

Challenges and Potentials of an SBCT Rifle Platoon Leader

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The Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) concept is truly worth examining because of its potential and its applicability to future operations. A recently concluded Initial Operational Test and Evaluation (IOT&E) unmasked great potential for the SBCT concept as the way to fight. The purpose of this article is to provide a glimpse of the challenges and potentials of an SBCT during the train-up and of the IOT&E from a platoon leader's perspective.

The concept, task organization, and organic weapons within the platoon have greatly altered the dynamics of the way you fight with the SBCT platoon, because fighting the fight at the platoon level within an SBCT rifle company can quickly become fast paced and lethal. The task organization and organic weapons in the platoon make it more lethal and capable of accomplishing many varied tasks that may be unique to an SBCT rifle platoon. Organic weapons include Javelins, AT4 (not by MTOE but part of unit's basic load), MK-19 grenade machine gun and the M2 .50 caliber machine gun. These weapons, combined with four Stryker Infantry Carrier Vehicles (ICVs), three full squads with designated marksmen and a weapons squad, are the core that make an SBCT rifle platoon both lethal and highly mobile.

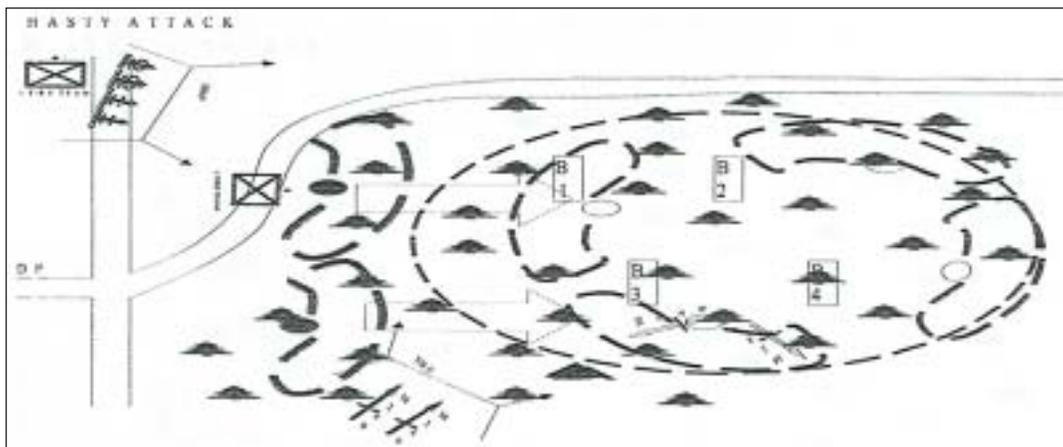
During the IOT&E, we accomplished a myriad of tasks and objectives such as conducting platoon ambushes, establishing and manning traffic control points (TCPs), conducting presence patrols,

performing route clearance and cordon and search operations, reacting to contact, raids, and defend in sector drills. A typical platoon objective consisted of a sector measuring between five and 10 kilometers. The platoon missions varied from collapsing defense to platoon attacks; the tasks and objectives were multifaceted, requiring creative solutions to complicated and dynamic tactical situations.

Flexibility, firepower, and mobility are the hallmarks of an SBCT rifle platoon. Navigating through the complexities of employing the platoon in tactical settings at first created challenges we needed to address. The whole concept of fighting as part of an SBCT unit is new and still needs to be refined, but the potential is too evident not to be realized, and we need to continue to refine and train on the tactics, techniques, and procedures that will let us take fullest advantage of the capabilities of the Stryker Brigade Combat Team.

The key to the SBCT's success is the effective application of its strengths, while at the same time continually correcting and mitigating its weaknesses. With its task organization, organic weapons and attached assets, the SBCT platoon can unleash firepower comparable to a World War II rifle company. Its firepower





ICVs can be used to infiltrate, provide SBF, and block the enemy during platoon missions.

can be devastating and lethal, capable of destroying a company-size element or more, and we need to teach ourselves and train others to accomplish just that.

Mobility, Enablers, and the Combined Arms Fight

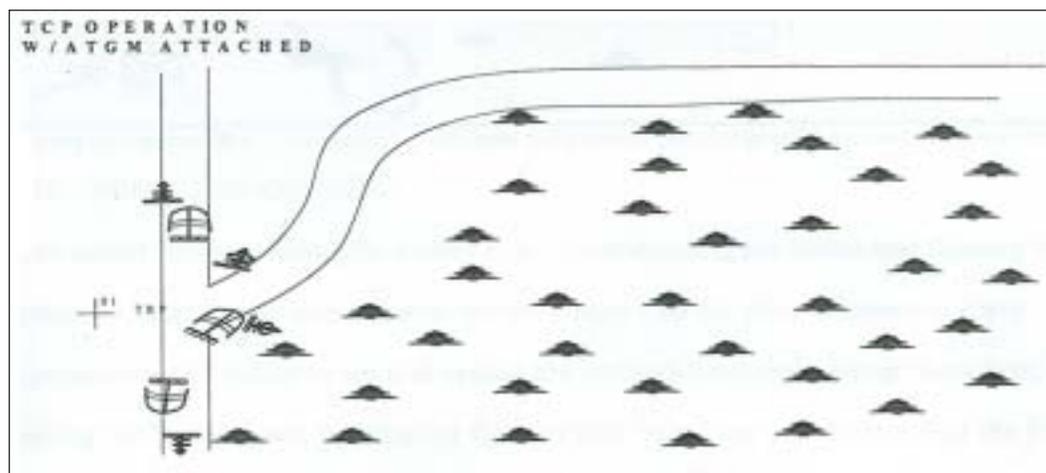
Mobility is the heart and core of an SBCT rifle platoon. Coupled with other combat multipliers, the SBCT's mobility allows the platoon leader to better visualize the battle space, and he can quickly relay time sensitive information throughout the company sector. Real time information allows the platoon leader and company commander to make critical decisions on how to shape the fight and effectively engage and defeat the enemy. During a given platoon mission, the platoon leader can utilize the full spectrum of combined arms available to him. He can combine company indirect fire assets with his platoon's direct fire assets, and the anti-tank guided missile/mobile gun system (ATGM/MGS) — when it is attached to the platoon — to create a lethal combination. During traffic control point and defend in sector operations with a mechanized threat, the ATGM/MGS can augment the platoon's combat power by identifying and neutralizing mounted threats. Indirect fire capability at the company level can be allocated by priority to help the platoon that needs this support.

The engineer platoon is an asset that we can use for mobility and countermobility operations in support of the rifle platoon's missions. The engineer platoon

can affect a rifle platoon's combat effectiveness by not only building obstacles; they can also fight the dismounted fight when needed. Company and battalion snipers can also be used on a given platoon mission to help identify and neutralize threats, especially during presence patrols and on raids.

The ability to close with and destroy the enemy with firepower and maneuver is a capability that makes the SBCT rifle platoon lethal and effective. A rifle platoon is composed of four ICVs, which are able to move on terrain that most tracked vehicles would be hard pressed to traverse. This capability makes the platoon both versatile and multifaceted in its application. After performing the many tasks and objectives during the IOT&E, it was clear that mobility is key to success and mission accomplishment. Because of their increased mobility and maneuverability, the ICVs move faster during infiltration and exfiltration, and these capabilities result in greater lethality and survivability.

ATGM adds depth and firepower to the rifle platoon during TCP operations and other missions.



During reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance missions, the ICVs' mobility is especially noteworthy. Mounted patrols and observation posts (OPs) disrupt enemy reconnaissance efforts and limit his ability to reconnoiter. Denying him this ability can easily be accomplished with active patrolling and shifting observation posts. During the many training exercises, winning this fight proved devastating to the enemy and was critical to the success of the

SBCT rifle platoon and company team.

See, Understand, Fight

The added value of seeing the enemy first, understanding his intent, and fighting him when he least expects it can wreak havoc on him and on his plan. The ability to see and exploit the enemy's weaknesses is decisive to every operation. Being there first, seeing the battle space and fighting on your terms are all capabilities that the rifle platoon can employ in any given fight. Mobility, coupled with other combat multipliers, can provide the commander vision of the area of responsibility (AOR) and battle space. Acting as eyes and ears for your unit are added capabilities that a platoon can perform to augment the battalion's scout platoon. This can also significantly aid your commander in painting a common operating picture (COP) of his battle space. FM radio and the Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2) are two enablers that can be employed to better visualize your

battle space and both can help you obtain an accurate or at least much improved picture. Both have limitations, but when applied their practical use is truly amazing. Timely and accurate information can also be transmitted with these enablers.

Firepower and Flexibility

The organic weapons and task organization within an SBCT platoon make it a formidable fighting force. The platoon's firepower can delay the adversary or destroy him in his tracks. During ambushes performed during the IOT&E, the ICVs not only demonstrated enhanced lethality, but also proved flexible enough to meet any threat. The platoon's ability to react to any situation is assured by this ability. In any mission, the platoon can transition and fight the fight itself, not the plan. The ability to fight the fight and not the plan gives the platoon the flexibility to adapt to any situation. This capability allows the platoon to meet the threat and engage the enemy with the force and flexibility available to it. Depending on the situation, there may be some limitations to the platoon's flexibility and firepower, but the platoon's ability to regress or exfiltrate and transition to fight the fight allows it to be flexible (and move to relative safety before fighting). The platoon's enhanced survivability and its ability to quickly transition to meet and engage any threat are attributes that cannot be underestimated.

Training, Learning, and Developing Leaders

Along with everything else in the Army, it takes time for leaders to grow and be able to employ their rifle platoons to their full capabilities. If the recent events of the IOT&E are any indication, leaders can be entrusted to meet this challenge. Today's technological lead over our adversaries, combined with our doctrinal dominance and decisive leaders, make for a tactical dream team, but to get to this state requires much training and time to develop doctrine and TTPs to cope with the changing threats.

Learning and growing as a leader is an ongoing process. The holistic approach to this is the only way to go. This requires focus and involvement from the chain of command. Leaders and Soldiers gain — and instill — confidence in one another through their demonstrated abilities. Commanders and leaders in general trust those whom they perceive to be competent. A person's ability is often viewed through the lens of his actions and the confidence he either exudes or lacks. Confidence is gained through success, and success is a by-product of preparation and training. To this end, there is no substitute for detailed, mission-oriented training and preparation for combat.

Maintenance ranks high among some of those issues that need further refinement. The light mentality of a unit moving into a medium brigade is a challenge that must be dealt with quickly and vigorously. We cannot afford to waste time on the petty and misguided notion that vehicles are simply the means of transportation. Maintenance must be balanced into the equation of training and resources, because a unit's vehicles can only be useful if they work.

Training in general can be modeled using the bottom up concept, with major emphasis on the required mission essential

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task list (METL) tasks. A commander can minimize and manage his resources for training at the platoon level if given a chance. The ICVs give the platoon and squad leaders the ability to do more with less, if they are allowed to develop and exercise initiative. Emphasis on the basics is key to success. The fight is always going to be at the platoon and squad level, and platoon and squad leaders must be trained and able to fight the fight as it evolves, and not simply focus on executing the plan.

Seeing the enemy, understanding his intent, and fighting him when he least expects it are the capabilities an SBCT rifle platoon must master. Platoon and squad leaders must understand and be able to employ this capability. The combined arms fight, short of close air support (CAS), can be employed on any given mission. A leader must develop the habit of using the SBCT assets to augment the rifle platoon to accomplish the mission. The platoon leader has within his grasp the capability to complete any task he is assigned to do. Employing additional assets on platoon missions has its challenges, but the enhanced potential for success cannot be ignored. The decisive point or critical task for the platoon leader continues to be the ability to predict and assess the enemy's intent and actions. The real challenge is employing the platoon to its fullest potential, and that can only be realized with much time and training.

Decentralization and subordinate initiative are key factors that have direct bearing on success and failure. Training subordinate leaders to be thinkers must be part of the training process. Subordinate leaders able to react and act independently are key to completing missions with minimum casualties. Empowering junior leaders and building their confidence pays dividends in many ways. Squad and team leaders are the ones on the tip of the spear; their education and learning are critical. Seeing a platoon performing at peak level is a gratifying experience. A platoon executing at peak level can accomplish any mission, and this the ultimate goal of an SBCT rifle platoon.

The potential for the SBCT concept is yet to be fully realized. The first SBCT, the 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, is already deployed and fighting in Iraq. Surely its performance will be closely monitored and evaluated, and the unit will be assessed on what it was able to do and what it wasn't able to do. For that reason, we must be careful to weigh the unit's value in light of the full spectrum of its capabilities and the manner in which it employed those assets to meet the missions and challenges presented to the unit. The debate will linger on; the way we fight will be an ongoing battle as the enemy changes and new threats emerge. Suffice it to say that the potential and capabilities of an SBCT rifle platoon are very promising. Soon, a second SBCT, the 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, will deploy. I am confident that we will meet the challenge and validate the carefully developed and resourced SBCT concept.

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