CMTC Lessons

From the Platoon Leader's Perspective

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After returning from a peacekeeping tour in Bosnia in mid-1997, our battalion geared down from the deployment and at the same time trained for a gunnery and a rotation at the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) in Germany. Training a Bradley platoon for the CMTC was a dramatic change from the peacekeeping operations. From this experience, we learned four basic lessons:

MILES rules the battlefield. This lesson was an unavoidable issue on the high-intensity battlefield of the CMTC. With the multiple integrated laser engagement system (MILES), a weapon either kills or it doesn't, which leaves out any subjectivity in assessing *catastrophic*, *mobility*, *firepower*, or *communication* kills. The kills and near misses are also registered in one collective computer bank, used for immediate after-action reviews (AARs) and battle monitoring.

Furthermore, the new MILES II system forces Bradley fighting vehicle (BFV) gunners to practice reloading

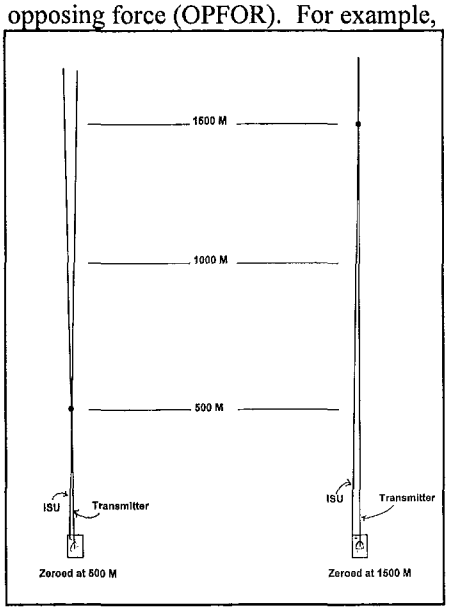
procedures and the platoon sergeants to enforce Class V resupply actions in simulated combat. First-time users of mounted MILES gear become frustrated with the system. Today, however, the MILES II is the best means of controlling a fabricated battle. Some units might consider using MILES training at home station to prepare for a CMTC rotation.

Maintenance on each system is a must. The MILES components on each BFV must be treated and cared for as if they were the weapon systems themselves. This includes the sensor belts and the hookups for the precise lightweight GPS (global positioning system) receiver (PLGR). If the sensors do not respond, the vehicle is not allowed to enter combat. As for the laser transmitter, the priorities of work must include constant zeroing and verification.

A lot of thought must go into when, where, and how to zero weapons. Whenever possible, zero should be confirmed at the greatest distance (at least 1,500 meters), that time, terrain, and security allow. When firing a TOW or the 25mm gun at a 2,500-meter target, a 400-meter zero may prove to be off. This is rarely the case in the wooded terrain at the CMTC, but it does happen at least once in every battle. The parallax effect takes away from the actual reticle sighting. In combat, a soldier can see real 25mm rounds and adjust from them, but in MILES combat, he has to rely on his zeroing talents. The transmitter and the integrated sight unit are 24 to 36 inches apart on the vehicle. Therefore, it would be safe to assume that if a BFV is zeroed at 500 meters, the offset distance at 1,000 meters would be 24 to 36 inches in the opposite direction. Furthermore, at 1,500 meters, the difference would increase proportionally to 48 to 72 inches. (Just imagine trying to fire at a BMP 2 that is 2,200 meters away, for example.)

The method of zeroing the BFVs during a high-intensity rotation is simple but effective. Basically, one platoon BFV, with the MILES key, is sent out as far as the terrain dictates. The three remaining vehicles confirm off the target BFV, then the target BFV fires back to confirm its own zero. This is done, of course, after the transmitters are boresighted, which is a platoon leader's highest priority before entering combat. Platoon sergeants are much better at implementing the actual tasks. This can be done at night, but it is not recommended. In addition to boresighting problems, the light from the flash weapon effect signature simulator (FLASHWESS) and the combat vehicle kill indicator may compromise the position. We found that zeroing after stand-to during twilight was the best opportunity. This allows for good confidence-building moments before an attack. Another consideration is that traveling across the rugged terrain at the CMTC causes the transmitter to shake erratically, thus throwing the zero off.

As for targeting, engagement, and disengagement criteria, the platoon leader must assess the strength of the opposing force (OPFOR). For example,



with the MILES II upgrade, the 25mm antipersonnel round no longer suppresses the OPFOR T-80 tank (a modified U.S. M60). T80s can now fire while being engaged. This is where the platoon leader definitely needs to study the probability-of-kill factor for frontal, flank, and rear shots on vehicles, including BMP 2s and BRDMs. With the sensor belts on the T-80, flank shots consist of the turret only. On the BMP 2 (M113), the sensor belts are on the upper part of the hull. To be effective, gunners therefore need to focus their efforts on the belts—any other shots at the vehicle may be wasted.

Tactics Must Adapt and Change. Once a new platoon leader has accepted the fact that MILES rules the battlefield, his tactics on gaining a positional advantage will also have to be adapted and changed. In addition, he must know the CMTC rules of engagement (ROEs). These ROEs allow for a better simulated battlefield—mines, obstacles, safety, markings, limits of advance, civilians on the battlefield, indirect fire. All these factors must be included in the platoon leader's estimate process during the rotation.

For example, breaching techniques and capabilities are somewhat different. When breaching, we typically use the four tenets—suppress, obscure, secure, reduce—but the direct fire MILES offers little or no actual suppression. The FLASHWESS and the lack of gunfire sound do not display firepower or intimidate, but it does reveal your position to a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) team. The obscuration itself is very effective, but it limits the security effectiveness to the distance of the smoke at the breach site.

The actual reduction of the obstacle is also changed in the ROEs, especially when using a mine-clearing line charge. In a company breach rehearsal, we found that an armored-vehicle launched bridge (AVLB) took about two minutes to emplace over an 11x3 mine-wire-mine obstacle, thus eliminating any need for de-mining, lane marking, and reduction. The AVLB, in this case, proved to be the better choice. Taking all breach attempts into account, the bypass method is by far the most effective tactic. Nevertheless, there are various techniques that allow for a good combination of the ROEs and doctrinal techniques. These are essentially the same; the conditions have simply changed, and the tactics have had to adapt.

One doctrinal tactic commonly used is developing a support-by-fire (SBF) position. This will work, of course, with live rounds in actual combat but not with the present system. We found that there is no such thing as a true SBF. The fire and maneuver effect is altered slightly. A simultaneous fire with maneuver is preferred and more effective (attack by fire). Bounding alternately

and successfully should be used only as overwatch positions but not for establishing a stationary base of fire. Firing by sections, or even the entire platoon, should be done on the move.

Firing on the move does not mean rushing to your failure. A common armor tactic at the CMTC was to attack swiftly and use shock. From my experience, the maneuver of shock in the open was more deadly on our behalf. I prefer a more deliberate and methodical approach. Moving through Slow-Go terrain in the woodline proved beneficial to our survivability and stealth, and was also lethal to the enemy. Tempo is regarded as setting the pace and having constant and overlapping timed events. Tempo should never be confused with actual speed and maneuver.

The difference between cover and concealment is clear to any infantryman. At the CMTC, however, concealment *is* cover. I quickly found that it is futile to fire the 25mm gun at an OPFOR RPG team behind a bush. The foliage itself provided a MILES berm, giving the advantage to the well-trained OPFOR. The same may be done with the BFVs. Actually it is proper doctrine to use the concealment of the brush in masking movements; the side effect just happens to be cover as well. Inadvertently, hand-held smoke also creates a MILES berm (Figure 2). I believe this is cheating with MILES and teaching BFV crewmen bad habits. But it would be an excellent tactic in simulated laser warfare.

Traditional maneuver and formations are not applicable at the CMTC (echelon left/right, vee, action left/right). The restrictive terrain here dictates more of an event-driven type of formation and movement. This is in deep contrast to the formations used at the National Training Center. To seize a valuable piece of key terrain quickly, units should use combat column on the roads. File formations are used to bypass obstacles or travel through a prescouted woodline. It is possible to steer away from the file when going in and out of the woodline, but a new platoon leader is concerned because he loses sight of the other three vehicles and dismounts. This does pose a never-ending problem with command and control, especially with fire and maneuver. Still, if the platoon leader correctly uses his tactical sense, he can maneuver the platoon if he knows the BFVs' general locations. A platoon leader should place more emphasis on where the enemy is than on exactly where his BFVs are. Consolidation will happen at the next opening space of the woodline. This is when a basic "follow my lead" needs to occur.

Use the dismounts. Although the CMTC mechanized fight is very track-and-armor oriented because of the limited number of dismounts, a good dismounted operation can turn the tide of the battle. The mounted sections of the platoon are usually the main effort, but this tends to shift to the few dismounts on the ground. Each mission is different, and the dismounts must constantly refocus their efforts. Every infantry platoon leader wants to dismount and fight on the ground, but with seven dismounts I found it better to stay with the BFV and not be tempted to micromanage a very competent squad and squad leader. I dismounted only on rare instances of damage assessment and obstacle emplacement.

In the CMTC AARs we encountered, the emphasis and focus were on vehicle kills only, by type and quantity. OPFOR dismount kills did not register in the battle because they were too difficult to track, confirm, and register. The fact that they are not included in the AARs should not refocus the platoon leader on killing the enemy. The enemy should never be primarily regarded as a vehicle or track. For example, an enemy dismounted platoon (minus) prevented the breach of an armor company team by the proper use of massing RPGs, indirect fire, antitank mines, and overwatching obstacles, thus eliminating covert breach attempts at night. Twenty-five well-trained OPFOR soldiers killed a company team in the breach. In another example, 20 of our dismounts successfully conducted covert breaches of obstacles, stealthily scouted the enemy, and marked a secure route for an entire armor/mechanized infantry task force to pass through to the objective. This was achieved by sending the dismounts out the night before the attack, 12 kilometers to the intermediate objectives (breach sites). The 20 men were obviously the main effort throughout the night and proved invaluable to the success of the task force.

The same may be done on a smaller scale at platoon level. The BFVs and the squad will mutually support each other throughout the fight. In the defense, dismounts have the best opportunity to provide early warning of any enemy activity. Without dismounts, an enemy squad can easily take out a BFV section. The noise of a Bradley makes it impossible to listen for the OPFOR. Therefore, the squad should be sent out as far as support will allow; it will be the eyes and ears for tracks, and the BFVs will be the shooters.

It is possible to use the dismounts to reduce the enemy force in the defense and in the attack. AT4 and Dragon antiarmor weapons need to be massed, concentrated, and volley fired. The antitank team leader must train his men to fire two or more AT weapons, simultaneously, at one vehicle. A single shot alone will not kill a BMP 2. Actually, this is good training because of the inaccuracy of men firing in real combat. During our last gunnery, three out of five gunners hit a stationary target at 600 meters with an AT4.

When to dismount the men is a hard decision. There are two schools of thought: Keep them inside the BFV to protect them from indirect fire; and dismount them to prevent a complete catastrophic kill from direct fire. At the CMTC, the troops who typically live the longest are dismounted troops. At every stop, the platoon leader should dismount the men for survivability. During screening operations of the defense, they should be left at the forward line of troops to keep watch, for intelligence and to call indirect fire.

We found that teams with radios can be very lethal. Remounting and linkup will take place after the battle. Dismounts who are assessed as casualties in the back of BFVs receive no training value whatsoever, and they often spend most of their time in "dead" pools. Even when the "fog of war" has them outside the BFV with no orders or

communication from "dead" leaders, they at least receive some dismounted training.

In the mechanized fight, the dismounts must be used to help the BFVs reach the objective and effectively kill the OPFOR vehicles. They should never be used to pull security for an armor company or to protect the Bradley, for example. The BFV should be thought of as the means of getting men closer to the battle instead of as the actual main effort throughout most of the battle. Once again, if used correctly the dismounts can shift the momentum of the battle in favor of the mounted troops.

Train for Combat. These experiences are nothing new to some units that continually train at the CMTC. But with the peacekeeping operational tempo of infantry units in Europe, training for combat has been rare lately. This may also be due to the difficulty of acquiring land space at home station training areas. These precious warfighting skills and training were more subtle as our battalion began another peacekeeping train-up for a Macedonia mission in early 1998. When we were training for CMTC, though, the MILES and ROEs were sometimes looked upon as training distractions. Platoon leaders must train their soldiers for actual combat, not to win at the MILES game. If we concentrate our training on winning at CMTC by using MILES tricks, we will be in for a big surprise when tracers are flying across our deck. If used properly, the training distractions can be turned into training enhancements. We need to respect MILES and the ROEs. This is not a game but a train-up for actual combat, which is exactly what it is intended to be.

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