

Armored Assault Company:

Increase Lethality with Platoon Expertise

by CPT Travis Hines

America Company, 1st Battalion, 29th Infantry Regiment, 316th Cavalry Brigade, demonstrated a new concept in July 2021 designed to change the Army's mounted formations: the armored assault company (AAC).

Testing concepts is not new for A/1-29 Infantry. This infantry company is the Army's experimental force (EXFOR), working with the Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCoE)'s Maneuver Battle Lab to test equipment prototypes and innovative concepts for modernization.

The EXFOR company is well-suited for the task of demonstrating the AAC concept with trained infantry and Bradley platoons, and providing critical feedback ahead of the AAC's incorporation by III Armored Corps this calendar year.

The Army consolidated the infantry military-occupation specialty (MOS) skill identifiers of 11M (mechanized infantryman) and 11H (anti-armor specialist) to 11B (infantryman) in 2001. Since this consolidation, the following objective observations of decreased lethality were seen at combat-training centers in Bradley crews:

- A decrease in overall target hits during the past 20 years;
- A requirement of more time for Bradley crews to qualify; and
- The first-run crew qualification rates were not to standard.¹

Coupled with changing conditions and the focus on the Global War on Terrorism and shorter dwell times in armored units, the lethality decrease and loss of proficiency inside Bradley crews have continued.

Allowing Soldiers to develop as subject-matter experts in a specific career field eliminates the generic infantry Soldier who can perform many tasks at an average level, and instead develops that Soldier into an extremely lethal expert on a single platform. Each

infantry capability (light, mechanized, airborne, Ranger and air assault) brings a unique ability to the fight. Therefore, for maximum lethality, the Army should allow Soldier development inside each capability through relevant experiences during years of repetition.

Lethality critical to success

Lethality is critical to mission success against a near-peer threat and a number overmatch. For example, a recent computer-simulated wargame between North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russian forces in the Baltics indicated a 1:4.6 NATO to Russian infantry fighting vehicle ratio.² The NATO numerical disadvantage must be overcome by technically proficient vehicle crews and tactically proficient dismounted-infantry Soldiers mutually supporting each other.

The creation of the AAC and the 19C MOS will increase lethality, creating a depth of experience for the noncommissioned officers (NCOs) on the Bradley Fighting Vehicle (BFV) and increasing knowledge on gunnery, maintenance and recovery. Soldiers with expertise on BFVs are not developed in

a week; they are created through repetition and codified during multiple assignments throughout an entire career.

AAC task-organization. Four platoons are broken into two infantry platoons and two BFV platoons. The infantry platoons have three nine-Soldier squads with a headquarters element that includes a platoon leader, platoon sergeant, radio-telephone operator (RTO), medic, one M240B machinegun team and a 60mm mortar section.

The BFV platoons have a driver, gunner, Bradley commander and a headquarters section with platoon leader, platoon sergeant and medic. Currently, there is no change of higher-echelon battalion and brigade task-organization. The U.S. Army Armor School and the U.S. Army Infantry School created this task-organization based on a zero-growth model – meaning the numbers inside the current formations remain the same.

The EXFOR conducted the AAC demonstration July 23, 2021, at Fort Benning, GA. Following are observations of the AAC as identified by Soldiers who participated in the initial concept demonstration.

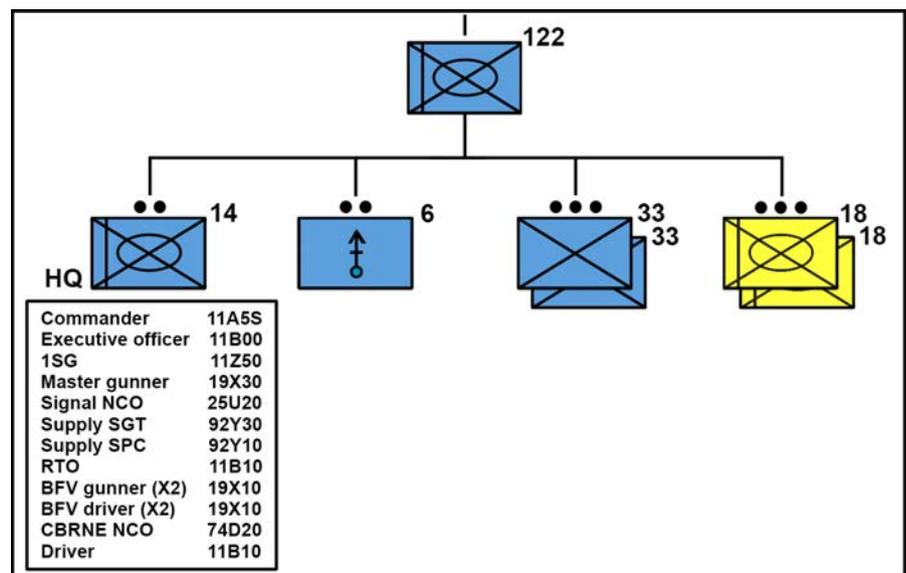


Figure 1. Proposed AAC task-organization (four platoons).

Command and control

Heavy planning at company level.

First, the EXFOR company completed BFV familiarization courses, ensuring all participating Soldiers were familiar with the platform. The company then conducted initial planning with rehearsals on the Augmented Reality Sand Table. This included preparation of company operations orders and a tactical exercise without troops before moving into platoon-level troop-leading procedures.

With four maneuver platoons operating simultaneously, command and control (C2) and creation of shared understanding is crucial. Planning at company level is essential. Therefore, company-level graphic-control measures (GCMs) were established to allow platoon-level leaders to understand their left/right limits and shift/lift fires. Using BFV platforms to maneuver and dismount the infantry as close to the objective as possible enabled speed, audacity and tempo, but it required a company leader to ensure a safe battlefield handover.

Communicate across platoons. Conducting operations with four platoons supporting each other required a heavy command presence. Radio communication was initially an issue due

to an insufficient frequency-modulation net architecture. BFVs are equipped with two Single-Channel Ground and Airborne Radio Systems radios for platoon and company nets, with a vehicular intercommunications system for internal crew communications.

When geographically separating the company between continuously paired infantry and Bradley platoons, the commander and “fighting” executive officer need command nets to coordinate and maneuver platoons. For the demonstration, the executive officer controlled 3rd and 4th Platoons from an alternate command net. In contrast, the commander controlled 1st and 2nd Platoons from the primary command net, allowing for switching back and forth between the primary and alternate net for situational awareness. Again, operating with four platoons supporting each other required heavy command presence.

In a normal mechanized and infantry company, the command net simultaneously sends information across all three platoons, creating situational awareness. However, in an AAC, one command net with four platoons sending critical information (shift-fire calls, cease-fire calls and key calls) will be overcrowded and will create delays

in tempo. Therefore, the necessity of two command nets with a key leader monitoring each is vital to the company’s and each platoon’s success on the battlefield. The key leader monitoring each net (commander or executive officer) will clarify the “who is in charge” question with two platoon leaders who are performing a tactical task on an objective against a near-peer adversary.

Movement and maneuver

Two infantry platoon leaders and platoon sergeants, and two armor platoon leaders and platoon sergeants.

The proliferation of leadership at the platoon level increased flexibility for maneuver across the battlefield during the demonstration. The ability to dismount infantry forces to complete a tactical task – with platoon leadership sending situation reports while maneuvering Bradley platoons to prevent enemy forces or establish blocking positions – increased C2. During our scenario, the task was to seize key terrain (infantry platoon), destroy enemy reconnaissance patrol vehicles and interdict enemy reinforcements maneuvering inside the area of operations. Simple radio calls and GCMs among company and platoon leadership enabled three ongoing fights simultaneously.



Figure 2. Infantry Soldiers dismount from BFVs during the AAC demonstration. (U.S. Army photo by Patrick A. Albright, MCoE Public Affairs Office)

An assigned platoon leader and platoon sergeant for each of the four platoons in an AAC allows platoons to complete their mission-essential task list without focusing on other training. Infantry and Bradley platoons can independently conduct Tables I-VI for individual and crew weapon systems, allowing each platoon to increase lethality. Following completion, company collective tables must be integrated, but that was beyond the scope of this demonstration and will require more analysis.

Intelligence

Intelligence collection for the AAC is limited by the constraints of the RQ-11 Raven (a small hand-launched remote-controlled unmanned aerial vehicle), which is organic to each AAC. Unfortunately the Raven proved to be an insufficient means of collecting intelligence during the offense, considering the speed and optics of a mounted force. However, the AAC used the Raven to monitor enemy named areas of interests when we became static, which allowed the AAC to maneuver combat power during the scenario.

Launching the Raven from a moving Bradley increased its mobility and survivability, allowing a higher probability of a first-time flight.

Fires

60mm mortars are ineffective in an armor fight. Since the maximum effective ranges for the M224A1 60mm mortar system and M242 Bushmaster 25mm cannon are similar, the three-Soldier 60mm mortar team could be replaced with an anti-tank section to better support against enemy armor formations. The 60mm mortar munitions are effective against infantry Soldiers and light-skinned vehicles, but they add little firepower and suppression abilities when there are multiple BFVs on your support-by-fire line.

The M320 grenade launcher (organic to the infantry platoons) and 25mm Bushmaster also can provide suppression in dead space, similar to the potential use of the 60mm mortar systems. Each infantry squad will carry two M320s, allowing instant suppression when a squad leader deems it vital.

Sustainment

Sustaining the company first sergeant as a 19Z (as opposed to an 11Z).

Throughout the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, U.S. forces had the highest survival rates for any conflict in military history due to the “golden hour” medical evacuation policy.³ Credit is due to the professionalism, training efficiency and experience of our first sergeants, who apply the ability to balance giving orders during high-stress times, when microseconds count, and getting the casualty to a field hospital in one hour.

When casualties happen inside the AAC, a 19Z company first sergeant will have the knowledge and experience required to move casualties rapidly. An 11Z could accomplish the mission with enough training, of course, but a 19Z has years of experience and technical knowledge on the BFV to know what is most efficient. An 11Z first sergeant who has only served in light formations would have to learn hard lessons on maneuvering casualties with vehicles, whereas a 19Z has worked these procedures since his/her days as a platoon sergeant.

Changing the company executive officer from 11A to either 19A or 11A.

Battalion commanders have the ultimate authority for officer manning at the executive-officer level. Infantry and armor lieutenants are assigned to the AAC as their first duty station. Therefore, the education and experience levels between an 11A and a 19A on maintenance, resourcing and other executive-officer tasks are similar. Giving the battalion commander the freedom and flexibility to choose the right person for increased responsibility doesn't constrain the position to a specific branch.

Protection

The BFV provided unmatched protection, allowing infantry Soldiers to dismount within 75 meters of the objective. The suppression from 25mm cannons during the infantry Soldiers' maneuver into their support-by-fire position was overwhelming to the enemy forces, destroying most enemy threats. Once the infantry forces were within the correct right-limit of the 25mm Bushmaster (using a GCM), the

BFV ceased fire with the 25mm Bushmasters but continued to suppress with the 7.62 coaxial. The fire superiority provided by the BFV allowed the maximum amount of protection needed to maneuver across the objective safely.

Summary

A lethal platoon is the building block of the entire force. The AAC presents the potential to increase lethality with specialized training specific to the 19C MOS. Creating technically and tactically proficient Bradley crew members who continue to build from lessons-learned and hard-earned experiences will undoubtedly increase lethality. However, the AAC does present issues and challenges inside each warfighting function, such as:

- C2 of four platoons;
- Communications architecture;
- 60mm mortar teams vs. an anti-tank section; and
- Manning of specific positions.

More testing is required for continued refinement of these issues.

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Notes

¹ MAJ (Promotable) James Burnett and MAJ Jeffrey A. Feser; “At the Forward Edge and Beyond: Lethality and the

Armored Brigade Combat Team”; **ARMOR**; Fall 2020 edition.

² Scott Boston, Michael Johnson, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Yvonne K. Crane; “Assessing the Conventional Force Imbalance in Europe: Implications for Countering Russian Local Superiority”; Santa Monica: RAND Corporation; 2018; retrieved Aug. 8, 2021, from <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/>

[research_reports/RR2400/RR2402/RAND_RR2402.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2400/RR2402/RAND_RR2402.pdf).

³ Ben Barry, “Battlefield Medicine: Improving Survival Rates and ‘the Golden Hour’”; **Military Balance Blog**; April 16, 2019; retrieved from the International Institute for Strategic Studies Website; <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2019/04/battlefield-medicine>.

ACRONYM QUICK-SCAN

AAC – armored assault company
BFV – Bradley Fighting Vehicle
C2 – command and control
CBRNE – chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosives
EXFOR – experimental force
GCM – graphic-control measure
MCoE – Maneuver Center of Excellence
MOS – military-occupation specialty
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO – noncommissioned officer
RTO – radio-telephone operator



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