

What Comes First?

CAPTAIN KENNETH A. SIEGEL

Way back, say around the time of Sargon the Great, when foot soldiers got the idea of hooking up some rather wild horses to a wheeled vehicle and then trusting their scantily clad bodies on it, the argument began — which comes first, the vehicle or the man? Through the ages — from chariot to elephant howdah, to Hussite wagon, to combat car, to halftrack, to armored personnel carrier, to Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle (BIFV) — the argument has continued.

And the argument is the same today — what about the mechanized infantryman? Is his vehicle first and foremost a fighting vehicle, or is it chiefly a means of getting him to the fight? One might think that the development of the BIFV would have settled that issue firmly in favor of the fighting vehicle concept, that the mechanized infantryman is first and foremost a mounted warrior who happens to have, in addition, the vital but only secondary ability to do his thing on foot.

Aha, say the dedicated mobile warriors, this is indeed the way to go. But there are others, the dedicated grunts, who say phooey and balderdash, that it is, instead, the way to instant mass incineration.

So where is the middle ground? What is the doctrine? How do we train the soldiers in our mechanized infantry units? What do we emphasize? And who decides what is most important? Is it being able to move and fight mounted in support of

tanks as part of the combined arms team, or being able to perform all the functions of the infantryman, or being able to do both equally well?

Ideally, of course, the answer is the last of these — being able to do both equally well. But how do we do that, given the problems we always have



with time, fuel, ammunition, replacements, and such?

In trying to answer that question, mechanized infantry units such as my National Guard company have had to take several things into consideration:

First, a mechanized infantry company has as its maneuver element three platoons. Each has four full-tracked vehicles — currently these are

M113A somethings, soon BIFVs (please Lord, very soon). These twelve vehicles, complete with weapons, communication systems, and great mobility, are the guts of the unit; they enable it to perform its mission.

The weapons platoon and company headquarters function pretty much the same as in a regular infantry company except that their mortars and TOWs are more mobile and their maintenance section is bigger and also more mobile.

The final consideration is that the mechanized platoons must be able to work with tanks as part of a combined arms team. This means they must

- Keep up.
- Enjoy somewhat similar protection.
- Be close enough to protect the tanks from enemy infantry.
- Be able to influence the battle by using weapons and maneuver.
- Be able to dismount to clear obstacles, dug-in positions and built-up areas, and to conduct patrols.

Note what comes last in this list of considerations — dismounted operations. The point is that if a mechanized platoon can properly man all its vehicles and weapons, it can perform the bulk of its missions. If a mechanized platoon can do an absolutely amazing imitation of a badger and build the finest defensive position in the world in twenty minutes, perform patrols that would put the Ranger School to shame, and slosh through swamp and thicket in

	3 men	4 men	5 men	6 men	7 men	8 men, 9 men, 10 men
Sqd ldr	*M203/Dragon gnr	*M60 MG gnr	*M203	*M16	*M16	*M16
Car. tm ldr	.50 Cal MG gnr					
Driver	M203	M16	M16	M16	M16	M16
Tm ldr		*M203/Dragon gnr	*M60 MG gnr	*M203	*M203	*M16/bipod
AR man			*M203/Dragon gnr	*M60 MG gnr	*M60 MG gnr	*M60 MG gnr
AR man				*M203/Dragon gnr	*M16/bipod	*M16/bipod
Grenadier					*M203/Dragon gnr	*M203/Dragon gnr
Grenadier						*M203/Dragon gnr
Rifleman						*M16/Dragon gnr
Rifleman						*M16/Dragon gnr

absolute silence, but is weak on what makes the M113 or BIFV tick, it is a flat failure.

So, after going through this list of considerations, my company came to a decision on where the emphasis should be placed and at the same time came up with a method of training to support that decision.

We stress mounted operations, mounted maintenance, mounted marksmanship, mounted tactics, mounted everything, first, second and third. We always make sure the best people we have in the platoons — after the platoon leaders and platoon sergeants — are the assistant platoon sergeants (the platoon leaders' carrier commanders), the other carrier team leaders, and the drivers. No soldier gets to be a squad leader if he cannot perform as a carrier team leader.

The result is that despite extra details, understrength squads (the Reserve Components and the regulars suffer equally in this regard), and personnel off hither and yon, we can still field four carriers per platoon and do most of the missions that a mechanized unit has to be able to do. If we have to go out with a platoon of only twelve men, we can still field four carriers, man four .50 caliber machineguns and three Dragons, and have the M60s sitting inside ready for use — and we can still work with tanks. We can dismount a fire team, if we must, to do some of the dismounted work that may be necessary and still keep two men in each carrier.

Training this way also guarantees that our platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, assistant platoon sergeants, and squad leaders get experience in performing the most im-

portant of their tasks whether they are doubling as carrier team leaders or actually leading squads. It also lets the company commander get experience in handling all his vehicles, which he needs as badly as anyone.

PRIORITIES

We use the accompanying chart of priorities in preparing for training. It shows the order of manning, including who carries which weapon. The chart runs from three men to ten, the most we are authorized, given the MTOE we operate under in the National Guard. Expanding it to eleven or twelve men would be simple enough but probably unnecessary given the reduction in squad strength that comes with the arrival of the BIFV. (An asterisk beside a position means that the soldier can also be part of a dismounted team.)

The Dragon may be assigned to any one of four men in the 8-, 9-, or 10-man squad, and in that squad, an M203 man is left with the carrier. (On the rare occasions when a squad has only one or two members available for training, these men are assigned to the squad with the next larger strength.)

Each squad, regardless of its size, always carries the full equipment authorized for the carrier and the squad. This includes pioneer tools as well as NBC, communication, and maintenance equipment.

We charge the assistant platoon sergeants with the responsibility for training the drivers. They work closely with the maintenance sergeant to see that the carriers are as ready as

possible. Each driver and carrier team leader, in turn, cross-trains with our track vehicle mechanics.

I use my own carrier both as a mobile command post and as a maintenance contact team, and keep the communication repairman and a track mechanic on board. This avoids the unnecessary dispatch of our M578 and lets the recovery team concentrate on training for and performing recovery operations.

Every man in the company, regardless of his MOS, learns to drive and maintain the M113 vehicle. We believe that if we're down to the supply sergeant, the company clerk, and the cook's helper, they'll be in an M113 manning a .50 and a Dragon and looking for a tank to work with. (Even our mess section has placed first in a competitive .50 caliber machinegun crew drill event that we run often.)

Essentially, our choice is weighted heavily in favor of mounted operations, with infantry tactics coming second. The day — and may it never come — when we revert to foot infantry, we'll pounce on all the wonderful and esoteric niceties of being grunts. Meanwhile, we'll use our limited time to prepare for what is most important — being part of the combined arms team.

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