
Heavy Infantry

Let's Revive Its Lethality

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If you have served in a mechanized infantry unit in recent years, you have experienced the frustration of under-resourcing. The heavy force is infantry-poor. A good-sized rifle company might have one squad of seven to nine men per platoon, instead of eighteen. There's plenty of room in those M2 Bradleys out there—some units have even resorted to consolidating all their riflemen into one platoon and having no riflemen, just crews, in the remaining vehicles. Sometimes it seems the only things that come out of a Bradley fighting vehicle when the ramp drops are sagebrush and wishful thinking. Let's be frank: The heavy infantry, while not broken, is a shadow of what it could be.

The good news is that the Infantry branch won a significant victory in the fight for structure within the Force XXI concept. With the loss of one rifle company in the Force XXI battalion organization, it was important to make sure the platoons in the remaining companies were capable of winning the close fight. Analysis showed that the four-vehicle platoon with three nine-man squads was best. Each of the three rifle squads in the Force XXI platoon has two balanced fire teams, as well as a medium machinegun and a Javelin missile launcher for use as the situation demands. Think of it: 27 riflemen in each platoon, 81 in each company. Finally, the heavy force will have a maneuver element robust enough and resilient enough to be effective. And heavy units will see this 27-rifleman platoon organization very soon with the advent of the Limited Conversion Division XXI modified

tables of organization and equipment (MTOEs) taking effect from now through Fiscal Year 2000 for most of our mechanized and armored divisions. We all know that it may take a full-up regional conflict for us to see 100 percent of this authorization, but we are sure to see more riflemen than we have now.

More Soldiers Won't Fix It

Low foxhole strength, however, is not the properly identified problem in the heavy force. Our problem stems from being infantry-poor, and simply adding more men won't solve it. Over

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the years, the lack of riflemen has significantly affected the way the heavy force fights. Empty and near-empty BFVs and an increasing desire to exploit the firepower of the vehicle itself gradually caused us all to stray from the basics of fighting the heavy infantry organization. We lost sight of the two basic building blocks common to all five types of infantry: *base of fire* and *maneuver*. The infantry-poor organizations, lacking maneuver (robust rifle squads) turned to their base of fire (the BFVs) to serve as both. The BFVs exceptional armament and mobility, along with the low infantry strength, have driven us to use the BFV as a tank, and this has embedded some bad habits.

These bad habits, in turn, have translated into bad tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that a generation of young leaders have come to understand as the way they should fight.

One needs only to review the most repeated trends at the combat training centers (CTCs) over the past several years. Most assaults are mounted, with no integration of the infantry squads. Units rarely plan a coordinated attack in which the dismounted force is attacking an objective in conjunction with the mounted force. Dismounted elements are most often sent to conduct an attack forward of the task force, hours before the mounted forces of the task force cross the line of departure. Frequently, these operations result in failure because they are not properly planned and coordinated or because they are out of supportable range of the mounted element.

Units do not plan for or conduct the defile drill as required. While we generally understand the fundamentals of this drill, leaders often lack the tactical patience to allow the dismounted element to clear the defile. As rifle squads conduct clearance, anxious commanders push the mounted force through the defile too early, and the result is failure. Time and again, in both the offense and the defense, the rifle squads are employed almost as an afterthought and frequently with ill-defined and unachievable assigned tasks: It is the BFV that remains the be-all and end-all, the base of fire and the maneuver, and that is not how we want to fight.

This current condition is quite understandable: With such low foxhole

strength and such limited time at home station, it is a challenge to conduct collective training of a heavy infantry platoon to proficiency, and the CTC becomes the first place to plan and execute some of these exceptionally tough tasks. To make this new mechanized infantry organization work and break some of these bad habits, we need to make a significant change in our attitude, training methods, and emphasis within heavy outfits. The first step would be for us to return to basics.

It's All About Suppression

The mechanized infantrymen are our shock troops. Their purpose is to sustain the mobility and momentum of the total heavy force. The tremendous shock effect of massed suppressive fires, and the sudden introduction of rifle fire, grenades, and bayonets, are hallmarks of the heavy infantry. Mounted riflemen are tasked to sweep aside impediments to movement. They gain or clear complex terrain for security or position. Armored infantry units were formed for this purpose in World War II, and they were the key to maintaining momentum in the European Theater. Their techniques—learned at cost from well-trained German units—remain effective today, even though the equipment has radically changed: Achieve fire superiority through suppression, drive the enemy to the ground, close with him under the suppression, and finish him with grenades and rifle fire. All of this requires that the base-of-fire element and the maneuver element work in close coordination, as a system, and not as separate entities.

The timeless lessons in the Infantry School's *Infantry In Battle* (published by the Infantry Journal, Inc., 1934) emphasize this fighting system:

From the time Infantry becomes exposed to the fire of hostile infantry, fire and movement become inseparable. At the longer ranges, supporting weapons will furnish the fire and the riflemen will furnish the movement. This fire must be adequate and it must be effective if the Infantry is to close to assaulting distance and still have strength enough to storm the position.

This concept of the BFV's primary

role as transport and base of fire, as a support weapon for the rifle squads, is hard for some leaders to accept. Who can blame them? The stabilized and armor-protected 25mm Bushmaster has proved to be ten times as effective as any standard infantry machinegun. Considering both the main gun and the coaxial machinegun, a single platoon of four M2s has the firepower equivalent of 80 standard infantry machineguns. With TOW and armor-piercing 25mm ammunition, the Bradley is without question a tank killer. It is a stable, lethal, capable platform and one of the finest fighting vehicles in the world. Why should it be "relegated" to a fire support role? Because it can't get close—it wasn't created or intended to get close—and the close fight, those last few hundred meters, is still the responsibility of the riflemen.

Again from *Infantry In Battle*:

At dawn on July 18, 1918, Company D, 1st Battalion of the U.S. 16th Infantry attacked in the vicinity of Missy-Aux-Bois. Company D found itself in an unusual and unexpected situation. The lifting fog revealed that the company had gone astray. Contact had been lost with all friendly troops with all weapons that had been supporting the advance. Such were the conditions in which this isolated unit stumbled against the strongly held Missy-aux-Bois position and there it was stopped in its tracks by a storm of

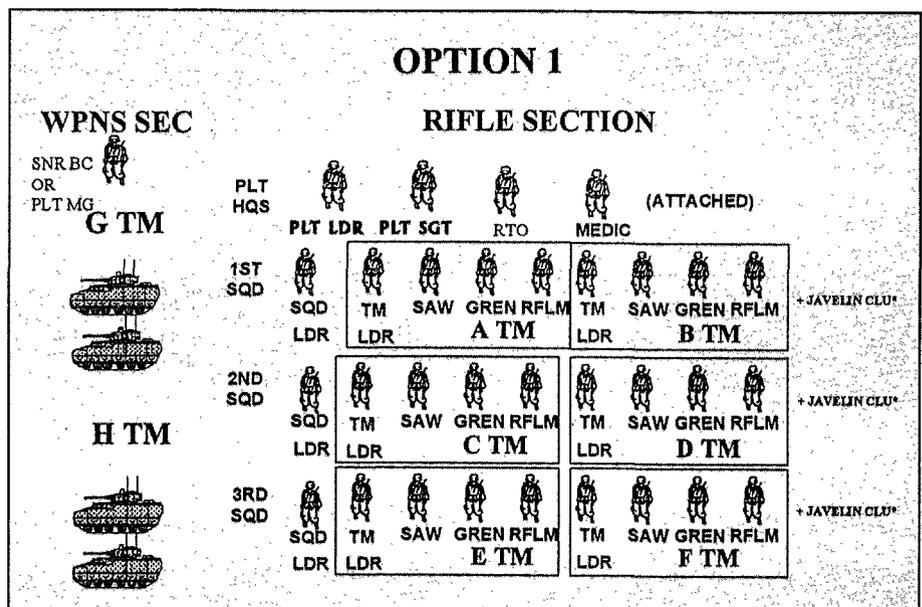
machine-gun fire from the front and both flanks. Further advance was impossible.

Then came the tanks—literally a deus ex machina. Here were supporting-weapons indeed; here was a base of fire—a moving base of fire—that could and did silence the murderous machine guns. Thus did Company D gain the fire superiority that enabled it to resume its advance.

We should think of the BFV as the world's finest mobile base of fire, whose indispensable contribution to the fight is to move rifle squads and to fire accurately. We must think of the rifle squad as the element that maneuvers and finishes the close fight, supported by this base of fire. And do not for one moment think we are "fighting the last battle." This is critical as we look at future battlefields. The dispersed and nonlinear nature, the high tempo, and the fleeting windows of opportunity demand a heavy force that can close fast and apply decisive shock effect at key points. By starting with these basics, and reminding ourselves of the unchanged purpose of the mechanized infantry, we can move forward to train proper TTPs that will improve our current situation and make us ready to meet this challenge.

How We Can Improve

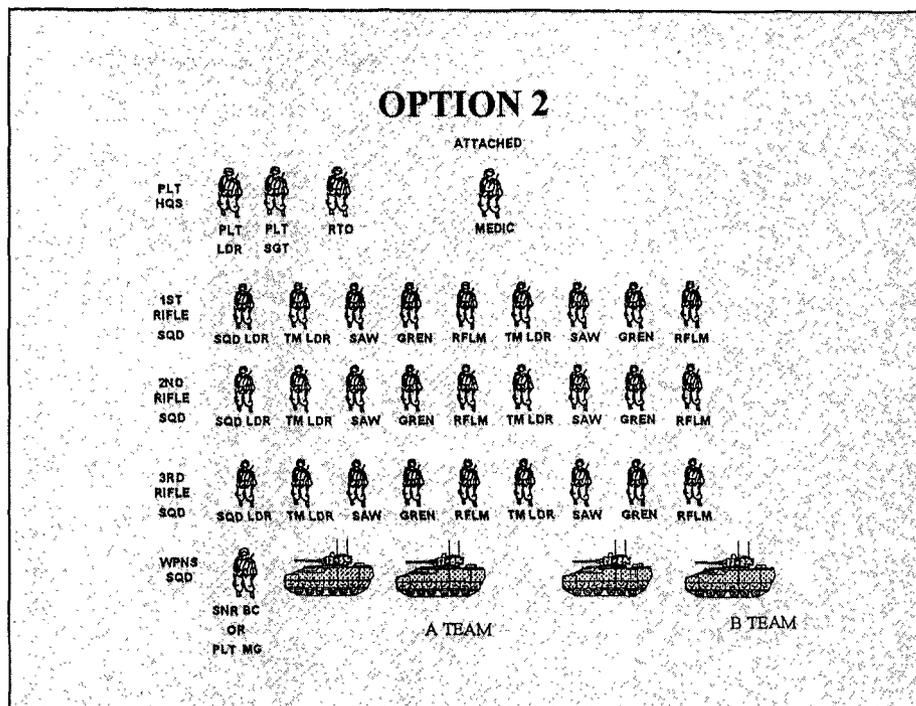
We have sound mechanized infantry doctrine. Our current problems do not



stem from a doctrinal deficiency at platoon or company team level. Nor does there seem to be a problem with doctrinal employment of the BFVs at task force level. But equal or greater consideration in home-station training must be given to the doctrinal employment of the infantry carried by the BFVs, as fully two-thirds of all platoon tasks are dismounted. The next version of FM 7-7J, *Mechanized Infantry Platoon and Squad (Bradley)*, out to the field in draft form this Spring, will incorporate the best of FM 7-8; will give tasks, conditions, and standards for drills; and will be focused on the new platoon organization. While there are no great revelations in this revision of the manual, the emphasis on the base of fire and maneuver roles is clear, and it will be a great training resource.

At home station, it is time to heed the call of many to narrow the training focus for the heavy platoon and make the most of that limited training time. We leaders must fight to minimize the separation in the training of the BFV crews and the squads and train tasks together as often as possible. Our practiced TTPs need to refocus on the basics through the repetitive execution of a finite number of platoon collective tasks for the offense and the defense: For the offense, *react to contact, platoon attack, and move tactically*; for the defense, *build an engagement area and maintain operational security*. Within these collective tasks, mission specific battle drills (such as *clear a trench, knock out a bunker*) can be incorporated. Achieving proficiency in these tasks takes time. Forcing detailed training and rehearsals will give a good feel for the amount of time it takes to accomplish these tasks, help leaders develop tactical patience, and, if practiced as a system, strongly reinforce the base of fire and maneuver concept into platoon organizations.

At the task force level, train to employ this base of fire and maneuver system for success. Again, one only needs to look to the CTC Trend publications for TTPs that work. Some of these include the maneuver element clearing flanks to guide or assist mounted elements, repositioning a



dismounted element to conduct a simultaneous attack with mounted elements, reconnaissance operations, and security operations. Almost all of the successful employment techniques have involved the sound employment of the squads and their base-of-fire fighting vehicles in support. The arrival of the Javelin on the battlefield brings additional considerations and TTPs for employment. Commanders may first determine the best location for the weapon, then task rifle squads to emplace and secure the positions. The Infantry School is looking closely at the initial Javelin-equipped units, and will incorporate into doctrine the new TTPs that work.

Organization and Lexicon

We believe the strongest catalyst to help regain the purpose of mechanized forces and the lost base of fire and maneuver concept would be certain organizational and doctrinal changes. These changes focus on the basis of organization, the terminology, and the M240B machinegun.

First, and perhaps simplest, we should purge an unofficial term from our lexicon. The term "dismount," used as a noun in reference to a rifleman, is no longer accepted here at the Infantry School. If we are to truly support the

concept of one Infantry in which there are five types, then there is essentially no difference between a rifleman and a squad member in airborne, light, mechanized, and air assault infantry; the only difference is the means by which they are brought to the close fight.

Another institutional change that could help bridge the gap within the mechanized infantry with the elements of maneuver is terminology. We consider that the only differences among the five types of infantry are in the mode of transport and the base of fire. The BFV provides the heavy platoon's base of fire. Airborne, air assault, Ranger, and light infantry platoons, on the other hand, rely on machinegun teams or weapons squads for their bases of fire. In mechanized infantry, there are 1st through 3d Squads, as in other types of infantry. But what is the appropriate reference for the four BFVs?

In our recent travels to a number of heavy outfits, we have heard numerous terms: *heavy sections, vehicle sections, fire support element, 4th Squad, mounted element*, and simply *Brads*. Doctrinally, the four-BFV element is the base of fire. We offer several possibilities for your thoughts and comments: In both of the options presented here, the platoon sergeant can either dismount with the platoon leader and

the three rifle infantry squads or stay with the base of fire.

One option is a platoon of two sections: a weapons section, with two teams of two BFVs each, and a rifle infantry section of three squads, with two teams. Team designations change from the standard Alpha and Bravo to Alpha through Hotel. This option avoids confusion during quick references on the net and helps track the actions of platoon elements. When the entire rifle infantry section dismounts, the platoon leader leads it, again, with the option (based on mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time) to have the platoon sergeant also dismount. The senior Bradley commander or the platoon master gunner would take charge of the base-of-fire element; 27 men make a sizeable maneuver element that needs a "second-in-command."

A second option is a platoon of four squads: rifle infantry squads 1, 2, and 3 and a weapons squad of four BFVs with two teams of two BFVs each. Team designation would not change, and this option aligns infantry terminology across all five types.

Delete M240B From MTOE

The existence of M240Bs in the heavy platoon TOE is causing confusion in the field. Under the current organization, if the platoon leader determines that he needs a dismounted base-of-fire element, he must designate that the M240Bs be taken for the mission. He places them where he wants them to support the maneuver and gives specific instructions along with a plan for initiating, lifting, and shifting fires. He then continues the mission with the assault element. In the offense or the defense, the machinegun team becomes a base-of-fire element when the mounted element cannot provide support. Unfortunately, these ad hoc machinegun teams subtract from the platoon's maneuver strength, and the challenge of their training is great. Feedback from experienced infantrymen has been clear: An "arms room concept" for machineguns won't work. The selection, assignment, training, and qualification of machinegun elements are crucial to their success. Therefore, if the machinegun

crews are assigned within the squad, again, the issue becomes reduced rifle strength.

In current U.S. Army doctrine, the machinegun provides fire support, while the automatic rifle provides assault fires. Once again, let us return to our roots. A *machinegun* is characterized as a weapon that can fire on fully automatic and that may or may not be fired in the semiautomatic mode. It has a front-end supported mount, which is often a tripod or bipod for light and medium machineguns. Although one man, under emergency conditions, may operate the machinegun, a two-man crew normally operates it. It is capable of sustained fire and is designed to facilitate barrel changes to prevent overheating.

An *automatic rifle* is characterized as a rifle that has been designed to fire fully automatic. The automatic rifle is operated by one man and, due to its portability, is ideal for offensive operations. The automatic rifle was developed when machineguns became too heavy and bulky to be used in a maneuver force. It is normally fired in bursts and is not capable of sustained rates of fire.

The distinction between these two concepts is important, and we believe, from our recent observations, that there is confusion among our junior infantry leaders. While machineguns provide accurate, sustained, lethal, long-range fires to support both offensive and defensive operations, in the heavy infantry platoon it is the BFV, with its chain gun and coaxial machinegun, that provides this capability. But the M249 can also provide it when necessary: With the standard machinegun accessories (tripod, traversing and elevating mechanism, spare barrel) and additional ammunition, the M249 becomes a light machinegun. The M249, when employed with these accessories, provides the platoon with sufficiently accurate, sustained, lethal, and long-range fires to support both offensive and defensive operations. We understand that the basic MTOE must be changed to add these accessories.

There are differences in the performance characteristics of the M249 and the

M240B, but these differences are not operationally significant. Specifically, there is little difference between the two weapons' maximum effective ranges or rates of fire.

The bottom line is that infantry platoons need resiliency in terms of rifle strength. The M240B was originally added to the heavy platoon to support an organization of two nine-man rifle squads plus a five-man machinegun team. The Force XXI structure changed the platoon organization to three nine-man rifle squads. This new structure does not dedicate personnel to qualify with and fight the weapon system. If the M240B is retained in the Force XXI platoon structure, squads will be required to select, assign, and train machinegun crews, thereby reducing the number of riflemen available for maneuver, which is a step in the wrong direction. We value your comment and input on this issue, too.

We believe that greater training emphasis on the basics, fighting the BFV base of fire and the robust rifle maneuver element as a system, will improve the lethality of the heavy infantry. Input from the field is critical to us so that training and doctrinal literature will reflect the best way to use the new force structure and technology. This will ensure that tomorrow's infantrymen can dominate the full spectrum of challenges in close fights around the world. Please send any comments to our Doctrine Division, by e-mail at durantea@benning.army.mil; or U.S. Army Infantry School, ATTN: ATSH-ATD (Art Durante), Fort Benning, GA 31905.

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