



ECHO ON THE BATTLEFIELD

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The key to successfully employing the new antiarmor company — Company E, or Echo Company — of the J-Series mechanized infantry battalion is the attitude of the chain of command. First, leaders should stop thinking of the antiarmor platoons and sections of Echo Company exclusively as “add-ons” to the other companies (or teams) of the battalions (or task forces). Echo Company can be trained and employed as a unit and can give a task force commander one more option in planning and executing combat operations. Leaders should exploit the lack of published doctrine on the employment of the antiarmor company and aggressively develop their Echo Companies into the powerful battlefield forces that they can be. (EDITOR’S NOTE: See also “Echo Company: The Fifth Player,” by Captain Michael S. Hackney, *INFANTRY*, July-August 1985.)

Echo Company is maneuvered by the Echo Company commander, and he has a tough job. He must provide continuous antiarmor coverage throughout the task force’s zone of advance or sector of defense. To do this, he maneuvers his platoons forward or to a flank or to the rear, always keying on the principle of retaining his flexibility to displace quickly and mass his antiarmor fires. Ultimately, massing his antiarmor fire will be the key to his success.

Consider, for example, the attack of a company-sized enemy force employing BMPs and tanks. A single ITV section facing this force is like a lone wolf stalking a

moose: The section can harass and damage the enemy company but is not likely to stop it. Add another ITV section and a platoon command and control vehicle, though, and the tactical advantage begins to shift in favor of the wolves. Add a third ITV section (the optional three-section ITV platoon found in some battalions that have not made the transition to the Bradley Fighting Vehicle), and the once dangerous situation becomes an opportunity to exploit success. It is the existence of platoon-level command and control that makes this employment technique possible. And always hovering about orchestrating the whole maneuver is the Echo Company commander.

The Echo Company commander is also a special staff officer — the task force commander’s antiarmor advisor — and he takes part in the staff planning process with the S-3. He develops antiarmor courses of action to support each course of action developed by the task force staff; he provides input concerning the indirect fire plan, the obstacle plan, the scheme of maneuver, and direct fire control measures; and he makes recommendations concerning the detachment of portions of his company, if any, as well as the attachment of task force assets to Echo Company.

There is no doctrinal reason why Echo Company cannot be used as a team consisting of one or more antiarmor, mechanized infantry, armor, engineer, or other maneuver platoons. Too often, unfortunately,

Echo Company's platoons and sections are automatically farmed out leaving a company commander with nothing to command, a company executive officer with nothing to maintain, and a company first sergeant with nothing to feed, fuel, or reload.

Command and control within Echo Company is not unlike that in the other companies in a battalion task force. In fact, with a little work, the antiarmor company can be the best shooter, mover, and communicator in that task force. The company commander can talk to the task force commander, other leaders in the task force, his executive officer, and his platoon leaders. His platoon leaders can talk to him, the company executive officer, each other, and their subordinate sections.

The TOE configuration of two AN/VRC-46 radios in the command and control M113s supports this communication capability quite well. But the addition of one auxiliary receiver to each vehicle, turning one of those VRC-46s into a VRC-47, really improves a platoon leader's ability to respond to the antiarmor needs of the task force. Thus, when he is attached to other task force assets, a platoon leader can still monitor his parent company's net to receive up-to-date antiarmor information about the battlefield. And if Echo Company is operating in general support of the task force, a platoon leader can monitor the command net of the company or team in whose area he is working so that the support he renders is more appropriate and more in line with what that commander wants.

Battalions that have not changed over to the Bradley Fighting Vehicle and that still retain two ITVs in their line companies should go ahead and move these sections into Echo Company for several reasons. Although a single ITV section is powerful, it is unlikely to meet anything on the modern battlefield that it can overcome by itself. One ITV section, for instance, can seldom overwatch the maneuver of an entire company or team. In addition, line company ITV sections can operate only on their company's nets unless they somehow rig up an AN/PRC-77 radio in the section leader's track. And if one ITV in the section is out of action for any reason, the company's long-range antiarmor fires are reduced by half. Finally, line company commanders generally do not train their ITV sections well — the sections are usually either left on their own or used as aggressors in training.

Certainly there are exceptions to this and, oddly enough, some of the best ITV section leaders come from line companies. Once consolidated with the antiarmor platoons of Echo Company, however, the ITV sections become elements of a powerful battlefield force and can be trained and maintained with their own kind. The antiarmor platoon leader can plan and execute tactics that are familiar to all triangular combat units.

In employing this technique, of course, a valid concern is the increase in the number of radios needed within the antiarmor platoon, and one of the most challenging tasks for a platoon leader is maintaining strict radio communication discipline.

Antiarmor platoon leaders and platoon sergeants should be selected from the best soldiers available in the battalion, and being chosen to lead these platoons should be considered both a reward and a challenge. ITV platoons are, after all, special platoons. They are powerful forces that can be deployed over large areas. They often are required to act semi-independently. They can number up to seven vehicles — if the three-section platoon is employed — and they have some similarity to scout and cavalry platoons.

Recently, there has been some debate — and at least one full field study — on the subject of where the antiarmor platoon leader and platoon sergeant should ride. There does not have to be a doctrinal answer to this question; there really is only one good answer: Platoon leaders and platoon sergeants should ride wherever they need to ride in order to control their platoons. The truth is that no matter how much you jazz up an ITV, it is still a poor command and control vehicle. To displace a section leader or squad leader so that a platoon leader or platoon sergeant can better "see the battlefield" is, at best, only an option.

Admittedly, having these two leaders ride together in the same M113 can be tactically dangerous. But it is better to do that than to have one of the ITVs in each platoon dilute its potential armor-defeating power. What the platoon really needs is a TOE authorization for a radio-telephone operator (RTO) to ride in the M113. In the absence of this authorization, smart platoon leaders are presently getting this RTO by taking a good man from one of the sections.

TACTICS

Echo Company's primary role during movement is to provide overwatch for a task force's maneuver companies. Depending on the commander's scheme of maneuver, the company can be dispersed throughout the task force formation, can have a majority of the company well forward overwatching the lead companies or teams, or can be used to help with flank and rear security. When enemy contact is not likely, the company should keep two platoons moving. If the zone is so wide that two platoons must be employed in the overwatch, then those platoons should keep one or two sections moving. The antiarmor company keys on anticipation and position selection and must be prepared to mass its fires. The ITVs will be left behind even by M113s if the company commander and the platoon leaders are not anticipating and aggressively positioning the overwatch sections. (There is a parallel between the way antiarmor leaders must anticipate, plan, and move and the way mortarmen and artillerymen do the same to provide coverage for the maneuver elements.)

In the offense, Echo Company moves by bounds within the task force's zone and provides continuous, overwatching antiarmor fires for the forward maneuvering teams. When enemy contact is likely, up to two-thirds of

the company should be in overwatch, although the Echo Company commander should keep one platoon moving and ready for any eventuality. Once contact is made, the antiarmor platoons establish a base of overwatching fire and begin destroying and suppressing the enemy. Platoons not in contact are not automatically committed to that contact.

It is important that Echo Company retain its freedom to maneuver if it is going to support the entire task force and also deal with the enemy's follow-on forces. Platoons in contact help fix an enemy force so that it can be destroyed or suppressed and bypassed. This must be done quickly so that the task force can maintain its own freedom to maneuver.

Echo Company's semi-independence plays an important part in making this work. For example, the antiarmor company commander may recommend attaching his platoon that is in contact directly to the task force maneuver team that is also in contact. (At times like this, the communication ability of the antiarmor platoon takes on a critical importance.) The techniques of detaching and re-attaching antiarmor platoons, in fact, can become part of a task force's maneuver SOP. It takes a lot of practice, and it suggests a habitual relationship between antiarmor platoons and companies or teams. Once developed, though, these techniques give a task force the flexibility it needs to deal quickly with the fluid nature of a modern battlefield.

In the hasty attack, antiarmor platoons are positioned to provide continuous, overwatching fires and are prepared to provide flank security along a task force's boundaries. This base of fire is not static. It moves, re-oriens, and shifts fires as needed. It displaces rapidly to consolidate and provide overwatch for subsequent task force moves and to defeat enemy counterattacks.

In the deliberate attack, the antiarmor platoons are positioned to provide overwatching fires onto and beyond the objective. Fire planning and distribution are more precise. Subsequent bounds are more clearly identified and sequencing is determined. Again, flank security for the task force can be an antiarmor platoon's mission. Once the attack begins, the Echo Company commander must be ready to move his platoons by bounds onto and beyond the objective to maintain the attack's momentum and to defeat any enemy counterattacks.

In exploitation and pursuit operations, the security of the antiarmor platoons is a particular concern. Still, the ITV can be a devastating weapon at great ranges against enemy rear area targets. Antiarmor platoons can also be used to secure lines of communication or to provide early warning along exposed flanks.

The German Army repeatedly used this flank security and early warning tactic with success in World War II. The technique, called the "pak-front," normally employed the long-range 88mm weapon in a direct-fire antitank role. These weapons often denied the enemy access to the exposed flanks of friendly penetrations.

Exploitation and pursuit operations tend to feed the



Soldiers from the 4th Division unload spent missiles from their M901 vehicle.

continuing dialogue on the disparity in mobility between the M113 generation of tracked vehicles and the newer Abrams and Bradley mix. We might do well to remember that speed alone is not the most important element of mobility — planning, anticipation, and execution are more important.

FIRE PLAN

In the defense, fire planning and control are the keys to the successful employment of a task force's antiarmor assets. The Echo Company commander submits the antiarmor fire plan, which includes TOW, tank, 25mm, Dragon, and artillery fires (as well as tactical air, gunship, and naval gunfire, if available). Control measures include trigger lines, engagement areas, kill zones, target reference points, sectors, priorities and techniques of fire, phase lines, battle positions, and boundaries.

When deployed along enemy avenues of approach the greatest danger to the antiarmor sections and platoons comes from their tendency to bunch-up. This is particularly true of the three-section platoon that might be deployed with other task force elements along a single avenue of approach. In this case, which is not an unusual one, a compromise must be reached between the need to mass fires and the equally important need to add depth to the defense. All too often the defense tends to become linear as leaders try to defend everything in the sector. This is dangerous, and we should be reminded of the old adage that "he who defends everything defends nothing."

Echo Company is well-suited to help provide depth in a

task force's sector. When employing the two-section ITV platoons, the best technique is to deploy the company in depth. Three-section platoons can achieve good depth by themselves. Often in the defense, a task force commander may wish to attach antiarmor platoons to companies or teams. When possible, a task force reserve force can be commanded by the Echo Company commander, built around an ITV platoon to counterattack by fire and a mechanized platoon to hold ground.

Echo Company is also particularly well-suited to the delay, especially when it is reinforced with a tank or mechanized infantry platoon and working with aerial or ground scouts. For example, Echo Company can provide the nucleus of a covering force and can be deployed as far as 15 kilometers forward of the main defense area. Deployed in depth, Echo Company can create a series of overlapping kill zones throughout the depth of the covering force area. As the enemy advances along his avenues of approach, he is worn down and slowed as the elements of the covering force fall back upon themselves, thereby gathering strength. Avoiding decisive engagement is critical, and so is avoiding the inevitable tendency of covering forces elements to "shoot and run." Anticipation is the key, and the control measures used for firing and moving must be simple and flexible.

Consideration should be given to attaching an artillery FIST to the Echo Company. Certainly for special missions, such as the covering force, the company needs a FIST. An alternative to a full FIST would be the addition of a spare radio mount in the Echo Company commander's track to accommodate at least an observer using the indirect fire net. If properly set up, TACFIRE can be operated right in the commander's track.

Supporting the Echo Company in the field will tax even the best company executive officer and first sergeant. Because Echo Company's elements often spread throughout a task force's area, the positioning of the executive officer and his group can present a great challenge. Unlike his line company counterparts, the Echo Company executive officer does not have a track, so he cannot stay too far forward during the battle. What he can do, though, is to position himself with the company's maintenance, recovery, and medical personnel close enough to be responsive.

The first sergeant brings the beans, bullets, and fuel

forward in platoon packages because it is seldom possible to feed, re-arm, and refuel the entire company in one place. Missile resupply at platoon level can be improved if the platoon command and control M113s are fitted with missile ready racks from the old M220 TOW vehicles. This immediate resupply of ten missiles represents 14 percent of the basic load of the three-section platoon and 20 percent of that of the two-section platoon.

An ITV is a weapon of position. No matter how good the weapon and crew are, if their position is poorly occupied, a disaster is likely to occur. Every ITV crew member must know what to do when occupying a firing position. Using an acronym for this process may be useful. The letters SCRAM, printed on the thumb and fingers of one hand, can help ITV crews remember the key elements:

Security. Normally, security means dismounting one crew member armed with an M203. This action is particularly important at night.

Cover and concealment. Often, the crew does not realize what a poor position they have occupied unless they physically get out of their track and look around. Whenever possible, tracks in the same ITV section should visually sharpshoot each other's positions.

Range card. A range card should be prepared in each occupied position. It is important to establish a time limit within which this must be done. By the time a track has been in position for 30 minutes, a range card should be completed.

Alternate and supplementary positions. Every crew member must know where these positions are and how to get to them, both mounted and on foot.

Mutual support. This includes the systems to the front, rear, left, and right as well as any other weapon systems in the area, including indirect fires.

Echo Company can be a powerful force on the modern battlefield, or its combat power can be diluted and lost. It is up to the entire chain of command to see that it is used to its best advantage.

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