

keeping the effects of the enemy's weapons to a minimum. From Position B, M16 rifles can cover Position A, thus bringing to bear the bulk of the platoon's weapons. In the other positions, the M16s cannot be brought into play because the machineguns have a greater range than the rifles. Here, by using the terrain, the platoon leader has eliminated the range advantage of the enemy's weapons.

For the infantryman, this is the greatest advantage reverse and counterslope positions offer—they equalize range differences between enemy and friendly weapons. This is particularly important when a light force is dealing with a heavier force. Additionally, reverse and counterslope positions prevent enemy observation of friendly positions and thus keep accurate indirect fire from being called in from long range.

This example serves to illustrate two

tactical rules of thumb: First, if you can see farther than you can shoot with most of your weapons, you're probably defending in the wrong position. Second, when attacking, place your overwatching weapons so they can hit the enemy from as far away as possible. Thus, in the defense, try to keep the enemy from achieving standoff over you, while in the attack, position your weapons to achieve standoff over most of his weapons.

As can be seen from this limited example, proper tactics are the product of a thought process that takes into account three main variables: the capabilities and limitations of friendly weapons; the capabilities and limitations of enemy weapons; and the use of terrain to make the most of friendly weapon capabilities while reducing their limitations in relation to the enemy's weapons.

All of these factors must be considered

in dynamic interaction with each other. Only then will a tactician be able to arrive at a proper solution. Considering only one or two variables will inevitably lead to a bad decision. After all, if one does not consider the effects of the enemy's weapons, emplacing a platoon on Position A doesn't seem to be a bad idea.

Whether a unit is light or heavy, and whether the leader in charge is a squad leader or a battalion commander, he should always consider the terrain in relation to the capabilities of his own as well as his enemy's weapons.

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Airmobile Operations For Mechanized Infantry Units

CAPTAIN MARK W. McLAUGHLIN

In certain situations on the battlefield, mechanized infantry soldiers may have to exchange their M113s or Bradleys for UH-1 or UH-60 helicopters. Typical air assault operations that mechanized forces could be called on to conduct are reconnaissance, river crossing operations, seizure of key terrain (choke points), raids, and rear area operations. These are normally short-term operations that would be carried out to support the unit's armor or mounted infantry mission.

In response to this possible requirement, the 1st Armored Division developed an air assault training plan in 1988. The plan called for each task force to designate one company, and the division one battalion, to be trained in air

assault operations. Air assault missions were then incorporated into the general defense plans of the trained units as contingencies.

Although the infantry soldiers in the mechanized infantry units were well trained in dismounted or light movement and tactics at the squad and platoon level, the company headquarters and the battalion staff needed additional training for deploying and supporting their units' operations.

Since my company—Company C, 7th Battalion, 6th Infantry—was one of those designated for air assault training, we began planning and training for a possible mission as part of a task force ARTEP. The mission, code named

“Gator Strike” (Figure 1), can be used as an example of the way a mechanized infantry air assault operation is conducted.

The concept of the operation was simple. The air assault force, consisting of three line platoons and the company headquarters, would lift off once the remainder of the task force was in the assault position, land on or near the objective, and secure it when the fires were lifted. The task force would assault through the objective, join the air assault company, and prepare for follow-on missions. The air assault force would then collect its organic vehicles and prepare to conduct follow-on missions, either by vehicle or by helicopter. An operation

like this one normally would be conducted to seize a key choke point, secure a bridge, or disrupt enemy command and control measures on the final objective.

During a computer simulation of this operation, the company was given the mission of seizing two bridges that were key to the task force's scheme of maneuver; they were possibly held by enemy units of squad or platoon size. We organized for combat (Figure 2), conducted our backward planning, coordinated with the adjacent and supporting units, and briefed the task force S-3.

At H-hour, the company conducted its air assault and joined with the remainder of the task force within 30 minutes after it had secured the area by clearing out a dug-in enemy platoon that had been watching the bridges.

The task force's leaders conducted the necessary coordination throughout the mission. We found that the coordination had to be exact and complete, not just for the indirect fires and linkup points but also for the direct fires of the armored vehicles and for the recognition signals between friendly forces. (At more than 2,000 meters, it is difficult for a tank commander or a forward observer to distinguish friendly soldiers from enemy soldiers on the ground.)

Although we were unable to execute an air assault mission during the actual ARTEP, the simulation exercise validated the concept of an air assault by a dismounted company in support of a mechanized infantry-heavy task force in the attack. The company and task force commanders were confident that, in an actual operation, such a mission would succeed in disrupting an opposing force's initial line of defense or in securing a key choke point in support of an attack.

We did learn several important lessons from the simulation, though. First, if a mechanized unit's training in air assault operations is to be effective, it must emphasize small unit actions; most such operations are executed at the company or platoon level. (The standard heavy division has 15 to 22 utility helicopters that can be dedicated to a single-lift tactical mission. To support a task force level air assault, though, the division's aircraft would have to be supplemented by corps or theater aviation units.)

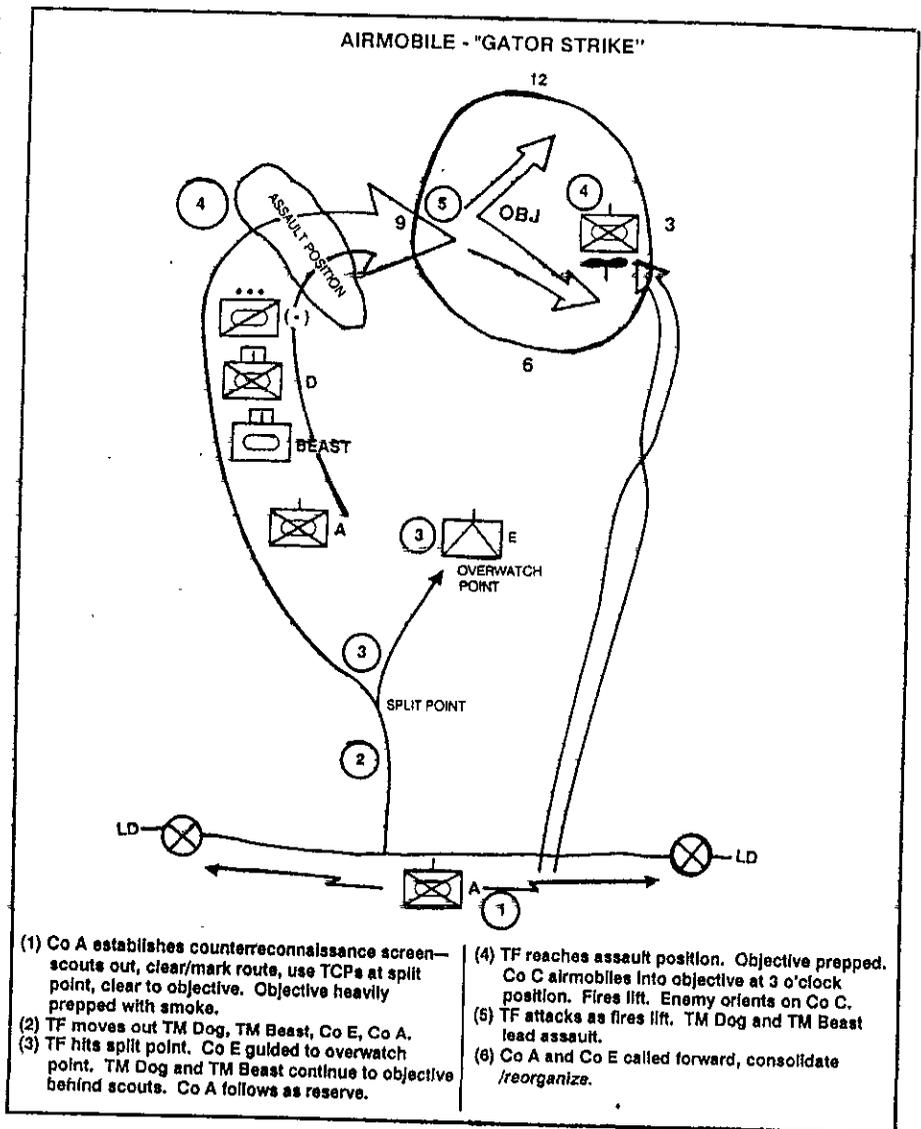


Figure 1

TASK ORGANIZATION					
AIR ASSAULT FORCES			MOUNTED FORCES		
1 PLT (-)	2 PLT (-)	3 PLT (-)	VEH SECTION	CO TRAINS	
1 OFF, 21 EM	1 OFF, 21 EM	1 OFF, 21 EM	1 OFF, 24 EM	8 EM	
			14 M113A2	2 M113A2	
			1 FISTV	1 VTR	
AA SEC	CO HQ				
10 EM	1 OFF, 3 EM				

Figure 2

At least once before the operation, the air assault force should practice the standard battle drills of loading and off-loading and air mission planning with the aircraft. Training must stress the linkup of forces, fire support coordination, and direct fire control, because the mecha-

nized infantry battle moves faster than the light infantry battle and is more deadly to dismounted soldiers in the open. In addition, the dismounted element must train without much of its normal equipment, and the mounted element must learn to maneuver without the protection of the

dismounted element.

Organizing a mechanized infantry company for an air assault operation requires a different approach, because the force must include two separate elements—mounted and dismounted—each with a distinct mission. If designated to conduct an air assault operation, a pure mechanized infantry company, with attachments, has between 100 and 115 soldiers assigned to it. The company is divided into four elements—air assault, mounted, headquarters, and support. The mounted force, however, must have a driver and a track commander for each vehicle, which takes 25 percent of the company's strength, not counting the headquarters and support personnel who have to stay with the vehicles. In all, then, only 65 to 70 soldiers are available for the air assault mission.

Because of the amount of equipment and firepower that must be left behind, the mounted element remains under the control of the executive officer. The company first sergeant controls the support elements and coordinates with the battalion administration and logistics center for the support of both the mounted and the dismounted forces during the mission.

The assault element is divided into three line platoons, a company headquarters, and an antiarmor section (created by detaching two Dragon gunners and a team leader from each platoon and placing them under the control of the company operations sergeant).

The antiarmor section is best used to concentrate all of the company's antiarmor fires along the major armor avenues of approach after it secures the objective, or it is used as a company reserve force during the initial assault. (The company's TOWs should be dismounted and taken along for defensive purposes only where a distinct long range enemy armor approach is available, an enemy counterattack is likely, and the landing zone is on or near the objective.)

Command and control in this kind of situation is, at best, difficult for the company commander. It is therefore wise for him to separate the mounted and dismounted elements until the linkup operation is accomplished, with each talking directly to the battalion tactical operations center. Fire support and direct fires must be tightly controlled between the air assault unit and the mounted forces. The task force commander can accomplish this best by assigning an officer in the TOC to coordinate with the air assault element and to ensure that the supporting fires are properly coordinated until the linkup has taken place.

The latter is the most important and dangerous part of the operation. Command and control at this stage is crucial. Communication between forces is vital, but an easily understood recognition signal is even more important. We found that marking panels could be used for this purpose, because they could be seen from a standoff distance of more than 1,000

meters in daylight. Smoke is not a good signal; it obscures the vision of both elements at the time visual contact is most critical.

Support operations are extremely limited simply because the task force does not have the assets to resupply its forces by air. The air assault element, therefore, must carry what it needs, and this depends on the amount of time before the ground element is expected to arrive on the objective. For a sustained operation, if the landing zone is on or near the objective, or if it will remain secured by the assault force, door bundles can be taken in by the air assault force to form a small immediate resupply base. The mounted element should carry along a basic resupply load so that when it finishes its linkup with the air assault force, the latter can be readied for its next mission as quickly as possible.

Many other aspects of this kind of mission are matters of unit SOP, mission, and the commander's intent. Our own efforts in that direction merely scratch the surface in expanding the AirLand Battlefield to give a heavy task force or division greater depth and maneuverability.

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Soviet Motorized Infantry

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is another in a recurring series prepared from unclassified sources by the Threat Division, Directorate of Intelligence and Security, U.S. Army Infantry Center, at Fort Benning.

The Soviets call their infantry units "motorized rifle units." In fact, though,

their firstline units meet the Soviet definition of mechanized infantry—that is, combined arms units composed of infantry equipped with armored infantry vehicles, tanks, and artillery. The lack of infantry vehicles in many of the Soviets' rear echelon division compels them to use truck-mounted infantry units or motorized infantry. This type of unit is transported in trucks or lightly armored

vehicles, generally without tanks. (The Soviets do not field any light infantry units.)

The infantry squad is the basic combat element of the ground forces. As the organization and equipment of infantry formations have evolved, the number of infantrymen in the squad available for dismounted operations has decreased from 14 in 1950 to 9 in 1960 and to 7