
Echo Company

A Vital Player

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was prepared by the Directorate of Combat Developments, U.S. Army Infantry School.

There continues to be a great deal of skepticism about the value of the Echo Companies in mechanized infantry battalions. Much of this skepticism stems from a dissatisfaction with the M901 Improved TOW Vehicle (ITV) in fast-paced operations. But some of it results from a belief that the Bradley fighting vehicle does away with the need for a dedicated antiarmor system and that Echo Company is merely a billpayer for fixes to heavy organization shortcomings.

The infantry community must come to an agreement on the benefits of having dedicated heavy antiarmor assets. Dissension will only result in our losing them. By examining what such assets have contributed in the past and what we believe they can do for us in the future, we hope to convince the community that Echo Company is a vital contributor and an integral part of the combined arms maneuver force.

As a historical example of antiarmor employment, in January 1943, Combat Command A, 1st Armored Division, was ordered to seize the crossroads of Sidi-bou-Zid, Tunisia. This brigade-sized task force attacked in column with a tank battalion leading. Defending the crossroads was an understrength *Kampfgruppe* with three panzergrenadier companies and a panzer company in reserve. The attack failed. Fifty-one of 54 Sherman tanks and 16 halftracks were destroyed. They were not victims of tanks but of German antitank (AT) guns. The *Kampfgruppe* battalion

commander had retained control of these towed 50mm AT guns and had structured his defense around their fires. He had positioned them for flank and rear shots into a central engagement area, supported by infantry and artillery and a planned, but not executed, panzer counterattack.

The Germans called such antitank employment a *Pakfront*, a group of up to ten well-camouflaged AT guns under a single commander, who was responsible for concentrating their fires on a single target area. The idea was to draw the attacking armor into a web of enfilade fire that was held until the last moment.

KILL, SUPPRESS, AND FIX

The Germans employed their AT guns effectively in the attack as well as the defense, despite the fact that they were towed and had trouble keeping up with the maneuver units. They were usually moved forward to kill, suppress, and fix enemy armor so that the panzers, massed in depth, could deliver the decisive stroke.

The Russians later adopted the *Pakfront* concept and used it against the Germans at Kursk. By Russian accounts, 75 percent of the German tanks knocked out in that "great clash of armor" were destroyed by AT guns.

U.S. commanders, on the other hand, traditionally have piecemealed their available antiarmor weapons, parceling them out to rifle companies or smaller units.

In the mid-1970s, after exhaustive evaluation and analysis, the Division Restructuring Study (DRS) concluded that the use of dedicated antiarmor weapons would be best planned at

battalion level but best executed at company level because of increased command and control and proficiency in employment. Under this concept, dedicated antiarmor weapon assets, notably the Echo Companies, because of their separate company status, would be employed to complement the available tanks and to cover critical avenues of approach into a battalion sector. It was believed that battalion commanders would be better able to integrate a combined arms team than company commanders because they would have more experience in applying combat power, and would also have an experienced staff and the necessary resources to handle multiple actions not directly connected with having to direct fire at the enemy.

These DRS conclusions, which were much like the later doctrinal philosophy of the AirLand Battle operations of Field Manual 100-5, were reflected in the Division 86 Army reorganization.

AirLand Battle doctrine ushered in a renewal of maneuver warfare at every level of the Army. There is now no clear distinction between attacking and defending. At all levels commanders position their forces or reserves in depth, seeking, structuring, and waiting for an opening and an opportunity to strike a decisive blow.

At the lower tactical levels, successful maneuver normally requires enough combat power to fix or hold an opponent in a frontal orientation so that decisive killing fire can be delivered from a position of advantage in his flank or rear.

The combination of Echo Company and four maneuver companies, particularly when the latter are modernized with M2 Bradley infantry fighting

vehicles (IFV), provides commanders a depth and agility they have never had before. They can now routinely mass tanks in depth at both battalion and brigade levels, using them in their most favorable roles of counterattacking or exploiting a successful attack. Tanks need not be employed as a unit's principal antiarmor platforms.

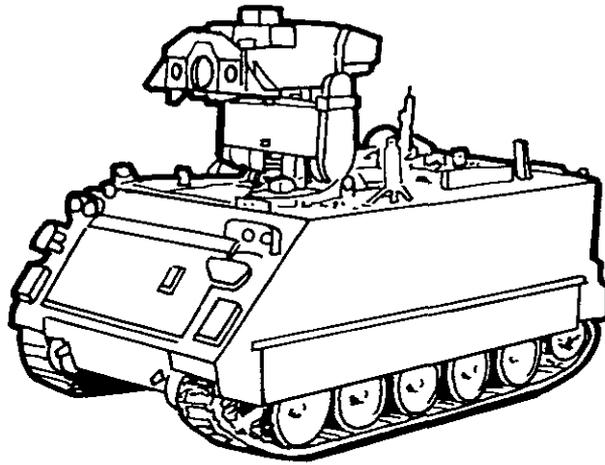
In the attack, Echo Company initially forms the base of a supporting attack-by-fire to fix the enemy force. For this role, the company will normally be reinforced with fire from the Bradleys' 25mm guns and, infrequently, from the tanks. Unfortunately, our commanders too often have placed their Echo Company in the rear of a formation where it must break off and then hurriedly move to its attack-by-fire position. This usually has resulted in a piecemeal attack.

In synchronizing Echo Company's attack-by-fire, the commander must consider using a separate axis and movement schedule, positioning it near the front of the battle formation as a vital part of the base of fire (the fixing force). Echo Company is also suited for contingency flank protection missions to block enemy counterattacks or to set them up for destruction by the maneuver companies.

In the defense (main battle area), the company is normally employed in either an area defense or a mobile defense. In the former, it is given a sector or battle position to defend, retaining critical ground, reinforcing the infantry fires, or denying avenues of approach to enemy armor or motorized forces. In a mobile defense, it can fix or contain enemy forces with antiarmor fires to set up the attack of friendly armor.

The battalion commander exercises command and control of the Echo Company through the company commander. Echo Company is the battalion commander's means of influencing the battle without using his infantry or tanks primarily in an antiarmor role — rarely should he piecemeal his antiarmor force by attaching out the platoons or sections of the company.

The essence of Echo Company is that it frees both the Bradleys and the M1



Abrams tanks from antiarmor missions and allows them to be employed to their best advantage. Commanders no longer have to task organize tanks with infantry as a standard procedure. The tanks can resume their rightful role, in mass, for shock effect and decisive action in both the attack and the defense. Bradley infantry is freed to provide depth to defensive positions and to channel the enemy into Echo Company attacks-by-fire.

The company further frees Bradley infantry for reconnaissance and security missions, restricted terrain clearance, night protection, obstacle and fortification breaching, suppression, and assault roles. The primary consideration for positioning Bradley infantry is for maneuver, not antiarmor, purposes.

The historical concepts and doctrinal roles and missions cited here are not anecdotal or scenario dependent. They are the fundamental underpinnings of maneuver warfare. If Bradley infantry is tied down with Echo Company or antiarmor missions, too many armor units may have to be diverted to assist them. Positional leverage, massed flank and rear attacks, and exploitation opportunities will then be lost, and we will be forced back into the linear, attrition warfare game.

This does not mean that the M901 is the right heavy antiarmor weapon system. Quite the contrary. The Infantry School is actively pursuing the fielding of an advanced system, the line-of-sight antitank (LOSAT). The LOSAT is a

dedicated, vehicular, long range, direct fire antitank system. It employs a kinetic energy missile to provide a significant overmatch capability against threat armor.

This system is programmed to replace the M901s in the antiarmor companies of mechanized infantry battalions on a one-for-one basis. Initially, in the first phase, the weapon module will be mounted on a chassis derived from the Bradley, but during the second phase it will be mounted on an armored system modernization (ASM) chassis. This system will reduce crew exposure time to a minimum, and the missile will have a greater range and lethality than that now employed with the M901.

At the present time, the LOSAT program is in an advanced technology test demonstration phase. The acquisition approach that is being used is uniquely tailored to speed up the equipping of units.

Employing the Echo Company correctly in its doctrinal role is important to success on both the training battlefield and the real battlefield today, and it will be important to success on all future battlefields where our ability to outmaneuver our opponents will be a guarantee of success. Echo Company's combat contribution is a vital component of mounted maneuver warfare.

