



A High Mobility Artillery Rocket System of the 1-14th Field Artillery Field Artillery Battalion moves from the firing point during a live fire exercise in the Middle East (Photo by CPT Patrick Montandon).

# The Surprising Attack in the Central Corridor

By Dr. Richard A. McConnell

*No plan ever survives the first shot of combat. This old army adage refers to battlefield surprises, or what army doctrine calls unanticipated threats and opportunities that emerge during mission execution (McConnell & Fletcher, 2023).*

*Leaders ignore or misinterpret the emergence of exceptional information at their own peril. History is replete with examples of leaders who were experts at visualization who used that skill to anticipate competitor actions and poised their forces to achieve victory (McConnell et. al. 2021).*



# Question: Is it worth taking a chance on expects your strongest play? This story inflict battlefield surprises.

I had only been an S3 of the Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) battalion for six months when we arrived at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, CA. Our main responsibility was to support the brigade as the counterfire headquarters, meaning we were supposed to make sure that enemy artillery could not attack the brigade's forces with impunity. Our job was to use our counterfire radars, find the enemy artillery that was shooting and shoot back as fast as we could to stop them.

I experienced most of the same challenges every S3 has at NTC. There are too many things to do with not enough time to do them resulting in a generalized lack of sleep. I had promised myself that I would get at least four hours of sleep every 24 hours and had failed every single day. By the time training day eight came around, I was unsurprisingly not thinking well as a result. It was my operations sergeant who brought this to my attention after I had fallen asleep standing up and midsentence.

"D!#+t, Sir. Why don't you get some sleep?"

To which I answered,

"You know good and well why. Every time I try to sleep somebody comes along and wakes me up 15 minutes later."

The next phase of the operation—a live fire in the central corridor—was a concerning one. We had an Infantry battalion attacking an objective that was under the range of a regiment of D-30 howitzers from east to west. These were towed howitzers, so we were afforded an opportunity since they take longer to de-occupy a position after they shoot. By this time in the battle, our drill for acquiring and firing at enemy artillery was less than two minutes from acquisition to firing. The real problem was finding a good place to put the radar so it could get us those acquisitions we could shoot.

I had a brand-new warrant officer 1, a former staff sergeant who had spent ten years as a radar crewman. He was on his first assignment as a

warrant officer. Mr. Rivera came to me with an interesting proposition. He put his finger on the map in the central corridor and pointed to a piece of high ground at the eastern edge called "Jack's Kitchen." This was a location many people put their radars because it was optimal. The enemy knew this.

Mr. Rivera said to me, "Sir, we cannot put the radar here because it will be dead in five minutes."

"Okay," I said, "you have told me where I can't put it. Now tell me where I can."

Mr. Rivera pointed to a location on a ridge that had a narrow draw opening to the northwest—it was called "The Window." Rivera said, "This is where our radar has to go."

"Interesting," I said. "Do you see that because it's a narrow draw, it is going to narrow the radar beam?"

"Sir, the terrain does narrow the beam, but we will still be able to see the enemy. They will never think to look for the radar in a location that degrades it."

"How do we convince the battalion commander that this is a good idea?"

"You leave that to me, Sir."

"Well, you have my support," I said.

He left our current command post with the radar deployment order (RDO) in hand and headed for the battalion commander who was in the brigade command post. I could hardly believe my eyes when he returned not only with a signed RDO approving this location but also the agreement of the brigade commander to assign a platoon of Bradleys to secure the radar.

I asked him, "How ever did you get the boss to agree to this plan?"

He replied, "I simply asked him a question."

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I said, "Sir, would you like the radar to be operational for the entire battle or for five minutes? He chose the entire battle."

Early the next morning, the enemy started firing at our positions with their artillery in earnest. This kept us very busy for two and a half hours. It started before daylight, and at about an hour past dawn, there were suddenly no more radar acquisitions of enemy artillery fire. The observer controllers (OCs) snapped closed their green books and began to walk out of the command post. I thought to myself, "Oh no, what have we done now? Did we shoot a fratricide mission?" I approached the receding OCs and asked what was going on.

"You might as well take a nap, S3—there's nothing left for you to shoot at," they said.

We had destroyed every enemy D-30 in that regiment. The Infantry started its attack an hour later and seized the objective completely unopposed by enemy artillery—a significant event. Their command sergeant major found me after the exercise and shook my hand, "Your unit's counterfire saved our skins, Sir. I just wanted to thank you in person."

I later found out that we had also gotten lucky. The enemy Field Artillery commander had changed out the day prior to the battle, and the new commander could not find our radar, never imagining where we actually put it. The new enemy commander also did not realize that when you keep getting hit with artillery less than two minutes after you fire—and it is accurate—that you should probably stop firing and move. By the time he learned that lesson, it was too late, and all his tubes were destroyed.

## The Moral of the Story:

Mr. Rivera had recognized the exceptional information of a threat to our radar by placing it in an obvious location, but he did not stop there. Mr. Rivera created exceptional information by placing the radar where the enemy would never find it,

thereby creating an opportunity for us and a threat to our opponents.

He had turned a threat into an opportunity. None of this would have been possible if it had not been for a former non-commissioned officer turned warrant officer having the courage of his convictions to approach a leader and argue for a suboptimal solution that would work while deceiving the enemy catching them off guard. Mr. Rivera argued for risking the suboptimal when the optimal was obvious, and it paid off. It is often these types of people that not only can recognize exceptional information but can inflict exceptional information on opponents. That was what happened here.

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## References:

McConnell, R. & Fletcher, A. Creativity the backbone of initiative. NCO Journal, 17 April 2023.

McConnell, R., Mong, J., Patashek, D., Seeing through fog: Developing fog of war resistant visualization. January/February 2021.

**Note: For a more detailed discussion of how exceptional information can be discovered and employed during planning, read Wargaming: the laboratory of planning that appeared in the April 2024 Military Review online Exclusive. Wargaming, the Laboratory of Military Planning: A Wargaming Collaboration between U.S. and Brazilian Army Command and General Staff Colleges.**