

AMBUSHES

3-240. The ambush is a surprise attack from a concealed position upon a moving or temporarily halted target. It is one of the oldest and **most effective** types of guerrilla tactics. An ambush is executed to reduce the enemy's overall combat effectiveness by destroying or **harassing** his soldiers and their will to win. An ambush may include an assault to close with and decisively engage the target, or the attack may be by direct or indirect fire to harass the enemy.

NOTE: The following article was originally serialized in *Red Thrust Star*, dated July and October 1995 and October 1996.

Afghanistan is not Europe, yet the Soviet Army that occupied Afghanistan in late December 1979 was trained to fight NATO on the northern European plain. Consequently, the Soviet Army had to reequip, reform and retrain on-site to fight the insurgent *mujahideen* [holy warrior] guerrillas. The Soviets were forced to **revise** their tactics and tactical methodologies in order to meet the demands of this very different war. One of the tactical areas which the Soviets thoroughly revised was the conduct of ambushes. The Soviets planned to use ambushes in the European theater, but they were primarily ambushes against attacking or withdrawing NATO armored columns. The Soviets constructed most of their ambushes around tanks and tank units. They planned to employ concealed individual tanks, tank platoons and tank companies along high-speed avenues of approach or withdrawal to engage the enemy from the flank and then to depart. Such ambushes were part of security zone defensive planning as well as planning for the deep battle and pursuit. The Soviets also trained their squad and platoon-sized reconnaissance elements to conduct dismounted ambushes to capture prisoners and documents. They employed a command element, a snatch group and a fire support group in these small-scale ambushes.

In Afghanistan, the *mujahideen* seldom used armored vehicles and **seldom** advanced along high-speed avenues of approach. Instead, they infiltrated light-infantry forces through some of the most **inhospitable** terrain on the planet to mass for an attack or

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ambush. The Soviets soon discovered that they had difficulty maintaining control of the limited road network, which constituted the Soviet lines of communication. The guerrillas constantly cut the roads and ambushed convoys carrying material from the Soviet Union to the base camps and cities in Afghanistan. The Soviet ability to maintain its presence in the country depended on its ability to keep the roads open and much of the Soviet combat was a fight for control of the road network. During the war, the guerrillas destroyed over 11,000 Soviet trucks (and reportedly even more Afghan trucks) through ambush. The Soviets learned from *mujahideen* ambushes and used the ambush to interdict the guerrilla supplies coming from Pakistan and Iran. The Soviets conducted ambushes mainly with reconnaissance and other special troops (airborne, air assault, spetsnaz and elements from the two separate motorized rifle brigades which were designed as counter-guerrilla forces). The composition and employment of ambush forces differed with the units involved and the part of Afghanistan in which they were employed.

DESTRUCTION

3-241. Destruction is the primary purpose of an ambush. The number of men killed, wounded, or captured and loss of equipment and supplies critically affect the enemy. Guerrillas benefit from the capture of equipment and supplies through battlefield recovery.

HARASSMENT

3-242. Frequent ambushes harass the enemy and force him to divert men from patrol operations to guard convoys, troop movements, and installations. When enemy patrols fail to accomplish their missions because they are ambushed, the enemy is deprived of the valuable contributions these patrols make to its combat effort. A series of successful guerrilla ambushes cause the enemy to be less aggressive and more defensive-minded. The enemy becomes apprehensive and overly cautious and reluctant to go on patrols, to move in convoys, or to move in small groups. The enemy wants to avoid night operations, is more subject to confusion and panic if ambushed, and is mentally defeated.

ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

3-243. Surprise allows the ambush force to seize control of any situation. The force achieves surprise by carefully planning, preparing, and executing the ambush. Guerrillas attack the targets when, where, and in a manner for which the enemy is least prepared.

COORDINATED FIRES

3-244. The ambush force commander positions and coordinates the use of all weapons, mines, and demolitions. He coordinates all fires, including artillery and mortars when available. Coordinated fire support ensures isolation of the kill zone. This isolation prevents enemy escape or reinforcement due to the large volume of accurate, concentrated fire.

CONTROL MEASURES

3-245. The ambush force commander maintains close control measures during the ambush operation. These control **measures include** provisions for—

- Early warning signals of target approach.
- Withholding fire until the target has moved into the killing zone.
- Opening, shifting, and halting fire at the proper time.
- Initiating proper actions if the ambush is prematurely detected.
- Timely and orderly withdrawal to a recognized RP.

CATEGORIES OF AMBUSHES

3-246. Ambushes have two **general** categories: point and area. A point ambush, whether independent or part of an area ambush, positions itself along the target's expected route of approach. It attacks a single kill zone. When there is not sufficient intelligence for a point ambush, the commander establishes an area ambush. An area ambush uses multiple point ambushes around a central kill zone.

3-247. These two variations **succeed** best in situations where routes of approach by relieving or reinforcing units are limited to those favorable for ambush by the guerrillas. Both variations were used extensively by the North Vietnamese guerrilla forces in Vietnam against U.S. forces in the Republic of Vietnam.

POINT AMBUSH

3-248. A point ambush, whether independent or part of an area ambush, is positioned **along** the target's expected route of approach. Formation is important because, to a great extent, it determines whether a point ambush can deliver the heavy volume of highly concentrated fire necessary to isolate, trap, and destroy the target.

3-249. The formation to be used is determined by carefully considering possible formations and the advantages and disadvantages of each in relation **to terrain, conditions of visibility, forces, weapons and equipment, ease or difficulty of control, target to be attacked, and overall combat situation.**

3-250. The following paragraphs discuss a few formations that have been developed for the deployment of point ambushes. Those discussed are named according to the general pattern formed on the ground by the deployment of the attack element.

Line Formation

3-251. The attack element is deployed generally parallel to the target's route of movement (road, trail, stream). This deployment positions the attack element parallel to the long **axis** of the killing zone and subjects the target to heavy flanking fire. The size of the target, which can be trapped in the killing zone, is limited by the area the attack element can effectively cover with a heavy volume of highly concentrated fire. The target is trapped in the killing zone by natural obstacles, mines (claymore, antivehicular, antipersonnel), demolitions, and direct and indirect fires (Figure 3-14, page 3-61). A

disadvantage of the line formation is the chance that lateral dispersion of the target may be too great for effective coverage. Line formation is appropriate in close terrain that restricts target maneuver and in open terrain where one flank is restricted by mines, demolitions, mantraps, or sharpened stakes. Similar obstacles can be placed between the attack element and the killing zone to provide protection from the target's counterambush measures. When a destruction ambush is deployed in this manner, access lanes are left so that the target can be assaulted (Figure 3-15, page 3-62). The line formation can be effectively used by a **rise from the ground ambush** in terrain seemingly unsuitable for ambush. An advantage of the line formation is its relative ease of control under all conditions of visibility.

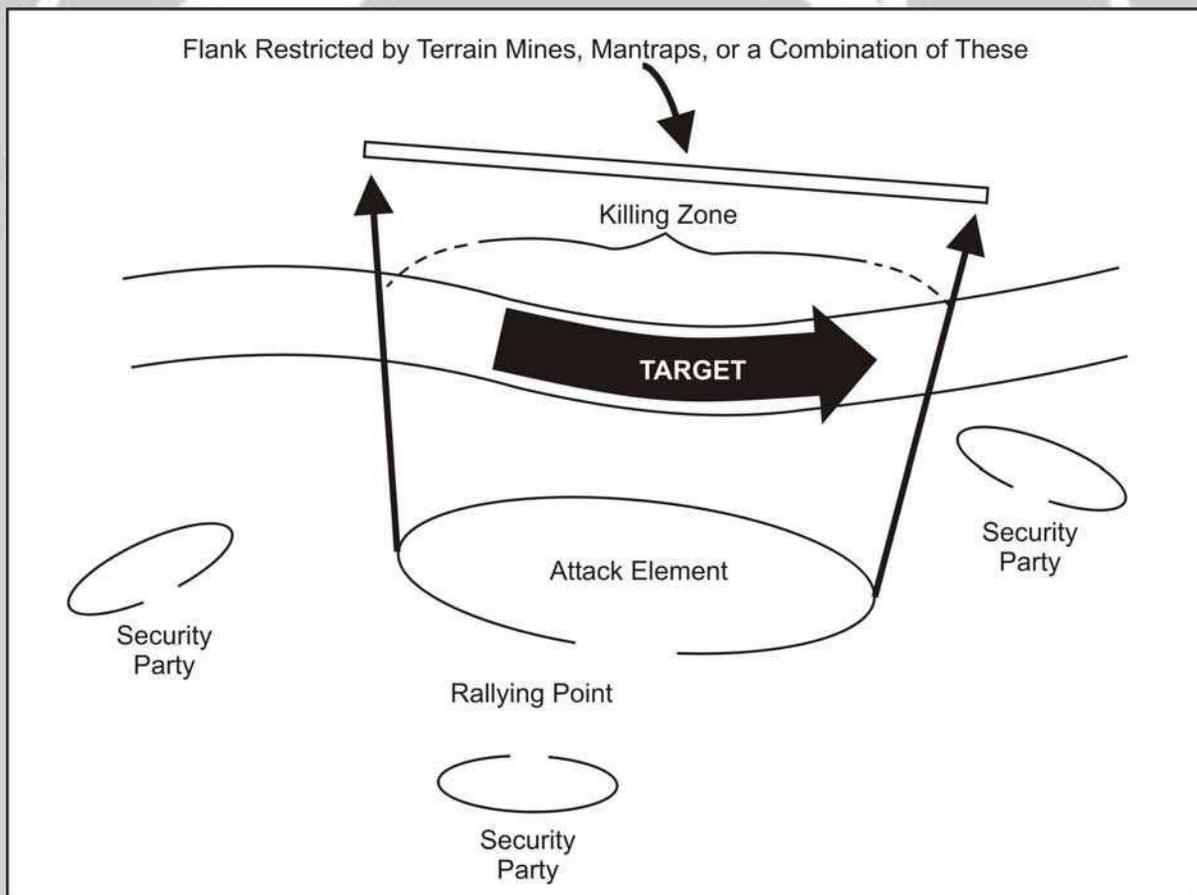


Figure 3-14. Line Formation for Harassing or Destruction Ambush

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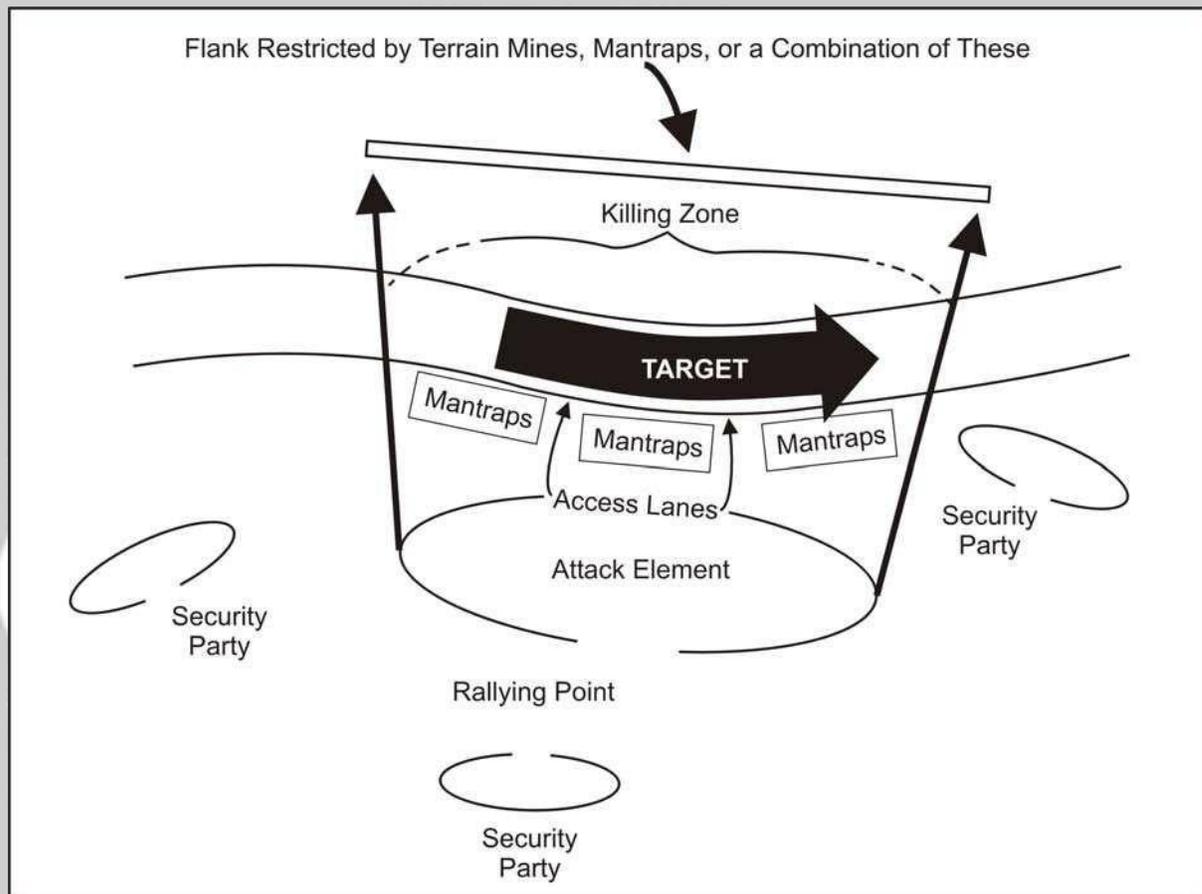


Figure 3-15. Line Formation for Destruction Ambush

L Formation

3-252. The L-shaped formation is a variation of the line formation. The long side of the attack element is **parallel** to the killing zone and delivers flanking fire. The short side is at the end of and at right angles to the killing zone and delivers enfilading fire that links with fire from the other leg. This formation is very flexible. It can be established on a **straight stretch of a trail or stream** (Figure 3-16, page 3-63), **or a sharp bend in a trail or stream** (Figure 3-17, page 3-63). When appropriate, fire from the short leg can be shifted to parallel the long leg if the target tries to assault or escape in the opposite direction. In addition, the short leg prevents escape in the direction of attack element and reinforcement from its direction (Figure 3-18, page 3-64).

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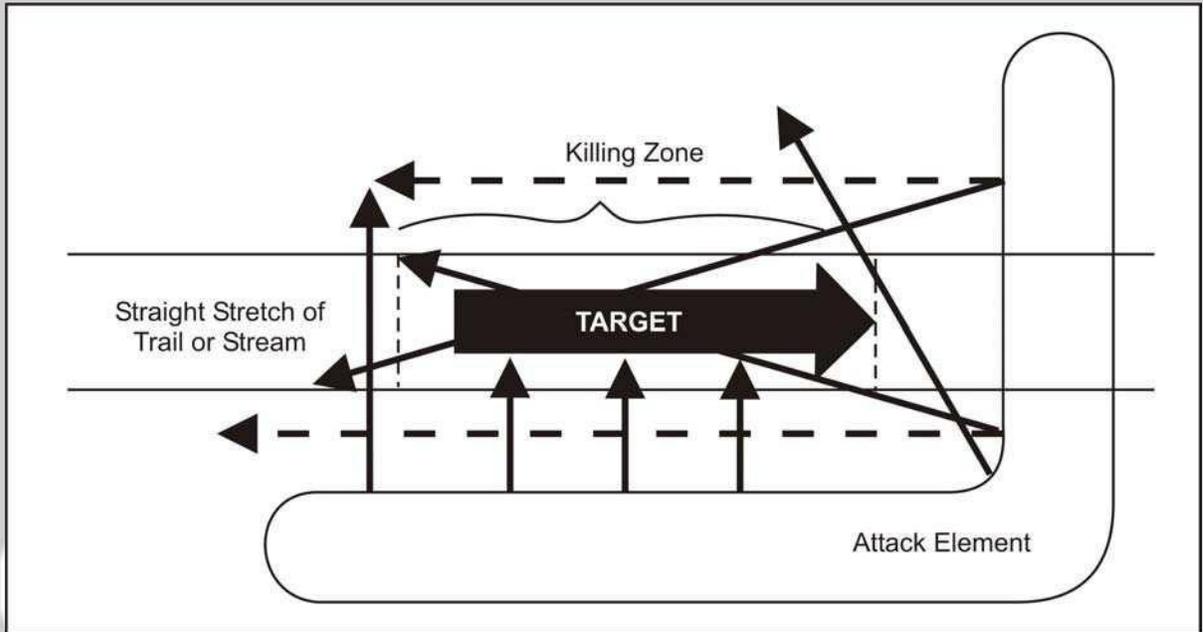


Figure 3-16. L Formation for Destruction Ambush

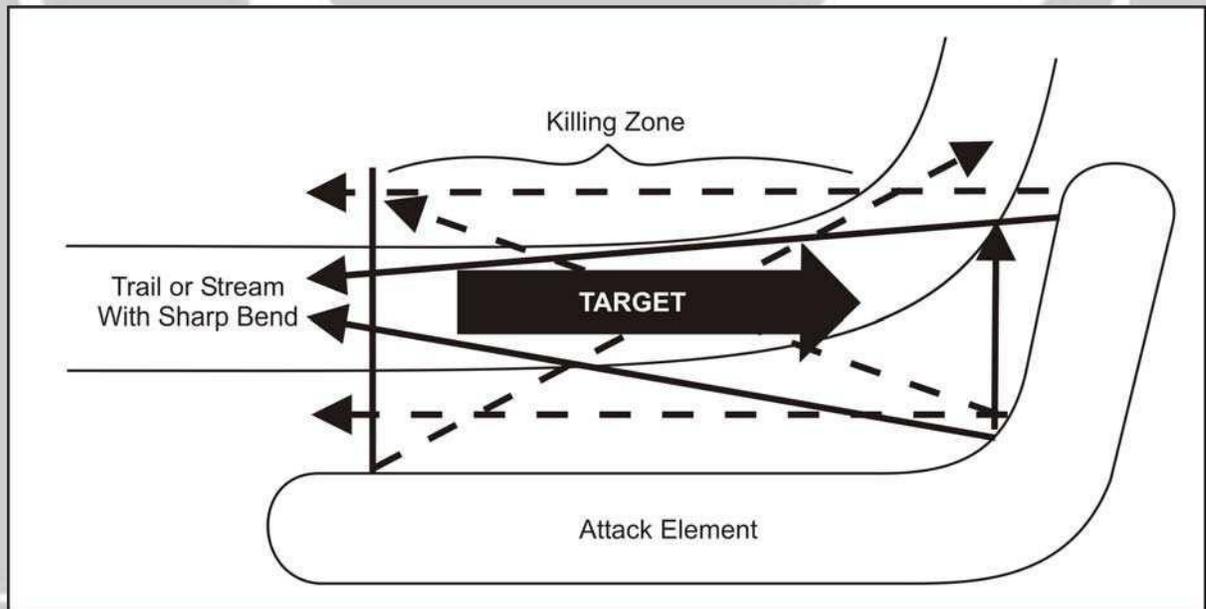


Figure 3-17. L Formation for Destruction Ambush on Bend of Trail or Stream

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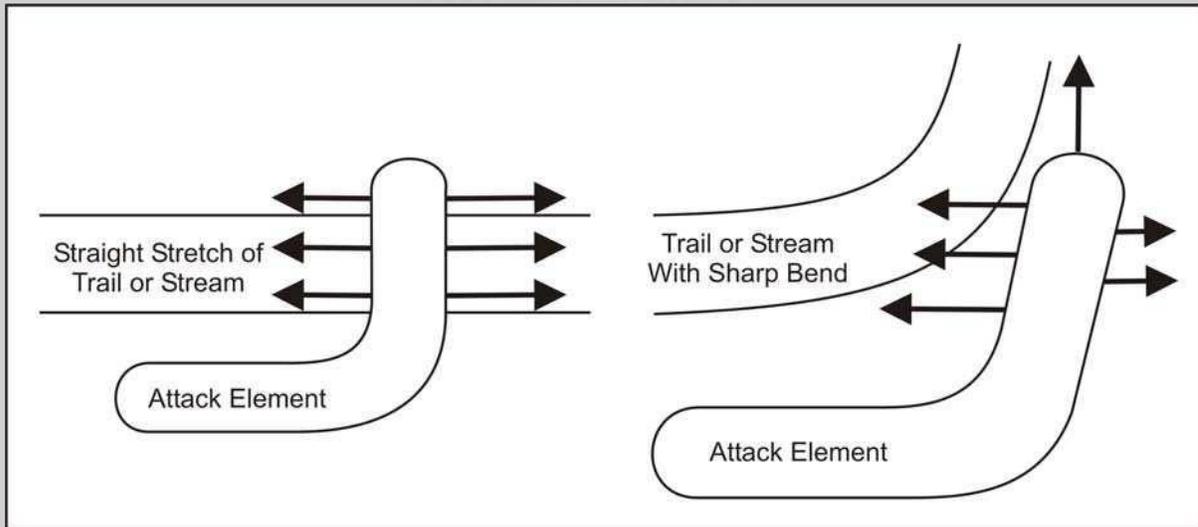


Figure 3-18. L Formation Where Short Leg of Attack Element Prevents Escape or Reinforcement

Z Formation

3-253. The Z-shaped formation is another variation of the line formation. The attack force is deployed as in the L formation, but with an additional side so that the formation resembles the letter Z. The additional side (Figure 3-19, page 3-65) may serve to—

- Engage a force attempting to relieve or reinforce the target.
- Seal the end of the killing zone.
- Restrict a flank.
- Prevent envelopment.

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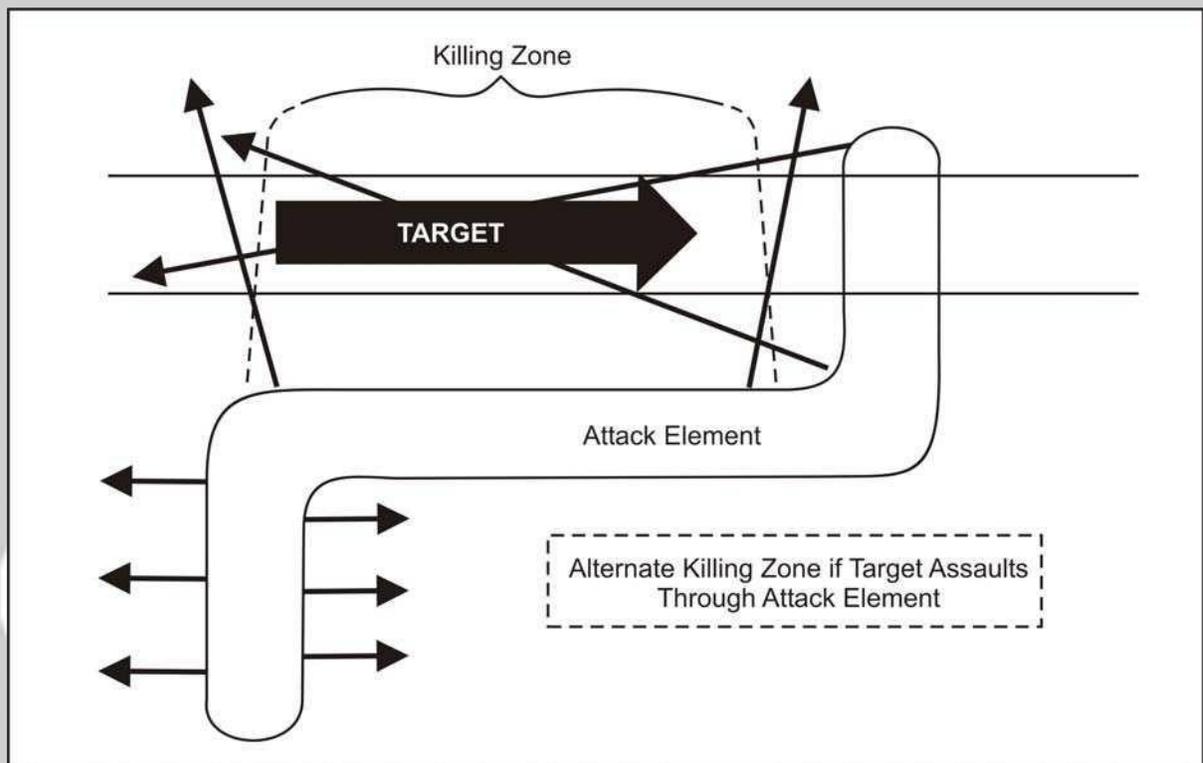


Figure 3-19. Z Formation for Destruction Ambush

T Formation

3-254. In the T-shaped formation, the attack element is deployed across and at right angles to the target's route of movement so that it and the target form the letter T. This formation can be used day or night to establish a purely harassing ambush and at night to establish an ambush to interdict movement through open, hard-to-seal areas (such as rice paddies).

3-255. A **small group** of persons can use the T formation to harass, slow, and disorganize a larger force. When the lead elements of the target are engaged, they will normally attempt to maneuver right or left to close with the ambush. Mines, mantraps, and other obstacles placed to the flanks of the killing zone slow the enemy's movements and permit the ambush patrol to deliver heavy fire and withdraw without becoming decisively engaged (Figure 3-20, page 3-66).

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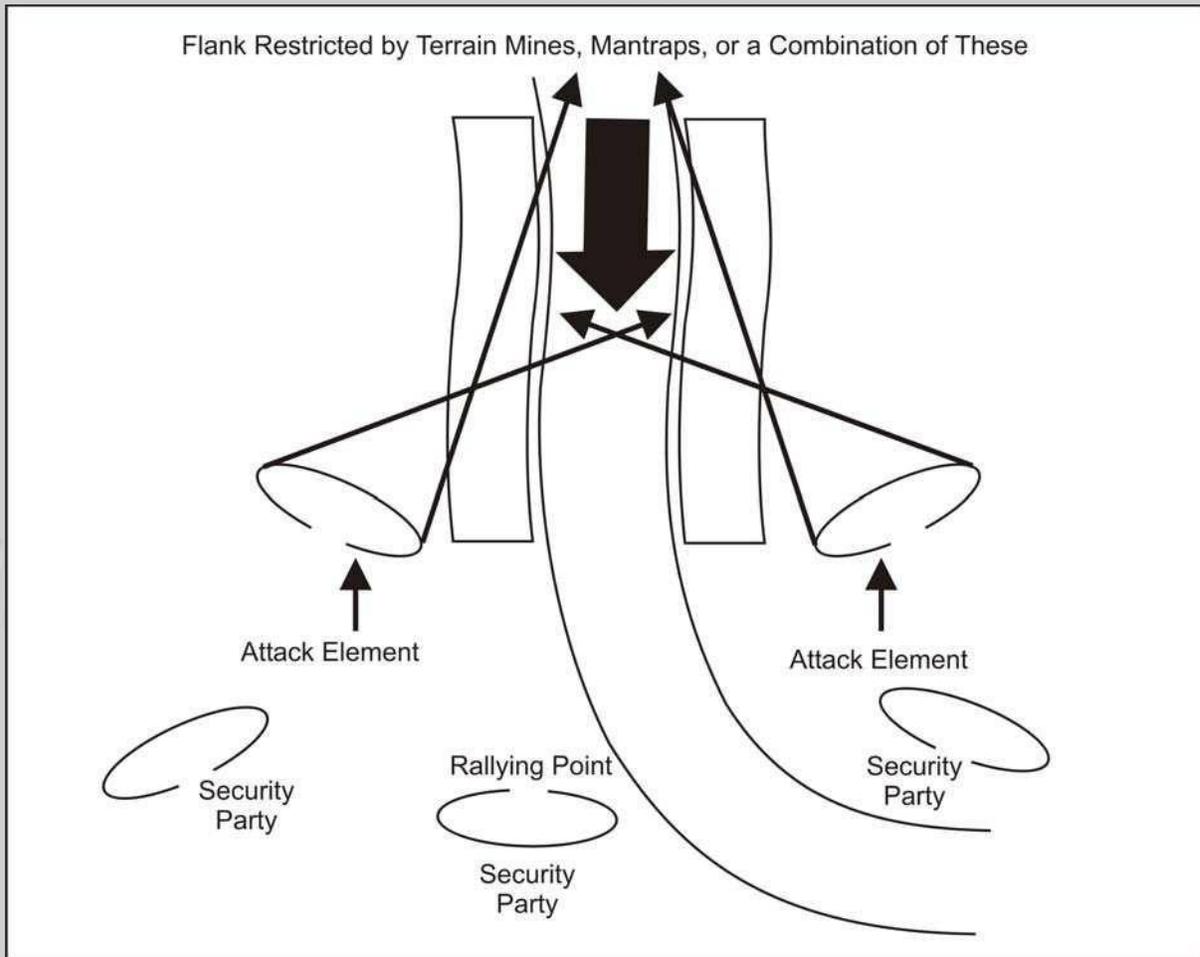


Figure 3-20. T Formation for Harassing Ambush

3-256. The attack element can also use the T formation to **interdict** small groups attempting **night** movement across open areas. For example, the attack element is deployed along a rice paddy dike with every second person facing in the opposite direction. The attack of a target approaching from either direction requires only that every second person shift to the opposite side of the dike. Each person fires only to his front and only when the target is at very close range. Attack is by fire only and each person keeps the target under fire as long as it remains on his front. If the target attempts to escape in either direction along the dike, each man takes it under fire as it comes to his vicinity. The T formation is very effective at halting **infiltration**. But it has one chief disadvantage: while spread out, the ambush may engage a superior force. Use of this formation must, therefore, fit the local enemy situation

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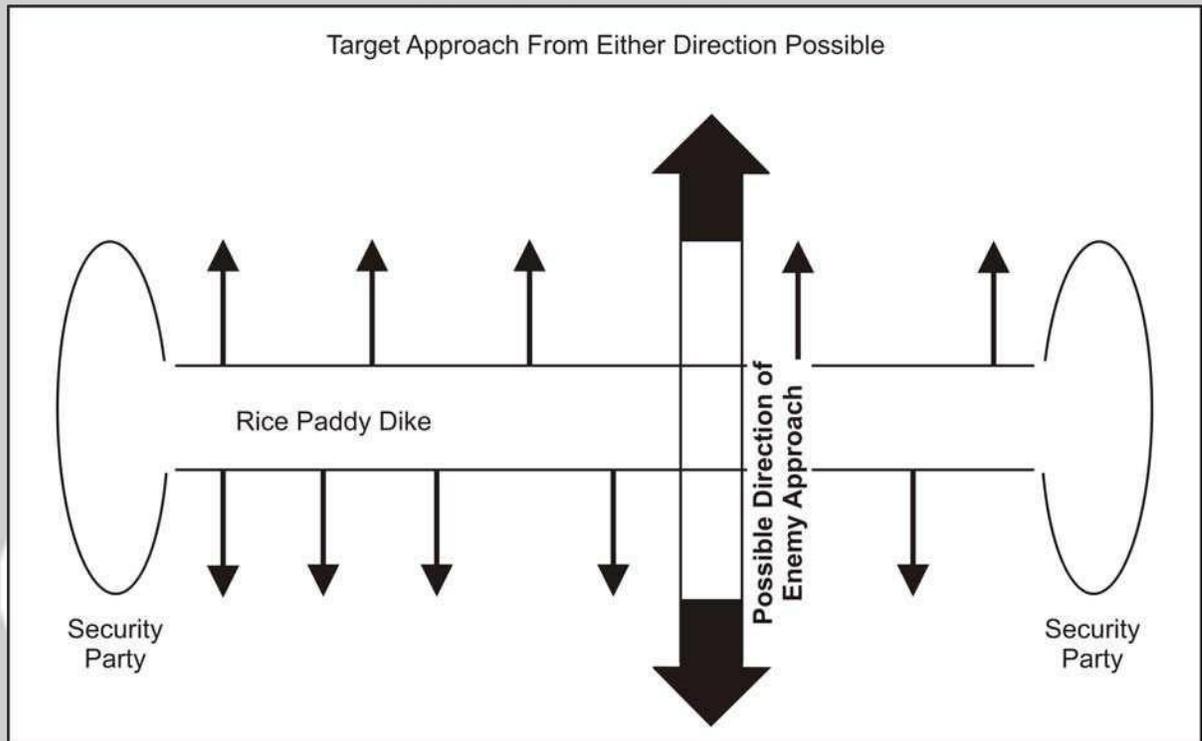


Figure 3-21. T Formation for Harassing Ambush in Rice Paddy

V Formation

3-257. The V-shaped attack element is deployed along both sides of the target's route of movement so that it forms the letter V; care is taken to ensure that neither group (nor leg) fires into the other. This formation subjects the target to both enfilading and interlocking fire. The V formation is best suited for fairly **open terrain** but can also be used in the jungle. When established in the jungle, the legs of the V close in as the head elements of the target approach the apex of the V; the attack element then opens fire from **close range**. Here, even more than in open terrain, all movement and fire must be carefully coordinated and controlled to ensure that the fire of one leg does not endanger the other. The wider separation of elements makes this formation difficult to control, and there are fewer sites that favor its use. Its main advantage is that it is difficult for the target to detect the ambush until it has moved well into the killing zone (Figures 3-22, page 3-68, and 3-23, page 3-69).

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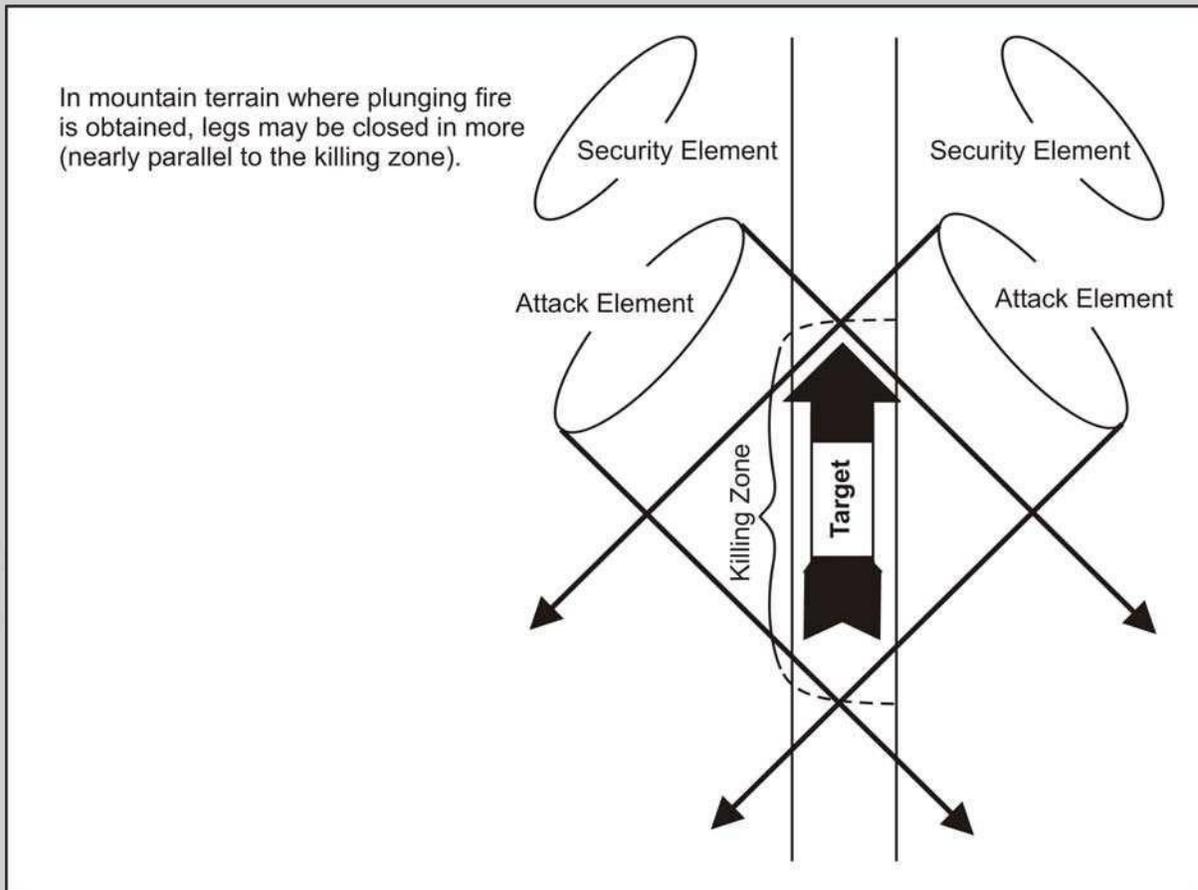


Figure 3-22. V Formation for Open Mountain Terrain

Triangle Formation

3-258. This formation is a variation of the V and can be used in three different ways. One way is the closed triangle (Figure 3-24, page 3-69), in which the attack element is deployed in three groups or parties, positioned so that they **form** a triangle (or closed V). An automatic weapon is placed at each point of the triangle and positioned so that it can be shifted quickly to interlock with either of the others. Men are positioned so that their fields of fire overlap. **Mortars** may be positioned inside the triangle. When deployed in this manner, the triangle ambush becomes a small unit strongpoint. It is used to interdict night movement through rice paddies and other **open areas** when target approach is likely to be from **any direction**. The formation provides all-around security, and security parties are deployed only when they can be positioned so that if detected by an approaching target, they will not compromise the ambush. Attack is by fire only, and the target is allowed to approach within close range before fire is opened.

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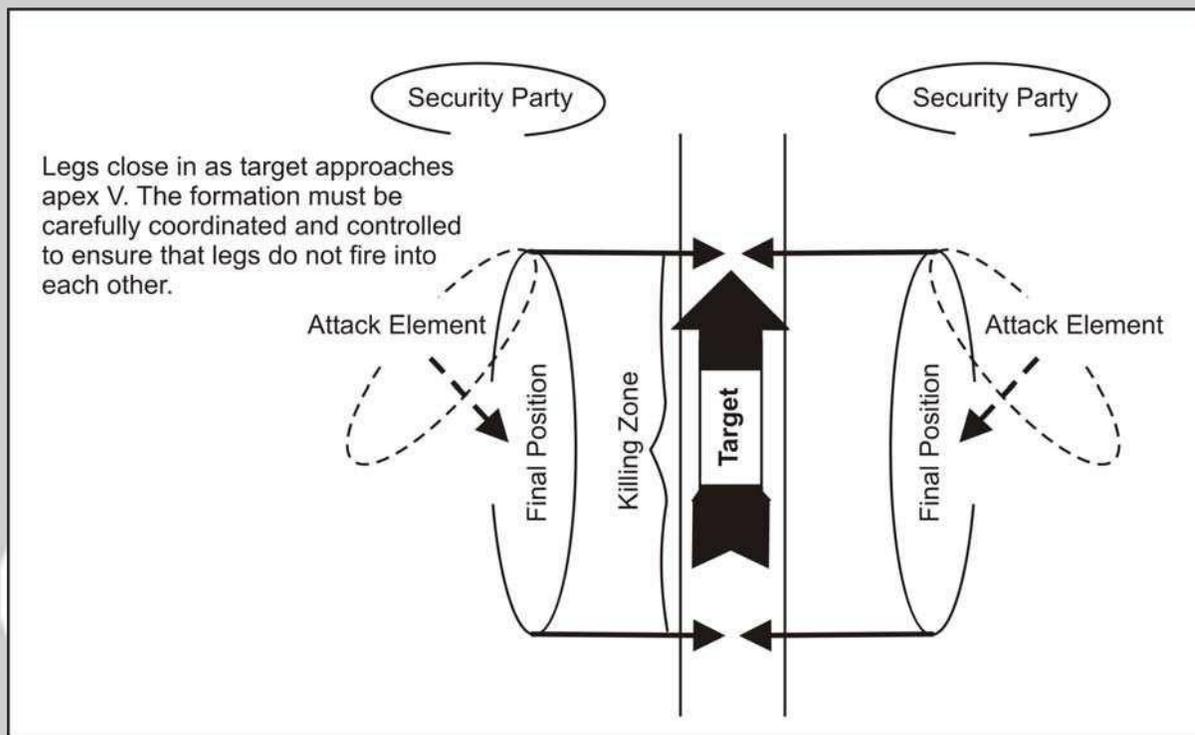


Figure 3-23. V Formation for Jungle Terrain

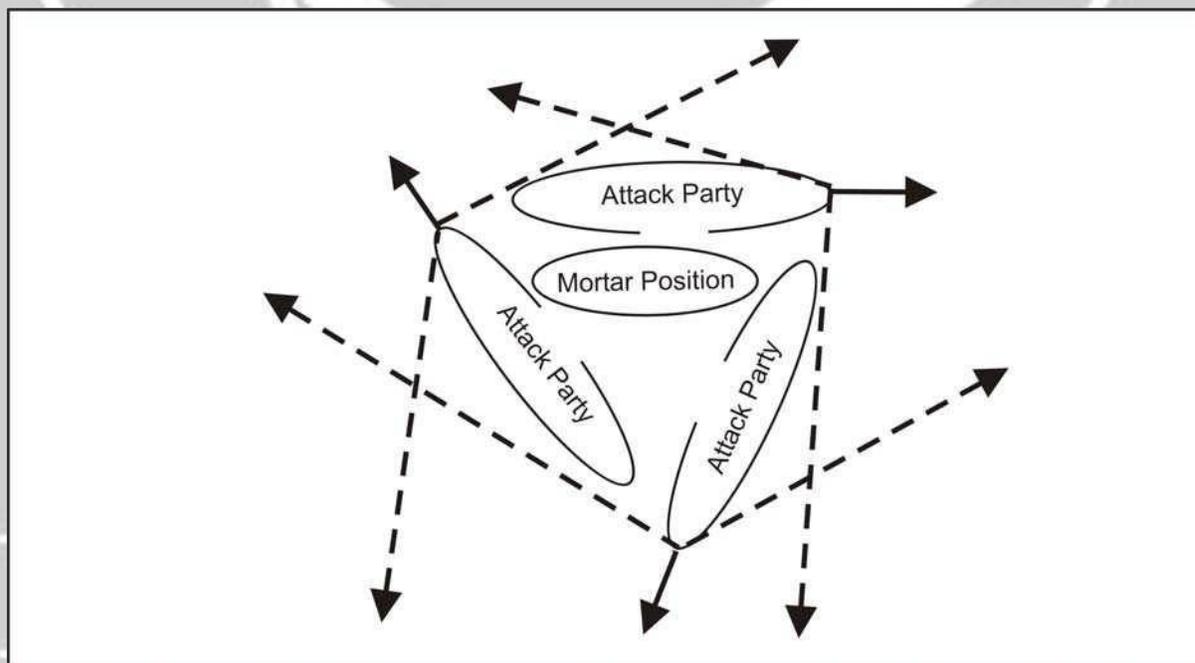


Figure 3-24. Closed Triangle Formation for **Night Harassing** Ambush

3-259. Advantages of the triangle formation include ease of control and all-around security. In addition, a target approaching from **any direction** can be brought under fire of at least two automatic weapons.

3-260. There are several disadvantages. For example, an ambush patrol-sized or larger is required to reduce the danger of being overrun by an unexpectedly large target. One or more legs of the triangle may come under enfilade fire. Lack of dispersion, particularly at the points, increases danger from enemy mortar fire.

3-261. The open triangle (during a harassing ambush) is designed to enable a small force to harass, slow, and inflict heavy casualties upon a larger force without itself being decisively engaged. The attack element is deployed in three parties, positioned so that each party becomes a corner of a triangle containing the killing zone. When the target enters the killing zone, the party to the target's front opens fire on the leading element. When the target counterattacks, the group withdraws and an assault party to the flank opens fire. When this party is attacked, the party opposite flank opens fire. This process is repeated until the target is pulled apart. Each party reoccupies its position, if possible, and continues to inflict the maximum damage possible without becoming decisively engaged (Figure 3-25, page 3-71).

3-262. In an open triangle (during a destruction ambush), the attack element is again deployed in three parties, positioned so that each party is a point of the triangle, 200 to 300 meters apart. The killing zone is the area within the triangle. The target is allowed to enter the killing zone; the nearest party attacks by fire. As the target attempts to maneuver or withdraw, the other groups open fire. One or more assault parties, as directed, assault or maneuver to envelop or destroy the target (Figure 3-25, page 3-71). As a destruction ambush, this formation is suitable for platoon-sized or larger forces. A unit smaller than a platoon would be in too great a danger of being overrun.

3-263. The following are more disadvantages of the triangle:

- In assaulting or maneuvering, control is very difficult. Very close coordination and control are necessary to ensure that assaulting or maneuvering assault parties are not fired on by another party.
- The ambush site must be a fairly level, open area that provides (around its border) concealment for the ambush patrol (unless it is a rise from the ground ambush).

Box Formation

3-264. This formation is similar in purpose to the open triangle ambush. The attack element is deployed in four parties, positioned so that each party becomes a corner of a square or rectangle containing the killing zone (Figure 3-26, page 3-72). The box formation can be used as a harassing or destruction ambush in the same manner as the two variations of the open triangle ambush.

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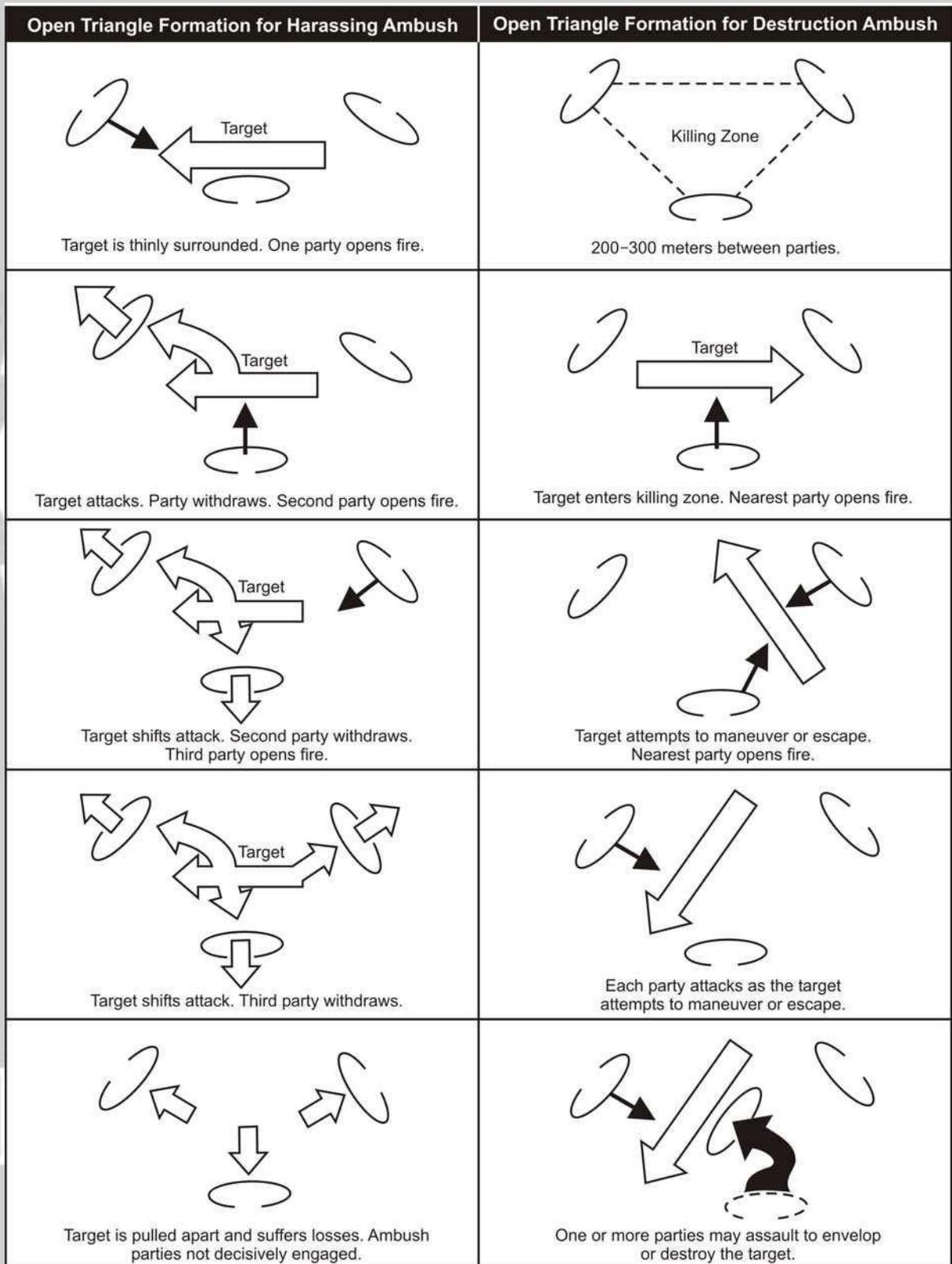


Figure 3-25. Open Triangle Formation

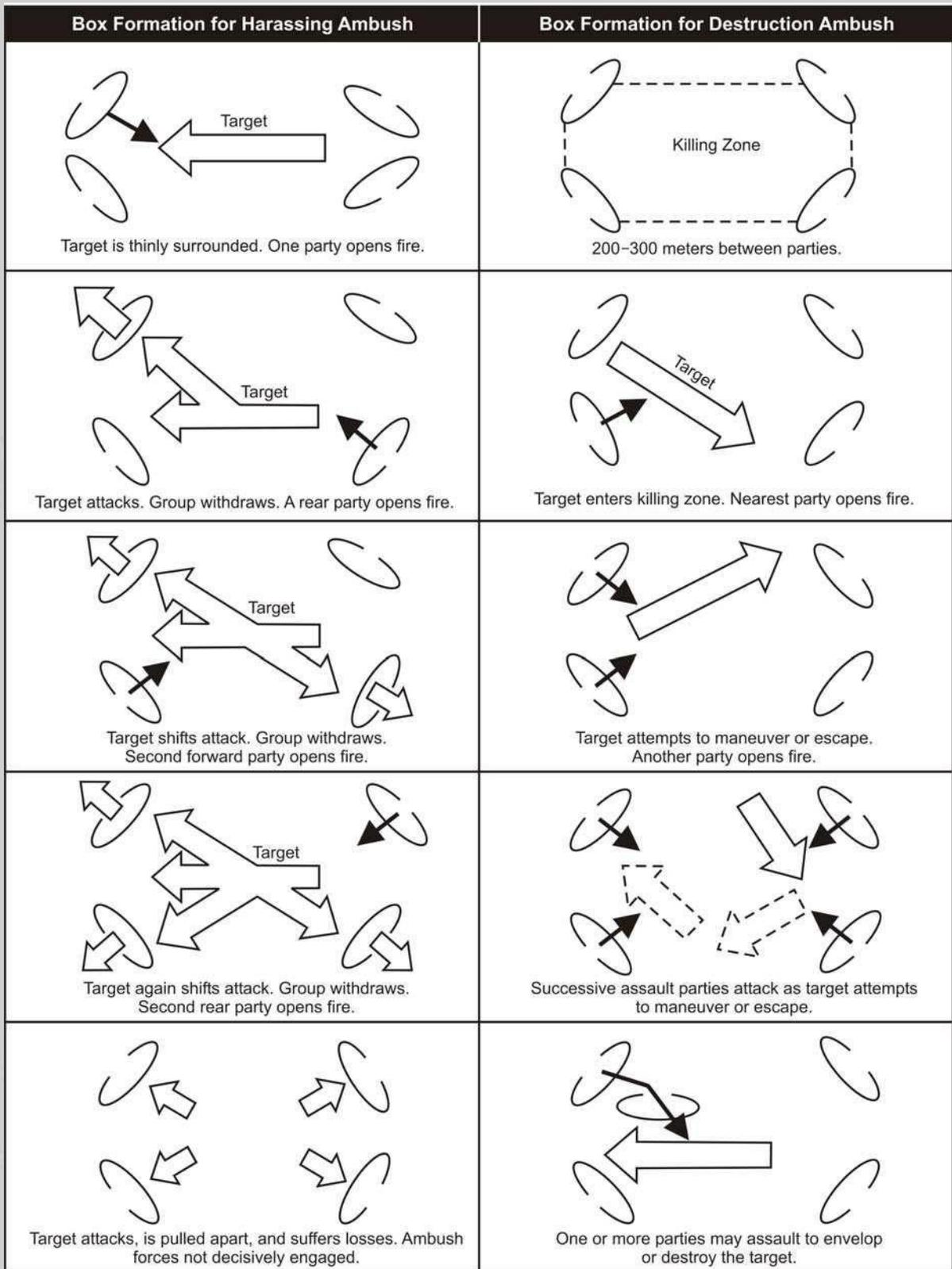


Figure 3-26. Box Formation

AREA AMBUSH

3-265. The origin of the type of ambush now called area ambush is not known. Hannibal used the area ambush against the Romans in the second century B.C. More recently, it was modified and perfected by the British Army in Malaya and, with several variations, used in Vietnam. The British found that point ambushes often failed to produce heavy casualties. When ambushed, the Communist guerrillas would immediately break contact and disperse along escape routes leading away from the killing zone. The British counteracted this tactic by blocking escape routes leading away from the killing zone with point ambushes. They called these multiple-related point ambushes the area ambush.

British Version

3-266. The British Army version of the area ambush involves a point ambush that is established at a site having several trails or other escape routes leading away from it. The site may be a water hole, an enemy campsite, a known rendezvous point, or along a frequently traveled trail. This site is the central killing zone. Point ambushes are established along the trails or other escape routes leading away from the central killing zone.

3-267. The target, whether a single group or several groups approaching from different directions, is permitted to move to the central killing zone. Outlying ambushes do not attack unless discovered. The ambush is initiated when the target moves into the central killing zone. When the target breaks contact and attempts to disperse, escaping portions are intercepted and destroyed by the outlying ambushes. The multiple contacts achieve increased casualties, harassment, and confusion (Figure 3-27, page 3-74).

3-268. The British Army version of the area ambush is best suited to counter guerrilla operations in terrain where movement is largely restricted to trails. It produces the best results when it is established as a deliberate ambush.

3-269. When there is not sufficient intelligence for a deliberate ambush, an area ambush of opportunity may be established. The outlying ambushes are permitted to attack targets approaching the central killing zone, if within their capability. If too large for the particular outlying ambush, the target is allowed to continue and is attacked in the central killing zone.

Baited Trap Version

3-270. A variation of the area ambush is the baited trap version (Figure 3-28, page 3-74), where a central killing zone is established along the target's route of approach. Point ambushes are established along the routes over which relieving or reinforcing units will have to approach. The target in the central killing zone serves as bait to lure relieving or reinforcing units into the killing zones of the outlying ambushes. The outlying point ambushes need not be strong enough to destroy their targets. They may be small, harassing ambushes that delay, disorganize, and eat away the target by successive contacts.

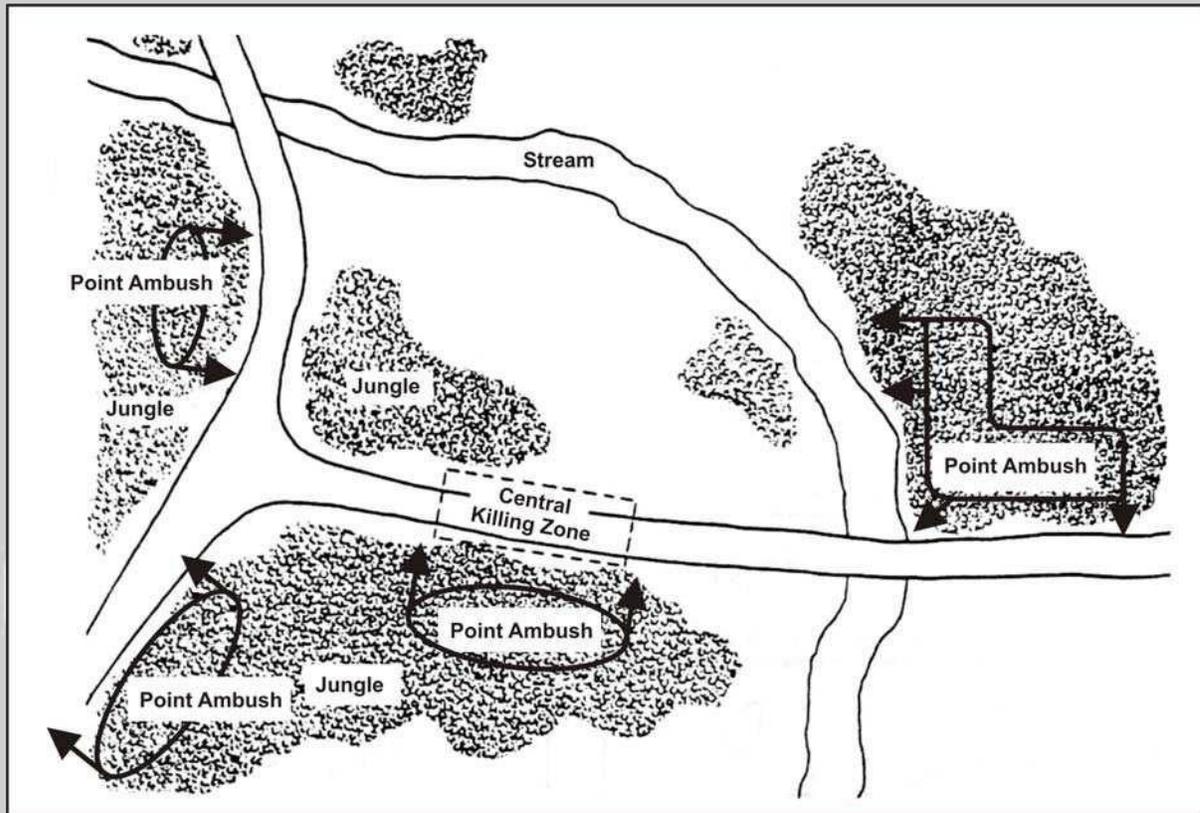


Figure 3-27. Area Ambush, British Version

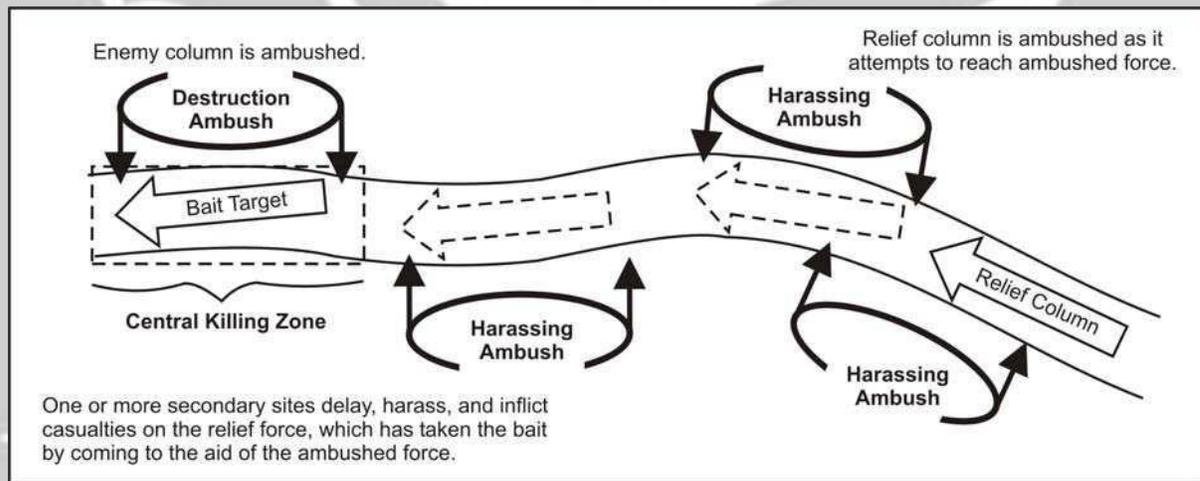


Figure 3-28. Area Ambush, Baited Trap Version

3-271. This version can be varied by using a fixed installation as bait to lure relieving or reinforcing units into the killing zone of one or more of the outlying ambushes. The installation replaces the central killing zone and is attacked. The attack may intend to overcome the installation or may be only a ruse.

3-272. These two variations are best suited for situations where routes of approach for relieving or reinforcing units are limited to those favorable for ambush. They are also best suited for use by guerrilla forces, rather than counter guerrilla forces. Communist guerrilla forces in Vietnam used both variations extensively.

UNUSUAL AMBUSH TECHNIQUES

3-273. The ambush techniques described above are so well known and widely used that they are considered standard. Other, less well known, less frequently used techniques are considered unusual. Two such techniques are described below.

Rise From the Ground Ambush

3-274. The attack element uses this type of ambush (Figure 3-29, page 3-76) in open areas that lack the good cover and concealment and other features normally desirable in a good ambush site. The attack element is deployed in the formation best suited to the overall situation. It is completely concealed in the spider-hole type of covered foxhole. Soil is carefully removed and positions expertly camouflaged.

3-275. When the ambush begins, the attack element throws back the covers and literally rises from the ground to attack. This ambush takes advantage of the tendency of patrols and other units to relax in areas that do not appear to favor ambush. The chief disadvantage is that the ambush patrol is very vulnerable if prematurely detected.

Demolition Ambush

3-276. Electrically detonated mines or demolition charges, or both, are positioned in an area (Figure 3-30, page 3-77) over which a target is expected to pass. This area may be a portion of a road or a trail, an open field, or any location that can be observed from a distance. Activating wires are run to a concealed observation point, which is sufficiently distant to ensure safety of the ambushers.

3-277. As large a force as desired or necessary can be used to mine the area. Two men remain to begin the ambush; others return to the unit. When a target enters the mined area (killing zone), the two men remaining detonate the explosives and withdraw immediately to avoid detection and pursuit.

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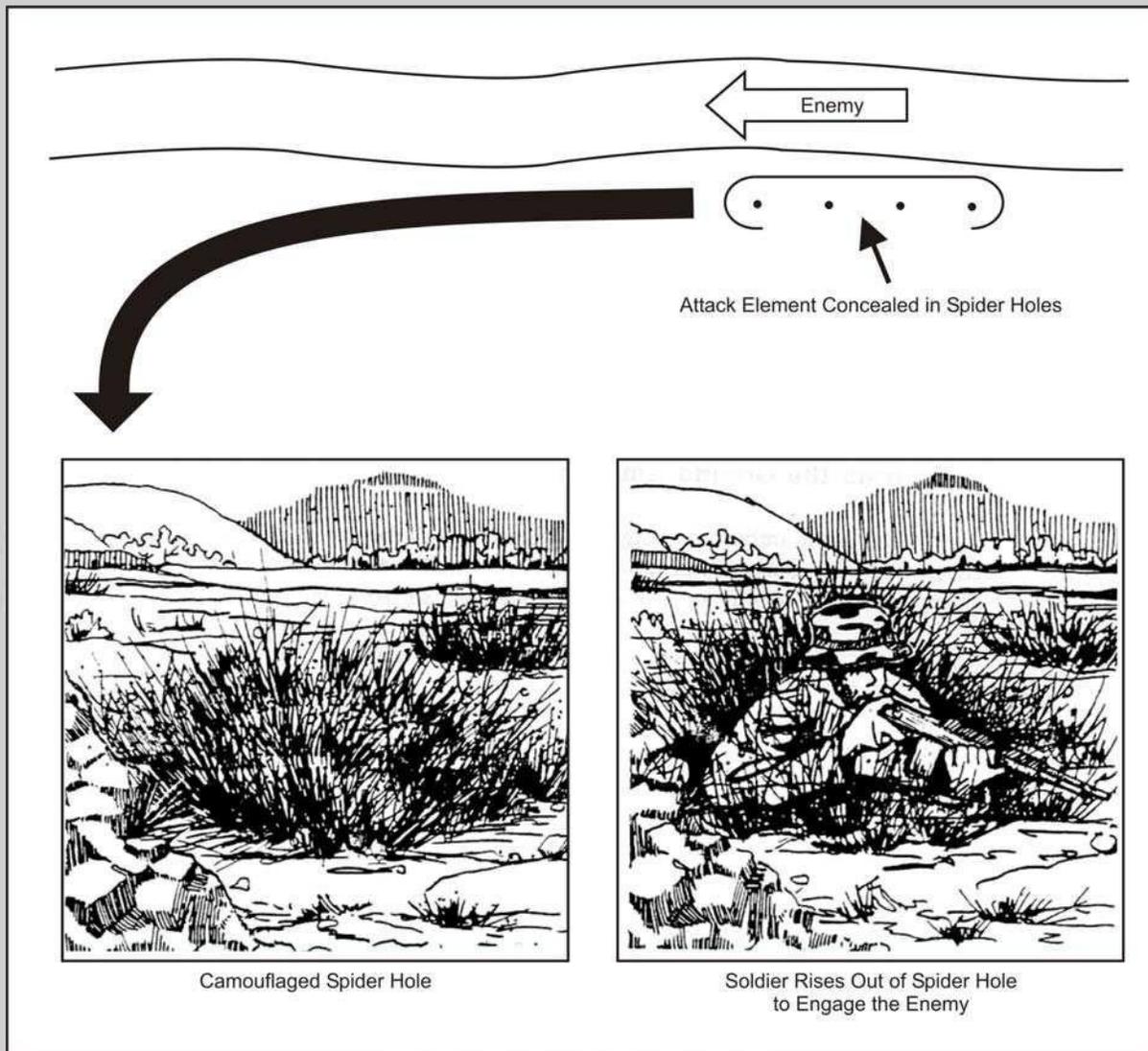


Figure 3-29. Unusual Techniques, Rise From the Ground Ambush

SPECIAL AMBUSH SITUATIONS

3-278. The following techniques are not considered standard ambush scenarios and therefore require special considerations.

Columns Protected by Armor

3-279. Attacks against columns protected by armored vehicles depend on the type and location of armored vehicles in a column and the weapons of the ambush patrol. If possible, armored vehicles are destroyed or disabled by fire of antitank weapons, landmines, Molotov cocktails, or by throwing hand grenades into open hatches. An effort is made to immobilize armored vehicles at a point where they are unable to give protection to the rest of the convoy and where they will block the route of other supporting vehicles.



Figure 3-30. Unusual Techniques, Demolition Ambush

Ambush of Trains

3-280. Moving trains may be subjected to harassing fire, but the most effective ambush is **derailment**. Train derailment is desirable because the wreckage remains on the tracks and delays traffic for long periods of time. Derailment on a grade, at a sharp curve, or on a high bridge will cause most of the cars to overturn and result in extensive casualties among the passengers. Fire is directed on the exits of overturned coaches, and designated parties, armed with automatic weapons, rush forward to assault coaches or cars still standing. Other parties take supplies from freight yards and then set fire to the train. Rails are removed from the track at some distance from the ambush site in each direction to delay the arrival of reinforcements by train. In planning the ambush of a train, soldiers must remember that the enemy may include armored railroad cars in the train for its protection and that important trains may be preceded by advance guard locomotives or inspection cars to check the track.

Ambush of Waterway Traffic

3-281. Waterway traffic, such as barges or ships, may be ambushed similar to a vehicular column. The ambush patrol may be able to mine the waterway and thus stop traffic. If mining is not **feasible**, fire delivered by recoilless weapons can damage or sink the craft. Fire should be directed at engine room spaces, the waterline, and the bridge. Recovery of supplies may be possible if the craft is beached on the banks of the waterway or grounded in shallow water.

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