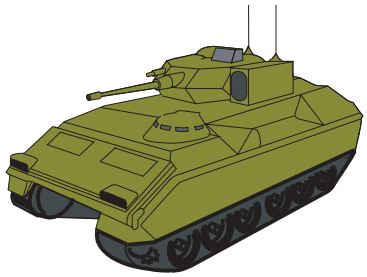
ARMOR and MECHANIZED Infantry Operations in Restrictive Terrain at JRTC



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The purpose of this article is to outline potential missions, as well as tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs), for a heavy team when it deploys to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) and fights in restrictive terrain. These TTPs were validated more than 20 years ago during the Vietnam War and were highlighted in several after-action reviews and studies, including *Armored Combat in Vietnam*, by General Donn A. Starry (Arno Press, New York, 1980.) Quoted material is borrowed from that book.

"The first debate on the use of armored units arose during planning for the deployment of the 1st Infantry Division."

Movement to Contact

The search-and-attack technique is the most frequently used form of fighting at the JRTC and usually does not include the heavy team because a hasty map analysis indicates more restricted terrain than is actually available. When a properly done modified combined obstacle overlay (MCOO) with satellite photos and other terrain-analyzing tools is used during the military decision-making process, it reveals semi-restricted terrain that will support heavy team operations. When the heavy team is used, it is generally as a finishing force. Most recently, though, we have seen examples, purely by accident, in which the heavy team, down to section level, through fire and maneuver has proved to be a very effective force in the "find and fix" part of the "find, fix, and finish" and the light infantry company as the finishing force through its stealth.

"Two significant facts emerge from these engagements. First, contrary to tradition, armored units were used as a fixing force, while airmobile infantry became the encircling maneuver element. Second, the armored force, led by tanks, has sufficient combat power to withstand the mass ambush until supporting artillery, air, and infantry could be brought in to destroy the enemy. Engagements with armored elements forcing or creating the fight and infantry reinforcing or encircling were typical armor action in 1966 and 1967."

When used during tactical operations, these techniques cause high casualties on the opposing force (OPFOR). The first technique requires the light infantry to infiltrate at night and establish an ambush site in the general vicinity of an enemy-emplaced obstacle or potential enemy location. Armor/mech forces are then used primarily during daylight hours (can be executed at night) to gain contact with the enemy. Once contact is made, armor/mech forces use fire and maneuver to turn the enemy in the direction of the ambush. The ambush is sprung, and the enemy is destroyed with virtually no fratricide due to control measures imposed upon the armor/mech forces and the armored capabilities of the vehicles to prevent this.

These forces are able to make contact with the enemy quickly for two reasons. One is their mobility to cover more ground faster, and the other is that when stationary or as part of a convoy they are favorite targets of the enemy "satchel man."

"Rapid reinforcement of a unit in combat was nicknamed 'pile on.'"

The second technique requires light infantry to be as mobile as the armor/mech forces. This is accomplished either in the form of airmobile operations to a landing zone close by, or motorized infantry in sandbagged HMMWVs, 2½-ton, or 5-ton trucks maneuvering to establish a hasty ambush point.

"Contrary to established doctrine, armored units in Vietnam were being used to maintain pressure against the enemy in conjunction with the envelopment by airmobile infantry."

In either case, planning on the part of the maneuver commanders and leaders require clear and concise task and purpose, clearly defined fire control measures (direct and indirect), graphic control measures distributed to all personnel, the ability to identify friend or foe, and a thoroughly rehearsed plan with strong junior leaders executing a decentralized plan.

Route Security and Convoy Security

Armor/mech units routinely function in this role at the JRTC and often have difficulty in the execution. Several techniques have been tried and the most successful of them incorporate combined arms operations.

"The primary route security technique used in the highlands was to establish strong points along a road at critical locations, and each morning have a mounted unit sweep a designated portion of the route. The unit then returned to the strongpoint where it remained on alert, ready to deal with any enemy action in its sector."

A combination of convoy escort, active patrolling, and strongpoint operations has been the most successful techniques used so far.

". . . the division abandoned the strongpoint system in favor of offensive patrolling missions several thousand meters from main routes, a tactic that made a much more effective use of armor."

Combined arms teams have proved to be the most successful when incorporating aviation as advanced reconnaissance, armor/mech as the escort/security force (in accordance with Field Manual (FM) 17-15), and engineers to assist in route clearance, artillery/mortar indirect fire support on preplanned targets, and/or hip-shots and light infantry infiltrating near potential enemy ambush points or critical areas, clearing the area of enemy and linking up with armor/mech teams escorting convoys through sector.

"In an effort to change this situation armored leaders developed several techniques. One, nicknamed thunder run, involved the use of armored vehicles in all-night road marches using machine gun and main tank gun fire along the roadsides to trigger potential ambushes. While this procedure increased vehicle mileage and maintenance problems, it often succeeded in discouraging enemy road mining and ambushes."

Above all, this is indeed a combat operation when the enemy is operating around the clock in all sectors and the restrictions and techniques developed are similar to those encountered and used in Vietnam.

Aviation/Forward Support Battalion (FSB) Assembly Area Security

There may be an occasion when platoons from the armor/mech may be sliced to support the security plan of assembly areas. The tendency for these unit planners is to lock these mobile units into static positions. By doing this, the unit — whether they realize it or not — has now brought the fight to its perimeter, most likely meeting the enemy commander's intent of disrupting operations in those areas.

"The success of the defense hinged on the mobility of the armored units, the heavy firepower-artillery and air support, and the tactics used. The armored vehicles had not been dug in and were not fenced in with wire. Throughout the attacks, ACAV's and tanks continuously moved backward and forward, often for more than twenty meters, to confuse enemy gunners and meet the attack head on. The movement added to the shock effect of the vehicles, for none of the enemy wanted to be run over. In addition, reinforcing platoons carried extra ammunition on their vehicles and provided resupply during battle."

One of the more successful techniques again is using the combined arms team, preparing a defense outside the wire similar to that of defending a battle position developing an engagement area on the most likely avenues of approach to the assembly area for both mounted and dismounted forces. By doing this again, the unit can capitalize on all its capabilities; that is, killing the enemy where we want to, engaging at maximum ranges with aviation, indirect, and direct fires.

In an environment of combat teams, task forces and expeditionary forces, the need for understanding combined arms operations continues to be a challenge during real-world contingency missions and at the Joint Readiness Training Center. The armor/mech team is a viable combat force in any environment and should not be counted out in any mission, once a proper analysis has been completed determining limitations and capabilities required for the mission.

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BATTALION MDMP IN A TIME-CONSTRAINED ENVIRONMENT

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"You can ask me for anything you like, except time."
— Napoleon Bonaparte

It is 2100 on the second day of a rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC). The commander of Company A receives a radio message from the battalion tactical operations center (TOC) that says, "The scouts have located a suspected Cortinian Liberation Front (CLF) cache point in the vicinity of LZ FALCON. Your mission is to destroy CLF and the cache no later than 2330 tonight to prevent the enemy from resupplying its forces in AO Rakkasan. You will get three UH-60s for three lifts and the take-off time for the first lift is 2300. What are your questions?" The company commander quickly plots the grids and realizes that the pickup zone (PZ) is over two kilometers away, and that the only way to make it to the PZ is to move now. As the company moves to the PZ, the commander quickly formulates his ground tactical plan, landing plan, loading plan, and staging plan. At 2240 hours, Company A arrives at the PZ, the commander finishes disseminating the order as the aircraft approach, and most platoons get on the aircraft without a clear understanding of the mission or of what is expected.

This scenario is played out time after time during most unit rotations to the JRTC. But why? Is our time management that poor? Does our doctrine fail to support quick mission planning? The answer to both questions is yes. As an Army, we are poor time managers during planning, and the current military decision-making process (MDMP) at the battalion level is inefficient. The solution we have developed addresses more efficient time management by modifying the process. This article will address various tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) for overcoming time management and mission planning.

The MDMP as described in Field Manual (FM) 101-5, Staff Organizations and Operations, may work well for corps and division-level operations. The complexity of operations at those levels dictates that multiple courses of action (COAs) be developed, analyzed, and compared in exacting detail to attain the best possible solution to each problem. Division and corps headquarters are generously staffed with real experts in their respective fields. Moreover, those who receive the orders generated by division and corps MDMP (brigades and divisions) are staffed with their own experts, capable of dissecting each order and initiating their own MDMPs.

Such is not the case for a typical infantry battalion. At the battalion level, operations are not (or should not be) very complex,