

Light Armored Cavalry — The Right Force at the Right Time

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Currently, the need to use light forces in contingency-type missions has become much more important. Our experiences in Somalia and Panama highlight the need for a rapidly deployable light armored cavalry force. Further, the HMMWV has proven to be inadequate as a combat vehicle in these missions. A readily obtainable “off-the-shelf” solution to harden this force would be the acquisition of an available wheeled armored vehicle family, like the LAV or Commando, to supplement the AGS.

This is an analysis of the various roles and missions of which a force of this nature is capable. This analysis also covers the capability of the light armored cavalry to effectively support infantry in LIC operations and the light armored cavalry’s capability to transition to mid- and high-intensity missions.

How much light armored cavalry? This question is a very complex one, and one that the strategists of the Army will have to answer. I recommend that we maintain at least one light armored cavalry regiment for each theater in which we could expect to simultaneously conduct light force operations. If the structure of Army missions is such that we expect to fight two low-to-mid-intensity conflicts simultaneously, then we need at least two light armored cavalry regiments. I further recommend that each of the light/airborne/airmobile infantry divisions restructure their light cavalry squadrons into light armored cavalry squadrons for support. The light armored battalions already envisioned should be assigned to the corps organizations most likely to conduct light force operations. We should have two light armored cavalry regiments if we are constrained to only two regiments and both are CONUS-based. Without manpower constraints, we should have three regiments with two light regiments based in CONUS and the heavy regiment forward deployed. The forward deployment of the heavy regiment in the theater where it will

most likely be used saves on deployment costs, while the more easily deployed, CONUS-based light regiments can react to any needed area. We could maintain our cavalry forces for less cost and the result would be highly flexible, deployable organizations. The current constraint of two regiments points to the need to maintain both as light armored cavalry regiments.

Equipment

We could provide adequate protection for any light armored force using wheeled armored vehicles. The cost to deploy these wheeled armored vehicles would be substantially less than their tracked counterparts, only a third as much to maintain and only half as much to operate as our heavy armored cavalry regiments. The AGS has already become a reality for the Armored Force, so I see no need to discuss the relative merits of this vehicle other than to say it will meet a critical need, although a wheeled system could have done the job at far less acquisition cost, lower deployment cost, and lower maintenance and operating cost.

Now, for the rest of the force. A system that could supply the needs of the entire force on a single chassis would appear to be the solution. The requirements indicate the selection of a wheeled armored system like the LAV or the V-300 Commando. The HMMWV just won’t get it done. If I understand the initial reports from Somalia, the “armored” HMMWV failed to perform as advertised in even that security scenario. Why do we delude ourselves? The HMMWV is an excellent light utility truck, but it is unsuitable as a light armored combat vehicle. Any of the light armored systems that I recommended in my May-June 1990 *ARMOR* article, “The Light Armored Force: An Urgent Need, A Ready Solution,” (LAV, V-300 Commando, V-150 Commando, or Dragoon 300), would only cost slightly more to operate and

maintain than the armored HMMWV. I admit that the HMMWV would cost significantly less to acquire and perhaps less to deploy, but this does not overcome the fact that the HMMWV is not suitable for the role of light armored reconnaissance vehicle, in whatever configuration.

We are most likely to face poorly to moderately equipped enemies with primarily second-line materiel. Our capability to adequately arm our wheeled armored vehicles allows us to use them against these second-line tanks and AFVs. The added firepower of the newly acquired AGS also supports the opportunity to maximize the use of the economical wheeled AFVs. An added bonus is the ability to put all armored vehicles in the regiment (less the AGS) on the same chassis, saving on maintenance, operation, and driver training costs.

Any of the four systems above can provide this multi-configuration option. The V-300 Commando is the best choice, because of its ability to carry more troops than the LAV, but a good argument can be made for the LAV as a proven system already in the inventory (the Marines’ inventory at least). I am convinced that it is imperative that we select a system of this type for our light cavalry, motorized, and light armored units. The V-300 Commando offers a full range of combat, combat support, and combat service support vehicles. Imagine APCs, mortar carriers, ambulances, recovery vehicles, cargo/ammunition carriers, command post vehicles, and air defense vehicles that are armored, can keep up with the combat vehicles, and share the same chassis. This is the direction we need to go with our light armored cavalry.

The AGS fills the position currently occupied by the M1 in our heavy armored cavalry. The wheeled armored vehicle family would then supply the Light Armored Reconnaissance Vehicle (LARV), APCs, command posts, ambulances, recovery vehicles, cargo/ammu-

nition carriers, mortar carriers, and air defense vehicles for the new organization. The use of the V-300 Commando would further allow light infantry to be attached and ride under armor in support of the light cavalry's operations, a contingency that can be easily imagined by anyone familiar with our recent operations in Grenada, Panama and the early stages of DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM. This added flexibility is worth the additional acquisition costs. Added protection is another key consideration, given the protection problems faced by our forces in Somalia.

We need to equip our light armored cavalry regiments with the AGS, the V-300 Commando family, and the current light utility and medium trucks. This well-equipped and flexible force would be a definite asset for the Army in executing its many varied missions in today's "new world order."

Organization

Now that we have dealt with the problem of equipping our light armored cavalry regiments, we can proceed to the organization of our new regiments. I wrote my earlier article as a response to the then-current plan (1988) to field a light armored cavalry regiment equipped with the AGS and HMMWV vehicles with a rather large, cumbersome organization maximizing the ability to take part in low-intensity operations. I believe the ability to take part in low-intensity operations is important, but the light armored cavalry regiment also needs to be able to fulfill missions in a mid- or high-intensity scenario. This was my primary reason for objecting to the HMMWV and for recommending an organization similar to our present armored cavalry regiments. I have given more consideration to the organization I recommended in 1990 and have concluded that some further refinements can be made.

My earlier position was that the same basic organization that we currently use for our armored cavalry could be applied to light armored cavalry and that equipment would be the major difference. However, upon further reflection, I feel that some modifications could be made to the organization of the light cavalry as well as the light cavalry-specific equipment. The light armored cavalry regiment's organization would remain substantially the same as I put forward in my earlier article, with the aviation squadron replaced by an avia-

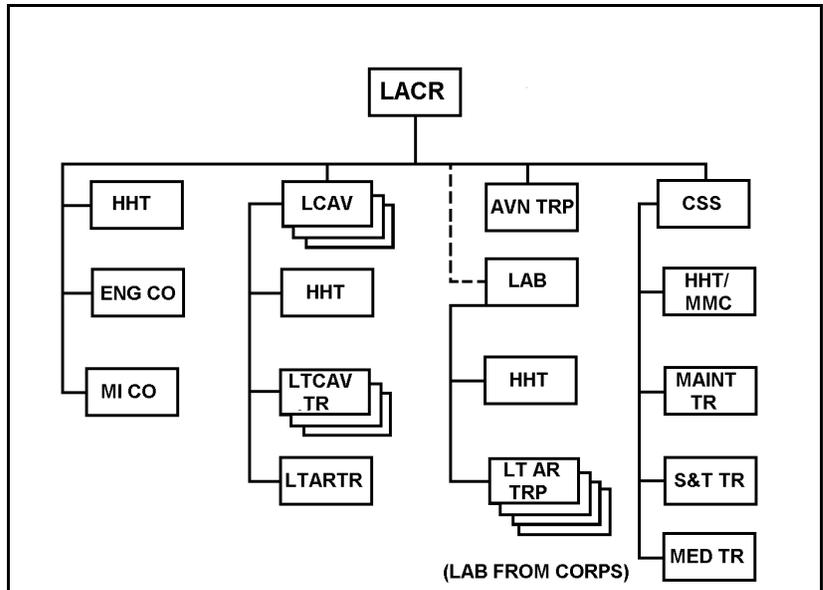


Figure 1

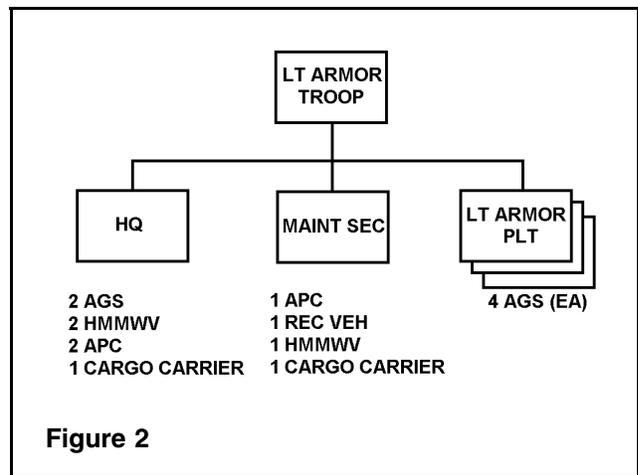


Figure 2

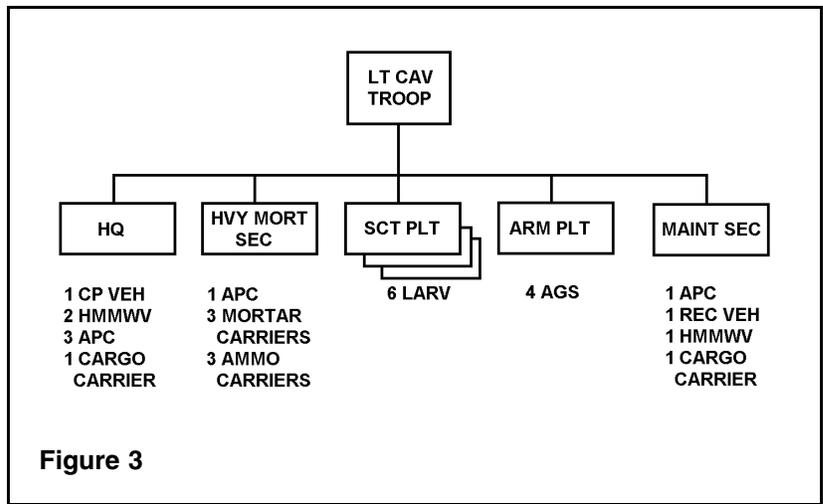


Figure 3

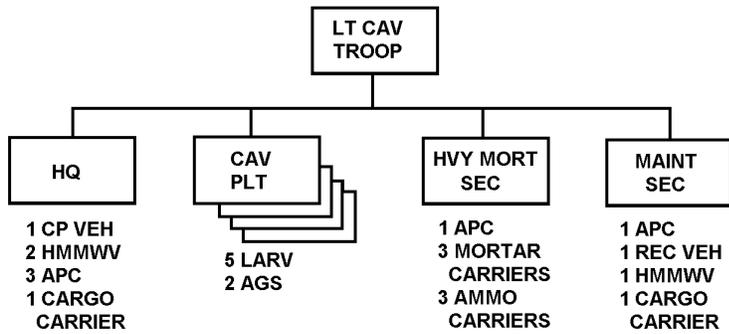


Figure 4

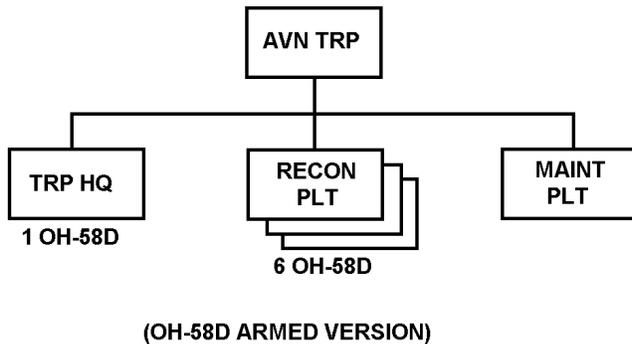


Figure 5

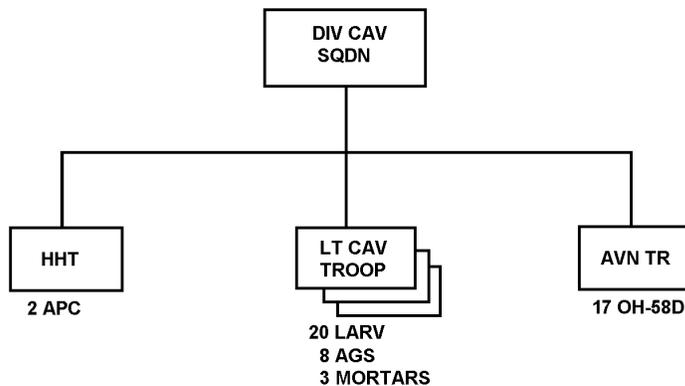


Figure 6

tion reconnaissance troop and with a light armored battalion available from corps, if needed (see Figure 1). This organization is flexible and far more easily deployed than any of our heavy armored forces. The replacement of the aviation squadron with a reconnaissance troop is a result of an analysis of the most likely threat that the light armored cavalry regiment will face. If a light armored cavalry regiment is deployed to a high-intensity conflict, the regiment can be supported by attack aviation from the corps, if needed. This regiment is, I feel, uniquely suited to support light forces deployed in most of the light force scenarios that can be imagined by our strategic planners and can fulfill any number of combat missions in a high-intensity conflict.

The light armored troop would also remain unchanged, retaining the current tank company organization with the M1 replaced by the new AGS system. The missions of the light armored troop would closely parallel those of the current tank companies of the heavy armored cavalry regiments (see Figure 2).

The light armored cavalry troops could have one of two possible organizations. The first has three scout platoons, one light armored platoon, a mortar section of three guns, and the usual support functions of the current heavy armored cavalry troop (see Figure 3). This change is a result of a careful review of the most likely threat and most likely missions. The troop commander can deploy a maximum of scouts and still retain a powerful reserve (the light armored platoon). This organization gives the troop commander maximum flexibility and allows his troop to undertake any number of missions in any intensity of conflict.

An alternate organization would have four cavalry platoons, a three gun mortar section, and the usual support (see Figure 4). This flexible organization allows the light cavalry troop to cover a larger sector and have the fire support necessary for most contingency missions available immediately to the troop's cavalry platoon leaders. This organization also has a great deal of utility in conflicts of any intensity level.

The aviation troop is maximized for reconnaissance and the massing of fires. Its three reconnaissance platoons have armed OH-58Ds with all of the associated capabilities of these aircraft. The inclusion of this troop allows the regimental commander to conduct rapid re-

connaissance and to more effectively mass the fires of the elements supplied by corps in support of the regiment (see Figure 5).

The elimination of the howitzer batteries is mainly due to the lack of a suitable platform and the reduced requirement for artillery in most light force scenarios. Again, the regiment receives its required indirect fire support from corps assets.

The divisional cavalry squadrons of the light/airborne divisions would be organized substantially the same, but would retain an aviation reconnaissance troop in lieu of the light armored troop (see Figure 6). This minor modification would facilitate completion of the squadron's reconnaissance missions over the larger division area of operations. The combat power of the ground troops, supported by the division's indirect fire assets and the corps' LAB, would be sufficient to conduct the necessary combat missions ordered by the division.

The organizations above would prove to be of the greatest utility in any contingency mission and would also allow the light cavalry to be very useful on a high-intensity battlefield. The loss of the aviation squadron is easily compen-

sated for by the fact that these cavalry units would be deployed with light units that have their own aviation, and on the high-intensity battlefield, the corps aviation elements can supply the necessary support. All of the equipment described above and, of course, the organizations are easily within reach if we make the proper decisions.

Missions

Once the light cavalry is organized (one, perhaps two regiments), the next question is what missions can the light cavalry perform? These new units can perform classic cavalry missions in deployments of forces to low-intensity conflicts world-wide. The 1993 Army Greenbook describes a new policy where the Army will be CONUS-based, globally-focused, and prepared for regional contingencies. Given this policy and the constraint of only two cavalry regiments, both should be light armored cavalry regiments. What force could be better suited to support this new strategic plan than light armored cavalry and light armored/motorized units?

The classic missions of reconnaissance, security, economy of force, move, attack, and defend could be performed by this light force in any low or mid-intensity conflict. Additional missions, such as, raid or break out from an encirclement would be given more importance. The flexibility of our light forces, as currently configured, is quite impressive, but heavily based on the use of aviation. In some cases, such as bad weather, intense resistance, or more advanced enemy forces, an ability to project force on the ground that is adequately protected will be of exceptional value. A light armored cavalry force equipped and organized as above will allow the commander to acquire intelligence (this force allows the scouts to fight more effectively for information than a HMMWV-equipped force), rapidly deploy the cavalry in all weather, project ground firepower as necessary, and move significant light infantry forces on demand. A more flexible force would be hard to imagine.

Internally, the squadrons, troops, and platoons would operate basically the same when conducting reconnaissance operations, security operations, economy-of-force operations, moving, attacking, defending, or sustaining. The alterations in organization require some minor changes in SOPs and tactical

drills, but the light cavalry would operate just as its heavier predecessor. The elevation of some supplemental missions to essential missions is indicated.

Since we don't use light armored/motorized forces, I don't think we fully realize their value. I am most impressed by the capability of light armored forces to make a contribution on all battlefields in any contingency. Imagine the result if a light armored cavalry regiment had been available to the commander in Somalia during the unpleasant occurrences of October 1993.

The missions of the cavalry force do not really change, but the environment in which these missions are performed can vary greatly. A light armored force, especially light armored cavalry, is a necessity, and ruminating over some new assortment of missions is not necessary. Organize the light armored cavalry, and let it do the missions that armored cavalry has always performed.

Conclusion

I would like to point out here that the development of doctrine or restructuring missions is not the primary problem we face. Rather, the fielding of the force is the key concern. We need to field the force and think carefully about the scenarios in which it will be used and the threat it will face. The political situation, world-wide, demands that we be prepared for intervention missions on a global scale. The adoption of the AGS goes a long way toward strengthening the multi-intensity capability of the light armored cavalry. The use of the HMMWV as a combat vehicle is a mistake. Apparently, the HMMWV was something of a failure in Somalia, in the combat role. Let's not make this mistake on a grand scale when adequate wheeled armored vehicles are currently in production, exported on a large scale, and can be acquired "off the shelf" to equip our light armored/motorized forces. We do not have enough time to spend years developing a wheeled armored family, as we did with the AGS. The acquisition and operating costs of any new force is obviously a consideration, but should not override the protection requirements of the force. I fully endorse the creation of the light armored cavalry, but recommend that the force be properly equipped and organized for combat in today's turbulent times and that it be suited to the complete range of possible scenarios.

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Author's Note: I would like to express my thanks to CPT Philip Decamp for proofreading this paper and for his thought-inspiring debate.