



The Infantry Heavy CAB in the Near-Peer Threat Environment

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The armored force plays the critical role in our Army's ability to deter and defeat a near-peer threat. With its maneuverable firepower, the armored force provides the joint force commander the capability to mass effects at the decisive point on the battlefield to overwhelm an opponent's defenses or defeat its attack. The focal point of the armored force has always been its tank forces. Tanks provide the commander mobile protected firepower capable of destroying any enemy ground vehicle and maneuvering rapidly across most terrain.

Although the armored force has always included mounted infantry, it is clearly weighted towards tank forces. The current task organization of the armored brigade combat team (ABCT) presents an apt illustration. The ABCT consists of 13 maneuver companies: three cavalry troops, six tank companies, and four mechanized infantry companies. This task organization gives the BCT commander tremendous striking power. Yet it also

provides the BCT commander with other capabilities if the mechanized infantry is employed in a way best calculated to maximize its strengths and augment the weaknesses of the other forces.

The infantry heavy combined arms battalion (CAB), in particular, can provide the BCT commander with several critical capabilities. It can seize, clear, and retain key terrain. It can block a single avenue of approach dominated by restricted terrain. It can provide additional maneuver elements — in the form of dismounted companies and a purely mounted element in Bradley Fighting Vehicles (BFVs) — to enable greater flexibility. Last, it can augment the cavalry squadron to perform reconnaissance forward and conduct security operations on the BCT's flanks.

Soldiers assigned to the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division scan terrain for enemy elements from their M2A3 Bradley Fighting Vehicle during Decisive Action Rotation 19-02 at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, CA, on 30 October 2018.

Photo by PFC Kimberly Riley



During the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division's recent rotation at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, CA, its infantry heavy CAB — 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry — demonstrated each of those capabilities. The BCT commander employed 1-8 IN in ways that enabled the BCT to disrupt the opposing force's (OPFOR's) preferred scheme of maneuver, dislocate its defenses, and fight at the BCT's desired pace. Despite 3rd ABCT's success during the rotation, the relatively limited amount of infantry in the formation at times hampered its ability to maneuver and exposed elements of the brigade to threats that destroyed precious combat power.

For the armored force to achieve the decisive effects it is designed for, it must be able to employ mechanized infantry effectively. This requires changes to the way we train infantry formations within the armored force. It also necessitates a change to how we think about massing armored forces: It is just as important to mass infantry as it is to mass fires and tanks. Last, as an Army we should consider whether or not we have the right mix of mechanized infantry formations to tank formations in our ABCTs.

1-8 IN at NTC

During our recent rotation at NTC, the BCT commander utilized 1-8 IN to perform all of the tasks described above. Perhaps the most critical task the battalion performed centered around seizing, clearing, and retaining key terrain. The OPFOR understands how to use key terrain to dominate maneuver corridors. Its ability to employ anti-armor systems with devastating effect requires the armored force to gain control of the key terrain before it can maneuver.

In our west-to-east rotation, the BCT first had to gain control of the Brown-Debnam Pass complex, which the brigade accomplished using its cavalry squadron followed closely by the two armor heavy CABs in a rapid movement to contact. The 1-8 IN conducted its movement to contact along the Colorado Wadi. The BCT arrayed along a defensive line that connected the Brown-Debnam Pass complex to the southern wall it needed to capture Brigade Hill next.

The knobby, segmented hill dominates the cross-maneuver corridor that separates the western and eastern portions of the box. If the BCT did not own Brigade Hill, it could not continue the attack to the east. Approaching Brigade Hill mounted presents a dilemma. Just a single well-placed anti-armor system can systematically destroy a mounted approach. Yet those same systems are vulnerable to an approach by dismounted forces. The 1-8 IN dismounted a rifle company and maneuvered it along the southern wall while the BCT set conditions for a dismounted attack using artillery suppression and smoke.

Although the assault took much longer than anticipated, the hill became a strongpoint for the brigade after dismounted infantry had cleared it. The BCT used the hill to mask the assembly of forces for the next phase of its attack east and as a position from which to defend the brigade's southern flank from envelopment. The OPFOR's repeated attempts to recapture the hill — all defeated with heavy losses from tank, anti-armor, and

BFV fire — indicate its importance to the OPFOR commander's preferred course of action.

Brigade Hill served another central function, however. It allowed the BCT to continue its dismounted clearance of key terrain. The 1-8 IN followed up its clearance of Brigade Hill by launching a dismounted attack with two companies to clear Hidden Valley. The two companies advanced near simultaneously on the north and south sides of the valley to destroy or displace enemy observation posts and anti-armor positions and secure the exit to John Wayne Pass. This maneuver effectively isolated the city of Razish from the south and prevented the OPFOR commander from using John Wayne Pass to envelop the brigade's flank.

Once 1-8 IN cleared Hidden Valley, it reorganized for the attack on the city of Razish. With the valley cleared of enemy forces, the battalion employed two dismounted infantry platoons as an economy-of-force mission to block John Wayne Pass and continue to isolate Razish. The remaining infantry and all of the battalion's BFVs were then available in the battle for Razish. The company commander remained with the dismounted platoons while his executive officer (XO) maneuvered the company's BFVs.

This additional maneuver element allowed the BCT commander to employ the remaining infantry in the BCT to secure other key terrain, which enabled the tank-heavy CABs to conduct a bold attack to the east that captured the entire central corridor. It also freed up the cavalry squadron from performing security operations on the brigade's southern flank. In fact, throughout the rotation 1-8 IN and the 4th Squadron, 10th Cavalry Regiment fought as dual components of the brigade's security and reconnaissance effort. The cavalry conducted reconnaissance forward primarily mounted; where it couldn't, the brigade commander employed dismounted infantry to push the brigade's eyes forward. Rather than dedicate cavalry troops to secure the BCT's flanks, 1-8 IN secured one flank while 4-10 CAV secured the other, conserving precious reconnaissance combat power.

The infantry did not demonstrate its tremendous value only on the offense. The brigade commander used 1-8 IN to block a single avenue of approach dominated by restricted terrain during defensive operations. The battalion used its infantry forces in the restricted terrain to destroy enemy forces forward with missiles and turn them into its tank forces in the center. From strong defensive positions, the battalion's tanks could defeat the already attrited enemy and force his withdrawal. During the brigade live fire, the battalion completely prevented any penetration along the Drinkwater Lake avenue of approach.

Training the Infantry Heavy CAB

To provide the critical capabilities it possesses to the BCT commander, the infantry heavy CAB must focus its training efforts. We identified two critical areas in particular: dismounted operations and lethality with missiles. These are the two distinct capabilities that mechanized infantry provides to the armored brigade. Yet they are often afterthoughts in the training progression for mechanized infantry.

If the infantry in the armored force cannot maneuver on its own — that is as a separate element supported by, or even not supported by, its BFVs — then it cannot provide the BCT commander flexibility. Throughout our train up, we emphasized dismounted maneuver to clear restricted terrain. During platoon and company live fires, we established objectives that forced the infantry to dismount and maneuver along a restricted or severely restricted avenue of approach. Later, during our brigade culminating training exercise, we used dismounted forces exactly as we would employ them later at the NTC. We even conducted a 10-kilometer approach march to establish a support-by-fire position using the dismounts from one company while its BFVs maneuvered as part of the battalion.

Although we talked often about the importance of lethality with missiles, we failed to take advantage of our simulator assets to develop these skills, a shortfall that we will correct during our next training cycle. Nevertheless, during company situational training exercises and the brigade's culminating training exercise, we forced the infantry Soldiers to learn to use their missile weapon systems. We demanded that they become experts at boresighting and zeroing the Javelin and TOW (tube-launched, optically-tracked, wireless-guided) weapons. Furthermore, they could receive credit for a kill only through the Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System (MILES) — no assessed missile kills. This frustrated the infantry squads and crews, but ultimately they adapted, learned, and became lethal. BFVs and squads in the infantry companies across the brigade learned to kill their tank brethren with missiles at range, which enabled the BCT's success at NTC.

Changing our Thinking about Mechanized Infantry Forces

While the training changes discussed above are welcome, they do not go far enough to maximize the capability of the infantry in the armored force. To do that, we as a force must change the way we organize, train, and fight the mechanized infantry. We must challenge older ideas and think differently about the ways we have always done things.

First and foremost, we must recognize that the greatest threat the mechanized infantry faces in the near-peer threat environment is from armored personnel carriers (PCs). Our adversaries' armored forces are top heavy with PCs, just like the OPFOR at NTC. Yet we continue to insist on prioritizing the use of high explosive (HE) ammunition for the 25mm Bushmaster cannon. The gunnery tables contain more engagements with HE ammunition than with armor piercing (AP) ammunition. Moreover, we still refer to the HE box as the "large ready box."

We know that in the near-peer threat environment the mechanized infantry is likely to encounter 10-15 times as many PCs as lightly or unarmed vehicles, but we still expect them to enter this fight with far more practice firing HE than firing AP. They possess different ballistic characteristics. We should train our gunners and Bradley commanders (BCs) how to fight in the



Photo by PFC Kimberly Riley

A Soldier assigned to the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division prepares to fire a Javelin during training at the National Training Center.

environment we expect them to fight in. One could argue that the HE engagements are more difficult. While somewhat true, it is also irrelevant: The primary threat is PCs. I recommend that doctrine change to emphasize the PC threat, make the large ready box the AP box, and prioritize AP engagements in the BFV gunnery tables.

Next, the organization of the mechanized infantry's squads does not enable the greatest flexibility. The current table of organization and equipment (TOE) gives the BFV platoon three nine-Soldier rifle squads. Although the TOE provides the platoon with two medium machine guns and two Javelin systems, these weapons are secondary weapons for the rifle squads. This is not how we organize light infantry platoons, which receive a dedicated weapons squad. Moreover, three squads do not divide into four vehicles in any manner that makes sense.

We organized our platoons with two full rifle squads, each supported by a weapons team. The weapons teams trained on the machine guns and Javelins throughout our training cycle to maximize their effectiveness. Once we arrived at NTC, this paid off. Our machine gunners suppressed enemy positions while our Javelin gunners decimated OPFOR mechanized forces. Furthermore, we added Stingers to the weapons teams, which allowed them to defend themselves — and the entire brigade — from devastating helicopter attacks.

The mechanized infantry platoon should contain two 12-Soldier squads — a nine-Soldier rifle squad with a three-Soldier weapons team. This provides the platoon leader and company commander the maximum flexibility to employ infantry forces. It also allows them to focus training for the rifle squads and weapons teams on their most critical tasks rather than training one or other element on a secondary weapon system. I should also note that this change reduces the number of

Soldiers in the platoon while enabling the two squads to divide evenly into the platoon's four BFVs.

Last, as an armored force we must re-think how we employ infantry against a near-peer threat. Like most mechanized units, we intended to fight task-organized at NTC with one mechanized infantry company, a mechanized company team, and a tank team. After our first mission analysis, however, we decided to fight company pure. We maintained a pure task organization throughout the rotation with only one exception.

Fighting pure enabled the battalion to mass tanks and infantry. We do not generally think about massing infantry, but most pieces of key terrain on the battlefield require more than one or two platoons to clear. Therefore, it makes sense to mass an infantry company (or potentially two or three) to clear key terrain. It does not make sense in many instances to mass mechanized teams to perform the same task. We would do better to employ the tanks as a company in support of the infantry — as the BCT did when it attacked Razish — and allow the infantry to perform the heavy lifting of clearing the terrain systematically.

This discussion highlights a central weakness of the armored force: it has too few infantry. The brigade secured the central corridor through a bold attack. But that attack cost a high price. With the BCT's infantry massed to clear Razish and secure the southern flank, no infantry remained to clear the key terrain along the northern flank of the central corridor. The brigade fought through the Iron Triangle and the racetrack using cavalry forces, but these forces suffered heavy losses. If the brigade had more infantry, it certainly would have used them, and the infantry might have prevented such heavy losses.

Moreover, the paucity of infantry in the brigade at times fixed us and limited our flexibility. The brigade essentially leapfrogged the infantry forward. We maneuvered one or two companies at a time while the other companies retained key terrain already captured. At points during the rotation, no less than three companies were fixed controlling key terrain, leaving only a single company available for the next attack. The brigade

assumed risk to free infantry forces for the next attack, but this took time and slowed the brigade's maneuver.

The armored force needs more infantry. It will challenge the Army's procurement, recruiting, and maintenance capabilities to add infantry companies to the armored force, but even two more companies per brigade could make an enormous impact. If that is deemed unfeasible, then the Army must consider how to task organize armored brigades with additional infantry forces from the infantry or Stryker BCTs.

Conclusion

Mechanized infantry, if properly organized, trained, and employed, provides the armored force several key capabilities that enable it to employ the striking power of its tanks more effectively. The mechanized infantry can seize, clear, and retain key terrain; block a single avenue of approach; provide additional maneuver elements to the commander; and augment the cavalry squadron. If it performs these missions well, the infantry will disrupt the enemy's scheme of maneuver, attrite his forces, and enable the brigade's maneuver. It falls on the infantry heavy CAB in each armored brigade to ensure that the infantry fulfills its full potential in the near-peer threat environment.

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Soldiers assigned to the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division maneuver in formation while assaulting an objective during Decisive Action Rotation 19-02 at the National Training Center on 28 October 2018.

Photo by SPC Kyle Chatman