Dismounted Complex Obstacle Breach Course

by CPT Kenneth A. Harshbarger

AirLand Battle doctrine has changed the priority of battle tasks and focused training on mobility operations. These operations require well-trained, coordinated and integrated Combined Arms teams. The teams are physically and mentally trained to use the element of surprise and initiative in breaching the depth of defensive obstacle systems. Time, speed, and agility are essential to synchronize combat firepower and mobility of forces through barriers.

Although bypassing an obstacle is still the desired course of action, breaching an obstacle will sometimes yield preferred results by avoiding threat kill zones and friendly force channelization.



Concealed by smoke, the breaching force marks a lane through the minefield (photo by CPT Kenneth A. Harshbarger).

The Dismounted Complex Obstacle Breach Course was constructed by the 2nd Engineer Battalion to train dismounted Combined Arms forces on obstacle-breaching and lane-marking operations. The course represents anticipated defensive obstacle systems that troops could encounter during dismounted breaching operations. The course consists of ten obstacles emplaced in depth, four enemy bunkers, six demolitions pits, and one safety bunker.

After an obstacle is detected, the advancing Combined Arms force is organized into four separate elements:

- The ***breaching force*** which breaches and marks a foot path through the course. This force is composed of Engineers.
- The ***assault force*** which neutralizes and destroys enemy forces in the breach area and on the objective. The assault force can include Engineers along with the infantry.
- The ***support force,*** composed of infantry, which provides over-watching fire and command and control of the operation.
- The ***Engineer deliberate breaching force*** which widens and remarks the initial breach to allow vehicle traffic.

The course is divided into six obstacle system zones. Each zone must be breached and secured before a force continues to the next zone. The course provides realistic battlefield conditions that include both smoke and opposing forces. Soldiers are required to wear an armor vest and MILES equipment.

As the breaching and assault forces breach and secure a zone, the support force maneuvers through the course providing direct and indirect fires for the breaching operation. The Engineer deliberate breaching force then follows, widening the lanes.

The breaching and assault forces enter the *Initial Obstacle System Zone* and breach a footpath through an enemy minefield consisting of antitank and antipersonnel mines 50 meters in depth. The breaching force must breach and mark a lane through the minefield while concealed from enemy observation and fire by darkness or a smoke screen. As the breaching force marks a lane through the obstacle, the assault force maneuvers through the zone.

The *Forward Obstacle System Zone* consists of a triple standard concertina fence and a seven-foot electric cattle fence. Still concealed by night or under a smoke screen, forces breach and mark both obstacles.

Next, the *Main Obstacle System Zone* presents a series of dragon's teeth and rock obstacles distributed 75 meters in depth. The breaching force breaches and marks a dismounted lane through the obstacles, while the support force maneuvers to provide cover. Meanwhile, at the start of the course, the deliberate breaching force begins to widen the lane for vehicles to pass through the enemy minefield.

The *Rear Obstacle System Zone* consists of a seven-foot electric cattle fence, a triple standard concertina fence, an antitank ditch, and two enemy emplacements. The support force provides direct and indirect fire to clear the enemy bunkers. Afterwards, the breaching force breaches and marks a dismounted lane through the wire entanglements and negotiates the antitank ditch which is mined and booby-trapped to prevent the assault force from using the ditch as a fighting position. At this point, the deliberate

breaching force widens the forward zone for vehicle traffic.

The *Defensive Obstacle System Zone* consists of an enemy minefield 50 meters in depth and a 10-foot antitank wall with two enemy emplacements. The support force and assault force neutralize the enemy bunkers before the breaching force breaches the minefield and negotiates the antitank wall. A lane through the minefield is breached and the antitank wall negotiated to allow the assault force to continue forward.

The *Final Obstacle System Zone* consists of a triple standard concertina fence. A dismounted lane through the wire entanglements is breached and marked. Then, the breaching force, the assault force, and the support force maneuver through the lane and set up a perimeter securing the far side of the obstacle system.

At this time, the deliberate breaching force breaches one of the dragon's teeth and one rock obstacle using reinforced-concrete breaching charges. They then mark a vehicle lane through the Main Obstacle System Zone. The training exercise ends with the destruction of the dragon's teeth and rock obstacle.

Well-coordinated and integrated Combined Arms mobility operations are necessary for successful AirLand Battle operations. Success requires detailed planning and rehearsals in assembly areas before such an operation begins. The 2nd Infantry Division identified the need for a dismounted Combined Arms force obstacle-breathing and lane-marking course. It was constructed by Company C, 2nd Engineer Battalion in Korea. The Army now has a Dismounted Complex Obstacle Breach Course for soldiers and leaders to use for training.

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Note: Complex obstacle breaching doctrine for heavy divisions is outlined in FM 71-2J (Draft), ***The Tank and Mechanized Infantry Battalion Task Force,*** and FM 5-101, ***Mobility.*** *Light unit breaching doctrine is still under development. This article is one way a unit trains for dismounted obstacle breaching as an expedient method to meet training needs.*

The 10-foot antitank wall is no problem to the breaching force in the Defensive Obstacle System Zone (photo by CPT Kenneth A. Harshbarger).





Soldiers breach and mark triple standard concertina and an electric cattle fence in the Forward Obstacle System Zone (photo by CPT Kenneth A. Harshbarger).