

Light-Heavy Integration at the JRTC

Part 3 - Offensive Operations

by First Sergeant Paul E. Thompson Jr.

This is the third article in a series written to help armor platoon leaders or platoon sergeants facing light/heavy situations, either at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) or in an actual deployment. The first article (July-August 1998) discussed the Joint Readiness Training Center and some tried and true tactics, techniques, and procedures. The second article (September-October 1999) covered defensive operations. Both articles are available on our web site at: www.knox.army.mil/armormag under the "Back Issues" link.



Several different things must be taken into consideration when planning offensive operations in a light/ heavy environment. In order to make it easier to plan, we have broken down the information by Battlefield Operating Systems (BOS) elements and by the planning, preparation, and execution phases.

Planning Phase

During the offensive phases of light/heavy operations, there are times when an armor platoon leader (PLD) will find himself task-organized to a light infantry company. During the planning phases of an operation, it is absolutely critical that the tank PLD be involved in **all** phases of the rehearsal process.

In developing his OPORD or FRAGO, the infantry commander must pay close attention to the capabilities and limitations of the tank platoon in his task organization. Having a tank platoon in the light company can considerably change the way the light company does business.

As he prepares his OPORD or FRAGO, the tank platoon leader must coordinate with the infantry company commander on several things. It is key that the infantry commander understands that the tank PLD and platoon sergeant (PSG) are the resident armor experts. Though briefing a commander

will provide him with cursory understanding of armor equipment, it is important that those who know the equipment fully be identified and relied on. Make sure the commander addresses routes, intervals, movement speeds, orientations, fire control measures, signals to be utilized between platoons, communication, and IFF procedures.

C2

A command and control consideration for the company commander is to use the tank platoon to eliminate the most serious threat to the company. Use tanks against tanks. Guard against "piecemealing" the tank platoon. Plan for maintenance time — tanks *have to have it!* Plan for the tank platoon as a company reserve if it has no immediate mission. In order for an infantry company commander to be able to plan and execute the maneuver, organization, and control of an armor platoon, he must understand it.

Intelligence

The commander should supply the armor PLD with the following intelligence, and if the commander does not furnish this information, the PLD should request it. The commander

should have the platoon leaders identify and plot known and suspected enemy positions (that may affect their platoons), and the direct and indirect fire range fans of enemy weapons systems. The enemy overlay in IVIS or appliqué digital systems will be updated. Periodically, the commander must ensure platoon leaders identify terrain features or determine standoff distance of friendly weapons systems to negate the effects of enemy weapons. Platoon leaders must determine the enemy's most probable course of action in their area of operations. They should also ID and rehearse anticipated contact situations such as:

- Will the enemy defend, delay, or counterattack?
- Where and when is contact most likely?
- What type and size of force will the platoon face?
- What type of weapons will they face?

The company commander should use the armor PLD to help decide the tank platoon's best route. If possible, use cavalry scouts to recon the route ahead of the platoon because they are experts at determining the trafficability of routes for various types of vehicles. Assigned some light infantry and engineers, they can also pre-breach obstacles covertly.

Other intelligence considerations are to always plan for the use of the tank platoon's thermal sights. Thermal sights can be a terrific asset to the company. Plan to use the tank platoon in the reconnaissance, counter-reconnaissance, and security roles. The tank's mobility and tremendous firepower is valuable. Also, plan to use armor as part of a deception to mask the main effort, or the use of PSYOPS loudspeakers to confuse the enemy about the true direction from which the armor is coming.

Maneuver

The commander must synchronize the armor platoon's maneuver plan with his commander's intent and his specific instructions. The addition of the armor platoon can make a difference in the planning timeline. Tank platoons bring an immense firepower capability to the light infantry commander, and every effort must be made to maximize their potential. Also keep in mind the additional observation capability of the tanks. A commander should not have tanks in the woods while an infantry platoon is overwatching a valley where the platoon's weapons ranges are minimized.

Additionally, the commander must address restrictions on fire (either imposed by ROE, or based on the types of ammunition carried in the tank platoon). It is important that the tank platoon has a copy of the tactical rules of engagement.

Some additional considerations on maneuver are to always consider the suitability of the terrain for movement of the company and its tanks. The commander must make a conscious decision to either concentrate or distribute the tank platoon. The armor platoon leader should do his best to at least keep his tanks or Brads in sections for mutual support. Remind the commander that in areas that are restrictive for tank movement, i.e., in heavy woods or MOUT areas, that the tanks will need infantry attached for local security, to guard against ambushes, and as additional LP/OPs. Also remind the commander that tanks provide excellent direct fire against field fortifications.

Fire Support

Platoon leaders should review the fire support plan. The commander should fix responsibilities for initiating, lifting, and shifting indirect fires. The armor platoon leader should make sure the plan supports his maneuver. If the platoon has priority of fires, make sure there are enough pre-plots to support your maneuver. When you are half way between pre-plots on the map, shift your priority target to the one you are approaching. The field artillery battery in support should be laying a platoon on that target to get you the most timely fire support if you have priority of fires. Consider the use of smoke to help conceal or obscure movement, suppress likely enemy positions while platoons are moving through danger areas, and to mark and/or assist in navigation.

Some additional considerations are that the tank platoon has no Forward Observer (FO). All their fires will be requested over the company net by the armor PSG. Plan for the tank platoon to receive enemy indirect fire as it approaches an obstacle. If AC-130 sorties are expected during your operation, ensure the tank platoon is marked on top of the turret with copious amounts of glint tape for night operations and VS-17 panels for day in a prearranged symbol and that it is then coordinated with the Air Force liaison at the brigade TOC or immediate higher headquarters. This will hopefully prevent a fratricide on the company's most important asset (and its soldiers).

Mobility and Survivability

While planning breach drills, the commander must designate the tank platoons as part of the support, breach or assault force. Being the support or assault force is not a problem, but the tank platoon will only be designated as the breach force if it is equipped with the assets required to breach the type of obstacle present. At JRTC, things are done a little bit differently than at other CTCs. Since the mine threat is always present and the reseeded of said minefields is continuous if minefields are not overwatched, the rollers and plows are always mounted on the tanks. A plow and roller, or better yet two sets, are crucial in light/heavy operations. Some other assets could be demolitions or grappling hooks. Since most tankers are not trained in the use of demolitions these days, the PLD will want to iron this out with the commander prior to blowing up a much-needed crewman performing a task he is not trained to do. Grappling hooks are great for removing wire during a breach drill. Know the capabilities and limitations of mine plows and rollers. Rollers are only to be used to detect the leading edges of a minefield and to proof lanes. The plow is used to clear a path with the roller following the proof. Be aware that there is a gap in the center of the area that is uncleared. The dogbone may detonate mines in this uncleared path, but it is by no means foolproof. Also remember that every hit taken on the plow or the roller will degrade its ability to be used further. Finally, remember that the M1's thermal sights can help in the visual acquisition of mines. If the mine is metal or of a dark color the sun will heat it up to a temperature that exceeds the temperature of the surrounding soil. This allows the mine to be picked up in some circum-

stances by an alert gunner scanning on his thermal sight. But this is in no way a guaranteed acquisition means, but rather an additional way of looking for mines. There are many factors that have to be right for you to be able to see mines with the thermal sight. What it boils down to is that countermine warfare has changed little since WWII and looking for the right indicators and the use of your mechanical and manual means of mine detection are your best bets. The PLD should ask the company commander to request additional engineer assets to support the tanks if the mine threat is high.

Air Defense Artillery

Tank platoons should get high priority for ADA protection as they will be a much sought after target by enemy air (if there is any). During the day, place a VS-17 panel on top of the tank to ID the platoon to friendly air assets. The use of glint tape at night has already been addressed.

Combat Service Support

The PLD and PSG (especially the PSG) should be intimately familiar with the company's CASEVAC plan. If there isn't one, then ask the commander or company ISG to put one in writing and also ask for a CSS overlay to ID casualty collection points, aid stations, air evac points, and company trains. Make sure the company ISG knows your needs. He will probably be flabbergasted, especially by the amount of fuel you'll need, but to sustain you he must be made aware. A platoon of M1s uses a lot of fuel, so coordination will have to be made between the light infantry ISG and the heavy team ISG for resupply and rearming. In some cases, it is better for the tank PSG to make direct coordination with the heavy team ISG.

Make sure the commander and ISG of the light company knows that a tank platoon can only sustain itself for 24 hours (at the outside). If operations are ongoing, that will decrease the time the platoon can sustain itself, especially for Class III. Plan for 30 minutes to an hour to refuel/rearm a tank platoon depending on weather and time of day or night. Since the sustained combat capability of the tank platoon is directly related to its logistical support, plan for recovery, and don't forget the need for maintenance time. You could use the tank platoon to carry extra water, ammunition, and Class I for the company, but be aware that there are limits to

what a tank can carry and still have good observation. The tanks can also be useful to conduct emergency resupply for the company in hot areas.

C2

As in any operation, conduct PCCs and PCIs as part of your planning phase. *FKSM 17-15-3* has a great detailed checklist for this. Ensure all crewmen are familiar with standard infantry hand and arm signals. Make sure the tanks have TA-1s hooked up to the right side of the turret for communication with dismounts. Make sure each soldier understands the plan. Ensure the PSG reviews the supply status of rations, water, fuel, oil, all types of ammunition, pyrotechnics, first aid kits, combat lifesaver bags, and batteries. "Don't expect what you don't inspect" is a good rule to follow when preparing for an operation. There is nothing quite as embarrassing or frightening than finding out that a piece of equipment critical to your operation does not work. "Murphy" is everywhere, so make sure that if the equipment is critical you have an alternate plan if by chance it does not work after you have checked it. Conduct a safety briefing with the light infantry concerning operating with tanks. Include riding on and moving around tanks. Ensure tank crewmen understand the movement plan of the infantry platoons. TCs must understand the company scheme of maneuver. Other crewman must understand the platoon scheme of maneuver.

Intelligence

Receive all updated spot reps and friendly actions. Ensure overlays on maps and in IVIS (if M1A2) are updated. As the commander adjusts his maneuver plan, adjust the platoon maneuver plan accordingly.

Maneuver

When conducting rehearsals, require leaders to be there. Have those with specific tasks carry out those tasks as closely as possible. Tank platoons bring a complex, different system to the light infantry company.

To maximize their synchronization with the rest of the unit, rehearsals should include coverage of the following events: movement from current positions, routes to be used, transporting infantry, platoon and company formations and movement techniques,

weapons orientation and fire control, decision points, actions on contact, actions on the objective, reporting procedures, and signals.

Some other maneuver considerations are to avoid maneuvering the tank platoon in single file if possible. Do not use plow tanks to "break brush," as they are not designed to do this. A broken plow tank is of no use in mine-clearing operations.

Fire Support

When the company commander employs fire support in the offense, it is to achieve a variety of goals. Based on the maneuverability and the speed at which the tank platoon can move, the following are critical to effective implementation of the fire support plan:

- Suppression of likely enemy anti-tank systems that could inhibit movement.
- Fixing or neutralizing bypassed enemy elements.
- Preparation of enemy positions for an assault. Preparatory fires are used during a deliberate attack, with fires placed on key targets before the assault begins. The commander must weigh the benefits of preparatory fires against the potential loss of surprise.
- Obscuration of enemy observation or screening of friendly maneuver. The company can take advantage of smoke in various maneuver situations. Tanks can also generate smoke through firing their on-board smoke grenade launchers or on-board smoke generators if using the correct fuel (diesel, not JP-8). If you want to take advantage of this asset, plan for the use of it.
- Support of breaching operations. Fires are used to obscure or suppress enemy elements that are overwatching reinforcing obstacles.
- Illumination of enemy positions. Illumination fires are included in contingency plans for night attacks.

Mobility and Survivability

The light infantry battalion task force may be augmented with engineers. This could include MICLICs, ACEs, or AVLBs. Actions at obstacles should be rehearsed to include suppression, obscuration, security, and reduction (SOSR).

Some other considerations are that tanks carry grappling hooks, which are useful in removing wire. Also, use the tank platoon to scan for mines with direct vision and with thermals.

Air Defense Artillery

Get information from the commander regarding templated enemy fixed wing and helicopter corridors. Try to plan the tank platoon's movement and its ability to engage in your plan.

Combat Service Support

Make it known that the tank platoon must have a coordinated, timely, and effective resupply operation. The CSS rehearsal should cover all aspects of the logistical plan to include resupply and personnel and vehicle evacuation procedures. If the rehearsal does not cover your needs then ask about them and get an answer.

Offensive Ops: The Execution Phase

Overwatch is the tactical mission in which an element observes and provides direct fire support for a friendly moving element. Of all the elements in the light company, a tank platoon task organized to them can best execute this mission. On the other hand, in restrictive terrain, infantry will be required to overwatch or provide local security as the tank platoon moves through restrictive terrain. The overwatch element must have communication with the unit being overwatched and scan gaps and dead space within the moving element's formations. Plan on the maximum bound for overwatched element to be a third of the overwatched element's weapons systems range, METT-T dependent. In restrictive terrain, this will be a much shorter distance. Overwatch elements must also remember to provide 360-degree security for themselves.

Other tactical movement considerations are to never move directly forward from an overwatch position or BP. Stay on low ground as much as possible to avoid skylining yourself. Scan the ground for disturbed earth, out of place terrain features, and surface laid mines. All platoons must plan actions at danger areas.

Offensive Ops: Tactical Tasks

There are nine tactical tasks that the tank platoon may be called upon to execute. Execution of these tasks

should be covered in the company OPORD. Platoon leader, ask the question! The answer could save the life of your platoon. The tank platoon can use the tactical tasks as courses of action when it executes actions on contact. The following are the nine tactical tasks.

- Task 1 - Destroy an Inferior Force
- Task 2 - Attack by Fire
- Task 3 - Overwatch/Support by Fire
- Task 4 - Assault
- Task 5 - Bypass
- Task 6 - Reconnaissance by Fire
- Task 7 - Hasty Occupation of a Platoon BP (Hasty Defense)
- Task 8 - Hasty/In-Stride Breach
- Task 9 - Clear a Danger Area

Some of the preceding information is covered in the draft copy of "Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Light Infantry Company Employment of Tank Platoons in Restrictive Terrain." It may or may not be the actual beginning of doctrine for Light/Heavy Integration for the U.S. Army. This information and the additional remarks are to give Armor leaders a starting point for reference. Again, there are probably plenty of old tankers and cavalymen out there who could undoubtedly teach us more. If you have any comments, please forward them to:

Operations Group-Bde C2
Attn: Armor/Mech Team
7154 Alabama Ave.
Fort Polk, LA 71459-5313

Or contact us e-mail at *harzbepd@polk-emh2.army.mil*.

1SG Paul E. Thompson Jr. enlisted in the Army in 1976 as an Indirect Fire Infantryman. His assignments include 2-325 AIR and 1-320 FA in the 82nd Airborne Division; 4-333 FA, 428th FA Brigade; 2-64 Armor, 3rd Infantry Division; Cincinnati Recruiting Battalion, Recruiting Command; 4-67 Armor, 1st Armored Division; and Operations Group, Joint Readiness Training Center. He recently served as the First Sergeant of E Co., 1-81 Armor at Fort Knox, Ky.