

A PROPOSAL FOR CHANGES TO THE INFANTRY WEAPONS COMPANY

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As the U.S. conflicts in the Middle East come to a close, much discussion has been generated across the Army about preparing for the next conflict. Many of these conversations have been on preparing for both conventional conflict as well as counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. In order to achieve overwhelming success on this future battlefield, maneuver units must be properly equipped and manned to meet this threat. The purpose of this article is to generate a discussion based upon the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) of the Infantry weapons company in an Infantry brigade combat team (IBCT) Infantry battalion with the intent of making changes to the design of its manning and equipment.

The first topic that needs to be addressed is the naming convention within the company. The term "Infantry weapons company" is a more sensible change from its predecessor (anti-armor company) as the organization is well equipped to conduct other types of operations than just anti-armor fires. However, the current term still doesn't quite portray the types of operations that the organization is capable of conducting. The current term inaccurately suggests that the company's composition is more akin to the weapons squads within a sister rifle company but on a larger scale in support of the battalion. A more appropriate term would be "motorized Infantry company" since the company's main platform of maneuver is the high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV); its weapons systems (TOW/ITAS [tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided/Improved Target Acquisition System], MK-19 40mm grenade machine gun, and M2 .50 caliber machine gun) provide greater damage to both mounted and dismounted enemy forces than the M240 machine guns available to the weapons squads. Another term that incorrectly portrays the company's capabilities is the name given to its four platoons — assault platoons.

According to Field Manual (FM) 3-21.12, *Infantry Weapons Company*, the company's mission, and subsequently that of the platoons, is to provide mobile heavy weapons and long-range close combat missile fires to the Infantry battalion. Though in theory the platoons are capable of conducting a mounted assault, they were designed to provide the base of fire for the battalion as the rifle companies maneuver and assault the objective. Another problem with the current term of assault platoon is that name doesn't readily identify it as part of its parent organization — the Infantry weapons company. The term assault platoon should be changed to mirror that of the proposed change for the company — motorized Infantry platoon.

Within the platoons, two terms that create confusion are that of squad and section. An assault platoon is broken down into two sections: 1st section and 2nd section. However, each section has two squads each, and herein is where the confusion lies. Unlike any other type of Infantry formation,



Photo by SPC Osama Ayyad

A Soldier with Delta Company, 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division, secures a checkpoint on 6 October 2014 at Fort Drum, N.Y., during annual training exercise Mountain Peak.

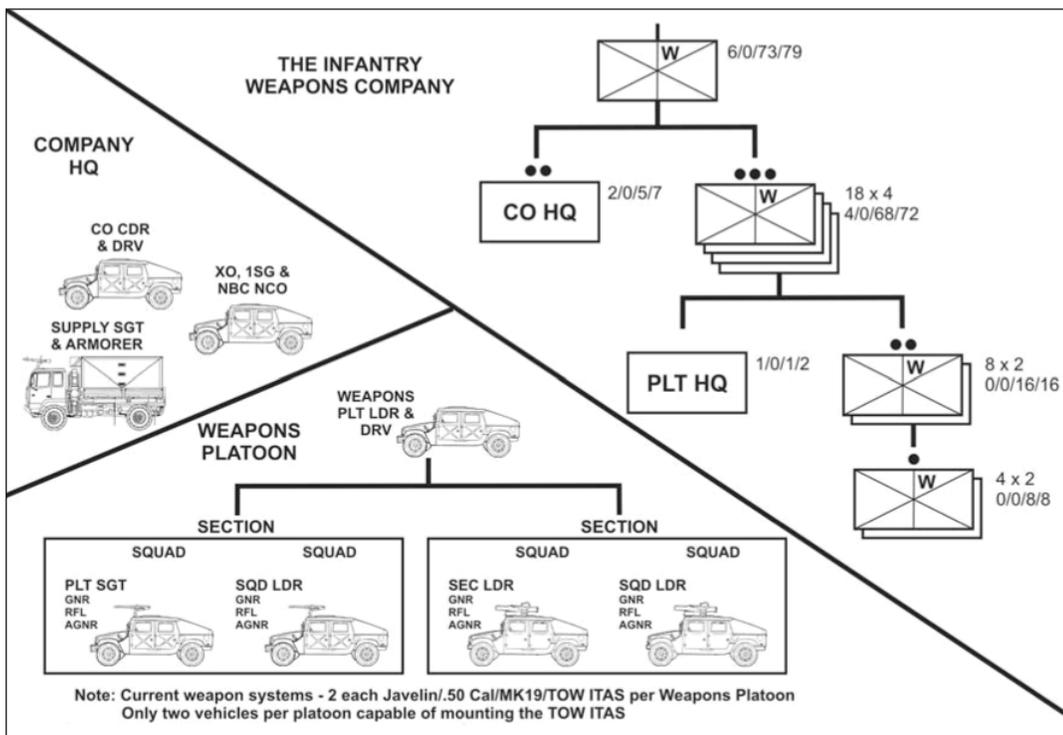


Figure 1 — The Infantry Weapons Company (FM 3-21.12)

in an assault platoon, a squad is three men in a HMMWV. A more sensible form of nomenclature would be to mirror that of the mechanized Infantry platoons. The nomenclature of each platoon should have two sections: alpha section and bravo section. Each section should then have two “crews” consisting of three men in a HMMWV. The term squad should be reserved for that of only dismounted maneuver elements consisting of two or more fire teams.

The next topic that should be addressed is the equipment within the Infantry weapons company. Each assault platoon currently has five vehicles: four armed HMMWVs and one command HMMWV. The command HMMWV is designated as the platoon leader’s vehicle; however, this doesn’t pass the common sense test. An Infantry platoon leader is expected to lead from the front and personally be at the decisive point of the operation. The fifth vehicle needs to be eliminated, and the platoon leader needs to be placed into one of the four armed HMMWVs. By dropping the fifth vehicle, it would improve the platoon leader’s ability to conduct mission command since he would go with one section and his platoon sergeant with the other. In addition to the battlefield advantages, dropping one vehicle per platoon (four per company) would significantly reduce the costs associated with its maintenance and upkeep and would also reduce the airlift requirements in the case of rapid deployment.

In addition to the assault platoons, some changes are needed in equipping the company headquarters. There are only two command HMMWVs (one for the company commander and one for the company executive officer [XO]), and there is one armed Light Medium Tactical Vehicle (LMTV) for the supply sergeant. The two command vehicles

need to be upgraded to armed HMMWVs, and the company first sergeant should be moved from the company XO’s vehicle to the LMTV with the supply sergeant and his clerk to facilitate both resupply operations as well as casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) in the absence of a field litter ambulance. The M2 .50 cal should be moved from the LMTV to the company commander’s vehicle, one additional M240 would be needed for the LMTV, and one additional M-19 would be needed for the company XO’s vehicle. These proposed changes would allow the company commander and the company XO to freely maneuver across the battlefield and enable them to lead from the front at

the decisive point of the operation.

Other noteworthy pieces of equipment that need to be addressed are the tow-bar, thermal Driver’s Vision Enhanced (DVE) viewers, and the Blue Force Tracker (BFT). The ability to conduct self-recovery not only affects the company’s mission but also the rest of the battalion. The forward support company, which is typically preoccupied with providing transportation and logistical support to the rest of the battalion, would have to divert critical personnel and equipment to assist with a simple recovery. Each platoon (including the company headquarters) should have two tow-bars to enable each section to conduct self-recovery. Each vehicle should be authorized a DVE with night-vision devices to be used as only a backup in the case of DVE failure. In regards to the BFTs, each vehicle should be equipped with one to facilitate mission command with all vehicles as well as to help prevent fratricide. This becomes extremely important when conducting conventional operations against mounted enemy forces.

In terms of manning in the Infantry weapons company, there are some flaws that need to be addressed as well. Of all of the Infantry platoon formations within the three types of BCTs, the assault platoon has the second highest sergeant-to-Soldier ratio behind the dismounted reconnaissance troops of the IBCT reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition (RSTA) squadrons. The current assault platoon has 18 total positions: the platoon leader, the platoon sergeant, the section leader, two squad leaders, four gunners, four riflemen, and four assistant gunners who also serve as the vehicle drivers, and one driver for the command HMMWV. This organization equates to a ratio of one sergeant to every 6.5 Soldiers; on top of that, the two sergeants manage the platoon’s five HMMWVs. This

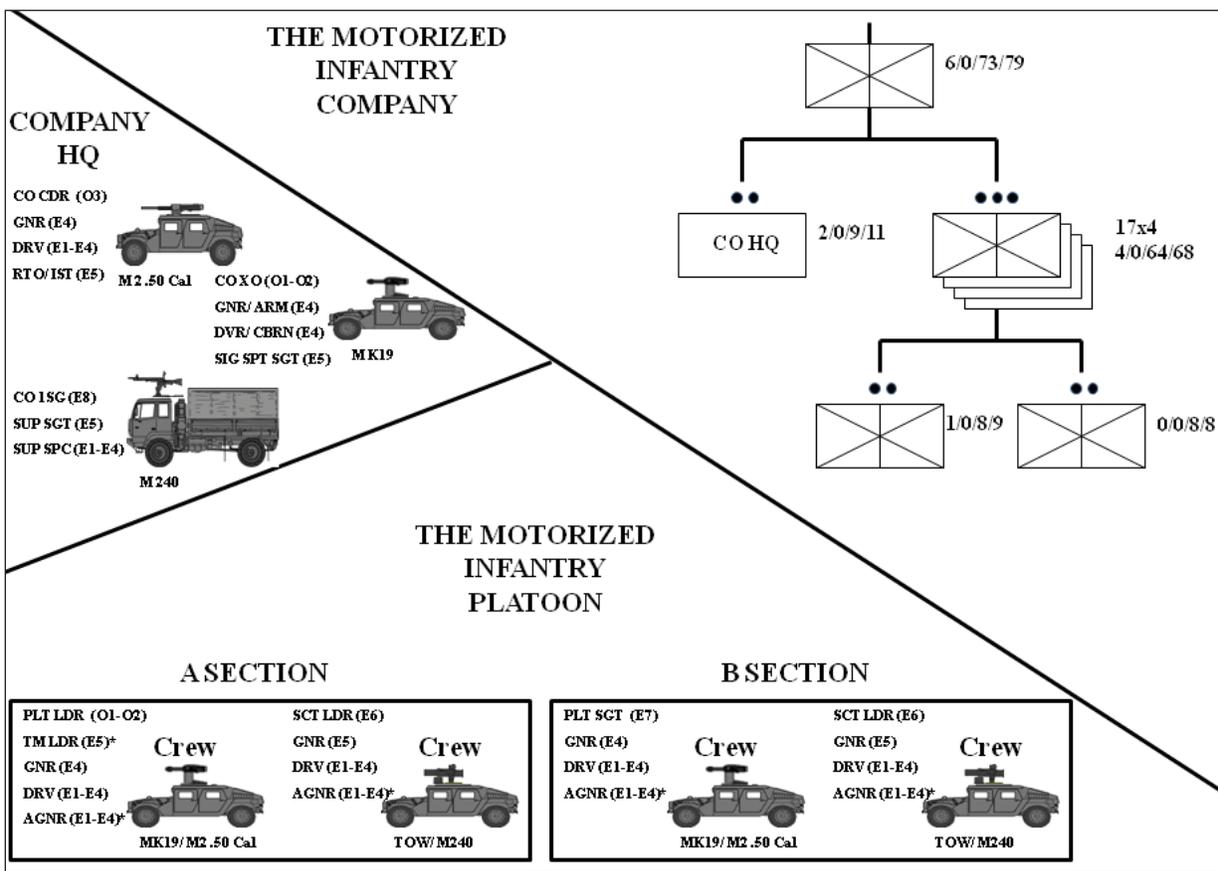


Figure 2 — Proposed Motorized Infantry Company

level of supervision exceeds the commonly accepted span of control of one sergeant to every three-to-five Soldiers. To help lessen the burden, each platoon should: shift one Soldier (E4) to the company headquarters, recode one Soldier (E3) to a staff sergeant to make another section sergeant, and recode one Soldier (E4) to a sergeant to create a dismounted team leader. The proposed assault platoon would have 17 Soldiers: The platoon leader, the platoon sergeant, two section sergeants (E6), two TOW/ITAS gunners (E5), one dismounted team leader (E5), two heavy weapons gunners (E4), four drivers (E1-E4), and four assistant gunners (E1-E4). The assistant gunners would double as the dismounted security element to help decrease some of the vulnerability inherent in mounted operations. This proposed configuration would reduce the sergeant-to-Soldier ratio from 1:6.5 to 1:3.3. The four Soldiers that were moved to the company headquarters (one per platoon) would provide a driver and gunner each for the company commander and the company XO's vehicles. The company radio-telephone operator (RTO) should be recoded to a sergeant to enable an NCO to crew the vehicle and still assist with mission command should the company commander have to dismount the vehicle. Additionally, the four newly acquired Soldiers would also serve as the company armorer; the chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) specialist; the company intelligence support team (CoIST) specialist; and the training/administrative clerk.

These proposed changes would better allow the Infantry weapons company and its platoons to successfully achieve its objectives in both a conventional high intensity conflict as well as during static stability operations by providing the proper equipment and the right amount of leadership at the critical point of any operation whether purely mounted, dismounted, or a mixture of both. Additionally, these measures would reduce the burden placed on the forward support company, reduce the costs of maintaining four unneeded vehicles, and reduce the amount of space needed to airlift equipment during rapid deployment — all while maintaining the same amount of personnel. In a garrison environment, the reduction of the sergeant-to-Soldier ratio would reduce the leadership burden by allowing the sergeants to focus more on their Soldiers and their vehicles, which in turn would decrease discipline problems and would enable maximum concentration to be paid towards training and preparing for the next conflict.

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