

# Employment and Training Of a Light Infantry Battalion Antitank Platoon

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Since the end of the Cold War, the United States Army has undergone many changes, in both structure and doctrine. Light infantry battalions have restructured training to meet the emerging threats in the Third World and in areas formerly part of the Soviet Union. These units are often called upon to conduct stability and support operations, in which there is less need for tank-killing assets.

Although the threat remains (most countries still have some armor capabilities), light infantry forces are less likely to face a mechanized threat. As a result, light infantry antitank platoons often find themselves underutilized. I propose some methods of improving the employment and training of antitank platoons, addressing missions, equipment, personnel, and training.

Light infantry antitank platoons can be employed in many different ways. Their missions can be broken down into the two broad categories of combat and combat support. Combat missions include *reserve and quick reaction force*, *screen*, *defend*, and *infiltration*. Combat support missions include *convoy security*, *checkpoint or roadblock*, *casualty evacuation*, and *resupply*.

The preferred method of employing antitank platoons is in the combat role. The ability to shoot, move, and communicate rapidly is a great asset in a battalion task force. As the reserve, the AT platoon can provide heavy weapons support anywhere on the battlefield and do it faster than any other organic battalion asset. The psychological effect alone is enough to displace most insurgents. During a screening mission, the

platoon can observe high-speed avenues of approach and open areas along the battalion's flanks or front. Our night vision sights can spot heat signatures (vehicles and personnel) out to 3,000 meters. In the defense, the antitank platoons can be instrumental in destroying enemy reconnaissance elements as "killers" during "find and kill" counterreconnaissance missions. During inclement weather, AT platoons can capitalize on the mobility of their vehicles to insert scouts forward of the battalion.

Antitank platoons also have a vital function in the combat support role and should be used in this role during low-intensity conflicts. The primary combat support mission is convoy security. During this mission, the AT platoon can secure battalion convoys and provide competent navigation within the battalion's area of operation. It can also establish checkpoints and roadblocks to control traffic along key roads and conduct search and seizure operations. During missions involving a large number of casualties, AT platoons can provide security for front-line ambulances and transport the less serious casualties in the C&C HMMWV (cargo). When units need immediate resupply, and

when LOGPACs are too vulnerable or not scheduled, the AT platoon can tactically and skillfully push supplies to those units.

The antitank platoon's equipment diversifies its deployment options. Currently, light infantry AT platoon vehicles include four M966 TOW HMMWVs and two M988 cargo HMMWVs. Each vehicle contains a communications platform that includes an AN/VRC-88 SINCGARS (single-channel ground and air radio subsystem) in each gun vehicle and an AN/VRC-91 SINCGARS in each C&C vehicle. The platoon's weapons that can be mounted include four TOW systems, two Mk 19 grenade machineguns, and two M249 light machineguns (January 1996 Tables of Organization and Equipment).

On the basis of my experiences, I recommend the following concerning the antitank platoon's weapons:

- Keep the TOW authorization at four. (Most countries still have vehicles that threaten light infantry forces.)
- Keep the Mk 19 authorization at two. Its destructive fires can rapidly gain fire superiority against any threat.
- Increase the M2 .50 caliber authorization to two. It is a proven weapon system and is very effective against light-skinned vehicles and aircraft.
- Increase the M60 authorization to two. The M60 complements the large weapon systems, promoting force protection while employing longer range weapon systems (the TOW and Mk 19 are dangerous to fire at close-in targets).
- Keep the M249 authorization at

Platoon Leader	11A	1
Platoon Sergeant	11H40	1
Section Sergeant	11H30	2
Squad Leader	11H20	2
Gunner	11H10	4
Driver/RTO	11H10	6
TOTAL		16

Table 1

# TRAINING NOTES

two. This weapon is light, allowing mobility of firepower during dismounted operations.

Knowledge of the mission and enemy will help commanders determine the ideal mix of weapons. Correct mounts and turret modifications will facilitate that mixture and improve force protection. The Mk 64 mounting system is primarily for the Mk 19 grenade machinegun, but with an M2 .50-caliber adapter or an M60 platform and tray, gunners can rapidly employ multiple weapons to meet any enemy situation. I highly recommend a turret modification to add a secondary weapon mount. The Mk 19 and the TOW are ineffective and dangerous against targets within 100 meters. Most metal shops will build mounts to employ M60 or M249 machineguns. The combination of thermal optics and an M60 machinegun proves very effective against small dismounted elements.

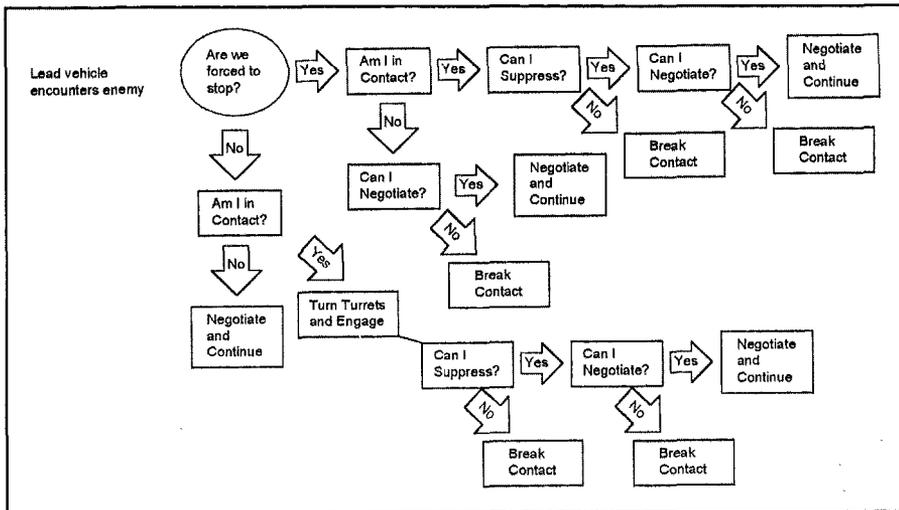
The two most important aspects of the personnel equation are strength and quality. MTOE strength for an AT platoon is shown in Table 1. When the AT platoon operates at less than 100 percent, a leader is forced to serve as gunner. Strength, maneuverability, security, and firepower are rapidly exhausted. I recommend two possible courses of action:

The preferred course would be to add a loader position to each vehicle, for a total strength of 20. The ability to continue the mission in spite of combat losses would then increase greatly.

A second course of action would be to fill the platoon with soldiers in MOS 11B. Just as a light infantry platoon leader mans key weapons within his platoon, a battalion commander reorganizes across the battalion to man the battalion's key weapons. Looking at quality, it is essential that the section sergeants and squad leaders be able to operate independently. Often antitank missions are complex and the necessary planning time is not available. Strong AT leaders can greatly influence a unit's success.

Training should focus on driving, react to contact battle drills, and gunnery.

Aggressive defensive driving is the



most essential element of survival on the battlefield, and the most experienced soldiers should be placed in the driver positions. The HMMWV is highly capable, even on the most challenging terrain. The vehicles and drivers should be pushed to their limits but should not drive recklessly. Every exercise should include terrain driving and stealth driving (through woods and away from roads). Proficiency with night vision goggles is paramount to unit success. Mounted land navigation skills require frequent sustainment training.

The react to contact battle drill is essential in employing the platoon to its maximum capabilities. ARTEP 7-91 Drill, Drills for the Antiarmor (TOW) Platoon, Section, and Squad, outlines a TOW-specific drill that is inadequate in today's employment. I recommend instead the battle drill shown here, which was developed from FM 7-8, The Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad, and associated manuals. SOPs should be

developed for disabled vehicles and recovery, disabled driver, casualty evacuation, and displaced crew escape and evasion. Using the crawl, walk, and run method of training, leaders could run short situational training exercises against a thinking, fighting opposing force to exercise initiative and free thinking. Finally, training should be done in the restrictive terrain where light infantry tends to operate.

The greatest training challenge for the AT platoon is weapon proficiency. Engaging targets from the turret is hard and requires a significant amount of sustainment. The guidelines in Table 2 will help maintain the unit's minimum proficiency on crew-served weapons. The purpose of gunnery is to teach soldiers to engage targets. Leaders should not get wrapped up in complex maneuver live fires until each gunner can effectively engage targets. On frequency, each system and task has frequency outlined in various field manuals and Standards in Training Commission

<b>TOW</b>	Conduct the Gunner's Skills Test Tables 1-6 as outlined in FM 23-34. Additionally, set up advanced gunnery (indoor and outdoor), Concentrating on targets between 1,000 and 1,500 meters.
<b>Mk 19 Grenade MG</b>	Conduct Mk 19 Gunner's Test. Conduct Tables 1-6 IAW FM 23-27. Conduct a field fire engaging multiple targets with a free gun (no T&E).
<b>M2 .50-Cal MG</b>	Conduct Gunner's Skills Test and Qualification IAW FM 23-66. Conduct a field fire, engaging multiple targets with a free gun (no T&E).
<b>M60 MG</b>	Conduct Gunner's Skills Test and Qualification IAW FM 23-67. Conduct a field fire engaging multiple targets with a free gun (no T&E).
<b>M249 Light MG</b>	Conduct Gunner's Skills Test and Qualification IAW FM 23-67. Conduct a field fire engaging multiple targets with a free gun (no T&E).

Table 2

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(STRAC) manuals. The Gunner Skills Tests should be conducted quarterly to sharpen gunners' basic skills. These tests require few resources and are relatively easy to execute. Qualifications are conducted annually, but a unit should never miss an opportunity to put rounds down range.

Finally, the AT platoon should be used in its combat roles. Although ef-

fective and necessary in the combat support role, their employment should not be limited to the latter mission. Proficiency in such diverse missions takes time to train to standard. The AT platoon should not be used as the battalion OPFOR detachment. It should receive appropriate attention and command focus. Crew proficiency is an important part of the battalion task force and,

when properly employed, the antitank platoon can be a deciding combat multiplier.

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