

Lighten Up, Guys

To Remain Relevant, We Must Revise Our Doctrine Toward Lighter Forces and Better Deployability

by Ralph Zumbro

The moving hand writes, and having writ, moves on. By now, it should be pellucidly clear to anyone whose brain is not encased in a depleted uranium cranium, that the times are changing for the armored force. We are, right now, exactly where the old horse cavalry was in 1940. Having had the time recently to do some intensive reading, this old soldier sat down in the Armor School Library and read **ALL** of *ARMOR* Magazine, starting in 1888, when it was the *Cavalry Journal*. When I got to the point in history where the Chief of Cavalry, General Herr, refused to give up even one horse, and lost it all, I began to get an eerie sense of déjà vu.

Granted, the general was the victim of terminal bureaucracy and compartmentalization, but the old, “been there, done that,” feeling began to surface. For the Vietnam generation, remember, RVN wasn’t “tank country.” And a generation or two earlier, tanks weren’t proper mounts for a cavalryman. For those of you who don’t know the story, the title in *ARMOR* is “The Ten Lean Years,” by General Robert Grow. It was serialized in the first three issues of 1987 and ought to be required reading at the Armor School. The school library keeps a copy in their vertical file and it can be checked out.

At the same time General Herr was proposing a giant cavalry-mech organization, General Adna Chaffee was walking into the War Department with the TO&E for a panzer-style armored division in his briefcase and George Patton in his pocket. The rest is history, and we are now right THERE.

It is a known and admitted fact that we cannot deploy the Abrams in any significant numbers in any credible period of time. In other words, we are no longer a significant deterrent to international chicanery and adventurism. Remember, it took six months to build up for Desert Storm. The next international shivaree is more than likely to be a come-as-you-are affair... And we’ve been getting smaller and heavier for nine years.

Remember the old saw, “You can’t get there from here”? We have been there before, and have had to make the choice. We made it in 1942, and we can make it now. For those who haven’t read Dick Hunnicutt’s book, *FIREPOWER*, a prototype of the M-6 heavy tank, the 60-ton big brother to the Sherman, was delivered just EIGHT months after Pearl Harbor, long before the German Tiger tank had even been thought of. A regiment of those suckers could have wiped Rommel off the African continent...IF we could have manufactured, crewed, and shipped them. The War Department had the choice, but the finger landed on the M-4 for several reasons, deployability being the most important, but also because of manufacturing considerations and the availability of adequate engines.

The realities have not changed in half a century. We had shipping problems then, and we have shipping problems now. For the shipping space and weight of one M-6, the Merchant Marine could ship two 30-ton Shermans or four half-tracks... For the shipping space and weight of one Abrams, the Merchant Marine can ship two 30-ton M3A3 Bradleys or four M113s in ACAV configuration. Nothing has changed, including our attitudes. If we don’t reconfigure SUDDENLY to an all-cav configuration, we are gonna get left out of a lot of peachy little wars. Remember this: the only reason that we now have a separate Armor Branch is the mental rigidity of the command structure of the cavalry of the 1940s.

J.F.C. Fuller was fond of saying, “The only thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind is getting an old one OUT.” His book, *General Officers, Their Diseases and Cures*, is in the Armor School Library and worth the read. General Patton, so the story goes, always kept several copies and delighted in shipping one to whomever he thought could benefit from the information. The military mind is extremely conservative, and for the most part, rightly so, as battlefield experimentation can sometimes lead to an

excess of widows and orphans... But conservatism can also lead to lost battles and missed opportunities. For the student of history, it is painfully obvious that our spiritual predecessor, the armored knight, was not shot off the battlefield; he simply refused to learn the art of maneuver warfare. Remember that the only thing that protected the English flanks at Crecy were open woodlands through which any competent modern commander would have sent a force of flankers. But the only thing the French knights knew how to do was to up-armor. Sound familiar? When it got to the point where a crane was necessary to lift a French knight into the saddle of his Percheron, the jaws of history were closing on him, just as they are squeezing us now.

Do not misunderstand me. We will always need the heavy force to handle the T-90s and their successors, in whom-ever’s hands they are sent to battle. The problem is simply that the Abrams and its ilk are too much of a good thing. The beast is the world’s most perfect breakthrough machine, and no foreseeable foe can stand against a full armored division of them. They are not, however, campaign tanks. All the veterans of Desert Storm to whom I have talked... and that is a LOT of tankers, as I move around a bit... tell me that the Abrams is a thirsty beast, that third world bridges are a problem, and that the ammunition selection is limited, and so on. The men from Bosnia say that the Bradley is a long step in the right direction, and that the old ACAV might just be the right machine... And we have about 25,000 M113s in the inventory at any given time. It wouldn’t take much to put turrets and extra armor on them and still keep the easy air mobility that makes the old “Battle Box,” such a valuable asset. It is probably our most mobile piece of hardware. The M113, remember, is a combat machine that can be lifted by helicopter.

The name of the game is credibility and deployability. We desperately need something that is air-deployable to the AO and

helicopter-mobile once it's there on the battlefield. For the next decade or so, we are not going to be fighting Saddam, although he or someone like him is waiting in the wings for us to go soft again. Instead, we are probably going to be protecting caregivers, resettling presidents, squashing petty dictators, eliminating warlords, etc., for the foreseeable future, and that is not a bad thing, if looked at in the proper light.

One could look at each deployment as a "training war," if that's a fair term. These OOTWs are where we locate and battle-test our new generation of leaders, test new weapons and doctrine, and generally work the bugs out of our organization. Each one will involve long distance deployment, light armor, some maneuvering, some logistic problems, and the interaction of air, infantry, and mechanized/armored units. This is a training opportunity not to be sneezed at. Think of them as minimized AirLand operations and the concept becomes considerably more palatable than spending a whole generation going stale in the motor pools, waiting for "Our Kind of War." AND, remember always, the whole world will be watching. A good performance will be graded by the whole planet, and a lethal lesson just may prevent more ill-advised international adventurism.

There is, however, a large, heavy Sword of Damocles hanging over our necks, and it gets lower with each swing of the nightly news. Sooner than later a shriek of urgent need is going to come echoing out of Washington and we won't be ready. There is much more interest in light forces and deployability in the Marines and the National Guard than there is in the heavy force, and where will that leave US when the call goes out? If the Marines get a sudden deployment because they can move and we can't... THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH OF THEM... And the nation gets another black eye. We do not need another Beirut, or a Mogadishu incident. Further, the Marines deploy by sea and are not configured to get really far inland. Deep inland, deep raids and strikes are our job, the traditional job of the Cavalry, the maneuver force that we have always been... until recently. The sad thing is that we already have the hardware. We only have to reconfigure what we already own, if we will.

Back during the Vietnam War, the 25th Division found out that a CH-47 can lift an ACAV and move it across about 20 miles of battlefield. We CAN jump tall buildings with a single bound, if we will only remember that we once could. We



Bradleys in Bosnia – “One could look at each deployment as a ‘training war,’ if that’s a fair term. These OOTWs are where we locate and battle-test our new generation of leaders, test new weapons and doctrine, and generally work the bugs out of our organization.”

still own those exact same machines, 30 years later, but have forgotten how to match them up. Better yet, we now have a helicopter which can move a HMMWV-equipped scout or a slingload of motorcycles... Even mountain bikes, out to where some serious Humint can be gotten. The drill would be to insert whatever scout forces are necessary to get our information and then land in what force the situation requires.

We already know where most of the C-130-capable airstrips or level stretches or road are, in any given nation. Drop a couple of planeloads of paratroopers on a selected location and you've got an airhead. Two companies of Screaming Eagles and a company of ACAVs will give most small countries and ANY warlord a permanent case of involuntary digestive trauma. Bring in the heli-lift capability and you can razzle-dazzle any normal military force into impotence. NO ONE is trained to handle the possibility of an enemy who creates a third flank with airborne armor. For the record, it was done just once, by the Russians in one of the Somali-Ethiopian wars, and it worked beautifully. One armored heli-lift and the war was over. They, however, seem to have forgotten the concept, as it was not used in Afghanistan.

Once you have an airfield, you can bring in the Engineers and upgrade it to a condition where the heavies can land. This, of course, brings up yet another consideration, fractioned operations. I would recommend a re-looking at an old RVN-era series of articles by Col. Riggs. The titles are "We Need A Few Tanks To..." (M-J '69) and "Tanks For Non-Tank Country" (J-F and M-A '70). The colonel is since deceased, and we miss him at reunions, but his work is his

monument. The RVN-era tankers and the Bataan and Guadalcanal tankers before them learned a whole bag of tricks that are in danger of being lost. It is distinctly possible for tanks to go out in support of infantry, perform noncombatant evacuation, beat the bushes for guerrillas, and run medical civil action patrols (MED-CAP), escort convoys, act as artillery, and still be available for concentrated armor-heavy raids. You just have to be mentally flexible. To quote Col. Battreall, "You have to think fast or get out of the Cavalry." And Armor designation or not, Cavalry is what we all are, and we need to remember that we are a light maneuver element as well as a battering ram.

That is where our minds seem to be jammed up at this point in history, and we cannot afford, nor can this nation afford, a mind-set that says, "The Russians/Chinese/Islamics are coming," and forgets that the warlord, the partisan, the smuggler, the drug lord, the tribal wars, the border jumpers, the slavers, and the mass murderers are here NOW. What is missing is a credible deterrent. Tempting though it may be, the use of atomic weapons is not an option in warlord extermination, nor is a full-scale "Hail Mary," sweep with an armored division. What has to be done is to go into the woods, deserts, and jungles, grab the miscreants by the stacking swivel, drag them out to a fair trial by a duly constituted government, and hang them.

To quote Ralph Peters, who writes in *Parameters*, among his other credits: "We are facing a new breed of 'Warrior,' who is capable of acts of atrocity which challenge the descriptive abilities of the language"... The two-legged varmints

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who make war on women, children, and the elderly have no discernible place in the scheme of things. They need to be terminated.

Right about this time though, things begin to get really tricky, and it is my opinion that only light armor (Bradley/ACAV) can do the job. The problem is that many of these little Third World brouhahas require the use of selected, personalized, less than lethal force, and that means mechanized transport. Water cannons, foam projectors, sonic boomers, and whatnot are NOT man-portable, unless the man in question is himself delivered by some conveyance. Non-lethal weapons are not an oxymoron; they are how we are going to have to do business in the near future, and only light armor can carry and power up the gear. There's not a lot of room for extras inside a tank turret. It takes a lot more equipment to capture someone alive than to simply blow his head off.

It also takes a dedicated, long-term effort, and a unit with long-term cohesion, and long-term TOs. This business of "up or out," six month's combat and six month's staff to get a ticket punched is not good for unit morale. The troops want a leader they can get to know and depend on, not a transient who is just passing through. What is needed for this kind of work are long-term professional soldiers — legionnaires, if you will. While the civil government and political types are doing their thing, the regiments or battle groups become the local infrastructure and install whatever stability is needed...

at gunpoint if necessary. Anyone who has been rescued from genocide is not going to complain about military government, at least for a while.

This kind of work can't be done in a few months; history indicates that you have to be ready and willing to go for the long haul. After all, it took a full generation to install some semblance of democracy in Japan and Germany and to convince them of its general superiority as a governmental system. How long will it take to install a cohesive government where none has been for living memory? Considerably longer than one combat rotation, and probably longer than the average enlistment. This kind of work is going to take dedicated professional soldiers who genuinely like their work, are good at it, and are willing to die for it, if need be. That kind of military mental manipulation, however, is outside the scope of this article, once the need has been pointed out.

What DOES need to be looked at is continuing to be relevant, and to keep our branch cohesiveness and to keep our hand in the soldiering business at hand, not ignoring the current situation and only preparing for the War in 2020. That, however, is not our only task, if we wish to remain the "Arm of Decision." Somebody else is swinging the sword that's threatening us and that is the old competition. Sooner or later, it will dawn on the infantry types that they, too, own and operate Bradleys and are not chained to a heavy force that won't give up its Abrams-heavy organization. Then where

are we? Agincourt comes to mind. We need to lighten the force with an all-cav T.O. but keep our options open. It is possible to operate fractioned, opconned and cross-attached, and then to consolidate when necessary. You just have to be almighty good at what you do. Does anyone see a problem with that?

We need to keep an Abrams force for when its task becomes imperative, but only the light forces — armed with the Bradley as a medium tank with dismounts, and ACAVs as light tanks — can open the door for them. The light force can be the "camel's nose in the tent," so to speak, to make the opening to get the big boys in to finish the job.

First the two-wheeled, or dismounted, scouts, then heli-lifted M1114s, then the ACAV force, then the Bradley, and suddenly, we're in, and the C-17s are unloading the Abrams force. Should be an interesting ride.

Ralph Zumbro served as an NCO in each of the combat arms, including combat service in Vietnam. He has commanded tanks in Vietnam, USAREUR, and CONUS, and has served as a gunnery and demolitions instructor. His Vietnam account, *Tank Sergeant*, is now in its second printing. He also wrote *Tank Aces*, and his newest, *Iron Cavalry*, and co-authored two novels, *Puma Force* and *Jungletracks*.