

PROFESSIONAL FORUM



Lethality and Flexibility Fighting the 4+3x9 Bradley Platoon

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The Army Transformation and its attendant force restructuring will have a significant effect on the way today's mechanized forces train for and fight in combat. The changes forced by the inactivation of one company in each mechanized infantry battalion is likely to receive much attention over the next few years. Unfortunately, when it comes to the changes made in the Bradley platoon, the Army and the infantry community cannot afford to wait that long to adapt our warfighting techniques. The Bradley platoon is the building block of mechanized maneuver. The career management field (CMF) 11 consolidation will likewise be closely related to the training and operations of the Bradley force.

The reorganized platoons will have four Bradley's and three rifle squads with nine soldiers each, a net gain of one squad. Although this change appears to be simple, it leads to vastly greater changes in command and control, maneuver, and training.

Currently, each platoon leader is responsible for two Bradley sections and two rifle squads. This keeps his span of control at a manageable four maneuver elements. Looking at the new design, it appears that the platoon leader would now be in charge of five elements—two Bradley sections and three rifle squads. With a leader normally able to effectively command and control a maxi-

mum of five elements, this seems to be a lot for a new lieutenant to handle. After all, a battalion commander's span of control is only five, and he has a battle staff.

Combining the three rifle squads into one section, and selecting the most competent staff sergeant in the platoon to control the section, limits that platoon leader's span of control to only three maneuver elements. The platoon leader would control only the two Bradley sections and the rifle section leader. Assigning a rifle section leader need not require any additions to the current modified tables of organization and equipment (MTOE). With the removal of the platoon leader's radiotelephone

operator (RTO) and making one of the squad leaders a sergeant with one of his fire team leaders a corporal, current authorizations remain the same (Figures 1 and 2). (The SINCGARS ASIP model's small size and handset controls eliminate any real need for a dedicated RTO.)

The addition of a third squad affects not only command and control but also platoon maneuver. Under the old design with two squads, leaders could simply fight one rifle squad with each Bradley section. Now with three squads, but not an extra Bradley section, the third squad must be split between the two mounted sections. In short, each Bradley section will be car-

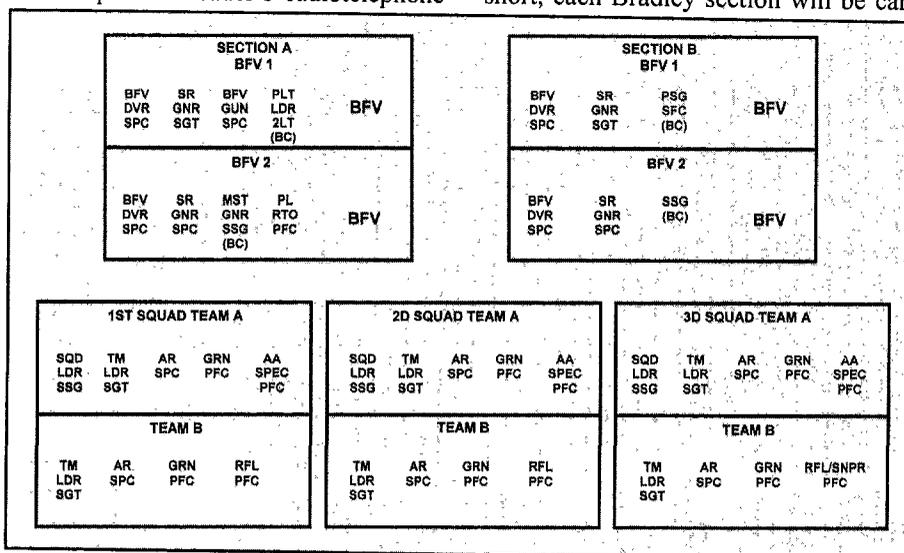


Figure 1. Current Force XXI Platoon Organization.

rying three fire teams. For the platoon to fight effectively as a team, the platoon leader must plan a linkup point for the rifle section, as well as for the contingency that the section cannot conduct the linkup.

If there is going to be a linkup, a leader must be positioned on each Bradley. This is accomplished with the platoon leader's mounted section carrying the first squad and the Bravo team from third squad, while the rifle section leader, second squad, and Alpha team from third squad travel with the platoon sergeant's mounted section. With the squad leader from third squad traveling with the platoon sergeant's mounted section, this places adequate leadership with each three fire team sections until a linkup can be completed. Once linked up, the rifle section can then continue to maneuver toward the objective.

The addition of the third squad enables the platoon to maintain combat effectiveness longer, in spite of anticipated casualties, and continue to maneuver on the objective. With only two squads, they could sustain fewer casualties before becoming combat ineffective. Now, with an extra nine soldiers, the platoon not only has more firepower with which to engage and suppress or destroy the enemy, but also has the manpower to sustain extended combat operations.

In the attack, a third squad now enables the platoon to breach and seize a significant foothold using one squad to breach, one or two squads to assault, and the four BFVs and/or one squad to support by fire. The platoon can better synchronize the maneuver of the rifle section and BFV sections in either assault or support-by-fire roles. With more riflemen now firing and engaging enemy personnel or bunkers, the BFVs can destroy additional vehicles or look deep for enemy counterattacking forces.

In a defensive role, the platoon can now secure all BFVs while also creating a small arms engagement area and increasing the obstacle effort. With more small arms, the BFVs are able to look deeper while they have increased flank security through more observation posts (OPs) and patrols. One of the biggest advantages with the third squad in the

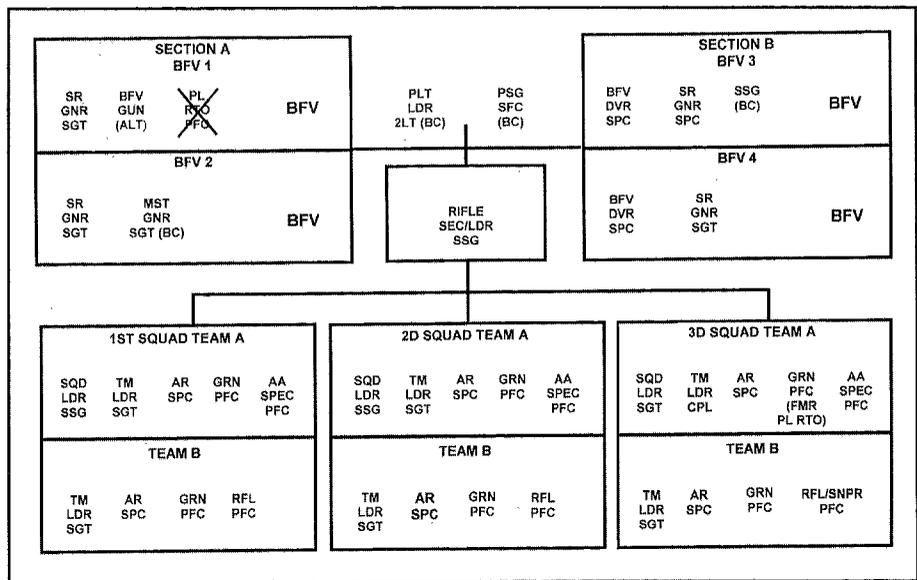


Figure 2. Proposed Force XXI Platoon Organization

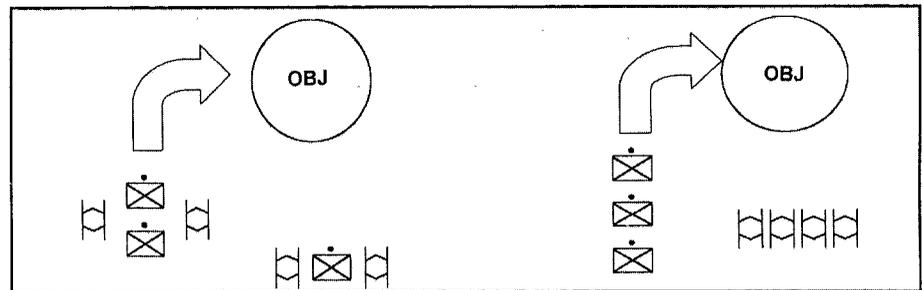


Figure 3. Effects of the third squad in the offense.

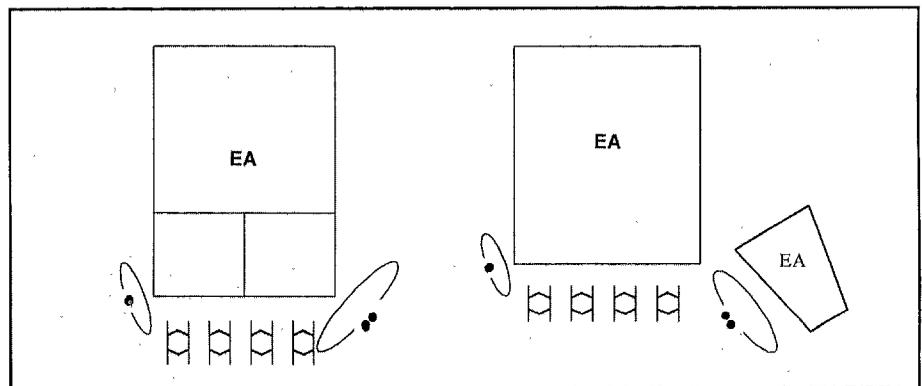


Figure 4. Effects of the third squad in the defense.

defense is that it may now allow a platoon to organize and conduct an internal counterattack.

After a rifle section is created, led by the platoon's senior staff sergeant, training must sharpen the unit's skills and techniques to command and control as well as its ability to maneuver all three squads in any combat scenario. The mechanized rifle section leader, unlike his light infantry counterparts, must not only know how to command three squads but also have a strong

background in mechanized infantry battle drills. The platoon and company must make sure their enlisted soldiers and NCOs are not allowed to single-track in either rifleman or Bradley crewman roles. Proper personnel management and a clear career progression will ensure that NCOs become technically and tactically proficient in both mounted and dismounted roles (Figure 5).

With the addition of a rifle section leader, commanders must develop

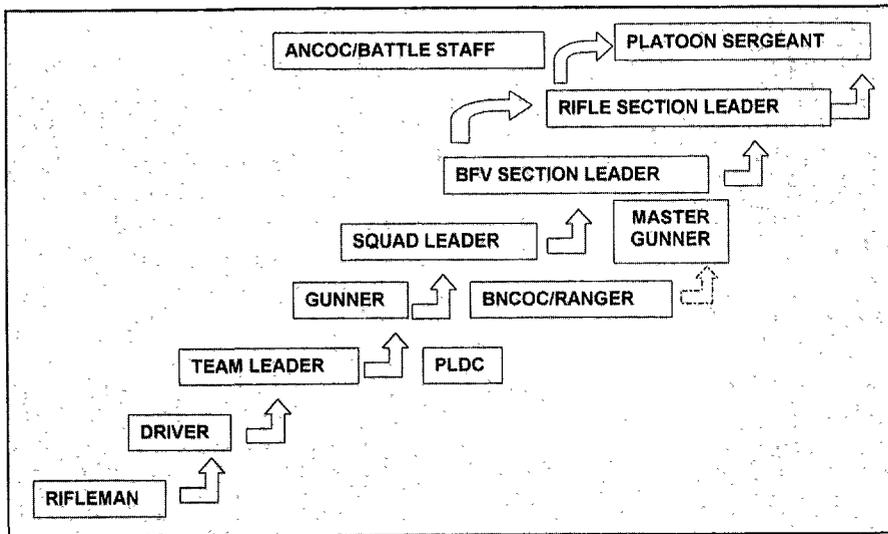


Figure 5. Mechanized Infantry NCO Career Progression.

training that allows the rifle squad leaders and the section leader to work with the riflemen to ensure that they can perform their basic battle drills both independently and as a cohesive team. For individual training, the squad leaders still perform as the primary trainers, while the section leader focuses on resources and supervision. For collective task training, the rifle section leader takes his place as the primary dismounted trainer, with the platoon leader and platoon sergeant supervising. In order to maximize the potential of the third squad, rifle section training must focus on dismounted drills and actions taken in the last 300 meters of the assault, something relevant to all soldiers involved in the CMF 11 consolidation.

Only after the section has become proficient in dismounted tactics should commanders incorporate the Bradleys into the training to complete the development of a lethal mechanized platoon.

From a training management perspective, commanders can best accomplish this by integrating the two during a period between Bradley crew gunnery and platoon gunnery. Ideally, the rifle sections will have trained on their squad drills while the crews were shooting gunnery through Table VIII. During the integration phase before Table XII, the platoon leader and platoon sergeant become the primary trainers to ensure that all three sections understand their internal drills and the way they relate to the platoon drills.

The arithmetic of fighting with three rifle squads and two Bradley sections will also require us to examine how we evaluate our sections and squads. It is also possible to envision scenarios in which the Bradley section and the three fire teams it transports might maneuver together. But given the current training constraints on time and other resources, it makes little sense to blindly follow a

rigid training doctrine in an era when flexibility has become paramount. Instead, company and battalion commanders must focus on developing training exercises that constantly emphasize coordinated mounted and dismounted maneuver in all of the combinations and permutations the new MTOE affords. After all, on the mechanized battlefield, neither rifle squads nor armored vehicles can win the fight alone; since the Bradley platoon is the smallest unit to incorporate both assets, it must remain the building block of the training doctrine.

Although Force XXI reduces each mechanized battalion by one company, it puts the *infantry* back into the mechanized infantry platoon. While one can argue the costs and benefits of this change, one cannot argue that, since the change has occurred, the task now becomes making this MTOE lethal on the battlefield. The key to this lethality lies in maximizing the rifle section in each platoon. In order to do so, leaders must embrace the change and overcome the challenges in command and control, effective maneuver, and integrated training.

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