direction to find the casualty point,” a Marine corporal responded.

“How many of you are there?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Five right here, but our whole company was pretty much wiped out. I don’t know where anybody else is,” he replied.

“Okay. Well, I’m not going to have you walking around. I have tracks and vehicles running around blacked out all over the place. You guys can consolidate here at my [casualty collection point] CCP until daylight, then we can sort it out. Did Captain Berger make it?” Captain Hanks asked. Captain Ryan Berger

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was the company commander of Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 2d Marine Regiment.

“No, I don’t think so, Sir. I think he was killed by friendly fire. That’s what the coyotes said at least. I don’t know where they went either. I thought they were coming here,” he said.

“Okay, no worries. Just check in with Staff Sergeant Villalobos. He’s in that building over there,” Captain Hanks replied.

Meanwhile, a few blocks away, Second Lieutenant Wise coordinated a phase line battle drill with the elements of Savage and Spartan Companies in H3D to cross MSR Hawaii. There were several enemy machine guns with principal direction of fire (PDF) down that danger area. Despite the suppression, Khaos 2 took two casualties, but the rest made it across. The 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, now owned strongpoints in the north and south areas of the Hospital District. That was about all the battalion could do that night until they got more combat power from Spartan Company. Captain Hanks did not want to have his lines spread too thin until they had a firm understanding of the situation. When 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, was here a few days ago, infiltration was an effective enemy tactic.

Around 0300, Captain Hanks walked the lines. As he moved through them, he reminded his Marines to keep weapons tight unless they saw targets in the open. They had been getting pop shots from buildings in the other sectors all night, but Captain Hanks did not want to give away their disposition. Any pop shots they saw,

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their FiST team would call for fire on or their sniper attachments would prosecute.

The area remained fairly quiet for a few hours. Even though the temperatures dropped significantly, Captain Hanks did not see anyone suffering from the cold. The Marines who had been able to execute a brief rest cycle were sound asleep in their fighting gear, Kevlar and all. Captain Hanks encouraged the Marines to get some rest as he walked the lines. He knew that dawn would bring another long day of operations. As sunrise approached, Grizzly 3 came on the net.

“Khaos 6, Grizzly 3. The 7-tons finally found our TAA and finished loading up Spartan Company. They’ll be coming your way in the next 30 minutes,” Major White said.

“Roger. Spartan 6, Khaos 6,” Captain Hanks called over to Captain Siani.

“Go,” he replied.

“Link up at northeast side of Alpha District. I’ll see you there,” Captain Hanks said.

The sun rose and Spartan Company followed in trace. Captain Hanks linked up with Captain Siani.

“Dave, do you have a [gridded reference graphic] GRG?” Captain Hanks asked.

“No, the battalion only had like three of them. Where did you get yours?” he asked.

“I printed them off before we came out here. I figured we were all going to get sucked into the city at some point. Here, take mine,” Captain Hanks offered and gave him one of his maps.

“How do I get to where Phil is?” he asked.

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“I’ll take you,” Captain Hanks replied.

Captain Hanks led Captain Siani and his company through his lines up to MSR Hawaii. As they arrived, they saw what looked like Captain Richard and elements of his company clearing the northern portion of the Hospital District. Captain Hanks and Captain Siani took a minute to reflect on the situation.

“So, let me get this straight. Phil’s been the main effort twice now, and in both cases, he wasn’t there?” Captain Hanks asked Captain Siani.

“Yeah, he died in Noble Pass, and I took over his company. Now, his vehicle broke down and his [executive officer] XO has to run the company. He has not had the best luck over the last few days. At least it looks like he’s getting the chance to do some good now,” Captain Siani joked.

Captain Hanks laughed and replied, “Yeah, he doesn’t look dead yet. We’ll see how this goes.”

They contacted Captain Richard over the radio and coordinated a link up at his lead trace. Captain Siani faced no resistance crossing MSR Hawaii with his company. Spartan Company and Savage Company then continued to back clear the northern portion of the Hospital District.

“Khaos 6, Grizzly 6. At your link-up position,” Lieutenant Colonel Berry called over the net.

“Roger, Sir, heading your way now,” Captain Hanks replied and headed back.

When Captain Hanks arrived, Lieutenant Colonel Berry was on the radio with Tarawa 6 and Typhoon 6. Captain Hanks could overhear some of the conversa-

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tion. Lieutenant Colonel Berry was pretty excited when it was expressed that 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, had made great breakthroughs, and 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, would have to flow through the ground gained by 3d Battalion, 8th Marines.

“You hear that shit?” he called over to Captain Hanks, pointing to his radio with excitement.

“Yes, Sir, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines’ making its name,” Captain Hanks replied.

Once the radio conversation was over, Captain Hanks gave Lieutenant Colonel Berry a quick battle-field update from his perspective.

“Good, great job. How do I link up with Phil? I want to get forward into the city,” he asked afterward.

“I’ll take you through, Sir,” Captain Hanks said. Something caught his eye and he peered behind the JLTV to see Sergeant Major Moss stretched out on the ground like he was about to start a race. “Don’t worry, Sergeant Major, there’s only one danger area you’ll need to sprint through,” Captain Hanks said and took off toward the link up point.

“Are these buildings clear, Sir?” Sergeant Major Moss asked, pointing to the surrounding buildings.

“Yes, Sergeant Major, my guys cleared them last night and have had security ever since. You’re about as safe here as it gets in this city,” Captain Hanks replied.

Captain Hanks took Lieutenant Colonel Berry and Sergeant Major Moss through his lines and up to MSR Hawaii. He pointed out the route they should take, and he told them to give him a minute to coordinate sup-



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pression. Captain Hanks was not taking chances on this crossing.

Captain Hanks coordinated with Second Lieutenant Porcarelli, and Khaos 3 opened up at a rapid rate, providing great suppression for the pair to move. Lieutenant Colonel Berry was already 20 meters down the road when Captain Hanks came to tell him it was good to move. He waited for the pair to enter the buildings before ceasing the suppression fire.

“Savage 6, Grizzly 6,” he called over the radio.

“Grizzly 6, Savage 6,” Captain Richard replied.

“Yeah, Savage 6, I’m near Battalion Objective 1 [H3D], and I’m looking to link up. Where are you guys?” he asked.

“Sir, Spartan 7 and about a squad are in the building now. You can link up with them,” Captain Richard said.

“That is not my assessment,” Lieutenant Colonel Berry replied.

The radio crackled in the silence. Captain Hanks could imagine Captain Richard cursing under his breath and making his way back across MSR Hawaii to link up with Grizzly 6. Captain Hanks found out later that this was indeed the case, and Captain Richard brought his first sergeant along with him as a battle buddy. As soon as Captain Richard linked up with Lieutenant Colonel Berry at H3D, the building came under siege. Either the coyotes tipped off the adversary force (ADFOR) or it was just an unlucky coincidence. Nonetheless, the siege cost the life of Captain Richard’s first sergeant, who took a sniper shot to the head while

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standing five feet from the battalion commander and sergeant major. The first sergeant was not happy about it. To his credit, Lieutenant Colonel Berry did tell Captain Richard not to come, but communications in the city were haphazard at best, so maybe he never got that message. Captain Hanks, however, was in a position to get Lieutenant Colonel Berry on the radio.

“Grizzly main, this is Grizzly 6,” Lieutenant Colonel Berry tried a few times to get the battalion [combat operations center] COC on the radio.

“Grizzly 6, Khaos 6. Sir, I can relay for you. I don’t think main can hear you,” Captain Hanks said.

“Khaos 6, Grizzly 6, roger. Let them know I am pinned down and am in no position to influence the fight. Let Grizzly 5 know he has the fight.”

“Grizzly 6, Khaos 6. Roger. Break. Grizzly main, Khaos 6,” Captain Hanks said.

“Khaos 6, Grizzly main,” Major Green replied.

“Grizzly main, Khaos 6. Relaying report from Grizzly 6. He says he is not in a position to fight the battalion and that Grizzly 5 has the fight.”

“Khaos 6, roger. Will pass,” Major Joshua White said.

With that settled, Captain Hanks walked back over to Khaos 3’s position and found Second Lieutenant Porcarelli and First Lieutenant Lindley in the same room.

“Sir, we’re ready to go on the attack,” Second Lieutenant Porcarelli said.

“Okay, give me some time. I have to coordinate 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, passing through our lines, then we should be free to push farther south and support

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Lima Company. If you see an opportunity though, take it. Just don't be rash," Captain Hanks said.

First Lieutenant Baldini came over the radio, "Khaos 6, Khaos 5. Typhoon 6 is here, and he's asking for you or Grizzly 6. I told him where you guys were."

"Roger, let him know I'm coming back. Grizzly 6 is pinned down in H3D, so I don't think he'll be coming," Captain Hanks replied. He definitely had not expected to see Lieutenant Colonel Diana there.

Captain Hanks returned to the link up point and found Typhoon 6. "Sir, great to see you again," Captain Hanks said.

"Hey, Matt, what's the deal, brother?" Lieutenant Colonel Diana asked.

Captain Hanks briefed him on the battlefield update and current situation.

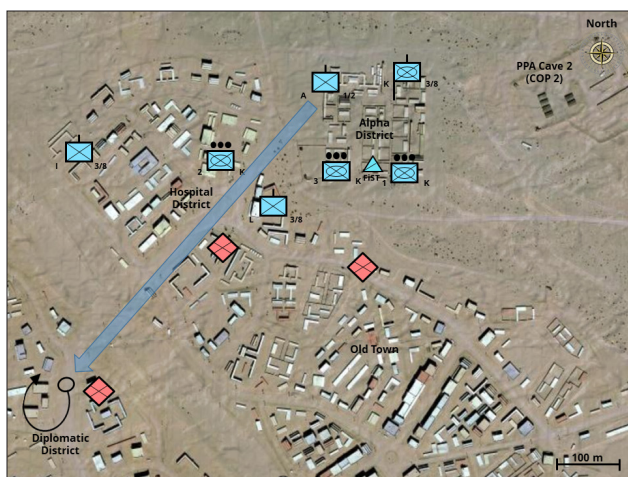
"Okay, I need to get Animal Company to D3 in the Diplomatic District. We are way behind time, so this needs to happen fast," Lieutenant Colonel Diana said.

Animal Company at this time was moving into Alpha District, posturing to flow through 3d Battalion, 8th Marines' lines and enter 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' battlespace from the east.

"All right, Sir, well the northern route is more secure, but it will take more time. The fastest straight-up-the-gut approach is not secure, and they would pass through enemy territory. I can give you some of my tracks to help expedite the process," Captain Hanks said.

"Okay, thanks, we'll take them," he replied, and he turned to work out the details with Animal 6.

**Figure 22.** Animal Company, 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' attack in the Diplomatic District.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

Captain Hanks radioed up to Grizzly 6 about Typhoon's new game plan.

"As long as it's executed with speed and violence, I'm good with it," Lieutenant Colonel Berry said. Captain Hanks could still hear gunfire in the distance that sounded like they were engaging H3D.

Captain Hanks worked out further coordination with Spartan 6 so that he could provide a support by fire across into the Diplomatic District for 1st Battalion, 2d Marines (figure 22). By this time, he had cleared most of the northern portion of Hospital District and was working his way back south along the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, and 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' boundary.

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With the plan set and half of Animal Company loaded, Lieutenant Colonel Diana came back to Captain Hanks. “Where’s the best place I can [command and control] C2 this from?” he asked.

“There’s a spot a few blocks away from here that you’ll be able to see them make it across into your [area of operations] AO. I’ll take you there,” Captain Hanks said.

Captain Hanks guided the Typhoon command team to a spot along MSR Hawaii, where they could observe and command and control the action. Animal Company’s two borrowed assault amphibian vehicles (AAVs) went racing by and then suddenly stopped at the traffic circle, a good two blocks away from their intended positioning. Captain Hanks and Lieutenant Colonel Diana were not sure what was happening. At the same time, about two squad’s worth of casualties appeared in the traffic circle, apparently heading toward the casualty collection point. Machine-gun fire sounded in the distance, but it was hard to tell where it was coming from. A minute later, Captain Hanks saw from the corner of his eye as Khaos 3 crossed into the Hospital District south of H3D. They must have seen their opportunity and taken the initiative to move. Good.

Animal Company’s borrowed tracks were slightly out of view, so Captain Hanks and Lieutenant Colonel Diana were not sure if those casualties belonged to Animal Company from the tracks or from somewhere else. They also still did not know why they stopped, though they assumed they were hit. They could see Ma-

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rines unloading the tracks and begin clearing toward their objective. Clearly, those Marines were not dead. Animal Company reported to Typhoon 6 that they had some casualties, which further confused the situation. With no ability to influence the situation there, Captain Hanks moved south to get better awareness and to catch a glimpse of Khaos 3's movement.

Khaos 3 was in a firefight in the Hospital District, and Khaos 1 was moving to support them. Captain Hanks caught First Lieutenant Lindley before he went out the door and told him he would be there to support with fires in a few minutes. Captain Hanks had to sort out Animal Company first to prevent a delay in the larger regimental scheme of maneuver. Captain Hanks linked up with Animal FiST back at the link-up point, where he was informed that the casualties were taken back to their assembly area near COP 2, and they just happened to be walking by the tracks at the same time they were stopped. The tracks were stopped because there was a notional obstacle in the road. It was notional because range regulations specified that certain roads could not be completely blocked in case there was a medical emergency.

Everyone assumed that the obstacle had been breached previously, because they observed civilian traffic driving through it earlier in the night. The element of Animal Company in the tracks were fine and pushing the attack, but Animal 6 requested that the rest of their company be guided through the northern route. Captain Hanks quickly gave instructions on the route, called up to Captain Siani to let him know they were

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coming, and sent them on their way. On his way back to Khaos 1, Captain Hanks ran into Lieutenant Colonel Diana and briefed him on what he knew.

Once completed, Captain Hanks rolled over to company TAC. “Khaos 3, Khaos 6. [situation report] SITREP when able,” he said.

“Sir, kershhh,” came the response.

Captain Hanks repeated the call and got the same answer. By this time, Captain Hanks recognized that Second Lieutenant Porcarelli’s radio battery died when he transmitted. He waited until he knew his radio would recycle back on.

“Khaos 3, I think you have a dead battery and can’t transmit. If you need support, key out. If you’re good, say nothing,” Captain Hanks called. In hindsight, this was probably not the best method of communication. If Second Lieutenant Porcarelli was dead, or the battery was useless and he did need support, this plan would fail. But Captain Hanks got a response.

“Sir, kershhh.” Captain Hanks now could put his full attention to supporting his platoons. Just then, he saw two light armored vehicles (LAVs) come down the road and engage the enemy. *Where did these guys come from?* Captain Hanks remembered speaking to Captain Robert Mortenson while they were at the commander’s huddle the other day, another EWS classmate of his and currently the light armored reconnaissance (LAR) company commander on the outskirts of Hidalgo City. Captain Hanks rolled over to his net.

“Apache 6, Khaos 6,” Captain Hanks called.

“Khaos 6, go for Apache 6,” he replied.

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“Are those your guys in old town?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Yeah, we saw some friendlies in a firefight so we thought we could support,” he said.

“Okay, good. Those are my guys. We’re currently in the red two story and white single story just to the west of your LAVs,” Captain Hanks said.

“Roger. Well, those LAVs were just taken out, so I don’t think they’re offering much support anymore,” he said.

“Okay, well thanks for the help. I’m pulling more forces into the fight. Call me on my net if your guys need more coordination,” Captain Hanks said and switched back to his company TAC.

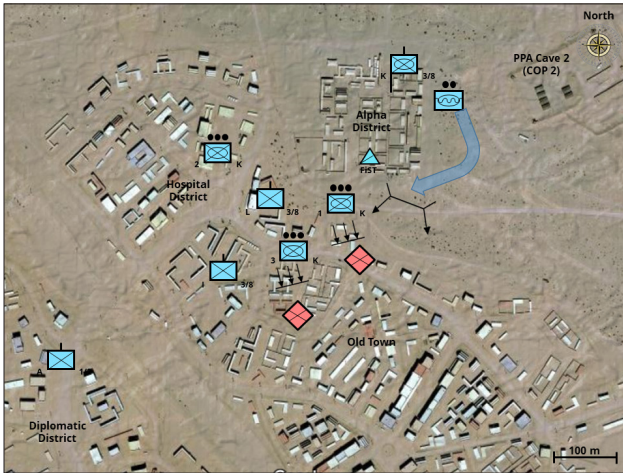
The 3d Platoon needed more support. Captain Hanks did not have enough situational awareness to bring fires in, especially if there were adjacent units in the area now, so he needed something different. Where was his FiST team? Captain Hanks had a fleeting, sinking feeling that he was losing his company because he was so focused on supporting the battalion. But there was no time to overanalyze decisions or mistakes. He ran over to Gunnery Sergeant Acosta.

“Gunny, get the tracks running. The 3d Platoon needs support,” Captain Hanks said.

Captain Hanks quickly briefed Gunnery Sergeant Acosta on the situation, and he asked if Acosta could come around and set up a support-by-fire position (figure 23). They could assess the situation further from there. They were moving in 30 seconds. Gunnery Sergeant Acosta ran a good platoon.



**Figure 23.** Khaos Company's attack across Phase Line Corona.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

Captain Hanks and Gunnery Sergeant Acosta arrived in two minutes, but it was already too late. The area was in a local timeout. Captain Hanks jumped out of the track and linked up with Second Lieutenant Porcarelli and First Lieutenant Lindley.

“What happened, guys?” he asked.

“Well, at first, we seized the buildings over here. There was about a squad-size enemy force in the area. We pushed them south beyond this road, but by that time we had taken a few casualties. 1st Platoon came in to support, but we didn’t make it past these buildings here before they called timeout,” Second Lieutenant Porcarelli explained.

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“Okay, how many enemies do you estimate to be here?” Captain Hanks asked.

“More than a platoon definitely, maybe even two,” he responded.

“Do you think you can make another attack?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Yes, Sir, we’re ready,” he said.

“Local timeout ends in three minutes,” Coyote 32W yelled.

“Okay, now that I know where you guys are, push the attack again. Do not cross this road. I’ll route some fire missions to isolate where you are attacking. I saw a handful of enemy forces back there, so I assume they are posturing to attack as well. If I see that you need it, I’ll bring tracks back in,” Captain Hanks said (figure 24).

“Sounds good, Sir,” Second Lieutenant Porcarelli said.

“You need anything else from me?” Captain Hanks asked.

“No, Sir, we’re good,” he said.

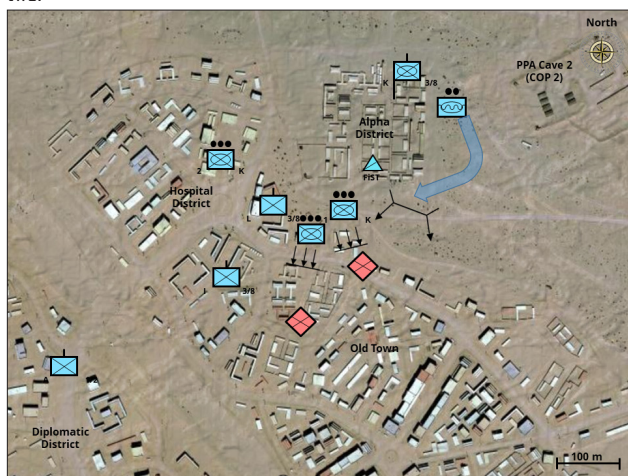
“Okay, good luck,” Captain Hanks said.

Captain Hanks got back in the tracks and briefed the gunny on the plan. They hid the tracks just outside of view, and Captain Hanks got into a position of observation. From this vantage point, and once the game resumed, Captain Hanks realized there was not just a platoon there—it was a whole enemy company.

“Grizzly fires, Khaos 6,” Captain Hanks called over the net.

“Khaos 6, go for Grizzly fires,” Captain Fields replied.

**Figure 24.** Khaos Company's attack across Phase Line Corona, attempt two.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

“I have eyes on a whole enemy company in the Oscar District. Specific concentrations are O3D, F, G and O2 C, D, E, and G.<sup>4</sup> There’s a lot of them moving in the streets. I see no civilians. Can you work an artillery sweep in zone of the O2 and O3 areas?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Copy all. We’ll send it up. In the meantime, we’ll put some 81s on it,” he replied.

“Thanks, brother, keep me posted,” Captain Hanks

<sup>4</sup> O3D, F, G and O2C, D, E, and G refer to specific buildings within the training area.

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said. He heard the 81mm mortar missions go through, nothing on artillery yet though. Hanks did not see the effects he wanted, so he asked Captain Fields to repeat the mission. There were still too many of them. Captain Hanks realized the fires were not as effective as he wanted, and they probably were never going to be. He could see 1st and 3d Platoons conducting their attacks. The 3d Platoon just crossed the road that Hanks had specifically told them to avoid. He had no good observation beyond that road and was not comfortable with the risk associated with bringing in artillery that close. From the sounds of the battle, they were taking heavy resistance. Time for plan B.

Captain Hanks ran down the stairs and out the back to Gunnery Sergeant Acosta's tracks; they were already onboard.

"Let's roll, Gunny. Execute as briefed," Captain Hanks yelled over the roar of the engines as he hopped in the troop commander's hatch.

They rolled into their support-by-fire position and started prosecuting targets. They attained about four minutes of action before the coyotes called another local timeout. Khaos Company had won the first engagement; but when the dust settled on the second, the results seemed about even. Apparently, the enemy had maneuvered farther west and gained a position of advantage outside of Captain Hanks's view.

Until now, Captain Hanks assessed their actions as fast but rushed. After spending a month fighting in the urban environment in Muscatatuck, Indiana, Cap-

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tain Hanks knew that the fight was largely a series of squad-level actions.<sup>5</sup> That was why he positioned himself outside the front lines. From there, he could gain better situational awareness and still be in a position to influence the fight and support if needed. If he was with the platoon commanders, he would just get in the way with plans, thoughts, or influence. He needed to let his subordinates fight their units, but this current situation was not working. It was still a little too sporadic and unsynchronized. The enemy was doing well in the face of dynamic, decentralized tactics that more represented the art of war. So, Captain Hanks needed to change tactics; time to apply more of the science of war.<sup>6</sup>

Captain Hanks brought the remainder of the company in for a quick huddle. It consisted of half of 1st Platoon, half of 3d Platoon, and most of 2d Platoon.

“Okay, guys, I think we’ve got one more shot at this before we have to hunker down in the defense. I expect that they think we’re going to try the exact same thing one more time and hope for the best. Well, we’re not. We’re going to change it up a little bit and sequence our

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<sup>5</sup> Owned by the state of Indiana and leased by the U.S. Army, the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center is one of the Department of Defense’s largest training venues that offers an extensive urban and rural environment.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the art and science of war, see Baron de Jomini, *The Art of War*, trans. Capt G. H. Mendell, USA, and Lt W. P. Craighill, USA (London: Greenhill Books, 1992; first published 1862); and Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976; first published 1832).

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heavy fires first and then hit them from their rear where they're not looking," Captain Hanks continued.

The plan was to keep 1st and 3d Platoons in defensive positions but conduct a feint as if they were going into the attack again from the north. Meanwhile, Choctaw would screen through the O2 District fast, open up on all targets they see, and then exit the area to the east. Gunnery Sergeant Acosta and his four tracks would establish a support by fire to the north and set a smoke screen. This would allow 2d Platoon to come behind the tracks and attack northeast to southwest, behind the enemy concentration. The idea was to form multiple anvils, hit them hard with heavy machine-gun fire so they are off-balance, and then close in for the kill with a mechanized infantry attack (figure 25).

Captain Hanks realized that, as this was the third attack in the same area, it appeared almost like *The Defense of Duffer's Drift*, except it would probably be more aptly named "The Attack of Kilo's Block."<sup>7</sup>

The remaining elements of the company fully embraced the plan, and they quickly set to their actions. As they were getting into position, Captain Hanks ran into an engineer squad that was lurking around the original link up point for Animal Company.

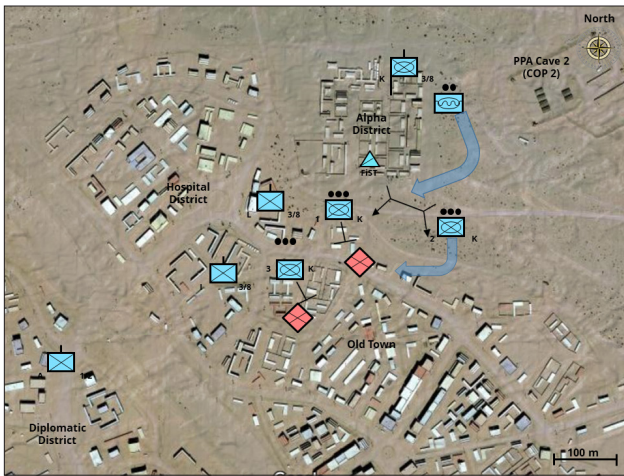
"Who are you guys with?" Captain Hanks asked.

"We were with 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, but now we don't know," the squad leader said. The number of units overlooked in this complex and large exercise was surprising. Considering the dynamic and changing sit-

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<sup>7</sup> Swinton, *The Defence of Duffer's Drift*.

**Figure 25.** Khaos Company's attack across Phase Line Corona, attempt three.



Courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP

uations, leaders getting killed, and general chaos this exercise brings to bear, situations like this were understandable. In either case, Captain Hanks had a job for them and could use the engineer's expertise in this attack.

"How do you feel about joining us in an assault across Phase Line Corona?" Captain Hanks asked.

"Absolutely, Sir. We've been sitting around all day waiting to do something," he said enthusiastically.

Captain Hanks put them in trace of Khaos 2 with the task of follow and support.

The coyotes let everyone know that the game was back on, and Choctaw went in hard. They took out a

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few enemy fireteams on the open roads, and gave Captain Hanks a good picture of what to expect. It only took Choctaw about eight minutes to complete their reconnaissance by fire.

“Khaos, this is Choctaw. There’s a few enemy teams in O3, but most of them are concentrated in O2 to the north,” Choctaw actual reported.

“Roger, tango,” Captain Hanks replied.

Captain Hanks could hear Khaos 1 and Khaos 3 engaging. The feint must be working; they were fixing the enemy to the north. Captain Hanks saw Choctaw move to the east; their geometries for tracks were now clean.

“Let’s roll, Gunny,” Captain Hanks said.

Gunnery Sergeant Acosta pulled his four tracks out into the center of Phase Line Corona and prosecuted a few targets that were caught off guard. As his gunners were engaging, his drivers generated smoke screens with their tracks. Four AAVs in close proximity can generate a decent smoke screen, and within 30 seconds, the smoke screen covered the entire block. Captain Hanks heard Khaos 2 and the engineer squad moving on the radio (only 30 feet from them), but he could not even see them cross the road.

“Khaos 6, Khaos 2. We’ve gained a foothold. Request to bring the tracks in closer. We’ll guide them in and pull them to our lead trace,” Sergeant Decker said.

“Roger, coming in,” Captain Hanks replied. This entire crossing of the danger zone took no more than five minutes.

Gunnery Sergeant Acosta pulled his tracks up next



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to Sergeant Decker's lead trace. The fight was close now—house to house. Captain Hanks could hear Khaos 3 and elements of Spartan Company applying heavy fire toward their front. Khaos 2 pushed house to house, closing the gap and squeezing the enemy between the hammer and the anvil.<sup>8</sup> At this point, Captain Hanks could see enemy teams attempting to shoot the tracks with rockets. But every time they tried, they exposed themselves to heavy machine guns at point-blank range.

Captain Hanks stayed in Gunnery Sergeant Acosta's AAV because it gave him the best vantage point to observe and command and control the entire company, attachments, and adjacent units. He had good communications with Grizzly fires through the AAV radios and did not think he would get the same results with his PRC-152 handheld radio. Additionally, it allowed him to rapidly bring support in the form of heavy machine guns to whomever needed it.

Captain Hanks must have overstayed his welcome in the track, or had been too Rommel-like in his behavior, because shortly after the major engagement ebbed down, Coyote 32W approached with a sad look on his face.

“Sir, I hate to do this, but you were just shot by a sniper,” he said.

“Seriously?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Seriously, Sir,” he replied.

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<sup>8</sup> Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, *Military Effectiveness*, vol. 3, *The Second World War*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511762970>.

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Captain Hanks took a moment and looked around. Sergeant Decker had strongpointed the key terrain in the O2 District. Khaos 1 and Khaos 3 held their positions. And Captain Hanks could see at least two enemy platoons forming up as casualties in the distance. Combined with the casualties they inflicted from the other attacks, Captain Hanks thought they must have wiped out most of the company they were fighting. Khaos Company's casualties for this engagement amounted to 11, with 1 mobility kill on a track. It was clear that Khaos Company won the third, and likely the last, engagement of "The Attack on Kilo's Block."

"Okay, brother, you mind if I stay here for a minute and watch how this plays out?" Captain Hanks asked.

"No worries, Sir. Just take off your helmet so they know you're dead," he said.

Other than the fact that he was dead, this was a great opportunity for Captain Hanks. He could sit on the sidelines and watch Khaos Company go. Watching the noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and Marines step up, take the initiative, and execute sound tactics violently and with speed truly made him proud.

Captain Hanks watched for about 15 minutes, and when it seemed like all actions were stable, he wished Sergeant Decker and Gunnery Sergeant Acosta good luck, collected the other casualties, and headed back to their packs to get their things.

When they made it back to the command post, Captain Hanks ran into First Lieutenant Baldini.

"Sir, you're leaving me?" First Lieutenant Baldini said.

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“Brian, I can’t have all the fun. You’re in charge now. Don’t worry, I have faith in you,” Captain Hanks said.

Captain Hanks gave him a little direction and let him know he should not expect much more resistance out of that corridor. Captain Hanks shook First Lieutenant Baldini’s hand, wished him luck, grabbed accountability of all casualties, and marched off to the casualty collection point in Forward Operating Base (FOB) 3.

Captain Hanks found the other Khaos casualties in FOB 3, shirts and boots off, absorbing vitamin D from the sun and talking about what happened. Everyone was in a good mood; they knew that they performed well and they were having energetic discussions about how they could have done even better. Captain Hanks set up shop next to his command track, which was painted as a casualty at this point, and kept the radio on battalion TAC 1 to stay abreast of how the fight was progressing, while also removing his boots and soaking up some sun.

Around 1700, Captain Hanks could hear dozens of artillery simulators (*arty sims*) go off in the city.<sup>9</sup> Shortly afterward, Spartan 6 came over the net.

“Grizzly, this is Spartan 6,” Captain Siani called over the radio.

“Spartan 6, go for Grizzly,” Captain Harb replied.

“Hey, dude, we’re all dead. We’re pushing to FOB 3,” Captain Siani said over BN TAC 1.

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<sup>9</sup> The term *arty sims* refers to pyrotechnics in steel cans with a plastic cap on the top and a handle on the side, which is actually the fuse to ignite the charge. The delay is approximately 12 seconds.

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“Okay, just uh . . . head to FOB 3 then I guess,” Captain Harb said.

“Hey, Grizzly, this is Savage 6,” Captain Richard called over.

“Savage 6, go for Grizzly,” Captain Gene Harb said.

“Yeah . . . we are also all dead and heading to FOB 3,” Captain Richard said over the radio.

“Roger,” Captain Harb responded.

“Grizzly, this is Khaos 5. We have not been told we are dead, so we are still alive with 23 Marines,” First Lieutenant Baldini called over the net.

Captain Hanks assumed it had been a massive artillery strike, but he had to know for sure. “Khaos 5, Khaos 6. Roll to company TAC,” Captain Hanks told First Lieutenant Baldini.

“Khaos 6, Khaos 5,” he rogered up on the company net.

“What happened?” Captain Hanks asked.

“Sir, they painted a BM-30 strike over a whole grid square. It wiped everybody out. The coyotes just ran around and said everybody was dead. I don’t know if they forgot about us, or if they don’t know where we are, but nobody told us we are dead,” he said.

“Good. So, don’t be dead. Get back on battalion net and let them know you’re ready to assume the main effort. Khaos is going to make it through MWX. Good luck, Brian,” Captain Hanks said.

“Roger, Sir,” and Captain Hanks rolled back to battalion TAC.

“Grizzly, this is Khaos 5. We . . . standby,” First Lieutenant Baldini called over.

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Captain Hanks could hear another dozen simulators go off in the city.

“Grizzly, this is Khaos 5. We just got hit by another BM-30 strike, and now we are all dead too,” First Lieutenant Baldini relayed a few minutes later.

So that was it—Khaos Company was officially out of MWX. The rest of Khaos Company, and all of Spartan and Savage Companies, aggregated in FOB 3. It was an eventful and spirited reunion, and company commanders celebrated with a glorious family-style dinner of lukewarm pizza MREs. Afterward, Captain Hanks returned to his deceased command track to listen to the fight.

The events that followed could most accurately be summed up as “the last stand of Grizzly 6.” Lieutenant Colonel Berry aggregated forces from 3d Battalion, 8th Marines (Choctaw, the battalion aid station, and the rear command post), and the nearby engineer company led by Captain Pinkerton.

Captain Pinkerton called over the radio, “Grizzly 6, this is Clydesdale 6. I’ve got a [M58 mine clearing line charge] MICLIC. I can put it in a building. I hear you’re the kind of guy that goes for that shit.”

This is what the fight dwindled down to. Lieutenant Colonel Berry kept the forces mobile in anticipation of follow-on BM-30 strikes, but he maintained a position where he could control COP 2. These actions continued throughout the night.

At some point in the night, Captain Hanks swore he heard Lieutenant Colonel Berry come over the net and say, “I’ve got a few on my left, many on my right.

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Any thought of reinforcements would be suicidal. We will hold.”

Under the glow of white star parachutes, the sounds of machine-gun fire in the distance mixed with the snores of Marines sleeping, and the soft crackle on the radio inside the track, Captain Hanks drifted off to sleep.

### Lessons Learned

**1** *A fight in the urban environment is extremely chaotic and complex.* Additionally, the terrain of the urban environment tends to canalize the fight into a series of small unit actions rather than a large synchronized maneuver.<sup>10</sup> Any attempts to control this fight is futile or detrimental to tempo, so the best method for success is accepting that the fight in the urban terrain is largely a series of small unit actions, and thus higher command elements should focus on establishing conditions that allow the chaos to go in the favor of their subordinates. This is most easily accomplished by developing a clear understanding of, and effectively communicating, two level’s intent up combined with clear tactical control measures that all units can operate from. The clearing of Hidalgo City saw elements of 3d Battalion, 8th Marines; 1st Battalion, 2d Marines; LAR; aviation; engi-

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<sup>10</sup> Maj Daniel B. Sparks, comp. and ed., *Small Unit Actions* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2007); and Benjamin M. Jensen, Henrik Breitenbauch, and Brandon Valeriano, eds., *Complex Terrain: Megacities and the Changing Character of Urban Operations* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2019).

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neers; reconnaissance; and all of their subordinate units operate in the exact same areas. This does not include the different types of enemy forces (conventional and unconventional) and civilian players that also operated in the area. The complexity, speed, and canalizing nature of the urban environment led to small units operating independently and at times at odds with each other in terms of battlespace geometries, rather than focusing their collective combat power in a synchronized manner.

**2** *There must be a balance between the art and science of war.* Art thrives in chaos, but it can rapidly become uncontrollable chaos when not restricted. Science can be dogmatic, but it can be a useful constant in chaos. The situation will never be fully understood and will often be at first complex or chaotic. A good practice is using the Cynefin framework in these situations (complex or chaotic), where to develop the situation, action must be injected into the system first with the ability to measure the responses, and only afterward follow-on actions are calculated.<sup>11</sup> This was apparent when Cap-

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<sup>11</sup> The term *Cynefin* [ku-nev-in] is a Welsh word meaning place or habitat. David J. Snowden uses it to describe a framework he developed in 1999 based on concepts from knowledge management and organizational strategy. The Cynefin framework represents a problem-solving tool that puts situations into five “domains” defined by cause-and-effect relationships: complex, complicated, chaotic, obvious, and ordered. David J. Snowden and Mary E. Boone, “A Leader’s Framework for Decision Making,” *Harvard Business Review*, November 2007.

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tain Hanks injected “artistic” actions into the first two attacks on Kilo’s block, realizing only after the second attack that it was not working, and then he switched to a different tactic.

**3** *Relationships matter.* Throughout the entire evolution of MWX, Captain Hanks consistently coordinated with adjacent company commanders to accomplish their missions. Captain Hanks witnessed the battalion commanders and his lieutenants doing the same. Having established relationships with the people around them was an intangible yet significant advantage that greatly increased their ability to apply speed and generate tempo against the enemy. Trust is one of the most essential requirements for the execution of maneuver warfare, and it is difficult to wholeheartedly trust someone you do not know. There is great value and enormous dividends to be gained by building and maintaining relationships with your peers.

**4** *War must be chaos.* The unforeseen events that unfolded, the number of Marines found on the battlefield with no understanding of the situation because it developed faster than the communication systems and feedback loops could handle, and the amount of dynamic retasking (either by others or by leaders tasking themselves) are all indicators of just how confusing and unpredictable operations like this can be. This is true even without the emotional, mental, and spiritual stress of actual combat. The answer then must be training that focuses on resiliency and adaptability. This includes sit-





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## EPILOGUE

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No other major action occurred in Hidalgo City that night. “White flag” was called the next morning, officially ending MAGTF Warfighting Exercise (MWX). It took the majority of the day to retrograde all forces back to Camp Wilson. The following day was the 244th anniversary of the Marine Corps, and the majority of 2d Marine Division gathered in a single location for a ceremony in Camp Wilson. Major General David Furness made some touching comments about being a Marine in this division and the enormity of what we had accomplished. Although, as he alluded, the completion of MWX was just the beginning of changes coming for the Marine Corps. This exercise diary represents the next phase of MWX: exploitation.<sup>1</sup> Without a comprehensive reflection and study of these events, they will stay just that—an event where a few thousand of the more than 180,000 Marines currently on active duty prac-

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<sup>1</sup> *Offensive and Defensive Tactics*, MCWP 3-01 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2019), 3-5.

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ticed warfighting. This exercise diary aims to exploit the success of a few to the benefit of many.

Khaos Company had a unique experience unlike any other company at MWX, but the lessons learned are so fundamental in principle that every unit in the exercise likely experienced each of them through their own actions. MWX represented an opportunity to bring to light *Warfighting*, MCDP 1, on a scale not often seen. After all, *Warfighting* is not just doctrine; it is a philosophy. More specifically, as General Charles Krulak wrote in the foreword, it is “the philosophy which distinguishes the U.S. Marine Corps. The thoughts contained [in MCDP 1] are not merely guidance for action in combat but a way of thinking. [*Warfighting*] provides the authoritative basis for how we fight and how we prepare to fight. . . . [I]t provides broad guidance in the form of concepts and values. It requires judgment in application.”<sup>2</sup> Marines cannot settle as mere philosophers or warriors. They must be both; and they must be able to bridge the philosophy from ideas to actions. This requires dedication to their profession, passion for challenge and growth, and environments that reflect and enable our way of thinking, training, and fighting.

If there was one facet about Khaos Company that made it successful: its culture.<sup>3</sup> Culture is so imperative to fostering the environment where the maneuver war-

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<sup>2</sup> *Warfighting*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997), iii.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, some of the concepts presented in Maj Anthony Pollman, USMC (Ret), “Framing Marine Corps Culture,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 144, no. 6 (June 2018).

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fare philosophy can flourish. Without the right culture, Marine units will cease to be “Marine” units. The odds are, at a glance, not in the Corps’ favor. The Marine Corps is, on average, one of the youngest Services in the Department of Defense, it has on multiple occasions been on the brink of dissolution as a Service, and it has a relatively small budget with an almost unsupportable global force management requirement.<sup>4</sup> Truthfully, its continued existence is based on values, not defense requirements. These values cannot be taken for granted. The United States leases its most valuable assets to the Service: its sons and daughters. These sons and daughters volunteer because they have a higher calling; a willingness to dedicate themselves to their profession in mind, body, and soul; a passion for challenge; and a desire for growth. They walk into the Marine Corps with everything the Service needs. The Marine Corps only needs to give them what they desire—purpose, challenge, and growth. The noncommissioned officers (NCOs) run Khaos Company. They do not always do it perfectly, and in some cases they fail completely. But they learn, and they do so in a team environment where their superiors—staff noncommissioned officers and commissioned officers alike—are students in this pro-

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *Resolution Establishing the Continental Marines*, Continental Cong. (10 November 1775); *An Act for Establishing and Creating the Marine Corps*, 5th Cong., 2d Sess. (11 July 1798); Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: A History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Free Press, 1991); and Gordon W. Keiser, *The Marine Corps and Defense Unification, 1944–1947: The Politics of Survival* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1982).

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fession with them. They in turn take care of the Marine Corps' most precious asset: the young Marines. These young Marines—filled with purpose, challenge, and growth—are determined to become the NCOs they see and want to emulate. The NCOs and the young Marines are, and will always be, the future of the Marine Corps. At the basis of the commander's responsibilities, along with their staffs, is establishing an environment where this sort of culture can thrive. The spirit of the Marine Corps, harnessed through culture, will take care of everything else.

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# CONCLUSION

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by Williamson Murray, PhD

The author of one of the most impressive memoirs of the Second World War described his memories of his participation in William Slim's army in Burma in the following terms: "Looking back over sixty-odd years, life is like a piece of string with knots in it, the knots being those moments that live in the mind forever, and the intervals being hazy, half-recalled times when I have a fair idea of what was happening, in a general way."<sup>1</sup> What Captain Hanks has done is to fill in the whole of his experiences instead of just a few small snippets that distort rather than capture the whole of the 2d Marine Division's exercise in November 2019. Moreover, in writing this diary of his experiences during the exercise, Captain Hanks has forced himself to think through and internalize the decisions he did or did not make. Moreover, he has attached his experiences to an effort to think through the Marine Corps' *Warfighting*, perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> George MacDonald Fraser, *Quartered Safe Out Here: A Harrowing Tale of World War II* (New York: Skyhorse, 2007), xiii.

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the most influential doctrinal publication written in the last 30 years.<sup>2</sup>

The exercise in November 2019 in which the 2d Marine Division participated will undoubtedly spawn a host of articles, commentaries, and after action reports—all of considerable importance to thinking about combat in the future. Captain Hanks’s diary is obviously one of them, and during the coming years, like the other commentaries on the exercise, it will provide considerable insights and challenges to the Marine Corps when considering the next war—and there will be a next war. But in time, the discussions of this exercise will fade, only occasionally read or used, as other and more recent exercises and maneuvers occur. But Captain Hanks’s work here will remain because it examines much more than the various data points of *what* happened in November 2019. It records the efforts of a company commander to internalize and learn from his experiences. It will illustrate to other future Marine leaders at the sharp end how to think through and learn from their experiences. As a result, this diary serves as an example for the education of future officers in the same fashion that *Duffer’s Drift* has and as such will serve a crucial educational function.

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<sup>2</sup> *Warfighting*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997).

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# APPENDIX A

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## Lessons Learned

**LESSON 1.** *Culture is the foundation for success.* The right culture is the most fundamental requirement necessary for units to live and fight in accordance with the Marine Corps warfighting philosophy. Culture can only be cultivated over time, and the ideal culture is cultivated by a cohesive group of individuals that share the same experience under challenging circumstances and project the right characteristics—both individual and collective. Critical variables include *trust* up, down, and across the chain of command; an infused sense of individual *purpose* and collective *ownership* across all ranks; and a *challenging* environment where *growth* is accepted in all forms—failure *and* success. A cohesive team will generate the right culture.

**LESSON 2.** *“Expect the unexpected” is not a cliché.* Adaptability is key, as situations will continuously change and what you have planned for is no longer valid. Having a resilient thinking model that allows you to understand the situation in as much entirety as pos-



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sible with flexibility enough to implement your own changes and variables into the system is critical. Captain Hanks's plan continuously changed as his missions and situations changed from performing roles as the regimental reserve, to establishing a deliberate defense with 72 hours of preparation, to establishing a hasty defense with less than 24 hours. He did not wait until the last minute to plan but evolved his plan as needed and found that the plan itself was not important. The planning *process* is what allowed him and his subordinate leaders to understand the situation and make the most appropriate decisions.

**LESSON 3.** *Real people fight wars.* If war is inherently a human phenomenon, then human faults must be inherently expected. You can try and negate all mistakes, but they are bound to happen. So, the important part is not preventing mistakes (of course, you should try to avoid them), but instead careful deliberation must be taken for how you react to mistakes. A zero-tolerance mentality generates mistrust and retards growth, for failure is an incredible learning tool.

**LESSON 4.** *Commanders must be controlled.* Effective command and control requires two basic things: clear intent and guidance from the commander to subordinate and adequate feedback from the subordinate to the commander to inform their decisions. Failure in the former increases the risk of subordinates making decisions that are not in harmony with the larger plan. Failure in the latter increases the risk of a commander making

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uninformed decisions that could be detrimental to their intent. Lieutenant Colonel Gabriel Diana provided clear intent and guidance to Captain Hanks originally. But Captain Hanks failed to provide adequate feedback to Lieutenant Colonel Diana until they had the face-to-face meeting near the Delta T, which led the lieutenant colonel to make a decision for the placement of Hanks's troops and the movement of his tracks. Both of these decisions, if not modified by providing Lieutenant Colonel Diana with adequate feedback, likely would have led to greater casualties and potentially mission failure.

**LESSON 5.** *Careful deliberation must be given when generating commander's intent.* This is a critical tool that enables the execution of the maneuver warfare philosophy. To be useful though, it must be clear, simple, and above all well understood. In some instances, the platoon commanders and squad leaders made decisions based on the method portion of commander's intent, such as developing and executing trigger lines and engagement criteria. In other instances, subordinates made decisions based on the purpose or end state portions, such as committing to support an adjacent unit or developing branch and sequel plans as the situation developed. The key point is that these decisions were made rapidly with no communication or direction, and had they not been made, would likely have led to the adversary gaining the advantage.

**LESSON 6.** *Do not let doctrine become dogma.* Doctrinal principles are important and simple in theory but

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difficult to fully understand and quickly translate into tangible action. Doctrinal tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) are a helpful starting point. In today's world, however, these TTPs are easily understood by both friend and foe. So, it is not enough to just apply TTPs and standard operating procedures (SOPs); units and commanders who wish to apply maneuver warfare philosophy must devote themselves to a study of their profession. Only true enlightenment can bring forward the vision to translate philosophy to action. We must not underestimate our opponents, and we should acknowledge that they are professionals themselves with the means to study our way of war as well. In this, we must apply the "I know that they know that I know theory." To be successful, one must have vision in order to outthink their opponent.

**LESSON 7.** *Resiliency enables reactions and counteractions.* Never underestimate the negative impact of losing a key member of your organization. This event will significantly reduce the spirit of the unit, in addition to reducing its proficiency. An effort must be made by commanders to measure and understand the spiritual health of the unit, implement ways to increase the unit's individual and collective resiliency, and have contingency plans in place should the circumstances warrant. This revelation came to Captain Hanks when Gunnery Sergeant Acosta was painted as a casualty, but this could be just as valid for a suicide or car accident back in garrison as it would be in a combat scenario. Even the best units must train for resiliency because despite doing every-

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thing right, bad things can still happen. The enemy has a vote, and chance is always a reality. Good resiliency enables rapid and accurate response as well as adaptability.<sup>1</sup>

**LESSON 8.** *Just because you see something does not mean you see everything.* Do not be in a rush to believe what you want to think, which is known as confirmation bias.<sup>2</sup> Take the time to confirm or deny the reports from multiple sources. Failure in this lesson cost Captain Hanks Mongol and vital combat power in the AO.

**LESSON 9.** *Heavy weapons and explosives kill people the most.* In all of the engagements that occurred in this chapter, indirect fire and heavy machine guns, coupled with surprise, were often the deciding factor. It is interesting how every Marine is a rifleman, but the riflemen did not carry the day in Prospect. Those with radios supported by those dropping mortars and artillery shells did, however. Perhaps more thought and effort should be given to enabling Marines to employ combined arms, with a mentality that rifles are used for security and to accomplish the mission.

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa S. Meredith et al., *Promoting Psychological Resilience in the U.S. Military* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Raymond S. Nickerson, "Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises," *Review of General Psychology* 2, no. 2 (1998), <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.2.175>. *Confirmation bias* means seeking or interpreting evidence in ways that support existing beliefs, expectations, or hypotheses.

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**LESSON 10.** *Never settle for subpar camouflage.* Once you are found, it is difficult to be unfound, and you will be targeted. This concept works inversely as well; surprise and information are more important than weapons systems—if you cannot see/do not know, you cannot use them. Pay particular attention to camouflage from aviation; because if they find you, they bring a savage wrath of fury and fire that will quickly induce fear in the ranks. Movement is much easier to detect than static positions. Had they not become complacent with camouflage, the company might have avoided detection from enemy aviation. Additionally, it will likely be impossible to hide from every collection capability peer adversaries possess. A good counter to this is attempting to stay under the adversary's high payoff target list, specifically communication and control nodes and groups of large assets. Use dispersion, and if you cannot hide something, make it look like something less valuable.

**LESSON 11.** *Use caution when conducting passages of lines.* A passage of lines seems like a simple evolution, but it can be a dangerous maneuver and simple miscommunication can lead to friendly casualties. In two instances, Captain Hanks's convoy was confused as a potential enemy convoy while passing through 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' defense. These situations were only diffused because the sentries radioed up inquiring about the movement rather than shooting their engagement criteria. Captain Hanks had a smooth passage of lines with 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, because they had a

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well-established passage of lines procedure, and Captain Hanks was able to conduct rehearsals with them while at TAA Grizzly.<sup>3</sup> The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, was not informed at all about Captain Hanks's movements until he was already there, and this, compounded with the fact that the enemy had breached their "secured" communications, could have led to a blue-on-blue incident. The official challenge and passes were confusing, and they had to resort to modified ones that only they would know, even though they were not previously established. If a passage of lines is occurring, commanders need to be on the radio, and weapons discipline must be enforced. It is better to not shoot until you know for sure than shoot and regret. Fratricide is one of the worst things to occur to a unit. It destroys trust, cohesion, and morale—in your command, in the individual Marines, and in their adjacent units. It is self-inflicted maneuver warfare tactics. On the flip side, thought should be given to how we can induce these incidents on enemy forces.

**LESSON 12.** *Moralities are a blessing and a curse.* General Charles C. Krulak's concept of the "three-block

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<sup>3</sup> See "Passage of Lines," in *Field Service Regulations: Operations*, FM 100-5 (Washington, DC: War Department, 1941), chap. 16.

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war” grows ever more complex in modern conflict.<sup>4</sup> The three-block war in Prospect was far different than the one in Hidalgo City. Additionally, as Americans represent the “good guys,” the enemy often has the opportunity to transition between blocks well before we do. Thus, in the urban environment, the critical decision for commanders is when to transition to the third block ourselves. The enemy executing a three-block war against a two-block war in an urban environment will have the advantage. The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, spent the majority of their time fighting a one- and two-block fight, trying not to inflict damage on the civilian population. The adversary forces, however, were using indirect fire on the city, conventional mechanized forces, and special forces to wage an elevated level of conflict. The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, was at a significant disadvantage under these conditions, and until Lieutenant Colonel Donlon decided to apply three-block tactics, were systematically losing the fight.

**LESSON 13.** *Nathaniel Fick had a point.* It is important to train and educate subordinates to execute the respon-

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<sup>4</sup> *Three-block war*, created by Krulak to prepare the Marines for urban combat, means that you have provided enough security for reconstruction to take hold and that reconstruction activities have created the political and economic means that allow the indigenous government to gain the legitimacy and stability that it will need to defeat the insurgents. Gen Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three-Block War,” *Marines Magazine*, January 1999.

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sibilities of the billets above them.<sup>5</sup> One bullet, broken leg, or lost Marine can force subordinates to elevated positions of authority. And by that time, it is too late for training—they will only have the training they received prior to that to rely on. Sergeant Burroughs had to fill in as the platoon commander in First Lieutenant Lindley's absence, and he had only minutes to plan and execute a platoon-supported attack.

**LESSON 14.** *Just because you know something, does not mean you know everything.* (reiterated from chapter 2) Do not blindly trust reports; they might have missed something. Reconnoiter before you attack, because you must always factor it in, no matter how pressed for time you think you are or how trustworthy the reports seem. And you have to force your subordinates to do the same. Information is more important than weapons systems, for information shapes how to employ forces.

**LESSON 15.** *Link ups among different units can be a dangerous event and result in blue-on-blue incidents if the proper procedures are not established.* Regiment had published a link-up procedure as part of their smart pack, however, the tank company that came to reinforce Captain Hanks was not part of the regiment and did not

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<sup>5</sup> Nathaniel C. Fick, "Officer Development for Counterinsurgency," in *Counterinsurgency Leadership in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Beyond*, eds. Nicholas J. Schlosser and James M. Caiella (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2011), 77–84.



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have a copy of it.<sup>6</sup> This, along with likely a lack of situational awareness of friendly and enemy disposition in vicinity of Hidalgo City, led to the tank blue-on-blue incident.

**LESSON 16.** *Do not become a victim of time.* Speed naturally becomes the first instinct to counter time impositions; but tempo supersedes speed, and to generate tempo, a commander must gain an assessment of the situation, generate clear intent, establish the conditions for success, and then allow subordinates to act. Bypassing one of these steps will lead to disaster, as seen in the case of Sergeant Burroughs and 1st Platoon.

**LESSON 17.** *A fight in the urban environment is extremely chaotic and complex.* Additionally, the terrain of the urban environment tends to canalize the fight into a series of small unit actions rather than a large synchronized maneuver.<sup>7</sup> Any attempts to control this fight is futile or detrimental to tempo, so the best method for success is accepting that the fight in the urban terrain is largely a series of small unit actions, and thus

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<sup>6</sup> *Infantry Company Operations*, MCWP 3-11.1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2014), 11-20.

<sup>7</sup> Maj Daniel B. Sparks, comp. and ed., *Small Unit Actions* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2007); and Benjamin M. Jensen, Henrik Breitenbauch, and Brandon Valeriano, eds., *Complex Terrain: Megacities and the Changing Character of Urban Operations* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2019).

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higher command elements should focus on establishing conditions that allow the chaos to go in the favor of their subordinates. This is most easily accomplished by developing a clear understanding of, and effectively communicating, two level's intent up combined with clear tactical control measures that all units can operate from. The clearing of Hidalgo City saw elements of 3d Battalion, 8th Marines; 1st Battalion, 2d Marines; LAR; aviation; engineers; reconnaissance; and all of their subordinate units operate in the exact same areas. This does not include the different types of enemy forces (conventional and unconventional) and civilian players that also operated in the area. The complexity, speed, and canalizing nature of the urban environment led to small units operating independently and at times at odds with each other in terms of battlespace geometries, rather than focusing their collective combat power in a synchronized manner.

**LESSON 18.** *There must be a balance between the art and science of war.* Art thrives in chaos, but it can rapidly become uncontrollable chaos when not restricted. Science can be dogmatic, but it can be a useful constant in chaos. The situation will never be fully understood and will often be at first complex or chaotic. A good practice is using the Cynefin framework in these situations (complex or chaotic), where to develop the situation, action must be injected into the system first with the ability to measure the responses, and only afterward follow-on

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actions are calculated.<sup>8</sup> This was apparent when Captain Hanks injected “artistic” actions into the first two attacks on Kilo’s block, realizing only after the second attack that it was not working, and then he switched to a different tactic.

**LESSON 19.** *Relationships matter.* Throughout the entire evolution of MWX, Captain Hanks consistently coordinated with adjacent company commanders to accomplish their missions. Captain Hanks witnessed the battalion commanders and his lieutenants doing the same. Having established relationships with the people around them was an intangible yet significant advantage that greatly increased their ability to apply speed and generate tempo against the enemy. Trust is one of the most essential requirements for the execution of maneuver warfare, and it is difficult to wholeheartedly trust someone you do not know. There is great value and enormous dividends to be gained by building and maintaining relationships with your peers.

**LESSON 20.** *War must be chaos.* The unforeseen events

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<sup>8</sup> The term *Cynefin* [ku-nev-in] is a Welsh word meaning place or habitat. David J. Snowden uses it to describe a framework he developed in 1999 based on concepts from knowledge management and organizational strategy. The Cynefin framework represents a problem-solving tool that puts situations into five “domains” defined by cause-and-effect relationships: complex, complicated, chaotic, obvious, and ordered. David J. Snowden and Mary E. Boone, “A Leader’s Framework for Decision Making,” *Harvard Business Review*, November 2007.

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that unfolded, the number of Marines found on the battlefield with no understanding of the situation because it developed faster than the communication systems and feedback loops could handle, and the amount of dynamic retasking (either by others or by leaders tasking themselves) are all indicators of just how confusing and unpredictable operations like this can be. This is true even without the emotional, mental, and spiritual stress of actual combat. The answer then must be training that focuses on resiliency and adaptability. This includes situational training exercises involving force on force that constantly change, introduce problems that can never be fully understood or solved, and generate challenges that train for more than just physical or mental stressors.

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## APPENDIX B

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# MAGTF Warfighting Exercise (MWX) 1-20 Discussion Guide

Written by the Warfighter Instructor Group,  
The Basic School<sup>1</sup>

### **PURPOSE**

The intent is to discuss the key foundations and reinforce vital concepts associated with conducting force-on-force exercises against near-peer, thinking, and opposing adversaries. End state: all students, regardless of military occupational specialty (MOS), walk away understanding the benefits of force-on-force training in a “free play” environment, and the lessons and concepts

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<sup>1</sup> This appendix is based on the original document used by The Basic School on Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA; however, minor alterations to the text have been made based on current standards for style, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Footnotes have been inserted as reader aides and were not present in the original document.

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from Marine Corps publications that are reinforced from realistic training. After digesting the *Discussion Guide*, students should have a deeper understanding of when and how to apply doctrinal policy and gain insight from Captain Matthew Hanks's successes and failures throughout the authentic training exercise.

## **SCHEME OF MANEUVER**

Artificial intelligence facilitates a guided discussion about key warfighting concepts using Captain Hanks's experience at (MAGTF Warfighting Exercise) MWX 1-20 as the lens from which to drive the discussion. Students will come to the *Discussion Guide* having read this work in its entirety and equipped with a basic knowledge of *Warfighting*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1. Students should apply lessons learned from *Warfighting*, *Tactics*, MCDP 1-3 and *Command and Control*, MCDP 6. This case study will be the means to tie concepts gained from doctrinal publications to real-life applications of doctrinal policy during a realistic training exercise. The goal for students is to glean experience by reading and discussing the key takeaways that Captain Hanks asserted following his experiences during the exercise. Ultimately, this guide should highlight the value of realistic training and the lessons available to those willing to put in the effort to simulate real-world experiences during training.

## **FOCUS POINTS**

1. Creating a culture of excellence—how to cultivate a winning mindset, handling

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- failures and mistakes, and generating buy-in.
2. Communication—as a means of sharing and building awareness as well as influencing decision and action. Communication while dealing with uncertainty—fog of war.
  3. Adaptability/flexibility—the enemy always has a say. Using doctrinal policy as a foundation during the planning process but not treating it like the gospel. Turn the map around.
  4. People—those “who gather information, make decisions, take action, communicate, and cooperate with one another in the accomplishment of a common goal.”<sup>2</sup> How to employ our most valuable resource (people) during the complexities and chaos of battle. Culture influences people. Clear commander’s intent drives the decision-making process at the lower levels.

## **MWX 1-20**

It is recommended that an instructor summarizes the above account with the students. During the review of the *Discussion Guide*, integrate Hanks’s account with a conversation about the human element in information processing and how our own personal experiences, bias-

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<sup>2</sup> *Command and Control*, MCDP 6 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1996), 48.

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es, judgment, and thought processes drive our decisions and the way we articulate things. A question to ask from this is: Why is this important for you as a leader and decision maker? How does understanding this work through this lens help you as a leader and professional?

## GUIDED DISCUSSION

Below are some questions broken down by chapter to use and/or reference during the discussion of the concepts contained in MWX 1-20.

### Chapter 1. The Calm Before the Storm

1. How would you describe Khaos Company's culture? What are some methods that Captain Hanks uses to foster positive culture within his unit? Why does having a strong culture within a unit create a foundation for success? What other positive repercussions result from having this foundation?

They had been training in Twentynine Palms, California, for several weeks before that, maximizing the training value of the live fire ranges offered on this Marine Corps base. At TAA Grizzly, though, times had been good and the tempo has been relatively easy.<sup>3</sup>

The company started off at TAA Grizzly with a

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<sup>3</sup> "The Calm Before the Storm," *Khaos Company*, 9.



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sunrise hike five days ago, hiking to the tallest peak in the area before the sun came up. To build on the culture within the company by breaking bread together on a mountain peak as the sun rose over the vast range of Johnson Valley was more important than any rehearsals they could have done.<sup>4</sup>

Both of the above quotes demonstrate Captain Hanks's ability to balance training and operational tempo and his willingness to allow time for morale-building events with rest and recovery. Taking the temperature of the unit and knowing when to push on the gas or pump the breaks is crucial for being an effective leader and gaining the unit's trust. Giving the "why" is important, especially when the operational tempo is high.

Captain Hanks divested an enormous amount of trust to his subordinates, and targeted the noncommissioned officers (NCOs) as his bid for success in implementation. . . . They built Khaos Company from the bottom up: recreating its logo, motto, symbol, call sign, etc., while being coached, mentored, and supported by the officers and staff noncommissioned officers (SNCOs).<sup>5</sup>

Captain Hanks stimulated culture from the ground

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<sup>4</sup> "The Calm Before the Storm," *Khaos Company*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> "The Calm Before the Storm," *Khaos Company*, 11.

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up, encouraging input from all levels within the unit, resulting in trust and buy-in. Trying to develop a cohesive team without essential characteristics becomes problematic.

When Captain Hanks first checked into the company, he removed all the furniture and cubicles in the main room of the company office. In its stead, they built a giant U-shaped table that could accommodate every squad leader, platoon sergeant, platoon commander, and member of the company staff. Their call signs were etched into their spots, instilling the fact that everyone was an owner of the legacy of the company and the Service. A gathering of this group was called a “Khaos session.”<sup>6</sup>

Captain Hanks again hits on the importance of ownership within a unit and the positive results that accompany it.

2. How did Captain Hanks show adaptability/flexibility in the planning phases? What issues can arise when a leader “falls in love with their plan?”

It is anybody’s guess, at this point, what the enemy will do. They did not have any intelligence on actual enemy activity, only intelligence on

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<sup>6</sup> “The Calm Before the Storm,” *Khaos Company*, 35–36.

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possible actions. Knowing that he might not be in the information loop with all the activity in the division's [area of operations] AO, Captain Hanks would have to wargame multiple situations so that the company would have clearly defined triggers and engagement criteria for their defense.<sup>7</sup>

Captain Hanks knows that the enemy is a living, breathing, thinking enemy. He expects the need for real-time adjustments during the upcoming engagement and focuses his planning efforts accordingly.

All of this resulted in an overloaded [Joint light tactical vehicle] JLTV that was capable of providing command and control, logistics, casualty evacuation [CASEVAC], and transportation capabilities for the company. And, it could be rapidly hidden from enemy sensors. These alterations extended the company's culminating point and provided it with greater flexibility in operations.<sup>8</sup>

Khaos Company used innovation in their preparation, which allows the unit more flexibility in the operational environment.

### 3. How can human factors (i.e., going inter-

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<sup>7</sup> "The Calm Before the Storm," *Khaos Company*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> "The Calm Before the Storm," *Khaos Company*, 35.

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nal) degrade the mission and negatively impact the unit?

Captain Hanks was here at Twentynine Palms a few years ago when a Marine was crushed by a vehicle at night, and he decided he was not going to chance it. The Marines' sleep was not worth their lives. He woke up the Marines and moved them to a location outside the vehicle's perimeter. As he finished, something told him to look inside the back of the JLTV. Among [meals ready to eat] MRE boxes and water jugs lay another cocoon. Captain Hanks woke it up. . . . Captain Hanks was starting to get impatient. Marines are sleeping all around, and in, his only vehicle. No one seemed to understand the sense of urgency he needed, and all of them seemed too tired to care.<sup>9</sup>

A momentary lapse in judgment or lack of focus caused by personal or environmental factors can significantly jeopardize the mission and deteriorate the culture within a unit. It was essential that Captain Hanks lead by example, waking up the Marines and clearing the area to mitigate avoidable mistakes. Injuring or killing a Marine due to preventable errors quickly destroys the trust within a unit.

4. What are the negative effects of a “zero-

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<sup>9</sup> “The Calm Before the Storm,” *Khaos Company*, 8–9.

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defect mentality?”<sup>10</sup> What kind of mentality did Captain Hanks and Khaos Company have toward mistakes?

Leaders demonstrate their worth when they are proficient enough to cover the gap of their subordinates’ failures, but they have built a culture where subordinates grow through their failures. Failure is a stressful and emotional event but is an invaluable tool for growth and development. To fulfill this theory, Captain Hanks divested an enormous amount of trust to his subordinates, and targeted the noncommissioned officers (NCOs) as his bid for success in implementation.<sup>11</sup>

Captain Hanks expects mistakes to occur, but he understands the importance of adopting a culture that allows criticism, feedback, and ultimately growth.

Lesson 3 in chapter 1 highlights the fact that real people fight wars. If war is inherently a human phenomenon, then human faults must be inherently expected. People can try and negate all mistakes, but they are bound to happen. So, it is not simply important to prevent mistakes but instead to employ careful deliberation with how to react to mistakes. A zero-tolerance

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<sup>10</sup> Milan Vego, “Mission Command and Zero Error Tolerance Cannot Coexist,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 144, no. 7 (July 2018).

<sup>11</sup> “The Calm Before the Storm,” *Khaos Company*, 11.

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mentality generates mistrust and stunts growth. Failure is an incredible tool for learning.

## **Chapter 2. The Defense of Prospect**

1. How did Captain Hanks fail to ensure adequate command and control?

Lieutenant Colonel Diana had tried to get on-line with a face to face with Captain Hanks twice now in two days. It was Captain Hanks's turn to go to him. He was a little concerned that they were playing a telephone game, and he wanted to tell him personally his thought process for their scheme of maneuver, the risks associated with them, and his concerns.<sup>12</sup>

It was his responsibility as the subordinate to “control” his superior through information and feedback. Captain Hanks's failure to adequately do so is what caused the small breakdown in the doctrinal command and control construct.<sup>13</sup>

Captain Hanks was singularly focused on setting up the defense and placed his energy on ensuring that it was set up appropriately. In those efforts, he failed to provide a feedback loop to his commander, allow-

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<sup>12</sup> “The Defense of Prospect,” *Khaos Company*, 54.

<sup>13</sup> “The Defense of Prospect,” *Khaos Company*, 58.

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ing room for Lieutenant Gabriel L. Colonel Diana to make decisions without input from Captain Hanks. The timely flow of information up and down the chain is crucial for effective decision making.

2. Once Captain Hanks realized a lapse in command and control had occurred, how did he remedy the situation?

There is a certain element of assumed trust between commanders, and this trust can be rapidly built on and won by the subordinate through even limited interactions. The few interactions Captain Hanks had with Lieutenant Colonel Diana were positive, so it was likely that he trusted Captain Hanks's explanation more so than the one from a lieutenant executive officer he never met—this is only natural.<sup>14</sup>

Captain Hanks identified the gap in the feedback loop to Lieutenant Colonel Diana and immediately sought to close it. By outlining his plan in person with details, supporting evidence, and confidence, he was able to effectively gain his commander's trust and the buy-in necessary for his plan.

3. How did Captain Hanks's commander's

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<sup>14</sup> "The Defense of Prospect," *Khaos Company*, 57.

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intent allow for rapid execution of maneuver warfare by his platoons?<sup>15</sup>

Captain Hanks was not sure how the paints were going to go, but he could not risk the adversary gaining a foothold in this area. He decided to commit 1st Platoon to reinforce 2d Platoon. “Khaos 1, Khaos 6. Go ahead and displace to reinforce 2d Platoon. Use the dismounted route, and go undetected. I may need to send you all the way back to the hot gates if they break through Nolan’s position. How long will it take you?” [Hanks asked] “Sir, we started moving 2 minutes ago; 15 minutes max until we’re there,” First Lieutenant [Malcolm] Lindley replied. Captain Hanks appreciated the fact that with no communication, First Lieutenant Lindley understood the problem, as well as potential future problems, and had already taken the initiative to provide a solution.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Commander’s intent provides leaders with the ability to deviate from a specific plan if necessary, while still accomplishing the ultimate goal of their commander. Marine Corps University has adopted and approved the following definition of *commander’s intent*: the commander’s intent statement must include a statement of the end state of the battlefield as it relates to their force, the enemy force, and the terrain and may include the purpose of the operations; the enemy’s actions and intentions; and an identification of the enemy’s critical vulnerability or center of gravity. See also *Command and Control*, 112–13.

<sup>16</sup> “The Defense of Prospect,” *Khaos Company*, 68.



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Captain Hanks provided all of his company leadership with simple, clear, and deliberate commander's intent. This enabled his platoon commanders to execute with speed and remain flexible within the realm of the overall intent.

4. Why is it important to understand the techniques, tactics, and procedures within our doctrinal principles? Why is it important that a commander not be so determined to follow doctrine?

In reality, the terrain is laced with multiple draws, washes, and fingers, many of which could hide entire companies. The doctrinal approach to this problem would have been to establish a defense at the natural choking point generated by the terrain. But here is the problem: the enemy knows Marine Corps doctrine. Facing a smart thinking enemy in force on force, one has to apply the "I know that they know theory."<sup>17</sup>

Around 0430, Khaos Company's embedded coyote painted an enemy artillery sweep and zone mission in the hot gates. Had the company been there defending the gates in a traditional defense, they would have experienced many casualties. That told Captain Hanks that

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<sup>17</sup> "The Defense of Prospect," *Khaos Company*, 50.

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the [adversary force] ADFOR knew the company was in the area, but they did not know its exact disposition.<sup>18</sup>

Captain Hanks and the rest of Khaos Company showed that they are well versed in doctrinal principles, tactics, techniques, and procedures, but they showed their willingness to go off script. Their adaptability during the wargaming and planning processes allowed them to develop a defensive plan that the enemy did not anticipate and therefore could not exploit.

5. Why is it important to have depth, clearly delineated responsibilities, and contingencies in leadership positions? What can units do to build resolve in preparation for the unfortunate situations when casualties occur?

Gunnery Sergeant [Rick] Acosta made one run on 3d Battalion, 7th Marines' main body with his heavy machine guns, but he was hit by a volley fire of Javelins. He and his three tracks were painted as casualties, and they were out of the fight.

The company took a hit. It was not the loss of the tracks Captain Hanks regretted; it was the loss of Gunnery Sergeant Acosta. Staff Sergeant Jaime Granados, his first section leader,

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<sup>18</sup> "The Defense of Prospect," *Khaos Company*, 66.

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instantly stepped up. But the lesson Captain Hanks mentally noted was the significance of the impact losing a leader could have on a unit. Captain Hanks gave himself a moment to empathize. Had this been real, where would his mind be? What would be the mindset of the company? Or his track platoon?<sup>19</sup>

Resiliency enables reactions and counteractions. Never underestimate the significant negative impact of losing a key member of your organization. This event will adversely affect the spirit of the unit in addition to reducing its proficiency. An effort must be made by commanders to measure and to understand the spiritual health of the unit, implement ways to increase the unit's individual and collective resiliency, and have contingency plans in place should the circumstances warrant. This revelation came to Captain Hanks when Gunnery Sergeant Acosta was painted as a casualty, but this discussion could be just as valid for a suicide or car accident back in garrison as it would be in a combat scenario. Even the best units must train for resiliency, because despite doing everything right, bad things can still happen. The enemy has a vote, and chance is always a reality. Good resiliency enables rapid and accurate responses—adaptability.

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<sup>19</sup> "The Defense of Prospect," *Khaos Company*, 73–74.

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### Chapter 3. The Long Night Movement

1. How important is communication between friendly maneuver elements in a dynamic environment? Can it be more challenging during a time of degraded communication assets or nighttime operations?

Use caution when conducting passages of lines. A passage of lines seems like a simple evolution, but it can be a dangerous maneuver and simple miscommunication can lead to friendly casualties. In two instances, Captain Hanks's convoy was confused as a potential enemy convoy while passing through 1st Battalion, 2d Marines' defense. These situations were only diffused because the sentries radioed up inquiring about the movement rather than shooting their engagement criteria. Captain Hanks had a smooth passage of lines with 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, because they had a well-established passage of lines procedure, and Captain Hanks was able to conduct rehearsals with them while at TAA Grizzly. The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, was not informed at all about Captain Hanks's movements until he was already there, and this, compounded with the fact that the enemy had breached their "secured" communications, could have led to a blue-on-blue incident. The official challenge and passes were confusing,

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and they had to resort to modified ones that only they would know, even though they were not previously established. If a passage of lines is occurring, commanders need to be on the radio, and weapons discipline must be enforced. It is better to not shoot until you know for sure than shoot and regret. Fratricide is one of the worst things to occur to a unit. It destroys trust, cohesion, and morale in your command, in the individual Marines, and in their adjacent units. It is self-inflicted maneuver warfare tactics. On the flip side, thought should be given to how we can induce these incidents on enemy forces.<sup>20</sup>

2. How might commanders mitigate confusion and chaos in these situations?

Captain Hanks was a little concerned. 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, was questioning their legitimacy in the middle of an attack. The fight here in Hidalgo City must be much different than the fight in the passes; the Royal Commandos electronic warfare must be effective if 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, did not trust that their communications equipment and nets were secure. But Captain Hanks was still under the impression that they were

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<sup>20</sup> “The Long Night Movement,” *Khaos Company*, 108–9.

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getting shot at, so there was no time to argue.<sup>21</sup>

It is imperative to establish communication plans between friendly maneuver units in the battlespace with redundant measures built in prior to action. If communications have been infiltrated, commanders must reconsider the basics of the challenge and create a strategy to roll to a secondary set of communication plans.

If not planned accordingly, the potential exists for blue-on-blue incidents that will demoralize the unit and only increase confusion on the battlefield.

#### **Chapter 4. Hidalgo City, Part I**

1. What advantages and disadvantages does a three-block war offer for friendly and enemy forces? When does a leader decide to make this tactical transition?

Moralities are a blessing and a curse. General Charles C. Krulak's concept of the "three-block war" grows ever more complex in modern conflict. The three-block war in Prospect was far different than the one in Hidalgo City. Additionally, as Americans represent the "good guys," the enemy often has the opportunity to transition between blocks well before we do. Thus, in the urban environment, the critical

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<sup>21</sup> "The Long Night Movement," *Khaos Company*, 105–6.

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decision for commanders is when to transition to the third block ourselves. The enemy executing a three-block war against our two-block war in an urban environment will have the advantage.<sup>22</sup>

The three-block war means that Marines may be required to conduct full-scale military actions, peacekeeping operations, and humanitarian aid within the space of three contiguous city blocks as seen in landscapes like Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria.<sup>23</sup>

As such, Marines must be trained in all three conditions—military actions, peacekeeping, and humanitarian aid—simultaneously, and the training at the lowest levels needs to be high.

2. How might the Corps train to ensure that Marines are able to take charge and fill in the responsibilities of the billet above them? How do you balance this new challenge with their current billet responsibilities?

Nathaniel Fick had a point. It is important to train and educate subordinates to execute the responsibilities of the billets above them. One

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<sup>22</sup> “Hidalgo City, Part I,” *Khaos Company*, 141–42.

<sup>23</sup> See Gen Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three-Block War,” *Marines Magazine*, January 1999.

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bullet, broken leg, or lost Marine can force subordinates to elevated positions of authority. And by that time, it is too late for training—they will only have the training they received prior to that to rely on. Sergeant [Brandon] Burroughs had to fill in as the platoon commander when First Lieutenant Lindley was not around, and he had only minutes to plan and execute a platoon-supported attack.<sup>24</sup>

3. What is the importance of leader's reconnaissance? Give examples of how Captain Hanks was successful, or when he was not, in achieving an effective leader's reconnaissance.<sup>25</sup>

Just because you “know” something, does not mean you know everything. Do not blindly trust reports; they might have missed something. Reconnoiter before you attack, because you must always factor it in, no matter how pressed for time you think you are or how trust-

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<sup>24</sup> “Hidalgo City, Part I,” *Khaos Company*, 142; and Nathaniel C. Fick, “Officer Development for Counterinsurgency,” in *Counterinsurgency Leadership in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Beyond*, ed. Nicholas J. Schlosser and James M. Caiella (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2011), 77–84.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, *Ground Reconnaissance Operations*, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 2-25 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2015).



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worthy the reports seem. And you have to force your subordinates to do the same. Information is more important than weapons systems, for information shapes how to employ forces.<sup>26</sup>

Captain Hanks was given little time to perform a proper leader's reconnaissance when setting up his defense in Prospect early on during MWX. He was successful performing a quick reconnaissance of the area and setting up an effective defense among the passes. However, he was unable to predict the massing of enemy forces behind the terrain feature in the vicinity of R205.

4. What is the importance of leader's reconnaissance? Give examples of how Captain Hanks was successful and not successful in achieving an effective leader's reconnaissance.

Do not become a victim to time. Speed naturally becomes the first instinct to counter time impositions; but tempo supersedes speed, and to generate tempo a commander must gain an assessment of the situation, generate clear intent, establish the conditions for success, and

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<sup>26</sup> "Hidalgo City, Part I," *Khaos Company*, 143; this lesson was reiterated from chapter 2, "The Defense of Prospect," *Khaos Company*, 77.

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then allow subordinates to act. Bypassing one of these steps will lead to disaster, as seen in the case of Sergeant Burroughs and 1st Platoon.<sup>27</sup>

Speed—speed is going fast. “We use speed to gain the initiative and advantage over the enemy.”<sup>28</sup>

Time—we employ speed and use time to create tempo. Tempo is acting at the right time while maneuvering.<sup>29</sup>

Captain Hanks’s canceled spoiling attack through old town and the urban core would have been an ideal time to generate the tempo needed to overcome the enemy within the city to exploit success. The importance of following through and finishing the attack, rather than stopping to reassess the situation, could mean the difference between success and failure.

## **Chapter 5. Hidalgo City, Part II**

1. What factors will become prevalent when fighting in a complex urban environment? Are there ways to mitigate the risks?

A fight in the urban environment is extremely chaotic and complex. Additionally, the terrain of the urban environment tends to canalize the

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<sup>27</sup> “Hidalgo City, Part I,” *Khaos Company*, 143.

<sup>28</sup> *Tactics*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1-3 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997), 4-5.

<sup>29</sup> *Tactics*, 4-8.

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fight into a series of small unit actions rather than a large synchronized maneuver. Any attempts to control this fight are futile or detrimental to tempo, so the best method for success is accepting that the fight in the urban terrain is largely a series of small unit actions, and thus higher command elements should focus on establishing conditions that allow the chaos to go in the favor of their subordinates. This is most easily accomplished by developing a clear understanding of, and effectively communicating, two level's intent up, combined with clear tactical control measures that all units can operate from.<sup>30</sup>

Small unit leadership combined with small unit actions are critical when fighting house-to-house in a complex urban environment.<sup>31</sup>

2. How do we define the art and science of war? When might there be a situation when one is relied on more than the other? How do we combine the two?

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<sup>30</sup> "Hidalgo City, Part II," *Khaos Company*, 189.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Maj Daniel B. Sparks, ed. *Small Unit Actions* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2007); and *U.S. Marine Corps Small Unit Decision Making: January 2011 Workshop Final Report* (Quantico, VA: Training and Education Command, 2011).

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There must be a balance between the art and science of war. Art thrives in chaos, but it can rapidly become uncontrollable chaos when not restricted. Science can be dogmatic, but it can be a useful constant in chaos. The situation will never be fully understood and will often be at first complex or chaotic. A good practice is using the Cynefin framework in these situations (complex or chaotic), where to develop the situation, action must be injected into the system first with the ability to measure the responses, and only afterward follow-on actions are calculated.<sup>32</sup>

Art—the employment of creative or intuitive skills. It includes the creative, situational application of scientific knowledge through judgment and experience.<sup>33</sup>

Science—the methodical application of the empirical laws of nature, including the laws of ballistics, mechanics, and like disciplines.<sup>34</sup>

Captain Hanks applied the art of war during his first two attacks on Kilo's block at Prospect. When he realized this would not be effective when continuing the fight, he decided to switch tactics. The canceled spoiling attack in Hidalgo City uses the art of war, utilizing

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<sup>32</sup> "Hidalgo City, Part II," *Khaos Company*, 190.

<sup>33</sup> *Warfighting*, MCDP 1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997), 1-17.

<sup>34</sup> *Warfighting*, 1-16.

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surprise and tempo by means of a thunder run against the enemy. Captain Hanks utilizes the science of war when involving resupplies, fire support, and combined arms.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

War must be chaos. The unforeseen events that unfolded into each other, the number of Marines found on the battlefield with no understanding of situation because it developed faster than the communication systems and feedback loops could handle, and the amount of dynamic retasking (either by others or by leaders tasking themselves) are all indicators of just how confusing and unpredictable operations like this can be. This is true even without the imaginable emotional, mental, and spiritual stress of actual combat. The answer then must be training that focuses on resiliency and adaptability. These should include situational training exercises that constantly change, the introduction of problems that can never be fully understood or solved, and challenges that pursue far beyond physical or mental stressors.<sup>35</sup>

1. As a company grade officer, we can cultivate a winning mindset into our Marines by instilling the importance of responsibil-

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<sup>35</sup> “Hidalgo City, Part II,” *Khaos Company*, 191.

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- ity of each billet, as well as taking the time to learn the billet above you.
2. Communication in a chaotic environment is critical to success. Built in redundancy plans and rehearsals will alleviate confusion on the battlefield.
  3. In a dynamic battlespace, the enemy always has a say. Maintaining tempo and constantly adapting to change allows for the exploitation of vulnerabilities. Understanding that the enemy is a living, breathing entity can give you the advantage necessary to be successful.
  4. By understanding that Marines are our most valuable resource, building a culture of success toward a common goal is critical. As leaders, we must know and understand how to employ our Marines to be able to decide, communicate, and act in the fog of war.

Relationships matter. Throughout the entire evolution of MWX, Captain Hanks consistently coordinated with adjacent company commanders to accomplish their missions. Captain Hanks witnessed the battalion commanders and his lieutenants doing the same. Having established relationships with the people around them was an intangible yet significant advantage that greatly increased their ability to apply speed and generate tempo against the enemy.

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Trust is one of the most essential requirements for the execution of maneuver warfare, and it is difficult to wholeheartedly trust someone you do not know. There is great value and enormous dividends to be gained by building and maintaining relationships with your peers.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “Hidalgo City, Part II,” *Khaos Company*, 191.

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## APPENDIX C

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# The Origins of Khaos Company

The excerpt below was written by two Khaos Company sergeants, Sergeant Andrew Decker and Sergeant Sean Goode, when they were asked why noncommissioned officers (NCOs) decided on the Khaos call sign and logo. This choice was completely their own decision, was indicative of the caliber of noncommissioned officers among the ranks of the Marine Corps, and was representative of a culture every organization should strive for.

### **KHAOS**

How can a misspelled word represent a Marine infantry company so well? The term *chaos* was first translated from ancient Greek as *khaos* (or abyss) and refers to the void state before the creation of the universe in the form of the goddess Khaos. She was a chaotic collection of elements: the fog, the mist, and the air. The spelling has since changed and has gained multiple meanings, such as “complete disorder and confusion” and “the inherent unpredictability in the behavior of a complex natural



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Khaos Company



3rd Battalion 8th Marines

system.”<sup>1</sup> We have taken some poetic license to maintain the original translated spelling and definition as un-

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<sup>1</sup> In ancient Greece, *chaos* was originally thought of as the abyss or emptiness that existed before things came into being, and then the word was used to refer to a specific abyss: the abyss of Tartarus, the underworld. When the word chaos first came into English in the 1400s, this was the form used. Later, in the 1600s, and with the renewed interest in classic literature, chaos gained its more familiar sense. The great Roman thinker Ovid considered chaos as not a formless void from which all things were made, but as a formless, jumbled, disorganized mass. English speakers borrowed this meaning and then broadened it into the word we recognize today: one that denotes utter confusion or disorganization. See “Chaos: Meaning and History,” Merriam-Webster, accessed 21 December 2020.

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predictable behavior. In Michael Moorcock's books, he created a symbol to represent chaos in the form of eight arrows traveling away from a center point. He intended it to be an "ancient symbol" represented by the eight arrows showing every conceivable possibility.<sup>2</sup> We have represented this on the forehead of our skull in the form of operational terms and graphics for the weapons we bring to bear on our enemy.

Why does this image represent Khaos Company? The philosophy of this company is to be led by the small unit leaders, maximizing mission-based tactics and minimizing centralized control. We embody this in everything we do. During company physical training, some may see a large, disorganized mass of Marines racing to the same objective. If that is all you see, you have witnessed firsthand the effect of decentralization on our enemies. What we see is several small units flooding an area, all working to accomplish the commander's intent. We work with each other to emulate how the leaders around us operate so we may assist each other in the fight. We have eliminated gaps by giving freedom of movement to squad- and team-level leaders. The enemy thinks we are everywhere and nowhere because we can move quickly and quietly, and we can hide much easier. During a Khaos session—to most it is known as a sync meeting—the squad leaders and higher are present. Witnesses may immediately assume that there were too

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<sup>2</sup> See Michael Moorcock, *Elric Saga* (Garden City, NY: Nelson Doubleday, 1984), for more on the symbolism and meaning behind chaos.

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many leaders and not enough subordinates. They have failed to see the point. By giving the squad leader a vote, you have empowered them to affect the battlefield deep into the planning phase, giving insight to the whole company from someone who has been directly involved in operations. These actions also create small unit *leaders* instead of small unit *followers*. The next time you see this misspelled word over a skull with eight seemingly disorganized destinations, think of maximizing initiative through mission-based tactics. How much can you decentralize a force if you give them the tools to train and operate freely under your will?

Khaos Company pushes boundaries and rejects complacency. It coexists within a realm of intent untethered by procedures and empowered by concepts. Khaos is a construct and the identity of a group of Marines drawn together for the purpose of mission accomplishment. We are Khaos Company.

# Glossary of Selected Terms and Abbreviations

- AAV: assault amphibian vehicle capable of operating on land or sea armed with a .50-caliber machine gun and an Mk 19 automatic grenade launcher and able to carry up to 18 personnel
- ABV: M1150 assault breacher vehicles
- ADFOR: adversary force designated as the aggressors in this exercise
- AO: area of operations that are designated for a unit to operate in
- Bastard: call sign for 3d Battalion, 2d Marine Regiment
- BFT: blue force tracker is a system used to track all friendly positions. It can also be used to communicate with other friendly units
- BM-30: the BM-30 Smerch is Russian-based artillery asset
- C2: command and control
- CAAT: combined antiarmor team is a unit, normally motorized, that encompasses heavy machine guns and antitank capabilities
- CASEVAC: casualty evacuation or the process of treating

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	wounded military personnel and evacuating them to a safer place for further treatment
CCP:	casualty collection point
CO:	commanding officer. This term is typically used to describe the senior officer in charge of a unit of battalion size or larger
COC:	combat operations center is a term that is sometimes used interchangeably with command post
COP:	combat operations post. In contrast to the COC, a COP is a designated area where a unit temporarily bases. In the context of this work, COP 1 and COP 2 refer to specific locations within MCAGCC
Coyote:	call sign for Marines serving in the TTECG
CP:	command post or check point, depending on the context
ETA:	estimate time of arrival
EW:	electronic warfare refers to operations involving the electromagnetic spectrum
EWS:	Expeditionary Warfare School is part of Marine Corps University and is designated as professional military education for senior company grade officers
EWST:	electronic warfare support team refers to a unit capable of conducting operations in the electromagnetic spectrum
EXCON:	exercise control refers to the unit designated to control and manage the flow and execution of an exercise
EXFOR:	exercise force refers to the friendly force that conducts training against the ADFOR
FiST:	fire support team is a designated unit specific-

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FO:	ly responsible for coordinating all fire support forward observer refers to the Marine responsible for observing and requesting fire support
FOB:	forward operating base
FRAGO:	fragmentary order refers to a short modification of previously issued military orders that provides amplified or updated guidance and instructions
GRG:	gridded reference graphic
Grizzly:	call sign for 3d Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment
GSP:	ground sensor platoon refers to a unit with a specific capability of emplacing sensors that can detect movement of ground forces
HMMWV:	High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle, or Humvee, is the standard vehicle used for military operations
H&S:	headquarters and service company refers to a unit that encompasses most of the supporting elements required to maintain operations, including security, billeting, messing, facilities, and utilities
IED:	improvised explosive device
ISR:	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
IO:	information operations refers to activities intended to influence people
JLTV:	Joint light tactical vehicle was intended to replace the Humvee with more survivable vehicles and greater payload
JTAC:	Joint terminal air controller refers to a Marine specially trained to coordinate with aircraft for close air support
Kevlar:	armored helmet

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Khaos:	call sign for Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment
K/3/8:	The written shorthand used to identify an infantry company. “K” is the company designation, “3” is the battalion designation, and “8” is the regiment designation
LAR:	light armored reconnaissance refers to a motorized Marine unit that is capable of conducting reconnaissance and possesses lightly armored eight-wheeled vehicles
MACO:	marshaling area control officer
MAGTF:	Marine Air-Ground Task Force
MarDiv:	Marine Division (e.g., 2d MarDiv)
MCAGCC:	Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center
MCDP:	Marine Corps Doctrinal Publications serve as foundational documents that describe how the Marine Corps operates
MCTOG:	Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group
MCWL:	Marine Corps Warfighting Lab at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia
MICLIC:	mine clearing line charge
MRE:	meals ready to eat refers to food packaged in a bag with a long shelf life that are convenient for operating in austere environments
MSL:	minimum safe line
MSR:	main supply route
MWX:	Marine Warfighting Exercise
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO:	noncommissioned officers refer to sergeants and corporals normally in a leadership position with several years of experience
NVG:	night vision goggles
OP:	observation position

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OpsO:	operations officer refers to the officer in charge of planning and synchronizing operations of a designated unit
PAUSEX:	pause exercise
PDF:	principal direction of fire
Plate carrier:	armored chest rig
RCT:	regimental combat team refers to a task-organized unit built around a Marine regiment
RIP:	relief in place refers to when a unit is replaced by another
RO:	radio operator refers to a Marine responsible for maintaining radio communications with other units
SITREP:	situation report
Smerch:	a Russian-based multiple rocket artillery asset
SNCO:	staff noncommissioned officer refers to all enlisted ranks above that of sergeant who are normally in leadership positions with many years of experience
SOF:	Special Operations Forces
SOP:	standard operating procedure
TAA:	tactical assembly area refers to a designated location where a unit gathers in preparation for operations
TAC:	shorthand for “tactical” when referred in context with a designated radio channel to communicate tactical information with other units
Tarawa:	call sign for 2d Marine Regiment
TBS:	The Basic School at Marine Corps Base Quantico is where all newly commissioned and appointed (for warrant officers) Marine Corps officers are taught the basics of being leaders
Thermals:	thermal optics refers to equipment that is capa-



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	ble of observing heat anomalies in the environment
TOT:	time on target
TOW:	tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided
TSE:	tactical site exploitation refers to actions that normally occur after an event, where the unit inspects an area for intelligence
TTECG:	Tactical Training Exercise Control Group
TTP:	tactics, techniques, and procedures
Typhoon:	call sign for 1st Battalion, 2d Marine Regiment
UAS:	unmanned aerial system refers to remote controlled aircraft that come in a variety of sizes and capabilities
UTV:	ultralight tactical vehicle refers to a small off-road vehicle capable of holding four Marines
XO:	executive officer refers to the second in command of a designated unit

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