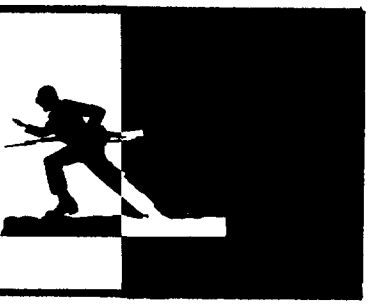
PROFESSIONAL FORUM



The Platoon Team

CAPTAIN JOHN R. SUTHERLAND, III

One of the basics of combined arms operations is to avoid task organizing units below company level. Some of the arguments against mixing Bradley fighting vehicles (BFVs) and tanks are that the two systems are not complementary at platoon level; a platoon leader would be overtaxed trying to employ both systems; the tanks will lose their firepower effect; and the infantry will be spread too thin to protect the tanks and also accomplish their own mission.

Doctrine strongly discourages reorganizing platoons. The only common examples are of the platoon minus a squad or a section that has been retained as a company reserve, or that has been used to beef up the main effort. The doctrinal approach makes sense in the vast majority of the situations a company faces, but deviations from doctrine are sometimes necessary in the face of changes in mission or situation. The key to making a logical change is to understand exactly why it is being made and its relevance to doctrine.

A task-organized platoon is feasible and logical, given the proper set of circumstances. The decision must be made on the basis of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time). What missions require a platoon consisting of two tanks and two Bradleys? What enemy situation will allow—or force—you to task organize your platoons? In what terrain can you get away with this? Have you taken the time to train your troops to work as a small team?

Investing time in training is critical. As a lieutenant commanding an opposing force (OPFOR) motorized rifle company at the National Training Center (NTC), I employed my motorized rifle platoon in battle positions with one tank and two or three BMPs. Everyone in the OPFOR fought that way, and it seemed to work well. Every position had long-range antiarmor weapons on the BMPs and rapid-fire tank killers in the T-72 tanks, and there was plenty of infantry for security.

It was obvious, at least in the desert, that we didn't need to mass vehicles to mass fires. It was also obvious that a system on a vehicle was just a system and not a mysterious device that needed to be led by a branch-specific officer. The Armor lieutenants relied on the Infantry NCOs for guidance on employment, and the Infantry lieutenants likewise relied on the Armor NCOs. A leader is a leader and should be able to run whatever he gets. After all, when attrition sets in at the NTC, the leaders who are left take charge of whatever vehicles are still moving—whether they are tanks or Bradleys.

For the OPFOR, reconnaissance of the units in training at the NTC was easy. Tanks were always clumped up, by platoon, so it was easy to find the armor teams. We only needed to fix and bypass, while the enemy reconnaissance would find tanks dispersed throughout our positions, so it was difficult to identify strong—or weak—points.

As a result of this NTC experience, I was comfortable with mixed platoons and believed in combined arms all the way down to platoon level. When I took command of a company in the 2d Brigade, 24th Infantry Division, during Operation DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM (1990-1991), I fully expected to face circumstances that would require this technique and developed a training program to facilitate it.

I decided that a platoon team with one tank and three Bradleys was not the best choice for a U.S. organization because of the close relationship that wing men develop. I therefore used platoon teams of two BFVs and two tanks each. Since my company team consisted of two infantry platoons and one armor platoon, I would have an infantry platoon team and an armor platoon team. The two platoon leaders and their NCOs were briefed, and the teams were set up. They rehearsed and maneuvered together every day for a few hours so

the leaders could get used to working together. The infantry platoon team was to be used for infantry-type missions—breaches in tight terrain and attacks against trenches. The armor platoon team was to fight on high-speed avenues of approach (AAs) where mutual support from other platoons would not be available. It was fully understood that the pure platoon was the standard and that the platoon team would be a contingency only.

To add to our flexibility, the fire support team hooked up a digital message device in my executive officer's (XO's) BFV and trained the crew to use it to call digital fire missions. This allowed redundancy in the company and also enabled me to send the company fire support officer or the XO with a platoon team to provide call for fire.

The stage was therefore set for employing the team whenever it might be needed, and I found three situations during the war that called for its employment:

In Saudi Arabia, our general defense plan was a large one. We oriented our main defense along the desert-access hard-surface road. We developed a number of separate defense and counterattack options that covered some 80 kilometers. One of the defense options required us to move some 20 kilometers west to a small town with a good road that bypassed the main highway.

The defense of this town put us in an unusual position (Figure 1). The enemy would need to cross a road and pass through the town. South of the town, a large hill split the AA. The enemy could apply his main effort against one side or the other, or attack both sides at once. Since the eastern side of the hill provided the best bypass, this was the side the battalion weighted with one armor and one mechanized infantry company team. The western side of the mountain had a steep ridge that favored the employment of the antitank company equipped with improved TOW vehicles. A tank team (minus) would be the reserve from a battle position in depth, set to block penetrations.

Due south of the hill that divided the avenue of approach was a smaller hill tied in with a fence that enclosed an animal pen. It was the only defensible position that could effectively engage both avenues. Someone would have to sit there, in the middle of the fire storm, and delay the enemy advance to allow uncommitted forces to reposition in depth, and we were that team.

We were faced with two solid high-speed avenues of approach and shallow engagement areas (EAs) that prevented us from massing the fires of more than one platoon. Furthermore, my lieutenants and I would be the only ones to see this position before a fight; we could not bring the company here to rehearse. I put two platoon teams forward, one covering each avenue of approach, and kept the BFV-pure platoon in reserve to reinforce whichever platoon felt the enemy's main effort. This gave me tanks on both EAs. Holding back armor on such a shallow EA would be dangerous against a determined armor-heavy advance. I felt that my "island" defense called for the use of the platoon teams.

The next time we needed a platoon team was four months later. We were planning the attack north into Iraq, and one of our intermediate objectives was to sever a main line of communication between Al Safwan and Al Busaya. The 6th French Armored Division and the 82d U.S. Airborne Division were to hit Safwan, and the 1st U.S. Infantry Division was to hit Busaya. My company was going to be set up between the two in a perfect position from which to block lateral repositioning or the enemy escape route along the only good road.

The road was set in a deep valley. As seen on aerial photos, the width of the valley appeared to vary from 200 to 400 meters wide, with only one or two ways into it and maybe a bridge or two over it. It was the perfect place for a light infantry battalion to take up blocking positions and dominate the road. The enemy's light companies were supposed to be equipped with chemical rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and one tank platoon per company consisting of three T-55 tanks. The valley floor could accommodate only one company and, once again, it was ours.

We were faced with a light infantry threat, a thick obstacle belt, tanks, and a very narrow front (Figure 2). We could advance only with the platoons deployed and traveling in column. A plow tank and a combat engineer vehicle with mine rake were our best breachers. The company's infantry was the best for clearing trenches or bunkers and for forward reconnaissance to report on the situation around the valley's sharp

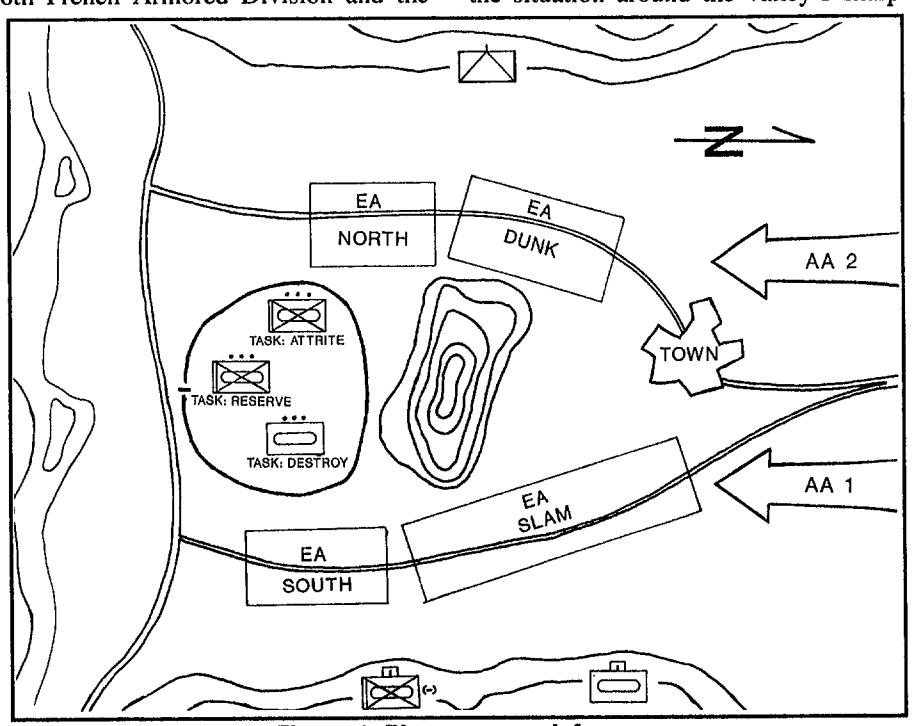


Figure 1. Platoon team defense

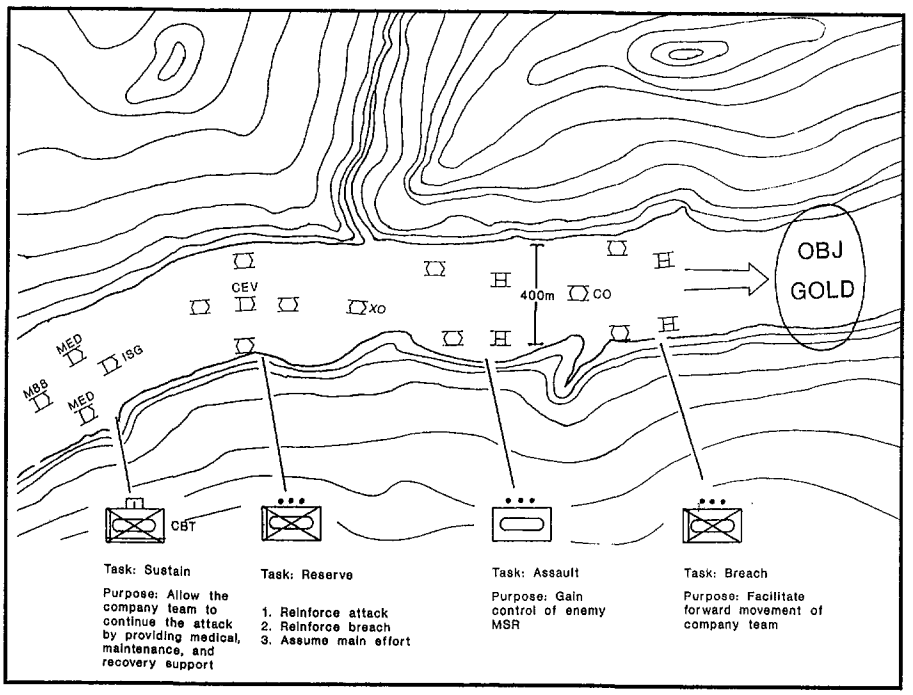


Figure 2. Platoon team defile drill

bends. The best suppression weapon was the Bradley's 25mm cannon, firing high explosive rounds.

I decided to use two platoon teams. The infantry team would lead to provide dismounted reconnaissance to clear the bends in the valley. Because of their survivability against RPGs and T-55s, the plow tank and his wing man would lead, and the BFVs would follow to clear bunkers. A pure BFV platoon would trail with the mine rake to act as team reserve to reinforce the lead platoon with breaching and infantry. I felt this approach gave me the most flexibility. As it turned out, the aerial photos had been deceiving, and the enemy had not been smart enough to cover this important area. But we did advance in this manner.

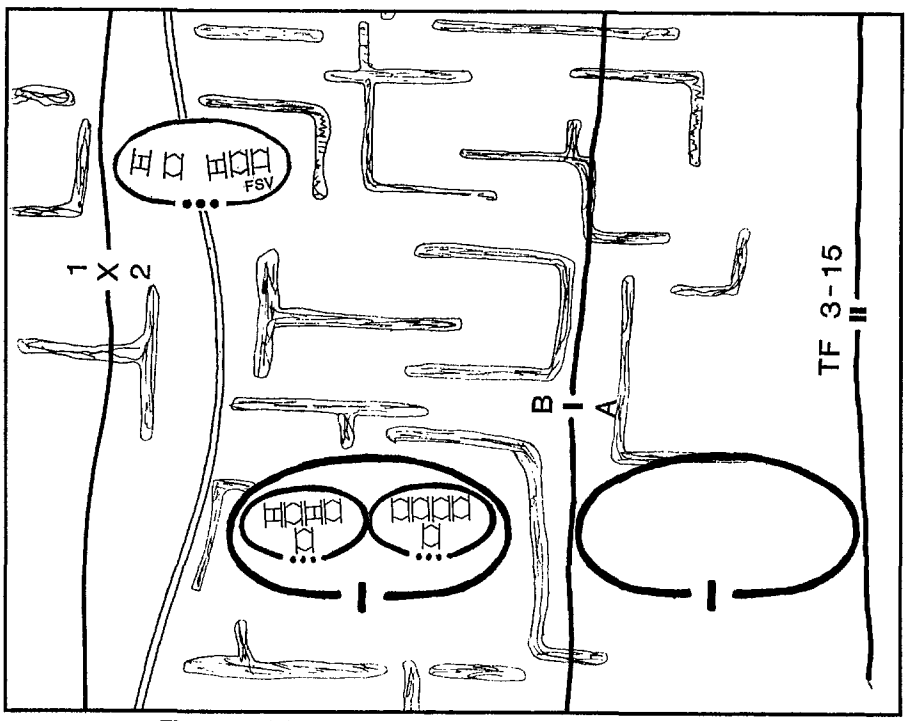


Figure 3. Platoon on high-speed avenue of approach

The third occasion to use the platoon team was along the Euphrates Highway on the night of 28 February, the next to last night of the fighting. We were caught up in the farming area, which was interspersed with numerous berms two to four meters high (Figure 3). Our position at approximately 0300 was highly compartmented. The only defensible terrain for the battalion was one kilometer south of the highway. We tied in the battalion and established our defense.

My company was to hold the left flank, closest to the road and to 1st Brigade, our closest flank unit. The command group realized there was a gap between the 2d and 1st Brigades and the only real high-speed avenue of approach went right through it. The commander could not shift the entire battalion without causing a gap within the 2d Brigade sector, yet we had to cover the road and make contact with the 1st Brigade. We had taken artillery fire that night and had captured many enemy troops moving east and west through the valley. Reports were that we were chasing the Hammurabi Division of the Republican Guard only 30 kilometers ahead of us, and that it might decide to counterattack, stand and fight, or continue to run. The artillery helped convince us that a counterattack was still a possibility.

My company received orders to move to the road to cover the high-speed avenue of approach and link up with 1st Brigade. I told the battalion commander that my company would move shortly but that we first needed to transfer about 40 enemy prisoners of war. He said he did not want the entire company to move, just one platoon. This meant I would send a platoon one kilometer away, unsupported, and separated from me by numerous berms. Since the platoon would then straddle the high-speed avenue of approach, it needed infantry for security, TOWs for long-range antiarmor fires, and tanks to provide rapid fire, close tank-killing ability, and survivability. Since the darkness and the berms would put the platoon out of my view, it also needed artillery support. I therefore made this platoon an

armor team with the fire support vehicle (FSV). Covering the avenue of approach was an armor mission. The platoon would find the 1st Brigade, coordinate the flanks, and position along the road favoring my own position. The FSV, tanks, and TOWs would be used to delay the enemy while we deployed, and the infantry would provide protection from the Iraqi soldiers still wandering in the area. I felt that an isolated platoon on the most obvious avenue of approach, surrounded by drifting soldiers, would need a balanced force to deal with the numerous threats.

The task-organized platoon is not a cure-all. It should be recognized as an exception to the doctrinal rule and, at the very least, an option to be considered. The factors of METT-T will determine when and why platoons should be task organized.

A commander should trust his junior leaders to handle this organization and should train for platoon team operations so the group can get used to each other. Some specialized standing operating procedures would help, along with remembering that massed fires—not necessarily massed troops or equipment—are the key.

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The 21st Century Land Warrior

CAPTAIN GREGORY J. DYEKMAN

The Dismounted Battlespace Battle Lab at Fort Benning is developing a program that will prepare the dismounted soldier for combat well into the 21st century. It begins with a vision of the future dismounted soldier, which is a modular, integrated battlefield fighting system appropriately called the 21st Century Land Warrior. The joint program will support the dismounted land forces of the Army, Marine Corps, and Special Operations forces by making use of emerging commercial technologies and exploiting microelectronics.

This technology push to make high-performance electronics smaller and more rugged will provide the dismounted land warrior with lightweight, man-packed communications, data networking, and sensor modules; protection from a full range of threats; more lethal weaponry; and the ability to operate freely in extreme temperatures and over most terrain. These improvements will give the soldier a technological advantage over his potential adversaries that will contribute to the Nation's ability to deter conflicts or, at least, to win them decisively and swiftly with as few casualties as possible.

Situational awareness and real-time battlefield information are keys to success on the modern battlefield. Dramatic improvements in both lethality and survivability can be achieved through a direct link between modern dismounted soldiers and the rest of the force. Through this network, dismounted warriors will receive digital information from leaders and squad members and will provide continuous real-time information to commanders. This link will improve situational awareness for the individual soldier, the small unit, and the ground and air forces at higher echelons. It will also reduce the risk of fratricide and allow precision munitions to be used more effectively.

Commanders will be able to maneuver forces and dictate battlefield tempo as never before. The 21st Century Land Warrior will be given a tremendous increase in command, control, communications, computer, and intelligence (C4I) capabilities; this will enable small units to better control battlefield movement and tempo, leading to more controlled dispersion and improved survivability and lethality for the entire force.

To achieve this vision, the Dismounted Battlespace Battle Lab is using the 21st Century Land Warrior Top-Level Demonstration (TLD). The cornerstone and integrating effort of the 21st Century Land Warrior TLD is the Generation II Soldier Advanced Technology Demonstration (ATD).

Generation II Soldier ATD

The Generation II Soldier ATD builds on the Soldier Integrated Protective