HEAVY-LIGHT OPERATIONS

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Since the increase in non-mechanized infantry during the early 1980s, leaders in the Army have recognized that any future mid- to high-intensity war will be fought with integrated heavy and light units (non-mechanized infantry). By the mid-1980s published writings on heavy-light operations began to appear in professional journals and field manuals. Since that time, few articles have critiqued the doctrinal evolution of our manuals in light of experiences on recent exercises in Europe and the United States, including the National Training Center (NTC). These experiences have validated some aspects of existing heavy-light doctrine and have brought to light new or modified concepts, tactics, and techniques that can be used.

The ideas presented here are limited to a heavy-light force that has as its basic elements an armor or mechanized infantry brigade headquarters, one or more armor or mechanized battalions, and a light infantry battalion (any type of nonmechanized infantry). The concepts are valid for similar forces throughout the world and are not tied to units training for or at the NTC.

The existing publications and journal articles already provide excellent outlines for planning and conducting heavy-light operations as well as a basis for further doctrinal evolution. Some of the more notable of these are "The Heavy/Light Concept," by Major General John R. Galvin (*Armed Forces Journal International*, July 1982, pages 66-80); "Heavy-Light Forces and the NATO Mission," by Lieutenant General John R. Galvin (INFANTRY, July-August 1984, pages 10-14); "Heavy-Light Operations," by Colonel William W. Hartzog and Colonel John D. Howard (*Military Review*, April 1987, pages 24-33); FM 71-2, The Tank and Mechanized Infantry Battalion Task Force (1988); and FM 71-3, Armored and Mechanized Infantry Brigade (1988).

In recent years, the conceptual and tactical evolution of heavy-light doctrine has resulted largely from experience gained during a series of heavy-light rotations at the NTC in 1988 and 1989 and one "focus" rotation in 1989. The focus rotation specifically examined the validity of current doctrine and techniques in the comparatively realistic environment of the NTC. Additional thoughts have come from other exercises, including recent exercises in Europe.

ASPECTS

Before focusing on tactics and techniques for integrating heavy and light forces, a review of certain aspects of heavy-light doctrine may be helpful.

The advantage of a heavy-light mix is, of course, its tactical flexibility. One problem, however, is that leaders who are confident in their ability to control a heavy force often have difficulty employing the light units to the best advantage in a combined force.

Generally, the light force can work in such restricted areas as forests, urban areas, mountains, and strongpoints, freeing the heavy force for decisive maneuver and combat. Our current manuals and exercises have defined some typical light force missions in the heavy brigade battle.

In the offense, for example, the light force might perform the following missions:

- Infiltrate by ground and air to seize restricted or key terrain and limited obstacles for the heavy force (implied link-up).
- Conduct disruption missions (raids, limited attacks) against counterattack forces, command and control centers, and artillery or air defense units.
- Conduct reconnaissance, counter-reconnaissance, and security missions to assist the heavy force.

In the defense, possible missions for the light force are:

- Establish strongpoints, shaping the battlefield and freeing heavy force units for reserve or counterattack missions.
- Conduct reconnaissance, counter-reconnaissance, and security missions, again boosting the heavy unit's efforts in critical areas and providing limited security for friendly obstacles.
- Conduct rear operations tasks to secure command and control (C2), combat support (CS), and combat service support (CSS) assets. Additionally, if utility helicopters are available, they can provide an air assault reaction force.

With the advantages that a diverse force provides, some inherent limitations are also to be expected, and as exercises have repeatedly proved, their implications can be severe. If the two forces do not have an opportunity to practice together, for example, their disparities in mobility and firepower will cause problems in synchronization. And whatever the size of the attached light unit, extensive CS and CSS augmentation must be provided by a higher headquarters (usually division or corps) to support it.

Generally, when a light battalion is attached to a heavy brigade, a typical augmentation package includes a light truck company (-) (25 trucks), a corps decontamination platoon, and a portion of the parent light division's forward area support company (FASCO). Some support from utility helicopters, 105mm artillery units, and Stingers may also be included.

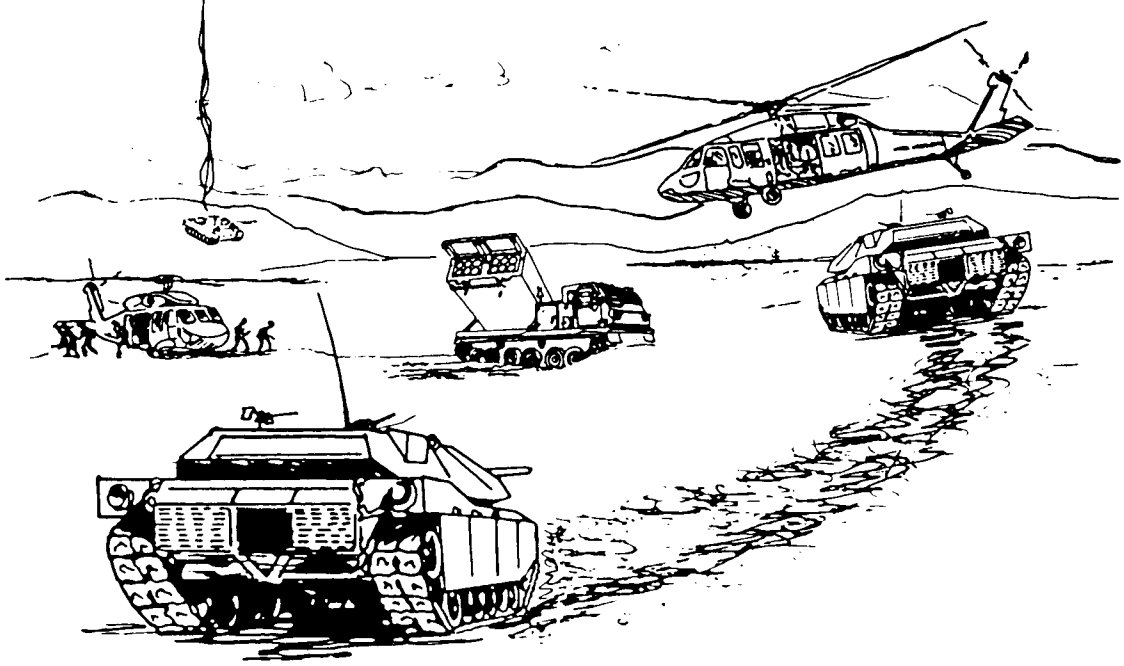
REVIEW

Given this short doctrinal overview, it is useful to review some tactics and techniques that have been used to overcome the synchronization, CS, and CSS problems. Some of the following ideas are described in the manuals, but many are new ideas used by units in recent heavy-light operations. For simplicity, these tactics and techniques are presented in the battlefield operating systems format.

Intelligence. In addition to the missions defined by the manuals, experience during the training exercises led to an added emphasis on reconnaissance missions. Because of their extensive training in dismounted tactical operations, light infantrymen proved to be effective scouts, especially when used in observation posts (OPs) to observe specific named areas of interest (NAIs).

Early in the planning sequence, when the brigade S-2 has prepared an initial intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB), heavy and light scouts as well as select light units can be sent out to cover the NAIs. Through ground infiltration or helicopter insertion, light soldiers can be positioned at critical OPs while heavy reconnaissance units cover areas where more mobility is required. Later adjustments in NAIs can be examined by the heavy scouts or by a second group of light scouts inserted by helicopter.

Light units employed in conjunction with heavy units have proved particularly effective in blunting the efforts of enemy reconnaissance elements. Heavy and light units, using thermal sights to track enemy reconnaissance elements, can guide light elements to enemy contact before the enemy knows he has been detected. Additionally, the number of OPs that a light platoon or company makes possible are a welcome human in-



telligence supplement to the counter-reconnaissance force.

In the defense, because of a light force's limitations in protection and antitank weapons, deceiving the enemy as to the type of force in a given location can be advantageous. Units have successfully used such ruses as digging tank emplacements in the light sector and running tanks through the area (especially at night). Multi-spectral close combat decoys, if they are available from the heavy force, may also be effective.

Conversely, in some situations it may be more desirable to allow the enemy to know the light force's location (for example, by helicopter insertion). If that sector is painted as being the defensive weak link, the heavy force can plan to counter expected threat attacks through the light force.

Maneuver. FM 71-3, Armored and Mechanized Infantry Brigade, states, "Divisions normally task organize brigade-size heavy-light units; task organization can also be used at lower levels if METT-T dictates." More emphasis should be given to task organization at lower levels. In fact, when developing a course of action, planners should *routinely* consider task organizing heavy-light forces at battalion and even company level.

The best way to task organize (operational control or attachment) and the best mix of units will depend on the length of the operation, the enemy tank threat, and the size and dispersion of any constricted terrain (such as woods and built-up areas). As an example, a tank company should be placed under the operational control of a light battalion, whereas a light company should be attached to a heavy battalion. This difference is caused by the CSS capability (parts, fuel) of the controlling headquarters.

Leaders should also remember to task organize their CS assets, considering especially the needs of the heavy and light engineers, artillery, and air defense units. (These groups will be discussed further.)

If a METT-T analysis determines that the entire light force cannot be used in a more conventional manner, leaders should consider using part of the force for missions such as ambushes (using tank killer teams) in front of the forward edge of the battle area (FEBA) and as obstacle guides (for friendly or enemy obstacles). Behind the FLOT (forward line of troops), light infantrymen can be used for limited security at the BSA, the main command post, or the prisoner collection points. If utility helicopters are available, light units can also form air assault reaction forces.

Although the current manuals clearly state that the heavy and light forces should mutually support each other, exercises have demonstrated the difficulty of implementing this concept. Because of the differences in mobility and firepower, even in the planning phase, operations tend to degenerate into separate heavy and light actions.

Commanders, staffs, and liaison officers (LOs) must ensure that the light force is part of the heavy force's main effort and that it contributes to that effort from beginning to end. This interlocking of heavy and light forces should be included in developing the task organization, the maneuver plan, and the use of the CS and CSS assets. Particular problems to watch for include the following:

- Foot infiltration routes or attack axes that are so long that the light force is physically incapable of conducting its final assault.
- Long distances between heavy and light forces that prevent reinforcement by fire or unit movement (mutual support).
- No contingency plans in the event air assault operations cannot be conducted because of bad weather or equipment failure.
- Inadequate plans for extracting the light force in case of friendly failure.
- Direct and indirect target lists and obstacle plans that are not integrated or that are changed after the light force