

# ‘The Armor Will Stand’

by CPT Adriano Santiago Garcia

The end of the Cold War in 1989 gave birth to a lot of prophets, spouting different speeches, but in the end, all drew the same tragic conclusion: Be aware; the main battle tank’s time was finished.

First the prophets said that tanks were not useful in non-war operations. The Balkans’ operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995) and Kosovo international forces (1999) proved them wrong.

Two other instances of the prophets being wrong were when they claimed that armored forces couldn’t survive military operations in urban terrain (MOUT) and when they concluded that the use of “kamikaze” air drones during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict meant a new death sentence to armor weapons.

The armored force also has its internal critics. It’s not difficult to find inside the armed forces people who agree with the prophets’ conclusions, but they base them only on statistics and academic knowledge.

The answer is to be a “trouper.” In Sir B.H. Liddell Hart’s book *The Rommel Papers*, Liddell Hart detailed how the German field marshal divided commanders into two categories: office-chair soldiers and “trouper.”

Chair soldiers look on war as a purely intellectual problem; they demand energy and drive only from the troops (not themselves) and blame others for their failures.

Troupers also have knowledge, but the dust on their boots gives them experience and energy to fight smartly to preserve their troops as a mission objective’s first imperative.

This article’s objective is to present the most practical things for young “trouper” to use for thinking, planning and executing during tactical armored operations. It will also give some principles for an armored task force’s success.



Figure 1. Looking to and through the battlefield.

## What's not possible to change

The armored forces are, since the end of World War I, the tip of the spear of every regular operation due to their three main characteristics: mobility, firepower and protection.

However, although this “golden triangle” looks like an invincible combination, there are more and more opportunistic hunters in the way, whose simple objective is to shoot and disappear, creating friction among and damage to U.S. troops, and lowering their morale.

Troupiers must recognize that in an irregular battle scenario, the use of improvised explosive devices like mines, cars or vests – and now the already mentioned explosive flying drones – are the hunters' desperate attempts to hold back armored (especially tanks) movements.



**Figure 2. Nagorno-Karabakh drone sight.**

Mitigating this desparation may lie in task-organization. Despite the so-called weak spot of armored task forces, the solution is inside their own combat organization and resides in the tank/rifleman combination. But it's not a new problem. For example, CPT José Pessoa, a Brazilian tanker who served in the French army's 40 Dragoon Regiment during World War I, observed (even at that early stage of tank combat) that a rifleman needed close protection tied to the advance of tanks.

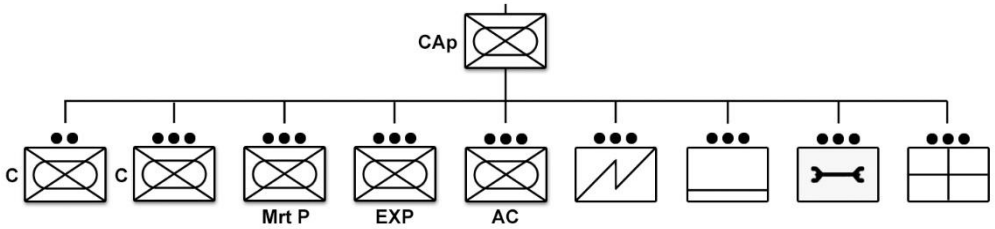
## Support combat organization

We'll now look at a combat structure for a headquarters and logistics company in an Brazilian armored task force. We have these organic platoons:

- Company headquarters section;
- Battalion headquarters platoon;
- Heavy mortar platoon, 120mm;
- Light reconnaissance platoon;
- Anti-tank platoon;
- Command-and-control platoon;
- Logistics platoon;
- Maintenance platoon; and

- Medical platoon.

Combine the support elements with more four companies – two companies of tanks and the other two of armored rifleman – and it’s enough strength to reverse the “weak spot” situation and strike fear in the threats.



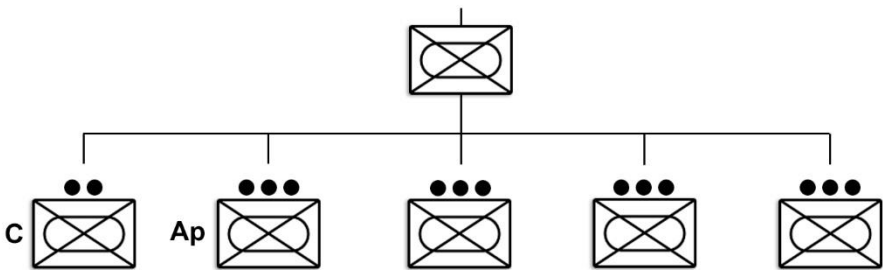
**Figure 3. Headquarters and logistics company in Brazilian armored-battalion task-force organization.**

### Air defense

It’s easy to see that this proposed combat structure is without organic air protection:

- Not coordinating who is in charge of your troops’ air defense and making needed liaisons – or even asking to receive these troops into your direct command – will be a death sentence before your operations begin.
- To make the air shield thicker, it’s important that the crew of at least one Infantry Fighting Vehicle (IFV) in each rifle platoon keeps their eyes on the sky.
- Each armored company also needs a support platoon equipped with two light-machinegun teams, two rocket-launcher teams and two 81mm mortars that can provide fire and smoke cover very close to the action, increasing security.

In his memoirs, Rommel wrote that the differences between the Eastern and Western Fronts, and one with the most emphasis, was total air domination at the Western Front.



**Figure 4. Armored rifle company in the Brazilian armored-battalion task-force organization.**

### Key elements in planning

Turning from bulwarking a unit’s success through task-organization, we consider the principles of war. The principles of war are philosophical precepts learned in military academies and – combined with tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) – create the basis of planning.

With multiple threats and the irregular battlefield, the following principles must be in sync with the planning work:

- A clear view of your objective;

- Security for your logistics and maintenance elements as well as for your armored forces; and
- Simplicity or consolidation to your objective.

## ‘Looking through’ terrain

A task force is far removed from the concepts of “silent” and “covered” movements because of the vehicles’ sizes and their engines’ roar. But some mitigation can be done.

For example, the Germans exploited darkness to move during World War II in their counterattack against the Normandy bridgehead.

The evolution of night-vision goggles and thermal-vision equipment is increasing ways to conduct regular operations in the night, as Operations Desert Storm (1991) and Iraqi Freedom (2003) proved. The downside of this capability is that this kind of camera or binoculars, once a privilege for very wealthy forces only, is becoming more accessible every day in cellphones or in military surplus, arriving in the wrong hands daily.



**Figure 5. Command center linked up with recon platoon.**

- Before heavy machines set tracks on the ground, it’s absolute necessary to obtain the most accurate information about the terrain. But don’t make the mistake of using charts and satellite pictures only; studying these will enable you to understand only 10 percent of the environment. Not putting eyes on the ground can be your troops’ downfall.
- Of course, to recon the objective area, special-forces operatives will be needed. Since this isn’t available in the task force’s proposed structure, combine the use of the recon and anti-tank platoon; this will clear the path until the line of contact.

Other principles:

- A simple plan and use of combat TTP will be the core of the execution to take the objective.

- Observation of the rules of engagement, checking the temperature of public opinion and psychological-operations members' directives are no longer only a "high-boots" subject.
- The armored leader must understand that collateral damages occur from organic weapons, or just because tanks, IFVs and armored personnel carriers can destroy vehicles and property like a hot knife through butter.
- It's also very important to locate in terrain the place to create a diversion attack so as to lead the enemy to the wrong conclusion as to where and what are your intentions.

So know the boundaries of the operations and apply the rules, and this will save you and your soldiers from facing later tribunal situations.

## **Integrate**

Troops, companies and platoons have natural interaction due to their missions and to achieve success. Logistics and maintenance are not so closely integrated, but logistics and maintenance must have modular structures integrated into the combat pieces.

More principles:

- Most of the time, machines will be limited due to mechanical problems.
- Supply elements need to be under the iron umbrella, so optimally, logistics will facilitate the conduct of operations after the objective's occupation.
- It's common to keep combat trains at a relative distance; this is deemed safer from enemy artillery or guerrilla actions. But getting these structures closer to the combat pieces they support can be a managed risk if the troop assumes an offensive mentality.
- Use of indirect fire of medium and heavy mortars will push enemy resistance back, allowing penetration to a forward area to secure the objective and get your supply closer.
- In MOUT actions, long supply corridors will be an attractive target to opportunistic hunters, as happened during Thunder Run toward Saddam Hussein's palace/citadel in Baghdad.

## **Consolidate**

There will be three critical activities to be made to consolidate the objective:

- The first one will be to prevent the counterattack by putting observation posts close enough to see the nearer compartment or district (so this will be a task mostly for tankers or riflemen).
- The second is clear the objective and resupply as fast as you can, giving accurate reports to the high command about status.
- And finally, evacuate injured Soldiers by using the recon platoon as a scout for medical vehicles to the rear area.

## **Conclusion**

The armored forces' doom was long predicted by specialists even before its history began in 1917. However, armored forces are facing a reshaping opportunity for the machines – but not to the concept itself.

It is very possible in the near future that unmanned tanks will work in cooperation with lighter-weight vehicles and the existent big boys.

The two operations in Iraq proved that in open-field or MOUT scenarios, the armored task force still is the key to secure the ground and advance.

There are no secrets to achieve victory – just hard, serious training planning and self-critical thinking, always trying to understand how the enemy will exploit your weaknesses and overcome your troops.

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## **Acronym Quick-Scan**

**IFV** – Infantry Fighting Vehicle

**MOUT** – military operations in urban terrain

**TTP** – tactics, techniques and procedures