

SMALL WARS MANUAL
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
1940



CHAPTER VIII
CONVOYS AND CONVOY ESCORTS



RESTRICTED

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CHAPTER VIII

CONVOYS AND CONVOY ESCORTS

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8-1. **Definitions.**—*a.* When a number of pack animals, carts, wagons, or trucks are to be sent from one place to another, they are formed into a train. The train is called a **CONVOY**.

b. When carts, wagons, or trucks are used at least one man armed with rifle or automatic weapon generally goes with each vehicle, or men so armed are otherwise disposed throughout the length of the train. These men constitute what is known as the **TRAIN GUARD**. They stay with the convoy and fight only for the close protection of the convoy. They are under the direct command of the convoy commander.

c. When operating in dangerous territory troops are furnished for the protection of the convoy. These troops are called the **CONVOY ESCORT**. The officer in charge of the escort is in command of, and is responsible for, the convoy. He defers to the recommendations of the convoy commander insofar as is consistent with the necessary safety precautions.

8-2. **Mission.**—The mission of the convoy escort is to insure the uninterrupted march and safe arrival of the convoy it is detailed to protect. All formations adopted and all plans of action must be in accordance with this mission. This does not and should not preclude offensive action, but merely requires that the attack must have as its purpose the safety of the convoy, rather than the destruction of the enemy. Pursuit that carries the escort, or any part of it, to such distance that it can no longer act in defense of the convoy violates the mission of the escort and such action may be just the opportunity for which the enemy seeks. The rate of march is limited by the rate of the slowest element of the convoy or the convoy escort.

8-3. **Organization.**—*a.* Escorts vary in strength and composition with the size and importance of the convoy, the length of the march, the nature of the terrain, and the type of resistance expected. Detachments from the rifle companies with the necessary machine guns

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attached will usually constitute the escort. When the rate of march of the convoy exceeds that of infantry, the escort should be provided with a means of transportation which is no slower than the convoy. For other than convoys mounted detachments may be employed very effectively for this duty.

b. For large trains the vehicles or pack animals should be formed into sections, each under a responsible officer or noncommissioned officer, before the march begins. The train guards placed on the individual vehicles or within the pack-animal sections, should come under the control of the section commanders.

8-4. Convoy types.—*a.* Convoys of pack animals are difficult to protect because of the vulnerability of the animals themselves and because of the extended road space required on narrow trails. When possible, the pack animals should be herded in groups of about five animals but generally it will be necessary to have them travel in single file. Pack trains of untrained or poorly trained animals will take more road space and will require more men. In extreme cases, a man to lead each animal may be necessary, but usually the animals may be led in strings of two or three, fastened together, "head to tail." If train guards are placed in the pack-animal sections, they may be employed by the section leader to lead animals, particularly ordnance animals. Comparatively speaking, pack convoys are not economical and should be used only in very difficult terrain.

b. Trains of native packmen (porters or carriers) are sometimes necessary. The average useful load of a packman is about fifty pounds. These trains, like all other trains should be organized into sections, each section under its native leader, when any considerable number of packmen is employed. Trains of packmen have the disadvantage of extending to great length on the line of march and of requiring strong escorts. The packman, unlike the pack animal, fully appreciates danger, and, at its first appearance, is likely to abandon his load and seek safety in flight.

c. A train of 100 bull carts or wagons when well closed up occupies a road space of about 1 mile. The difficulties of control and protection of such trains will naturally increase with their length. In dangerous territory it will seldom be advisable to operate very large trains because of the difficulties of protecting them. Close protection should be provided by having train guards armed with rifle or automatic weapon ride on the individual carts or wagons. If marine drivers are employed they should be armed with the rifle or an automatic weapon (no pistol or revolver). Communication should be

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maintained between sections of the train by mounted messengers. The prompt discovery of breaks in the column is dependent upon continuous communication between sections of the train by mounted messenger. Each element of the convoy must guide on the element next in rear. If contact with a rear element is broken the leading element must immediately halt on ground that will afford the animals rest and wait for the rear element to close up. If this is habitually done, serious breaks in the column can be averted. Proper consideration for defense must be given in the choice of such halting places.

d. Motor convoys are made up of military motor transport units or of hired or unrequisioned motor vehicles. In any case, the convoy should be properly organized before starting the march. The escort may be carried on the train or in separate vehicles capable of at least the same speed as the convoy. The slower elements of the convoy should be placed in the lead. With suitable roads, motor transportation is peculiarly advantageous for convoys because it is less vulnerable to small arms fire, and because of its speed and ability to travel long distances with few halts. Fast tanks, armored cars, or trucks converted to serve as armored cars, may be employed to great advantage in escorting motor convoys. If the enemy has made a practice of using land mines, it may be advisable to have a pilot cargo truck precede the point.

e. For river convoys and escorts see chapter X.

8-5. **March of convoys.**—*a.* Convoys should be assembled in sufficient time prior to the march to organize them into sections and to appoint and properly instruct the section leaders in their duties. Carts, wagons, and motor vehicles should be loaded the day prior to starting the march, and should be so located the night before that there will be the minimum of confusion in forming the column in the morning for the march. Newly organized pack and bull cart trains should be marched only a very short distance the first day, preferably only a few miles beyond the limits of the town from which the march originates. This first day of march can then be used to perfect the organization of the convoy, to correct any deficiencies in equipment, and to indoctrinate the escort in their duties. Spare vehicles or carriers should be provided to carry the burden of those that may be disabled enroute. When this is not practicable, the loads of disabled vehicles or pack animals must be distributed amongst the convoy, or destroyed.

b. It may happen, as it has in past operations, through misinformation, inability to foresee road conditions or other circumstances, that large convoys will begin a march greatly overloaded. When such a condition develops, the escort commander is faced with a serious problem which requires immediate action to save the convoy from serious difficulties, or, in extreme cases, from complete break-down. If the convoy has not proceeded far from its base, it may be advisable to return and reorganize the convoy with lighter loads or to procure additional animals or vehicles from the base or in the vicinity of the halt. If this is not practicable, it will be necessary to lighten the loads by the establishment of a dump or by destruction of the excess cargo. It is far better to make a radical reduction of the loads as soon as it becomes apparent that the loads are excessive than to make small reductions from day to day as the animals become worn and exhausted from carrying excessive loads.

c. The available route should be considered carefully. Long distances, poor roads, steep grades, many stream crossings, sharp turns, defiles, close country, and exposure to view from considerable distances along an open ridge are objectionable features. The loss of a few animals shot down by a handful of men in ambush, or the disabling of a few trucks or tractors might seriously delay the convoy. Generally, the best road, even though it may not be the most direct, is to be preferred. The route should be selected with a view to avoiding probable hostile forces, and a detour is justifiable if it be reasonably certain that an ambush may thus be avoided. Provision should be made for temporary repair of roads and bridges and for the crossing of fords.

8-6. Disposition of the escort on the march.—*a.* The escort commander, after assigning the necessary train guards to the sections of the convoy, should divide his force into an advance guard, a main body, a rear guard, and flank guards as necessary. The functions, armament, and tactical disposition of these elements are the same as those corresponding elements in combat patrol formations.

b. The advance guard precedes the train in the convoy in the usual patrol formation. Critical places on the route of march, such as fords, defiles and trail crossings should be reconnoitered and commanding positions occupied before the convoy is committed to them. Over some terrain, the convoy can be protected best by having the advance guard proceed by bounds from one position to another. The head of the convoy is never permitted to enter a defile until the advance guard is in possession of the farther end.

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c. The main body is charged primarily with the defense of the convoy. It is therefore likely to fight on the defensive, this being forced on it by its mission. The main body may be marched ahead of the convoy; but, if this is done, adequate train guards must be provided within the sections of the train and the rear guard must be sufficiently strong to fight independently until support can reach it from the main body. For very long convoys, it may be necessary to split the main body and have these divisions of the main body march between sections of the convoy.

d. The rear guard marches a short distance in rear of the convoy with the usual rear-guard formation. Rear guards should not maneuver in support of advance elements of the escort if by doing so the rear of the convoy is left totally unprotected. Conditions may sometimes warrant the detachment of a part of the rear guard to maneuver in support of advance elements of the escort, but sufficient force should always be retained by the rear guard commander to protect the train from attack in that direction.

e. The flanks of a convoy are most vulnerable and are particularly difficult to protect in heavy brush, jungle, or mountainous country where parallel roads or trails do not exist. In such terrain it is often not practical to employ flank guards as they will slow the rate of march to too great an extent. Whenever practical, adequate flank guards should be provided. In terrain not practical for the employment of flank guards, the flanks will generally have to be protected by a careful reconnaissance by the advance guard and by the occupation of commanding positions and intersecting roads or trails by elements from the advance guard. These elements join the rear guard when the convoy has passed.

8-7. Defense of a convoy.—The escort fights only when necessary. The mission of the escort is to protect the train and to insure its uninterrupted progress. If the enemy is discovered holding a commanding position or a defile on the line of march, he should be dislodged and driven off before the convoy is permitted to proceed. In most small war situations, hostile forces attempt to ambush the convoy. Prearranged schemes of maneuver, as described in chapter VI should be prepared to meet such ambushes. The sections of the convoy under the immediate protection of the train guards should seek any available cover that will prevent the hostile troops from firing into the train. If it becomes evident that the capture of the train by the enemy cannot be prevented, the transport and its contents should be destroyed.

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8-8. **Attack of a convoy.**—The most favorable time for an attack against a convoy is when it is passing through heavy woods, jungle growth, defiles, or stream crossings; when it is ascending or descending steep slopes, or passing over bad sections of the road; when the convoy is making or breaking camp; and when animals are being watered. The objective of the attack is always the transport and not the escort. The attacking force should first bring the convoy to a halt and then throw it into confusion by attacking from an unexpected direction. The fire of automatic weapons and the attacks of airplanes flying at low altitude are very effective. When a convoy is captured, the parts that cannot be carried off should be destroyed.

8-9. **Security measures at the halt.**—*a.* During short halts, elements from the escort should be so disposed as to afford protection to the convoy for the period of the halt. Commanding positions and intersecting trails particularly should be guarded and the train guards should be kept on the alert.

b. For long halts and halts for the night, the train must be so parked that it will afford the maximum protection to the convoy escort. At the same time the train should be ready to move out without delay when march is resumed. In dangerous territory, when no suitable defensive positions are available, the cargoes and the pack saddles of pack convoys may be so placed at night as to serve as breastworks. In very close country, this use of the cargoes is particularly valuable as it provides a definite line on which the escort can form in case the convoy is rushed in a night attack. Carts and wagons can be arranged in a circle or hollow square with the escort located within the enclosed area. This disposition should not relieve the escort commander from the responsibility of establishing outposts. The animals should be afforded such protection as is possible. Motor vehicles should be so parked for night halts as to provide maximum protection for the radiators, motors, and other vital parts of the vehicles from small-arms fire in case of night attack.

