

# Why the Army Needs More Stryker Brigades

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The Army needs more Stryker brigades — or an equivalent mobility platform. The Army's default brigade combat team (BCT) or fighting element should be highly mobile. What that requires are units that are assigned Strykers or an equivalent vehicular platform on their modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE). This is imperative for several reasons.

The average Stryker in the infantry battalions within a Stryker brigade combat team (SBCT) can travel 300 miles on a single tank of fuel — not counting the capacity of carried fuel cans. Compared to infantry brigade combat teams (IBCT) across the rest of the Army, I believe the SBCT is much more valuable to the Army on both the offense and defense. With the current MTOE, IBCTs require outside assets to transport their formations over long distances. Many will say that they can walk, and that is true, but the average Infantry Soldier may not be capable of moving 20 miles a day under a load of 50-plus pounds, which I predict would at times be demanded of light infantry in a fight against a peer adversary in large-scale operations. Airborne and air assault brigades considered, they are highly limited once a vertical envelopment or joint force entry (JFE) into a hostile battle space has been conducted.

While IBCTs are uniquely suited to fight in restricted terrain, Infantrymen in an SBCT are also capable of doing so, as they have the ability to dismount and walk, leaving their Strykers behind. Air assault-, airborne-, mountain-, arctic-, and jungle-specialized light infantry units are unequivocally needed in the Army and provide a unique capability that can be leveraged against an adversary. The unique skills they possess provide flexibility to the Army for future large-scale combat operations or a peer fight. Those capabilities can be taught to other units across the force if that capability needs to be broadly used in a specific theater. All these units are still limited, however, by the necessity to have a light MTOE to fight using their unique capability. Lessons from the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, LA, and division-level exercises in the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) have shown that light infantry units are lacking specific capabilities in a few key ways.



Soldiers from 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, position their Strykers in preparation for a live-fire range at Fort Carson, CO, on 24 January 2023. (Photo by SGT Willis Hobbs)

IBCTs rely on their engineers via the brigade engineer battalion (BEB) to exclusively dig defensive positions that are larger than an individual or two-man position. The BEB has a limited amount of assets and will only be able to accomplish so much in a given amount of time. Fighting positions dug by Infantrymen, in practice, may not be to standard or plentiful enough to create a strong point defense or a defense in depth with survivability positions for the large majority of dismounted infantry. This is due to the limited time they have to prepare positions when they transition from offense to defense or defend the lodgment they have created after a joint force entry from an air assault or airborne operation. This is also because Infantry Soldiers possess only their entrenching tools (E-tools). The E-tool is great, but it may take the average Soldier eight hours to simply dig a position to standard. Often, a unit on the defense will not be in position for that long prior to having to defend itself due to the nature of the Army's military decision-making process and fighting against a thinking and adaptive enemy that is capable of lightning-fast maneuver warfare and, like us, will use disruption and deception tactics. A hasty position is better than nothing and the E-tool gets that job done, but "to standard" positions that we would actually want to defend from take time.

IBCTs are also unable to move very far via their own organic assets. During the last two JRTC rotations I attended, examples of the limitations of the air assault capability were persistent throughout the rotation. (In no way am I arguing to eliminate or decrease the number of air assault or airborne brigades in the Army — we need these capabilities to give the enemy multiple dilemmas and many variables to consider. The Army needs to keep and enhance these as we prepare for a peer fight.) Like airborne operations, weather may prevent an air assault from taking place because the risk to the aviation assets and Soldiers is too great. If the landing zone (LZ) is hot and the aviation assets can't land safely, air assaults will be aborted. What results is the need to transport the Soldiers from the aborted mission to a suitable drop-off location via ground lift assets with an escort from a heavy weapons company or simply having the Infantrymen walk. Naturally, this often results in failure to seize key objectives due to those limited capabilities or success with a cost in time and opportunity. Gun trucks from an infantry heavy weapons company and the Light Medium Tactical Vehicles (LMTVs) we typically use are inherently vulnerable against munitions/weapons our adversaries possess, limiting our ability to transport Infantry Soldiers over long distances safely.

While infantry battalions in an SBCT have liabilities of their own, they solve both the above capability gaps. In the SBCT, each infantry squad has the capability to carry entrenching equipment that is too burdensome for Infantrymen in the IBCT to carry on foot. A Stryker easily holds multiple full-size shovels, pickaxes, and axes that greatly enhance the entrenching capability of an infantry unit. With all that available at the squad level, building a strong point defense and survivability positions gets done much faster. They can also carry much needed anti-tank weapons. Multiple Javelin and Carl Gustaf rounds easily fit inside a Stryker — their value showcased by the war in Ukraine.

Through an MTOE that has the organic capacity to transport all of its assigned Soldiers, the SBCT can move much further than an IBCT. In large-scale combat or a scenario of competition against a peer adversary, maintaining offensive tempo is critical. It is also critical to seize and defend key terrain. The theater and operational environment will likely be vast and require units to be able to move rapidly to deny the enemy use of key terrain, like a road network, or to exploit a breakthrough or an armored unit. The organic speed that the SBCT has allows it to keep up with U.S. armored units and react to rapid movements made by an enemy that is also mounted.

Using the SBCT also prevents armored brigades from getting drawn into infantry fights that they should avoid. Taking and holding key terrain is not the job of an armored unit, nor should it be the job of that unit's associated heavy infantry. The armor needs to be saved for rapid and operational level maneuver, shock tactics, and to exploit breakthroughs on the offense. Its infantry needs to be dedicated to support that role. Stryker brigades can take and hold key terrain and defend it, allowing the armor to be used for what they were made for — lightning maneuver.

When I was a new lieutenant in an SBCT, my battalion commander had all his officers read an article titled "Three Kinds of Infantry," written by then COL Huba Wass De Czege, which appeared in the July-August 1985 issue of *Infantry*. The article is a persuasion piece arguing for the Army to create a new type of infantry formation. At the time, the Army had the heavy infantry mounted in the Bradley Fighting Vehicle that fought alongside the armor (like we do today) and the light infantry. He called for the Army to create a new "regular infantry" to bridge the gap between the two other types that would become the Army's go-to infantry. An infantry formation that



Infantry Soldiers assigned to 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment exit a Stryker during a squad training exercise on 13 January 2023 at Twin Bridges Training Area in South Korea. (Photo by SGT Jerod Hathaway)

fighters in the vast gap between, on one end of the spectrum, protecting armored formations and, on the other side of that spectrum, fighting in severely restricted terrain or out of a lodgment created by an airborne or air assault operation. I highly recommend his article, which can be read at <https://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/magazine/issues/1985/JUL-AUG/pdfs/JUL-AUG1985.pdf>. Below are excerpts from the article where COL Wass De Czege describes each type of infantry.

**Light Infantry:** “Light infantry is specialized for rapid air transportability, clandestine insertion, very rugged terrain, night operations, infiltrations, raids, and ambushes; it gives off only small tactical signatures. This kind of infantry complements other forces at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.”

**Regular Infantry:** “One characteristic that clearly distinguishes regular infantry is its ability to move to a key piece of terrain quickly with the paraphernalia it needs to turn that terrain into a fortress and, once there, to be able to do so in a short time. The other characteristic that clearly distinguishes regular infantry is its ability to rapidly reduce fortified positions and well-organized anti-tank defenses that have been prepared in depth.”

**Armored Infantry:** “Armored infantry orients on the advance and protection of the main battle tank. It keeps up with the fastest tanks, gets through close terrain safely, overwatches and secures tanks during movement, clears mines and obstacles in the path of the tanks, and in static positions provides close-in security and protection for the tanks from dismounted infantry, especially at night.”

In my opinion, the Army needs to make the SBCT its infantry brigade of choice. The Army should not think of it as its outlier formation but instead as its regular or standard fighting unit. My battalion commander used to liken the Stryker to the U.S. Army’s halftrack of World War II. We should embrace the Stryker — or a like vehicle as today’s halftrack, a vehicle that gets us to the fight and that enables us win with the mobile arms room concept.

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