



Three Kinds of Infantry

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In his article "Thinking About Light Infantry" in *INFANTRY* (November-December 1984, p. 19), Lieutenant Colonel Jack English does an excellent job of illuminating the history of light infantry and the dilemmas of modern mechanized infantry. His conclusion is that (aside from highly specialized types) there ought to be two distinct kinds of infantry: the "in-house infantry" of armor forces and "line infantry trained in light infantry skills." While I agree with the concept of "in-house infantry" for armor forces, I do not agree that one type of infantry can do both "line infantry" and "light infantry" tasks.

Infantry missions cover a wide functional range. Because of this, I believe we need three basic kinds of infantry today.

- We need infantry whose primary mission is to support the advance of the tank. Let's call this *armored* infantry.

- We need infantry whose primary mission is to hold ground and to take fortified or infantry-defended positions. Let's call this *regular* infantry.

- We need infantry that is strategically, operationally, and tactically highly mobile using Army or Air Force aircraft and that can fight highly mobile tactical engagements in difficult terrain. Let's call this *light* in-

fantry. (Light infantry may have several variants, such as air assault and airborne.)

But what does each type do in carrying out these missions?

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.

Armored infantry fights either mounted or dismounted. It accompanies tanks and overwatches them on the move or during temporary halts. It watches for and suppresses infantry equipped with antitank weapons. It dismounts to clear chokepoints in close terrain; it clears road blocks; and it assists in clearing minefields. Since tank formations are primarily oriented toward the offense, even when they are performing a defensive role, so are armored infantry units.

In the defense, armored infantry rarely digs in extensively. It provides close-in protection for tanks in static

positions and supports tanks in counterattacks and in movements between positions. It complements the fires of tank guns in the defense of a position against a combined arms threat and concentrates on taking out key soft targets. It also replaces road blocks and minefields.

What equipment does armored infantry need to do these tasks? It needs a carrier that has mobility equal to that of the tank. It needs a long-range standoff armor-killing missile system to provide overwatch to moving tanks. It needs a cannon system that can kill non-tank threats to tanks such as other carriers, attack helicopters, and dismounted infantry. It needs to carry mines and other obstacle-creating devices, including pioneer tools. The Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle can do this job quite well. (A more heavily armored vehicle would be nice to have in the future, though.) The vehicle should be at least partially protected from the heavy machineguns and automatic cannons (up to 40mm) that are likely to be mounted on equivalent Soviet vehicles.

REGULAR INFANTRY

Regular infantry often supports tanks at the operation level but is *supported* by tanks in its tactical level

tasks within an operational scheme. It holds key terrain in a defensive framework that may otherwise be dynamic in nature.

In any battle in Europe, it would fortify and defend towns and villages. Its offensive tasks may include taking heavily fortified positions that must be taken by infantry assault. It would follow and support leading armored formations by reducing bypassed pockets of resistance, keeping lines of communication open, and passing through armor units to clear stiff resistance from well-organized defenses to break the armor free to continue the attack.

To increase its tactical and operational mobility and to carry the array of heavy equipment it needs to do its job, regular infantry rides. But it fights dismounted — *always*. In the defense, the regular infantry is uniquely suited to move rapidly to a piece of ground that must be held and occupy it. And it can in short order turn that ground into a fortress that the enemy will have to either bypass or invest. (Operationally and tactically, the trick is in deciding where and when to hold ground, where and when to give up ground and where and when to strike a counterblow. Any operational or tactical defense is a combination of these. Regular infantry is best at holding ground; armored infantry is best at supporting the tank in the dynamic elements of the defense.)

In the attack, the regular infantry may create the initial penetration to break the armor formations free. To do so, it may have to assault fortified positions to take key terrain and root out other enemy infantry that might otherwise deny passage to our tank formations. It may then hold or widen the shoulders of a penetration to make sure the tank force is not cut off.

Some regular infantry may be detailed to follow and support tank heavy forces. This means that, if necessary, it fights to keep the lines of supply of the tank force open by defending against flank attacks and makes it possible to keep the forward units moving rapidly by bypassing strongpoints that are then either re-

duced or contained by the follow-on forces.

When an attacking tank force meets organized resistance it cannot overcome, regular infantry is passed through to break the armor free again. There will also be times in the attack when regular infantry will be asked to quickly seize, occupy, and defend key terrain on a flank to protect the overall force.

One characteristic that clearly distinguishes regular infantry is its ability to move to a key piece of terrain quick-



ly 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 antitank defenses that have been prepared in depth.

The regular infantry is not necessarily a low technology force — it is not necessarily less dependent on equipment than armored infantry. It just needs a different kind of equipment for a different purpose. The vehicle it uses must get it from one

point to another quickly, safely, cheaply, and comfortably. That vehicle must carry at least a full-sized squad and a lot of gear — the heavy tools of the regular infantryman's trade.

These tools are heavy automatic weapons with range and penetrating power, antitank weapons that can be fired from bunkers, mechanical tools (to aid in digging in and building fortifications quickly), mine-dispensing systems, mechanical trenchers, chain saws, demolitions (to clear fields of fire), camouflage systems, concertina wire, night sights, chemical protective gear, flamethrowers, "bunker-busting" weapons, and so on.

The M113, a "stretch" M113, or any number of wheeled carriers now available can provide protected mobility for the regular infantry. This vehicle would be used for travel to the vicinity of the battle and as a "mobile arms room." The mobility and protection the regular infantry needs may be provided in the future by lighter vehicles that have great cross-country load-carrying capacity, that require less fuel, and that are relatively inexpensive. The money saved ought to be spent on the mission-essential equipment the regular infantryman needs to root out the enemy in the attack and to rapidly create unassailable defensive positions. Regular infantry battalions would benefit from having an organic combat engineer platoon appropriately equipped to create or reduce both obstacles and fortifications.

LIGHT INFANTRY

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

At the strategic level it provides the flexible, rapid, initial response capability that often is sufficient in itself, or it provides the entry point for other follow-on forces.

At the operational level, light infantry is often used in many creative ways to complement heavy forces. In the defense, for example, it denies the enemy large areas of rugged terrain as primary avenues of advance; it frees other forces to become operational reserves; and it defends these areas of rugged terrain so that they can become the fulcrum for defensive maneuver and counterattack. In the offense, large light infantry forces infiltrate through rugged terrain to seize critical points or disrupt lines of communication, air assault to seize bridge-crossing sites for linkup, or conduct other deep maneuvers to facilitate the attack of heavy brigade, division, or corps forces.

At the tactical level, light infantry forces frequently cooperate with other arms. For instance, light infantry cooperates with helicopter formations to become a vital part of an "air mechanized" force. Light infantry battalions also assist by holding critical chokepoints in smaller, more rugged areas within the schemes of brigades and divisions that are made up primarily of heavier forces. In attacks conducted by heavier forces, light infantry battalions are air-lifted to seize chokepoints before they can be occupied by the enemy, thereby facilitating the rapid passage of the armored formations. They maneuver through impassable terrain in any weather or under cover of darkness into an enemy's flank or rear.

Light infantry is difficult to detect, but once detected it must complete its tasks quickly and violently or it can be defeated easily. It derives its protection from its ability to hide and to move in rugged terrain. It does not like to dig in and hold strongpoints because it lacks the means to do those tasks quickly and well. It can't carry much weight because it does not have the mechanical transport to stockpile ammunition, mines, and barrier material or the tools to prepare strongpoints.

It uses a wide pattern of hit-and-run tactics to repeatedly deny opposing mechanized forces the use of the regular road nets through rugged terrain.

It works best, perhaps, in conjunction with attack helicopters, protecting the air avenues of approach into the flanks of enemy columns along high speed corridors through rugged terrain.

Light infantry, being more nimble, forces the enemy to dismount his own infantry to root it out and destroy it. The purpose of these tactics is to tie down a large number of enemy troops with a small number of our own, and to slow their tactical and operational advance. Slowing the advance without committing our heavier forces allows our higher level commanders, at division and corps, to maneuver striking forces against the enemy at the appropriate places to defeat him operationally.

To do these things, light infantry troops must be lightly but potently equipped. There can be few compromises on their equipment. The battalion should not have any mission-essential vehicles. All its vehicles must be transportable by utility helicopter. The light infantry soldier himself must be able to carry his entire fighting load, a load that should not exceed 50 pounds. His weapon should be light but capable of tremendous firepower during the short but violent engagements that are expected. He must have the ability to direct precision-guided munitions from remote locations. It must be possible to resupply him by air at night and from prestocked caches.

MISSIONS

In summary, then, both armored and light infantry can do regular infantry tasks, but not as well as regular infantry can do them. Regular infantry can occasionally support the advance of tanks and work in close tactical cooperation with them. Regular infantry can also occasionally perform dismounted combat in highly restricted terrain. But the equipment, organization, and training of the three types of infantry make each particularly well-suited for a particular range of missions.

If we truly had these three types of

infantry, at the operational level we might well see all of them fighting interdependently within a corps sector. Armored infantry might be found in task forces and brigades that were primarily armor and might perform their tactical chores within operational schemes using speed and shock action.

Regular infantry might be found in task forces and brigades that were primarily infantry and might perform the difficult tasks of holding or taking key terrain. During an offensive, they might follow and support — protect the lines of supply of the armor and reduce pockets of resistance.

The light infantry might play a critical role in difficult terrain and during night fighting, the medium of battle that suits them best, and might free other forces to do what they do best. Light infantry could also be positioned rapidly by air (when being there first was most important) over tactical, operational, and strategic distances.

How these types of infantry should be grouped is a topic for another article. The important thing here is to resist the trend toward only two types of infantry — armored and light. Much of the debate today over how to use the Bradley-equipped infantry and the new light infantry results from trying to use either force as regular infantry. We need to develop a third type of infantry — a regular infantry — for use in that middle range.

We may already have such a force. In fact, we have basically had it all along in our M113-equipped mechanized battalions — especially when they were trained to fight using tactics suited to their equipment. That's worth thinking about!



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