

Armor in Support of OMFTS

by Major R.W. Lamont

The term Operational Maneuver From the Sea (OMFTS) is new to most soldiers. A wargame at the Marine Corps Combat Development Center, in Quantico, Virginia, tested this warfighting concept in December 1992. In analyzing power projection issues, the game players emphasized the need for flexibility, tactical surprise, and speed relative to the enemy.¹ The purpose of this article is to discuss the role of the Army's Armor Force in OMFTS and its ability to contribute to battlespace dominance in the littoral regions.

Armor has traditionally played a supporting role in amphibious operations. However, the scope of these operations has ranged across the full operational spectrum. In World War II, the center task force that seized Oran, Algiers, included the 1st Infantry and 1st Armored Divisions. The tactical scheme involved a double envelopment of the city, with the infantry on the inner ring and the armor on the outer ring. This effort placed 3,245 vehicles ashore and covered an area 70 miles wide by 15 deep.² By present standards, this landing was a herculean effort.

As the armed forces continue to draw down, each component will find itself facing new and expanding duties to meet national strategy commitments. The requirement for the Army to provide heavy forces in the conduct of OMFTS is real. A recent memorandum of understanding between the Army and the Marine Corps highlights the tasks ahead needed to ensure a power projection capability

consistent with the operational demands of an uncertain world.

The Nature of Maritime Campaigns

In the past, the focus of an amphibious assault was the Force Beachhead Line (FBHL). The intent of such an operation was to gain a lodgement area of sufficient size to ensure unencumbered unloading of combat power

mand that ground combat power only be employed against high-value objectives. A digitized battlefield is used only to focus on the enemy and mass the effects of combat power to disrupt his operational tempo. Sensors are fused onto a common battlefield picture that guides decentralized execution by combat forces ashore and afloat. These actions are consistent with the commander's intent, as they are based on a common command architecture.

OMFTS envisions avoiding enemy combat strength while destroying the political, military, and economic sources of such strength.

As with airborne operations, combat power during OMFTS must be built up from zero. The projection of ground combat power is directly tied to the ship-to-shore movement. This process is, in turn, linked to the characteristics of the landing craft that move the troops and their associated equipment to the beach. The interactions between these craft and the unique environmental setting

of a scenario drive the feasible operational schemes open to a commander.

Figure 1 outlines the build-up of combat power ashore over time. The transition has two phases. In the surge phase, the early part of the landing, assault assets are moved ashore as rapidly as possible. In this phase, limits on landing craft, both surface and air, coupled with the queuing dynamics of assault shipping, constrain the ability of the commander to place combat power ashore. Following the initial surge, landing assets that will complete the transfer of combat and



ashore. This approach is passive in execution if the landing force looks inward toward geographical objectives that fail to meet the operational demands of the campaign. The Anzio landing is an example of the stagnation that can result from turning inward.

OMFTS envisions a disconnected and non-linear battlefield. The principal defeat mechanism of the landing force is coherent maneuver against the opponent's center of gravity. The limitations of constrained shipping de-

Build-up of Combat Power Ashore Over Time

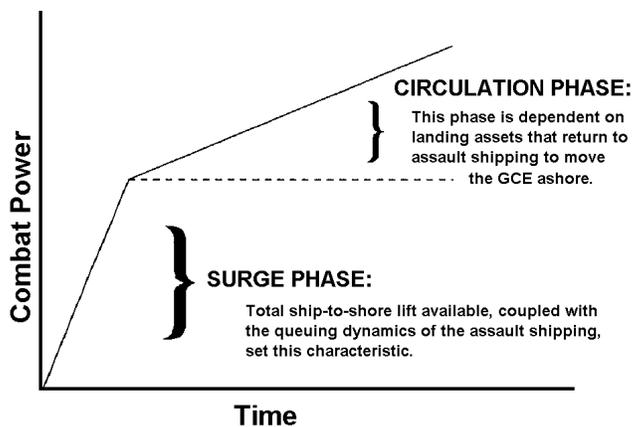


Figure 1

supporting units circulate between the transport shipping and the landing sites.

The Role of Marine Armor

Three types of Marine armor play a key role in the surge phase. The first is the Light Armored Reconnaissance (LAR) unit, a combined arms formation built around the Piranha family of wheeled fighting vehicles. They can move ashore by helicopter or Landing Craft Air Cushioned (LCAC). These units perform cavalry functions, and serve as an advanced force shaping the battlefield for the heavier forces that follow. They use speed and their ability to call in massed indirect fire from aviation and Naval Surface Fire Support to offset their light weight and relatively few numbers.

The second player in the surge period is the Assault Amphibious Vehicle (AAV), a tracked APC unique to the Marine Corps that serves to move infantry directly across the beach and into the zone of action. These vehicles are attached to infantry units to form mechanized infantry capable of keeping pace with the other mounted players on the battlefield. Tanks, combat engineers, and other arms are task-organized into the habitual combined arms teams built around these mechanized infantry formations. AAVs require no lift assets to make their ship-to-shore movement, so they contribute directly to the large spike of combat power during the surge phase.

Finally, Marine tanks move ashore on LCACs to support and maneuver with the other players in the Marine Air/Ground Task Force. These M1A1s

have communication packages that allow the tank company commander to call for the massive volumes of supporting fires needed to ensure maneuver in the face of superior numbers ashore. Their ability to dominate the direct-fire envelope ensures the MAGTF commander will present his enemy with expanding tactical threats that are difficult to counter.

One key to Marine armored warfare during OMFTS is the combined arms nature of its organization and operations. The LAR unit provides the timely information fast-paced operations demand. Combined arms teams, backed by a full array of indirect fire systems, are able to mass and strike enemy weakness. They then disperse before presenting a high-value target to the opponent's fires. Habitual relationships, forged during deployments and combined arms exercises, provide the glue needed to hold these forma-

tions together in the chaos of the early hours ashore.

The Role of Army Armor

Under the Army and the Marine Corps memorandum of understanding, the Army will provide additional armor to support OMFTS. Since the Marine Corps has organic armor battalions, the Army will normally be providing a brigade-size force OP-CON to the MEF commander. It is envisioned that the armor brigade will not make amphibious assaults, but will fight inland as part of the expeditionary campaign. This approach is consistent with the Army's experience in World War II. During the Sicily landing, a brigade of the 2d Armored Division was held off Licata as the floating reserve for the 3d Infantry Division.³ It is expected that the armor brigade will transition ashore during the circulation phase of the landing process. Finally, this brigade will not subdivide its units, except engineer and field artillery, during operations inland.

Three OMFTS principles are directly supported by the capabilities of the armor brigade: exploiting gaps, flexibility, and momentum. The notion of exploiting a gap is not new to Army operations. In the past, these gaps have been largely geographical and physical in nature. The armor brigade is able to push through or around an enemy that has been fixed in position. Further, it has the mobility to carry the battle deep beyond the ground striking range of some MEF assets.



Photo courtesy of General Dynamics

But exploiting gaps is not limited to the context of time and space. There may be exploitable gaps in the enemy's warfighting ability — perhaps a weakness in his night fighting capability or an overly centralized command and control system — that may be targets for the armor brigade.

OMFTS demands flexibility to provide the commander a wide range of tactical options. Increasing the availability of armor-protected, highly maneuverable, and hard-hitting units supports battlefield dominance by giving the ground commander a wide array of options to throw at, and around, the enemy. This in turn complicates the enemy's dispositions, since he can never be certain which course of action his opponent will execute.

Momentum is improved since the armor brigade is adept at concentrating combat power at the decisive point in the battle. Its actions fix, confuse, and neutralize the enemy by integrating fires and maneuver at a tempo the enemy will find hard to counter. In addition, Marine ANGLICO (Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company) detachments can provide the means for the armor brigade to tap naval fire support and further improve the weight and momentum of the brigade's blows.

The interactions between the armor brigade and the Marine Ground Combat Element (GCE) can force the enemy into a dilemma: if he concentrates his combat power to face the full weight of the armor brigade, he will have to uncover areas along the shore, opening gaps that Marine units can exploit, either operating from the sea or in a shore-to-shore mode, to strike at his rear areas. Conversely, if he disperses to cover the seaward approaches, the armor brigade is presented an opportunity to overwhelm or bypass his defenses and crush him against the beach.

If, during the surge phase of the operation, a port is captured intact, conditions may allow integration of the Army's PREPO Afloat brigade directly into the ongoing OMFTS scheme. This approach is potentially the quickest way to counter an armor-heavy threat operating in the littoral of interest. Once ashore, this joint force is able to conduct a series of operations intended to strike overland at the enemy's key centers of gravity

while being supported by a full range of naval power offshore.

Conclusions

Seafaring nations have always profited by exploiting the inherent strategic mobility afforded them by using the sea as an avenue of approach. The ability to dominate the land and strike the enemy's center of gravity is contingent on projecting a GCE with the prerequisite strength and mobility at the decisive moment. Some scenarios will require the Army to provide additional armor support to the Marine Corps to achieve this battlespace dominance.

The roles and requirements demanded of Marine and Army armor, within the context of OMFTS, are different and unique. Each is a key player in the various phases of power projection into the littoral regions of the Third World. This difference is reflected in the dynamics of our simple combat power build-up model and in the way these forces are trained, equipped, and organized. These subtle differences in operational characteristics must not be lost as we restructure our armor forces for the way ahead.

The inherent capabilities of the armor brigade are consistent with the principles of OMFTS. The potential role of the armor brigade to exploit or open gaps in the enemy's defense can ensure conflict termination on our terms. The flexibility and momentum that an armor brigade brings to the littoral region are an important step toward battlespace dominance in the expanded operating area envisioned with OMFTS. This increases in relevance if the enemy has mechanized formations that can oppose the maneuver of the GCE.

In future operations, all services must seek ways to support the national strategy and maximize their contribution to the joint battlefield. OMFTS is a concept that calls for the integration of all services in the littoral region to achieve battlespace dominance and victory. One of the key players on this future battlefield is the Army's armor brigade, supporting the dynamic operations which are launched "...from the sea."

Notes

¹"Operational Maneuver From The Sea 29 Nov-4 Dec 92," Studies and Analysis Division, MCCDC, Feb 1992, p. ii.

²Howe, G.F., *Old Ironsides*, Combat Forces Press, Washington, D.C., 1954, pp. 21-47.

³D'este, Carlo, *Bitter Victory*, New York, N.Y., Harper Collins, 1988, p. 146.

Major R.W. Lamont, a 1978 graduate of the United States Naval Academy, was commissioned a 2LT in the USMC. After completing The Basic School at Quantico, Virginia, he attended a similar program at Fort Knox, was designated a tank officer, and was assigned to the 3d Tank Battalion, Twentynine Palms, Calif. He served as a tank platoon leader and XO for both a tank and headquarters company, and participated in the formation of the Near Term Preposition Ship (NTPS) program and Mechanized Test Phase IV, which demonstrated the Marine Corps' ability to conduct large-scale mounted operations. He also served as Marine Detachment executive/guard officer on the USS CONSTELLATION (CV-64), and was combat cargo officer on the USS CLEVELAND (LPD-7), involved in 31 amphibious landings. In August 1985, he returned to the 3d Tank Battalion as the assistant operations officer and tank company commander. He returned to Fort Knox as an instructor for the Armor Officer Basic Course, then the Armor Officer Advanced Course. After receiving his Master of Science Degree at the Naval Postgraduate School, he was assigned to the Studies and Analysis Division of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command. He currently is the lead Marine analyst supporting the Joint Air Defense Operations/Joint Engagement Zone Test Team (JADO/ JEZ).