

# Understrength Platoon

LIEUTENANT MICHAEL S. HACKNEY

Understrength rifle platoons are not a rarity in today's Army. In fact, they are commonplace. In Europe, for example, many mechanized infantry platoons have only 18 to 25 men in them, and the five- or six-man squad is usual. But the basic TOE for a mechanized infantry platoon in Europe calls for 4 M113 APCs, 4 Dragon trackers (one for each vehicle), 4 caliber .50 and 5 M60 machineguns, 6 M203 grenade launchers, 32 M16 rifles, plus radios, night vision devices, and a mass of other equipment.

The problem for a platoon leader in this situation is to know how to combine the men he has with all this equipment in the most effective way so that the platoon can carry out its missions. He must tailor his platoon to allow the utmost individual and squad flexibility while maintaining

unit integrity. One way he can do this is shown in the accompanying chart.

The platoon's headquarters section consists of the platoon leader, the platoon sergeant (who rides in a squad APC), and the command track crew, which consists of the crew leader, the radio-telephone operator (RTO), and the driver. When possible during dismounted operations these men also supplement the squads. Their responsibilities, generally, are as follows:

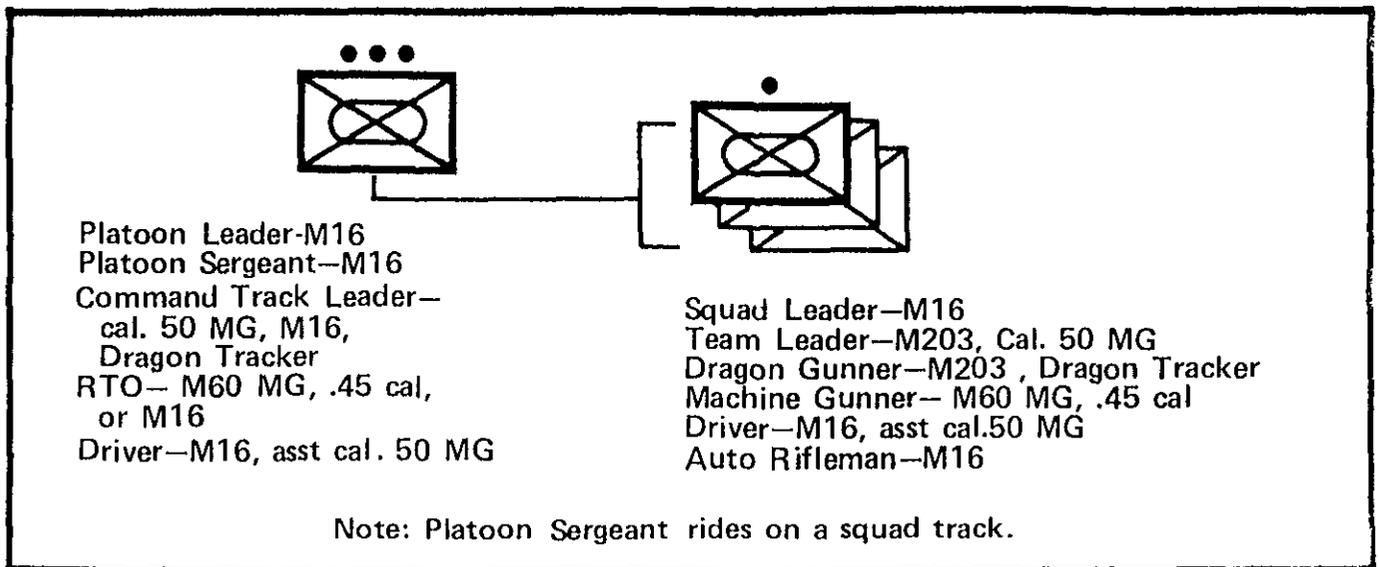
The command track leader, usually a corporal or a sergeant, mans the caliber .50 machinegun and carries a Dragon tracker. He is responsible for the command track vehicle and its crew. When dismounted, he becomes the second team leader for one of the squads. His individual weapon is an M16 rifle.

The RTO is responsible for an M60

machinegun and is the command track's air guard. When mounted he operates the command track radios. During dismounted operations, the company and platoon net radios are carried by the platoon leader and the RTO (armed with an M16 rifle), or by the driver if the RTO must employ the M60 machinegun in support of the platoon's operations.

The driver carries an M16 rifle and serves as the assistant caliber .50 machinegunner. Dismounted, he acts either as an RTO or as a squad automatic rifleman. He should be the most capable driver in the platoon, since he must perform vehicle and equipment maintenance with only limited supervision.

The five- or six-man squad does have many of the capabilities of a full strength squad both in movement and firepower. But because the small



squad must depend heavily on exploiting the full effects of its machineguns, Dragons, and M203s, a squad leader must make sure his men are trained to use the various weapon systems.

**The team leader** is usually a corporal or a sergeant. If his vehicle has one, the team leader must be capable of firing the Dragon system from the vehicular Dragon mount (VDM). He carries an M203 grenade launcher when dismounted. He and his driver are also responsible for operating the vehicle's caliber .50 machinegun and for maintaining the vehicle.

**The driver** carries an M16 rifle, assists with the caliber .50 machinegun, and mans that weapon in stationary or defensive positions when the team leader is away from the vehicle. When dismounted, he carries a Dragon missile and assists another squad member in operating an M60 machinegun.

**The Dragon gunner** carries the Dragon system and is the primary M203 gunner for the squad. He must

also be able to fire the Dragon from the VDM, and, when dismounted, he must know how to fire the Dragon from the M60 machinegun tripod.

**The M60 machinegunner** must be prepared to operate in most situations without an assistant gunner. He also serves as the vehicle's rear security and air guard.

**The automatic rifleman** rounds out a six-man squad. He carries an M16 rifle and serves as an assistant Dragon or M60 gunner as the situation requires.

In a dismounted situation, the team leader should be on the ground, and the driver should man the caliber .50 machinegun. If additional automatic fire is needed, the automatic rifleman can be given the platoon's fifth M60 machinegun, which is usually carried on the command track.

The small squad does have other definite limitations: The Dragon gunners and the team leaders cannot fire their primary weapons and their M203s at the same time; the amount of ammunition the squad can carry is

reduced because of its small size, particularly the number of Dragon missiles, 40mm rounds, and machinegun belts; and the platoon leader and squad leaders with their radios are not as mobile and tend to tire more easily than if they had someone else to carry those sets.

Understrength mechanized infantry platoons can perform many missions ranging from dismounted patrols and ambushes to mounted attacks. But the platoon leaders must know how to adapt their small units to the changing situations in which they will find themselves. By properly tailoring their platoons and deploying their most potent assets, they can use the inherent flexibility of the mechanized platoon to its fullest advantage.

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# Modernized Line

CAPTAIN HARRY F. NOYES III

It is a pity the Maginot Line has given fixed linear fortifications such a bad name, because new technology now makes it possible for such fortifications to contribute immeasurably — perhaps decisively — to the defense of western Europe against Soviet attack.

Needless to say, I do not envision a literal reconstruction of the pre-World War II French system of concrete caverns and heavy guns.

What I am proposing is that ultra-modern technology — in the form of a semi-automated complex of anti-tank guided missiles and antipersonnel mines — be combined with such ultra-traditional shelters as holes in the ground to create a thicket of depth that any Soviet invasion force would have to penetrate.

This proposed new line, which for want of a better term we can call the "Modernized Line," would differ

from the Maginot Line in two respects:

- It would require relatively few troops and small amounts of equipment and money. Thus, it would supplement, not compete with, the conventional mobile forces upon which our defenses would primarily and quite properly depend.

- It would not generate a defensive mentality. Because it would never be intended as the primary means of