

PROFESSIONAL FORUM



The Fighting Eagle TAC

1-8th forms tactical command post ground assault element

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The “Fighting Eagles” of the 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment (Mechanized), 4th Infantry Division – who are currently deployed to Iraq, – recently implemented a new tactic, technique, and procedure (TTP) for operating its tactical command post (TAC). In the first three months of the Iraqi campaign, the TAC — consisting of the commander’s and S-3’s Bradley fighting vehicles (BFVs) — executed its primary mission of command and control (C2) of the forward fight. Due to recent operational developments and changes in enemy tactics, the TAC has since been task organized with additional assets and reformed into the TAC Ground Assault Element (TAC GAE). While C2 remains its primary mission, the TAC – with the added firepower – can be employed into the fight at a moment’s notice. This article focuses on the TAC as a fighting element and how it can achieve quick, decisive results with minimal risk. The article defines the operational environment, TAC task organization, and capabilities/missions as well as discusses recent operations conducted to demonstrate the TAC’s effectiveness.

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

The current operating environment in Iraq is quite different than the traditional battlefield of the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif. Since the decisive defeat and dismantling of the Iraqi Army, the nature of the war and fighting conditions has drastically changed. Today, in the heart of the “Sunni Triangle” vicinity of Balad, Iraq, 1-8 Infantry finds itself operating on a noncontiguous battlefield, fighting in a low intensity conflict, where the enemy is using guerrilla-style tactics to combat the overwhelming firepower and superior training of coalition forces in an attempt to undermine coalition resolve and sway public opinion. Tactics used by the enemy include close ambushes with RPG-7s (rocket-propelled grenades) combined with small arms fire, use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) placed along well-traveled routes frequently used by coalition forces, and the frequent firing of mortars at high value targets (HVTs) such as the Corps logistics support area (LSA). These attacks are normally carried out by three to five individuals – usually peasants or local farmers who have been paid a generous sum by former Baath Party and Fedayeen leaders. The scenario described above mirrors the operating environment found at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), Fort Polk, Louisiana. As such, mechanized units alike have adapted their TTPs to combat enemy actions.

Based on the current threat environment and the fact that attacks can occur at anytime from any direction, no element is safe from attack. All Soldiers must be equipped and prepared to fight at anytime. Therefore, the Fighting Eagle TAC was born and has since operated with great success.

Another justification for forming the fighting TAC is the fact that our area of operations (AO) covers more than 80 square kilometers, and we have rifle companies established in outlying forward operating bases (FOBs). In order for the commander and S-3 to conduct battlefield circulation and C2 operations, the TAC must travel great distances day and night when there is always the imminent threat of contact. In addition, the fighting TAC acts as a combat multiplier by conducting limited operations, which preserves line company combat power for larger missions. Therefore, the fighting TAC is organized, prepared and capable of closing with and destroying the enemy once contact is made.

TAC TASK ORGANIZATION

As mentioned previously, at the outset of Operation Iraqi Freedom the TAC consisted of two BFVs. After three months of fighting, based on enemy tactics and tactical lessons learned, the TAC added Scouts, dismounted infantrymen and additional wheeled assets forming a formidable ground assault element, which could be employed at a moments notice much like a quick reaction force (QRF).

CAPABILITIES / MISSIONS

Task organized as listed above, the fighting TAC has added capabilities and can execute an array of missions across the spectrum of conflict while conducting its primary mission of C2. Capabilities include mobility and firepower equal to that of a mechanized infantry platoon, the ability to sustain itself for 24 to 48 hours if necessary, and the ability to serve as a QRF. As mentioned, the threat faced has been minimal with the largest element operating in three-to-five-man teams. Upon contact, the threat is outmatched numerically and outgunned in firepower.

The missions executed by the TAC cover the full spectrum of offensive and stability and support operations (SASO). The majority of operations executed by the TAC are in conjunction with the TAC accompanying one of our rifle companies providing C2 for the main effort. However, depending on METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops – time available) and the situation, the TAC has operated

independently executing raids, cordon and search operations, flash checkpoints, presence patrols and most recently the TAC executed search and attack operations to locate enemy mortars firing in our AO. There is no limit to the operations that can be conducted by the fighting TAC.

RECENT OPERATIONS

The fighting TAC has executed numerous missions to prove its effectiveness as a ground assault element. Most recently, the fighting TAC executed a movement to contact operation to locate and destroy a suspected mortar position which had been responsible for firing on the Corps LSA, which is located at Balad Airfield, Iraq. The operation was not deliberately planned. The TAC was on routine patrol in the vicinity of the LSA when it received mortar fire. The call to react came from higher headquarters, and the TAC — being the closest element — responded. Based on successful templating by the S-2, the TAC maneuvered to the suspected location and arrived within 10 minutes of the mortar's firing. After 20 minutes of searching, our scout element caught three individuals attempting to cache 82mm mortar rounds. They were immediately detained, and a detailed search of a nearby orchard was conducted that led to the discovery and seizure of an 82mm mortar and additional mortar rounds.

Another successful mission executed by the fighting TAC was the seizure of one of the largest weapons and explosive caches since the end of major hostilities was declared in early May. This operation was executed based on an informant lead, which provided the location and names of the individuals associated. The intelligence pointed to a senior Iraqi Al Qaeda leader who had conducted recent attacks against coalition forces in Baghdad and was operating out of a remote farmhouse near Ad Duluwiyah, Iraq. The informant stated that the cache would be moved soon to avoid detection and quick response was required to seize it. The fighting TAC quickly assembled, a fragmentary order was issued, and the operation was conducted. Upon arrival at the farmhouse, an inner and outer cordon was set, and the house was cleared by our scout element. The targeted individual was not home at the time; however, in an adjacent building, explosives were found along with several prepared



Sergeant Jack Morse

A Soldier from the 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, pulls security at a site near Balad, Iraq.

IEDs. The TAC found one ton of C4, 80,000 meters of detonation cord, and numerous electronic fuses. Additionally, the scouts and other infantrymen conducted a detailed search of the area with the assistance of mine detectors and soon found a buried cache. This cache contained more than 20 SA-16s, 75 RPG-7s, 50-100 AK 47s, SKS' and RPK machine guns and several crates of ammunition.

Finally, the fighting TAC conducts combat/presence patrols every time it leaves the wire while conducting battlefield circulation. During the course of these patrols, the TAC has come under ambush in the form of IEDs, RPG-7s and direct fire. Based on these contacts, the TAC has honed its tactical skills. However, the fighting TAC has not been without its share of wounded Soldiers. In the event of casualties, the TAC quickly provides buddy aid, secures the perimeter, sets up the landing zone (LZ), and contacts the air medevac. The skills acquired through Combat Lifesavers Training are invaluable. This, coupled with calm senior leadership, has saved several Soldiers who were seriously wounded.

The techniques discussed are used by all of our maneuver forces. The TAC is simply another fighting element at the commander's disposal. Organized and employed in the manner discussed, the TAC proves invaluable in its day-to-day operations. The combat power of this element far exceeds and outmatches any threat faced. This element, like all other maneuver elements, can operate and execute missions across the

spectrum of conflict. Our primary function is C2 of the battalion fight, but by thinking outside the box, the fighting TAC can operate independently and achieve decisive results.

The current operational environment in the "Sunni Triangle" is much like the environment at JRTC. Tactics used there have been adapted, adjusted and implemented and proven highly effective. Everyone at anytime is subject to attack and therefore everyone must be prepared to fight. The Fighting Eagles learned these lessons early on and formed the Fighting Eagle TAC.

The key to success is to counter the enemy no matter how small with overwhelming force. Therein lies the decisive point in this fight in Iraq. The fighting TAC is not a new concept, rather an adjustment in the way we fight. Task organized and employed in this manner the fighting TAC introduces not only another combat multiplier for the battalion, but also one with agility, speed and force. The mission remains the same – to close with and destroy by means of fire and maneuver. However, the fighting TAC provides another maneuver element on the asymmetric battlefield capable of destroying enemy resistance.

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