
The Mechanized Platoon In a LIC Environment

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As a high-intensity conflict in open country becomes less likely, the use of heavy forces to augment light units in a peacekeeping role, or in a low-intensity conflict (LIC) environment, becomes more likely. Mechanized infantry units must therefore begin to examine new employment techniques to support these new missions.

Light-heavy rotations are now commonplace at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), and Bradley fighting vehicle (BFV) companies from various posts now train both there and at the National Training Center. A rotation to the JRTC gives a mechanized infantry platoon leader a rare opportunity to operate independently at platoon or section level. He will find, however, that mission requirements and operating techniques differ greatly from those on the typical mechanized company mission essential task list (METL). This was certainly the case in my company—Company A, 2d Battalion, 12th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division—during a rotation at the JRTC with the 2d Brigade, 6th Infantry Division.

The LIC phase of a JRTC rotation is characterized by a definite lack of a front line of troops, with about two companies of opposing force (OPFOR) operating in teams of five to eight men each. The OPFOR has no weapon heavier than a 60mm mortar and usually cannot mass in any size greater than a platoon. Their logistics system is based

upon groups of well-hidden cache sites and what they can carry in their rucksacks or steal from the training units. The OPFOR soldiers enjoy free run of the wooded terrain, which enables them to snipe, ambush, and harass friendly troops and civilians.

In this environment, a mechanized platoon can expect changes in several areas:

Missions and Taskings. Because of a mechanized platoon's speed, firepower, and protection, a light unit will often give it missions and taskings a BFV platoon does not ordinarily perform. Because light units cannot effectively protect themselves from ambush attempts, convoy security is a constant requirement. Further, using the Bradley's thermal sights, the crew can see even well-camouflaged OPFOR in the woods. Road clearance and checkpoint missions allow light-skinned convoys to continue moving when there are not enough armored vehicles to accompany each serial. Constant movement and random routes keep OPFOR guerrillas guessing; any ambush they plan could see the arrival of heavy forces that they do not want to encounter.

To break the monotony of continual road patrolling, a mechanized platoon can halt and create a hasty checkpoint or vehicle control point. The vehicles can perform a semi-herringbone movement half off the road at designated hasty checkpoint locations, creating an "S"

curve to slow oncoming traffic. The BFVs can then overwatch their dismounted troops, who establish local security and stop traffic as it moves through the interior of the platoon's herringbone. More permanent security points can also be set up. Heavy platoons should expect to be tasked to guard such critical assets as a forward landing strip, important road junctions, villages, or forward area refueling points for aviation assets.

Not all missions in a LIC environment will be so reactive or passive, as mechanized units make excellent fixing and finishing forces in a light unit's area of operations. A mechanized platoon may be designated as an on-call brigade reserve or may be placed under the operational control of a light battalion. As light units find and fix enemy elements, a Bradley platoon standing by can quickly move to finish them.

Despite terrain that is wooded and especially thick in low areas, prudent aggressiveness allowed us to pursue and finish OPFOR guerrillas, even in thick brush or trees. On several occasions, the Bradleys simply used their speed and mobility to overtake OPFOR soldiers and then dismounted their infantry to finish the job. Whenever BFVs are unable to maneuver on a fixed enemy force, the platoon can simply suppress until its own or friendly dismounts can move on the enemy. In this environ-

ment, however, the line of sight seldom extends beyond 300 meters.

The OPFOR typically resupplies from well-hidden cache sites (for which the S-2 section will create a list of possible locations), and the mechanized platoon is useful in searching the areas. A BFV platoon can cover areas faster than a light unit, and the dismounted squads can search while the vehicles provide overwatching security. The platoon can be moved directly upon the suspected cache site, even if it is down in a heavily vegetated creek bed. Again, the presence of the armored vehicles is a powerful deterrent to any OPFOR soldiers who may want to interfere with the searching dismounts. The destruction of the OPFOR's caches will seriously degrade his ability to fight. If BFV platoons are integrated into these search efforts, light units will be left with more manpower for personnel-oriented search and attack missions.

Since these missions are significantly different from the traditional mechanized infantry attack, defend, and movement-to-contact tasks, and because of the nature of the LIC battlefield, a mechanized company's assets are often diverted to other units throughout the area of operations. Bradley platoon and squad leaders will operate more independently than usual. When under the operational control of a light battalion, a Bradley lieutenant becomes something of a specialty platoon leader, and he must effectively communicate the things he can and cannot do for the light battalion. He and his light unit commander must agree upon the criteria for his employment in fixing and finishing missions. If they do not agree, the Bradley platoon could find itself chasing every sniper discovered in the battalion's area of operations. The Bradley lieutenant must also ensure that the light commander understands the wing-man concept and should resist efforts to break his platoon down lower than section level (each light company commander may want his own BFV to add to his unit's firepower). Finally, operational control is the proper relationship, since a light unit does not have the ability or the fuel

to maintain its new heavy assets. A consideration: the Bradley platoons will have to leave the light unit periodically to refuel, rearm, and maintain if they cannot be resupplied on site.

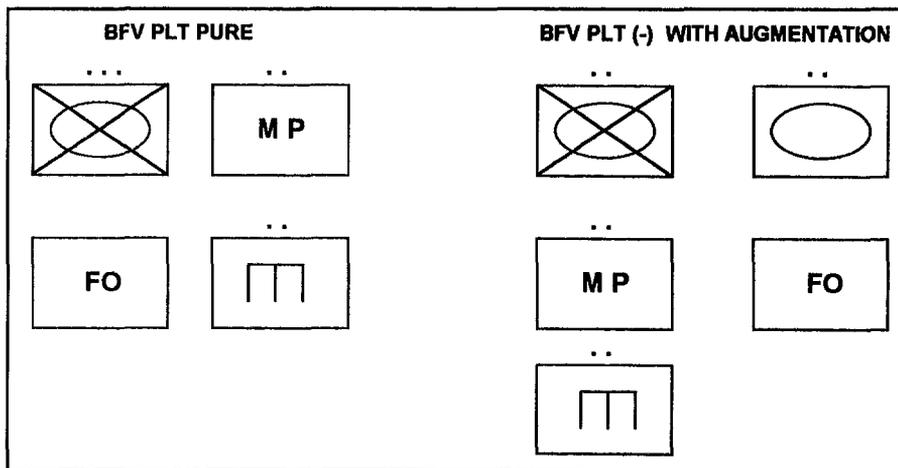
Task Organizations. Given the variety of tasks—and depending upon an analysis of METT-T (mission, enemy terrain, troops, and time)—unfamiliar task organizations may have to be implemented at platoon level to accomplish assigned missions. Field Manual (FM) 7-98, *Operations in a Low-Intensity Conflict (LIC)*, provides a good beginning for tailoring a heavy platoon for a specific mission. In some instances, a section of military policemen (MPs) equipped with HMMWVs (high-mobility multi-purpose wheeled vehicles) can be added as checkpoint and road security experts. The wheeled vehicles also add extra firepower with their MK 19 grenade launchers and mobility when conducting searches for cache sights or ferreting out OPFOR soldiers.

We enjoyed a close relationship with the MPs at the JRTC; they would find and fix the OPFOR while our Bradleys and dismounts moved to finish them. We often attached one engineer squad in an M113 to the platoon to breach minefields or obstacles laid along roads or patrol routes. Since two tank platoons accompanied Team A to the JRTC, tank sections were sometimes sliced to the BFV platoons for added firepower and shock effect. This also kept the tanks close to the infantry, because they could

not effectively secure themselves without friendly dismounts. Sections were often cross-attached between the tanks and the BFVs, creating MP and engineer-enhanced maneuver elements on the LIC battlefield. A mechanized platoon leader can therefore quickly find himself with a variety of potent but unfamiliar assets to use in accomplishing his LIC missions.

Assembly Areas. The fluid and unsecured nature of the LIC environment demanded some fundamental changes in the way assembly areas were selected and conducted, at both company and platoon levels, when platoons were sliced to various missions. Since there was no safe haven to locate, and because there was an air threat only during daylight, all heavy team assembly areas jumped at least twice a day. During the day, assembly areas were located in the woods to conceal them from enemy aircraft. Since the OPFOR would not try a daylight assault, they were also safe from enemy dismounts. At dusk, as the enemy air threat evaporated, mechanized units would move into open fields to force OPFOR dismounts into the open and in full view of thermal sights or night vision devices.

Our assembly areas always had roving guards who checked the interior and the perimeter for any infiltrating OPFOR soldiers carrying satchel charges. Security and scanning were done with AN/PVS-7s, because the noise of the vehicles' moving turrets and running engines often gave away our



Bradley platoon LIC environment task organization.

locations. Short counts were conducted periodically through the night. All vehicles would run their engines for half an hour to charge the batteries and then use the thermal sights to sweep their section of the perimeter to pick up anything the guards may have missed with their AN/PVS-7s. After half an hour, all the vehicles were shut down and passive security was reestablished. To further enforce noise discipline, radio watch was conducted with the volume turned down as low as possible and the guard listening only to the hand mike.

Using these techniques, we lost no vehicles to the OPFOR while in an assembly area. Subsequent after-action reviews revealed that OPFOR assets had moved through the area of operations all night, often vainly attempting to find our vehicles. The OPFOR that did try to penetrate our assembly areas were soon identified and caught by the designated quick-reaction force.

Force Sustainment and Logistics. Refueling and resupply could not be conducted in the traditional way. Sel-dom was the entire company together

often enough for the executive officer and the first sergeant to bring logistical packages (LOGPACs) out in quantity. Differing mission requirements often dictated that platoons resupply whenever they could. They would meet at a company LOGPAC site, resupply, and then return to their separate missions. When such service station resupply operations were not possible, tailgate resupply had to be performed at various locations. Under such circumstances, the platoon leader or platoon sergeant who was not with the company main body had to coordinate directly for resupply. Convoy escort or road security missions would often take a platoon by the brigade support area (BSA), where it would enter and resupply directly from the source.

Since distances in a light infantry environment are compressed, from a mechanized infantry viewpoint, a Bradley platoon under the operational control of a light unit could coordinate to move back to the BSA and resupply there. Since most of the vehicle maintenance assets were there, the BSA was

also often an ideal location in which to perform maintenance. Under the conditions imposed by a LIC battlefield, platoon level initiative and flexibility are the keys to sustaining the ability to fight.

As light and heavy infantry units work more closely, there may be less separation between them in the near future. Many mechanized units are already changing their focus as they add operations in urban terrain to their METLs, rotate through the JRTC with a light brigade, or deploy on peacekeeping missions to various parts of the world. For the Bradley platoon, this means a nuts-and-bolts reassessment of the way it will fight—one that takes into account more independent operation, new types of missions and taskings, and closer working relationships with soldiers of other branches and specialties.

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The Battalion Maintenance Officer In Civilian Support Operations

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In recent years, natural disasters and civil disturbances have shown that both Active Army and Reserve Component units must be prepared to carry out civilian support operations (CSOs). These are typically operations in which military forces are called upon to assist civilian emergency service personnel.

In recent years, both Active and National Guard units have deployed to

quell riots and to help in areas devastated by hurricane, flood, or earthquake. The units of the California Army National Guard were deployed throughout Los Angeles during the riots of 1992 and again following the earthquake in January 1994. (See previous *INFANTRY* articles, "The Los Angeles Riots: A Battalion Commander's Perspective," *January-February 1994*, and "Earth-

quake '94: Operations Other Than War," *November-December 1994*, both by Lieutenant Colonel William V. Wenger.) In each of these cases, units had to operate in an environment that was quite different from the traditional battlefield.

Like all the other staff officers, battalion maintenance officers (BMOs) have to adjust to this nontraditional battle-