

How to handle ambushes and road blocks

Encountering an Ambush

Whatever precautions are taken and preparations are made, ambushes when they happen are intended to be an unexpected encounter. A hostile force will spring their ambush from ground of their choosing, usually at close range, and which offers them a good view of their target.

The hostile force will have planned the ambush in an area that would allow them to be able to inflict as many casualties as possible in the shortest time. This is called 'the killing ground', and it would most likely prove fatal to stop in this area.

The only way to try to stop an armoured vehicle is to shoot out the tyres. It is imperative, therefore, that such vehicles are equipped with 'run flat' tyres. The best chance of escape is to try to drive through the killing ground if caught out in this situation.

If ambushed in a convoy, immediately inform all other vehicles of the ambush by the use of radios. The vehicles to the rear if not caught up in this ambush should have time to turn around or reverse out of the immediate danger area.

Every effort must be made to get the vehicles out of the area so that effective fire cannot be brought down on the vehicles. Do not stop until you are definitely clear of the area, and only then in an emergency.

Action if caught in an ambush

It is normal practice for a trained hostile force to hit the main parts of a convoy so that it inevitably cuts the convoy into small groups, leaving most vehicles isolated. If an ambush is implemented by a small, untrained group of bandits, etc. then they may go for the single vehicle or the last one in the convoy.

If the vehicles have not been able to clear the area, and the vehicle is armoured everybody should stay in the vehicle.

However, if you are in a soft-skinned vehicle your best action may be to get out as fast as possible and away from the gunfire. Immediately seek the best cover available - for example a ditch - and use it. Keep your head down and remain still. It is possible that they may be satisfied with your possessions and not inflict any casualties/fatalities.

Well-armoured vehicles will protect you from small arms fire - pistols to AK47 rounds - but be aware that if the hostile force is carrying RPGs or other anti-tank weapons then armoured vehicles offer limited protection. In this case, drive fast and zig zag if possible. However if your vehicle is static your best escape is to get out of the vehicle and seek cover immediately.

Use the communications you should be carrying and inform all other vehicles of the situation.

Road blocks

A hostile force will sometimes set up road blocks. These will nearly always be manned so that once a vehicle has been stopped, fire can be brought down quickly on those inside.

Such road blocks are usually sited on bends on roads, contra-flow areas, or over the brow of a hill so that they can remain undetected until the vehicle is right on top of them and then it is usually too late to do anything about it.

Road blocks will usually take the forms of sand or dirt banks, barbed wire, man-made obstacles, mines or any other natural items lying around in the local area. Anything that can slow a vehicle down sufficiently to bring it to a halt can be used.

If a road block is encountered and seems to be unmanned, be very cautious about moving the items blocking the road because they can sometimes be booby trapped.

If the vehicle in front is brought to a halt, it is easy for other vehicles following to close up the gaps in front and behind them. DO NOT let this happen. Keep your distance at all times.

There can be a wide variety of road blocks. Treat each one with the utmost caution.

What to do if stopped at a road block

- Remain calm
- On stopping, put the vehicle's gear into neutral so as not to stall, and do not apply the handbrake. You may have to drive through the road block fast.
- All passengers should place their hands where they can be seen by the stopping force.
- Always carry a reserve of local currency/US dollars and keep the money to hand as sometimes this may get you through. Be careful though as whatever you offer they inevitably will want more.
- Always be polite, courteous and smile. It may be a good idea to carry cigarettes, even if you do not smoke, to give as a 'peace offering'.
- Never argue.
- If you have valid credentials and documents from either the government, military force or other factions in the conflict, show these as you may be able to avoid complications at legal checkpoints and legal road blocks.
- If stopped by bandits/militia it is up to the team leader to take the decision whether to stop or drive through as fast and as safe as possible (Ideally all these options should have been discussed prior to the journey commencing with everyone, so all are in agreement and know what to expect if an emergency arises).
- On approaching a roadblock and in a soft-skinned vehicle, remove seat belts so that you are able to exit the vehicle quickly. If left on, seatbelts may impede your exit.

Action at a partial road block

It should be the responsibility of the team leader to take the decision whether to drive straight through a partial block or not. Again, this should be discussed between all team members prior to making the journey. If the decision is to drive through, then the driver should aim for the rear half of the blocking vehicle or obstacle.

Action on a complete road block

Driving through a complete road block will be virtually impossible. Reverse out wherever possible. On approaching either kind of road block, partial or complete, be vigilant as an immediate ambush may follow.

Movement by road should never be routine, always stay alert and be prepared for the unexpected. Restrict information concerning your routes, times, stores, departure time, destination, etc. to those who need to know only, as you may sometimes find that local people will inform militia or bandits of your planned route.