

The Tank XO... 2IC OR TOC-IC?

by First Lieutenant (P) Daniel W. Peck

Recently, I was rereading the May-June 1996 *ARMOR* magazine and, as always, I was searching for the articles dealing with the M1A2 MBT and digitization of the battlefield. As a company grade officer in the FUE (First Unit Equipped) M1A2 battalion (3-8 CAV), I am always looking to integrate as much professional knowledge as possible into developing the TTP for how to fight this new tank. Reading MAJ Poling's article, "M1A2 update," I was anxious to hear the insights of an officer who has had first-hand experience with the M1A2 outside of 3-8 CAV.

As with any opinion, I found great merit in some of his points and disbelief in others. I was glad to see him recognize the M1A2 tank commander's difficulty in deciding where to locate himself in the hatch, without suggesting that anyone but that TC knew the answer to that question. Somewhere in the first paragraph of his section, "Doctrinal Considerations," however, I began to have great problems with his opinion. I was surprised to hear him suggest that a tank company XO should fight from a C²V. Tank officers who have been on the M1A2 are usually focused on learning how to fight the tank to suit tanking, rather than change tanking to suit the tank. His doctrinal considerations could not have been more wrong. The tank company XO must fight from a tank.

First let's examine one of MAJ Poling's considerations, the assumption that CPT Krenzel's¹ proposal "involv[ing] the company XO playing a much larger role in the company's use of digitization and reporting information to higher headquarters" was a "bold proposal." This is without basis. First, in CPT Krenzel's article, his use of digitization was in reference to the information management side of digitization only. If you remove the word digitization from the quote and replace it with information management, I am confident that he and his battalion and company commanders would agree this perfectly describes how successful company XOs from 3-8 CAV fought at the NTC in M1A1 HC MBTs, yes I said M1A1! If this was the way an M1A1 XO fought his tank/company,

then the only difference is the tool, not the task. If he could manage the task before this tool, and cannot now, get rid of the M1A2! However, in my experience as an M1A2 XO, it's easier to apply the tool to make the task easier. My point is not that being an M1A2 TC is easier at first, but that it should be in the long run. If it isn't easier, then the tank doesn't meet the needs for which it was created. When considering doctrinal changes, as MAJ Poling is, it is easy to confuse arguments over doctrine with the related arguments over system types. We should clearly separate the two arguments and consider doctrine itself as a separate tool used by the soldier.

In MAJ Poling's article, he uses the capabilities of this new tank to define the role of the company XO. By doing this, he has effectively changed the job to meet the needs of the tool, thus breaking the basic rule that an item's form must serve its function. Using the form and function rule as a basis for the argument to decide which platform the XO should be in, we must first define the XO's doctrinal role, then choose the platform that best meets his needs.

For this discussion, I assume that the XO is the second most senior officer in the company, that he is the only officer in the company, other than the CO, who integrates all company/team assets to accomplish his mission, and that he has experience leading a tank platoon, as well as in battalion operations, from either a specialty platoon or assistant staff point of view. I will assume that an M1A2 is a tank (with digital capabilities) and that a C²V is an operations center (with digital capabilities²). I also assume that, when full up, every unit within a battalion has a redundant leadership so that the second in command has full capability to assume the role of the first without degrading his unit or a subordinate unit's redundant command. For example, in the platoon, the platoon sergeant has dual net capability. If he did not, he would degrade his platoon in one of the three essential elements of an Armor unit's ability to fight (shoot, move, and communicate) when he took over for his platoon

leader. Additionally, when the platoon sergeant takes over, he does not disrupt the redundant command of his subordinate,

the wingman, in any way. Finally, I will assume for my discussion that I am on the offensive in order to simplify the argument (I do hope all can agree, without much heartburn, that armor was intended to be used on the offensive).

What is the company XO's role? I believe that most company and battalion commanders would say they expect the XO to build and maintain combat power, assist the commander in the decision-making process, keep them constantly informed of the company's status, ensure class I, III, and V happen without delay, and any number of other key tasks. What probably won't be mentioned, but what you will experience in your first EXEVAL, is that they expect the XO to be a fully functioning commander in charge of a fully functioning company the minute his commander's MILES whoopie light goes off.

Not only do they expect this but, at that moment, any other task that conflicts becomes secondary. To be able to assume command immediately, nothing the XO does to perform his duties can place him in a position that will not allow succession of command. Without more in-depth discussion, I will accept that being the second in command is the XO's primary responsibility. He is the redundant leadership at this level, so his form must meet this function. He must have the ability to coordinate all company assets to accomplish the mission, and assume full responsibility of the commander's duties. Therefore, we must consider the functional requirements of being a commander.

The CO of any combat arm must have the ability to focus the efforts of his fighting units by locating himself at the decisive point of his battlefield to influence the outcome. The commander must be able to "lead the charge," that is, join his men in the fight to inspire them and lead by example. Therefore, the commander must be able to position himself within the battle, as well as be able to join the fight. A platoon leader in his tank could assume this role if the XO's platform did not allow it, but not without degrading his pla-

At right, members of A/3-8 Cav at the first digitized battalion EXEVAL.



toon by removing its redundant command. Therefore, the company needs someone with this capability. If an XO's responsibility is to assume this role, then his form, or platform, must also be able to include those abilities required of the commander.

Now, what about all those other logistical responsibilities? If taking over is just a contingency, shouldn't the XO's tools allow him to easily perform the other actions required by his position? Looking at the logistical coordinator for the battalion, however, the battalion XO, you will see he is not in a tank. His responsibilities in these areas are too important to become secondary when his commander falls. Why isn't this true at the company level? Both XOs are responsible for all classes of supply, replacement, repair, and maintenance. They each have responsibilities in many different directions. Or do they? The battalion has organized itself so that it will assume all responsibility for building, finding, collecting, or providing these assets and responsibilities so that they come to and from the company in one package, the LOGPAC. By assuming this role, they allow the company to focus on these responsibilities in cycles.

Before the battle, building combat power is the company's foremost responsibility. Once the attack begins, the company must move, and move rapidly, so the battalion allows them to switch primary focus to fighting the tanks. Building combat power becomes secondary to the company so that it will not slow its pursuit. Then, after the fight, repairing the tanks and preparing for the next fight again becomes the primary focus. To make full use of its tanks' strengths in pursuit and exploitation, the battalion cannot afford this luxury of cyclic CSS; it must constantly build, feed, and repair while the companies maintain battle momentum. The battalion XO is therefore placed in an operations center where he can continuously manage the assets that build and maintain the companies' combat power during all stages of their cycle. By placing him in an operations center, the battalion level XO's primary responsibility is not to assume control of the fight when his commander falls, thus creating the need for the battalion S3. The battalion S3 can assume command³ without degrading his unit or his subordinate companies' redundant com-

mand. If the battalion did not assume these logistical responsibilities, it is quite possible the company XO would have a similar role to the battalion XO, but then the company would need another first lieutenant in a role similar to the S3 at the company level. It is obvious, given the complexity of the company vs. battalion, and the different role — constant vs. cyclic — of the logistics system, that the battalion XO's role in an operations center is not similar enough, as its name suggests, to a company XO's to help in defining the company XO's role.

During the fight, the company XO has the great responsibility of acting as the company's battle captain. To do this, he needs tools that assist in information management. His focus is the task of collating, sorting, and distilling the flood of battlefield information into usable information and intelligence for his company and battalion commanders, so his platform must provide the ability to manage this information. At higher levels, this function is handled by someone in an operations center out of the fight, so they can calmly gather many types of information and provide them to the battalion commander as needed. Wouldn't the company commander have the same needs of his XO? As brought out by many articles warning of some of the potential downsides of digitization, such as CPT Bate-man's ("Force XXI and the Death of Auftragstaktik," Jan-Feb 96), we must remember that the only reason the battalion commander needs this information and someone to manage it is because he can never truly see or feel his entire battlespace himself. The critical difference between a company and battalion is that the company CAN see its entire battlespace, and this is why a company commander provides priceless information to the battalion commander that his staff cannot. The XO's role as battle captain is more to manage this information flow, freeing his commander to fight his platoons, than to manage it separately from the fog of war. Part of that fog is emotion and morale, and the battalion commander must see and feel that fog, not see through it, because it affects his sol-

diers and his battlespace. If a company XO was in an operations center, the information that he provides to the battalion would have the same disadvantages that come from information from the staff. The company XO must therefore be in a position to provide that true vision of war to the battalion commander in his role as battle captain.

Given his primary role as second in command, his responsibilities of managing the cyclic logistic system, and his additional role as company battle captain, we can easily define what the XO's platform must include. First, just as the commander, he must have the same mode of transportation and weapon as his men on the line, and the ability to communicate with his men and higher. For a tank company, this means a tracked vehicle with a cannon⁵ and dual net radios. He must have the ability to manage logistical assets during specific cycles, so he needs the ability to reach battalion logistic nodes by radio or on land. Because it is not a constant need, this does not require a third net, simply the ability to change frequencies. To reach them on land he needs any vehicle capable of moving him from forward positions to the rear and back. Finally, as battle captain, he needs the ability to manage information that he or his commander personally observes, from and to company and battalion. This requires an open hatch, or periscopes, and at least dual net radios, as well as any analog or digital tools which will help him manage that information. It's irrelevant whether those tools are laminated status cards with grease pencils and a map board, or digital report formats using a cursor and a map screen. Any way you slice it, the company XO's role **REQUIRES A TANK.**

Notes

¹CPT Krenzel served as an M1A2 tank platoon leader in A/3-8 Cav(MBT) during the first company-level test of the M1A2 in the U.S. Army. Based on his experiences as an M1A2 platoon leader, then as an M1A1 HC XO, he

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wrote "The Armor Lieutenant and the M1A2," in the July-August 1995 issue of *ARMOR*, describing the company XO as the chief information conduit to higher for digital traffic on the IVIS. During 3-8 CAV(MBT)'s fielding of the M1A2, he served as the HHC XO.

²At this time, the closest thing to a C²V in a digitized battalion is an M577 command post carrier with a dismount IGS (improved ground station) version of the IVIS, on a desk top, that has been plagued with compatibility and reliability problems in every exercise that it has been integrated to the M1A2 IVIS in 3-8 CAV. Eventually these problems will be worked out. Force XXI is also currently working on several C²Vs recommended by the Armor, Artillery, and Infantry communities based on a variety of vehicle chassis.

³Whether the battalion XO or the battalion S3 assumes command during a battle is another argument, but for the purpose of my argument I accept that the man forward, in the tank, will be controlling the fight (thus, commanding) until reorganization is possible.

⁴Although many of you will strongly argue the issue of when information becomes intelligence to the conclusion that only a staff makes intelligence out of information, my point in that using the term Intelligence is merely to compare the XO's responsibilities at the company level to those of the staff at battalion level. His job clearly has similarities, at times, to the functions performed by many different staff officers at higher levels.

⁵To those of you who argue putting the XO in a tank is taking a gun out of the fight... where do you think that gun is when you take away his tank and put him in a C²V?

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