



Transitioning from Mechanized to Light Infantry in Support of SbT CWMD Operations

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As the 2nd Infantry Division's Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD) Task Force (TF), the 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment received a unique mission set while deployed to the Republic of Korea as part of the Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF). The battalion was tasked to maintain its mechanized capabilities but also be able to fight as a light infantry battalion that is air assault capable. During the nine-month deployment, the battalion went through a series of changes within its formation to meet this mission requirement and conducted various validation exercises under different unit configurations. At the end of the deployment, 2-7 IN proved itself as an effective CWMD TF capable of deploying in various configurations to conduct subterranean (SbT) operations under chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosives (CBRNE) threats. This article will discuss three unique challenges that the battalion encountered throughout the transformation as a CWMD TF in task organization, equipment, and training.

Task Organization

The battalion arrived on the peninsula as a lethal

mechanized force capable of mounted maneuvers. The mission set, however, called for the battalion to also be able to fight as a light infantry battalion. Within the mechanized companies, Bradley fighting vehicle (BFV) crews were reassigned to create an additional weapons squad that consisted of three-Soldier 240B weapon teams (gunner, assistant gunner, and ammunition bearer). Additional Soldiers from the mounted crews were made into a fire team. NCOs from the mounted crews were assigned as the weapon squad leader and team leaders. At the end of the force realignment, each of the two mechanized companies had two configurations: a light infantry configuration which consisted of three rifle platoons and the mechanized configuration of 14 BFVs with dismounts.

Equipment

To be able to deploy as a light or mechanized force was not enough to meet the mission requirement as the CWMD TF. The mission required each of the infantry companies within the battalion to be able to traverse the complex terrain in the Korean Theater of Operations (KTO), endure the harsh Korean weather (extreme heat and cold conditions), and conduct SbT



Photo by CPT Bernard Wheeler

Soldiers in the 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment complete subterranean operations training in Korea.



Photo by MAJ Pete Bogart

An Infantryman with the 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, pulls security during urban operations training in Korea.

operations in mission-oriented protective posture (MOPP) gear with CBRNE threats. Throughout the various training events and validation exercises, the companies identified a list of useful equipment best suited for SbT operations as well as some capability gaps. We found that mesh network radios such as the MPU5s are more effective in SbT operations to counter the restrictive line of sight (LOS) in an underground facility (UGF). Weapon lasers and lights such as the Modular Advanced Weapon Laser (MAWL) are ergonomic, easy to operate, and extremely effective under limited visibility or no-light situations.

Every ounce counts in SbT operations under MOPP conditions. The longer Soldiers can sustain themselves in MOPP 4, the quicker they can move, and the wider the range of motion they have will help them survive and stay effective in SbT CWMD operations. We found that the medium-framed rucksack is more effective than the large rucksack or the assault pack. Plate carrier is more effective than body armor such as the Improved Outer Tactical Vest (IOTV). To retain organic indirect firing capabilities, we found that 60mm mortars are more effective than the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) 120mm mortars because of the need to limit the damage to the UGF with organic indirect firing assets, especially with the presence of WMD material on site.

Training

As a mechanized infantry battalion in an armored brigade

combat team (ABCT), the companies were trained to close with and destroy the enemy as a mounted force with dismounted infantry support with extreme aggressiveness. Leaders and Soldiers are ingrained with the concept of mass: overwhelming the enemy with fire and maneuver. We soon realized that this same approach could not be applied to SbT CWMD operations. There needed to be a mentality change to the way we approached UGFs, and Soldiers and leaders had to train on this new approach. It all begins with the mindset, complemented by training on the various specialty equipment unique to SbT CWMD operations. Clearing a UGF is an extremely deliberate operation. We found that making enemy contact with the smallest element possible is the best approach. This is because our forces are contested by two enemies: the kinetic force defending the facility and the environment itself. Contact is made as soon as our Soldiers enter the UGF, and our leaders and Soldiers

must be trained to understand this invisible enemy. We were trained on various detection devices and robots, which enabled the lead element to access the environment before entering the UGF. Leaders were trained to exercise tactical patience; continually assess the environment and enemy presence; protect Soldiers against enemy forces, the environment, or the CWMD material; and accurately and rapidly report to echelon in supporting assets as they advance into the UGF.

The 2-7IN was presented with a unique challenge during our nine-month deployment as a CWMD TF in Korea. We maintained our proficiency in mounted maneuvers as a mechanized force, task-organized into a light infantry battalion capable of air assaulting anywhere on the peninsula, and trained for additional capabilities as a CWMD TF capable of SbT operations. The battalion overcame challenges in task organization and became a robust force on the battlefield. We tested various equipment for SbT operations and identified capability gaps. Lastly, leaders and Soldiers executed an aggressive training glide path which changed the way we view and approach the SbT CWMD problem set.

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