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# The Antitank Section

## In Support of a Light Infantry Rifle Platoon

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During Operation *Desert Storm* in 1991, U.S. military forces engaged enemy armor in the greatest strength since World War II. Although Iraq's Republican Guard and the Iraqi Army did not pose a large threat once the ground war began, the possibility was there for light infantry—including airborne and air assault soldiers—to face the brunt of an armor attack.

If the Iraqi Army had gone on the offensive against the 82d Airborne Division, the division's only antitank capability would have been the 3d Battalion, 73d Armor, the antitank companies of the battalions, and the Dragon gunners in the line companies. The division lost its largest antitank asset when the 3d Battalion, 73d Armor, was subsequently deactivated in June 1997. Around this time, the 82d began fielding Javelin antitank missiles to replace the Dragons in the line companies.

All of these changes show the need for better light infantry training in antiarmor ambushes, attacks, and defenses. The one thing that has not changed since then has been the support of the 11H military occupational specialty in the antitank companies, one per battalion. Foreseeing the need to have these platoons pushed down to line companies, to aid in their attacks on armor or reinforced objectives or defense from an armor threat, also supports the argument for better antiarmor training in the rifle companies. A light infantry rifle platoon leader gains several capabilities when he is given an antitank section.

An AT platoon consists of four HMMWV M996 gun vehicles and two cargo jeeps (HMMWV M998s). The cargo vehicles are for the platoon leader and the platoon sergeant and together

make up the command and control element. The two sections of the platoon consist of two vehicles each with one Mk 19, one M2, and two TOWs with thermal sights. The M996s carry six rounds each for the TOW and can mount or dismount any of their weapons. The section leader is normally a staff sergeant, with one sergeant as a squad leader. Three people make up the vehicle crew: the gunner, the driver, and the squad or section leader.

During my officer basic course I received very little instruction on the employment of the antitank weapons I would encounter when I got to my platoon. What I did receive discussed the use of the TOW as an antiarmor weapon but did not go into the employment of the vehicles when moving with dis-

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mounted soldiers or the use of the M2 or the Mk 19. If you are a light infantry platoon leader, there are several key things you must remember when using an AT section in support of the platoon:

First, a good terrain analysis is vital, because vehicles obviously cannot go everywhere light infantry goes. Plan routes that allow ease of movement for the vehicles, or be ready to halt so the vehicles can bypass any obstacles they encounter.

The AT section must not be used as an advance guard for your platoon; keep them behind you or close to where you are moving. When moving with vehi-

cles, remember that you need to keep them close enough to support you but not so close that the noise gives away your position. Small arms fire can penetrate the light-skinned HMMWVs, and if a vehicle is destroyed because it is out in front, you lose both mobility and a large amount of firepower.

Finally, do not lose command and control of the vehicles. In cases where the vehicles have to bypass an obstacle and then link up with you, plan for this and designate someone to serve as the link-up person. I used my weapons squad leader at the rear of my formation to guide them back to the platoon. He maintained control of them through his AN-PRC-126 on the platoon net. This also enabled him to bring the vehicles up to his support-by-fire position.

During the search-and-attack mission, keep a tight rein on the AT section. Although HMMWVs can drive cross-country in most types of terrain, there are creeks and thickly wooded areas that they must bypass. During planning and route selection, include the section leader in your planning and wargaming group. He will be able to give you an honest opinion as to his ability to drive along your planned route. Do not tailor the route to the vehicles, but make sure they are controlled and responsive when they are separated from the platoon. During movement, keep the vehicles to your rear and slightly out on your flanks. This will disperse the vehicles and also enable them to bypass you without too much extra maneuvering. During the search and attack, the AT section can bound ahead of you a short distance to secure a major linear danger area. The section will be able to cover your left and right flanks, enabling you

to cross quickly, and then fall in behind the platoon. Do not leave them on the road for a long period. Although they can see a good distance, so can the enemy, and two heavy weapon vehicles are ideal targets for indirect fire or ambushes. Also, never split your vehicles when you are moving. Those vehicles are exactly like a dismounted fire team. They are trained to support each other when bounding toward the enemy or breaking contact. The range for the M2 is 1,830 meters, so they don't have to be right next to each other to provide mutual support. Again, the section leader should not allow you to split his section.

When contact is made with the enemy, remember the Mk 19 on one of the AT vehicles. The weapon's 40mm grenades are the most responsive direct and indirect fires you will have to seal off the escape routes of the enemy as they break contact. While the platoon reacts to the enemy—and with the aid of the Mk 19, fixes the enemy—the M2 gunner can be moved into a position to finish him. A key point to remember is that the M2 and Mk 19 have a greater chance of bouncing off positions. Keep the dismounted soldiers at greater distances when using these two weapons. If you do hit a large position with bunkers or a dug-in position, the Mk 19 and M2 will be able to destroy them while you move with the flanking or assault element. After the objective is seized, the AT section becomes a critical weapon system when positioning for a counterattack. If the platoon is moving to an LZ or a casualty collection point, use the AT section to secure the platoon during movement; then place them on likely avenues of approach to maximize the defense of these two points.

During the MOUT attack, the AT section will be key in closing off mounted avenues of approach and providing the heavy weapons, dismounted, to the support-by-fire. The Mk 19 and M2 can be used to seal off buildings from each other and to reduce any enemy resistance inside buildings. The Mk 19 and the TOW can be used to create entries through walls and, if no friendly soldiers are in the building, to clear entire floors. The M2 can rubble almost any small buildings and destroy

many hardened positions the enemy may have built outside of buildings.

After the platoon has seized its objective, you can move all of the weapon systems into positions that will maximize a hasty defense against a counterattack. Remember that you cannot emplace TOWs in buildings or bunkers. The backblast and concussion can seriously injure or kill anyone in that enclosed area. You may also want to mark the danger areas on buildings and signposts behind them. This will prevent soldiers from moving behind them if they must fire.

The defense is an excellent time for a rifle platoon leader to take advantage of the AT section he is provided. If there is an armor threat, the section can dismount the TOW systems and mount the Mk 19 and M2 and serve as a screen out in front of the defensive lines. Since this is a mission essential task for the AT company, the soldiers are trained in it and hence are very useful when executing this mission. When the AT section is performing the screen mission, it will allow you to maximize your platoon manpower to construct the fighting positions and emplace obstacles.

A key item to remember in your priorities of work will be the construction of vehicle fighting positions and the importance of full rehearsals of the vehicles passing back through the defensive lines as the enemy is approaching. Some things to take into account are routes, replacing obstacles along the route after the vehicles pass, and identification of the vehicles when they approach the passage point. One technique is to have an infrared chemical light tied to the Mk 19 or M2 to signal that the vehicle has not been compromised.

While constructing the fighting positions for the AT assets, it may be necessary to man the M2 and Mk 19 with an 11B infantryman, temporarily. This will allow the TOW gunners to complete their priorities of work on their positions. You may also mount the TOW systems on the vehicle and dismount the M2 and Mk 19; again, remember that it may be necessary to man the Mk 19 or M2. During your priorities of work, you will need to mark trig-

ger lines for all of these weapon systems. This will be key in the platoon echelonment-of-fires plan. Use the section leaders as subject matter experts when emplacing these weapon systems.

When working for extended periods away from the company resupply point, the AT section can help carry extra MREs, water, and ammunition. First, make sure there is plenty of room to carry the vehicle necessities; then place whatever extra you can in the vehicle. This may include spare batteries and breach or marking kits. During extreme cold weather, the vehicle may be used to warm a soldier who has a cold-weather injury. The radios in the platoon command and control vehicles may also augment your own communications. The two radios in these vehicles will also allow crews to program your company internal frequency and the platoon frequency, allowing for better communication without having to switch channels or reprogram every time. This will allow you to talk at greater distances than a manpacked SINCGARS (single-channel, ground and airborne radio system) allows. This option may not always be available, but this is a radio that does not need batteries.

Used correctly, an AT section can be a very lethal asset for a light infantry platoon. Remember not to commit the section unless you have to, and when you do, make sure you can support them. The planning process with the platoon leader and the section leader will ensure the success of the mission. The AT section has both more firepower than the whole platoon and the ability to move quickly across the battlefield, therefore enabling it to fix and finish the enemy before he can inflict a large number of casualties on the dismounted infantry. Training with an AT section and a rifle platoon will allow a light infantry unit to be better prepared the next time our Army must face an armor or mechanized infantry force.

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