



The 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment's Tactical Command Post:

An Alternative Command and Control Facility

by Captain Christopher Boyle

Framework

Equipped with a large tactical command post, the 3d ACR decided to experiment with a smaller, more deployable regimental TAC. The old and cumbersome TAC consisted of three M577s (S3, S2, and engineer); three M113s (S3, FSCoord, engineer battalion commander); two command Bradleys; and five HMMVVs. This configuration was too large and too difficult to set up and break down; the commander wanted a command post that could displace quickly, retain the ability to track current operations, provide a limited planning area, and be air deployable in support of the regiment's rapid deployment mission. The new concept, based on a model once used by the 11th ACR in Germany, eliminated the S3 and S2 M577s and replaced them with a 5-ton expandable van. Because a van was not available, the regiment used a modified M109 van.

Equipment

The regiment modified a standard M109 shop van to meet the regimental commander's command and control needs. The modifications were focused on three areas: the communications architecture, the continuous operations suitability, and the battle tracking sys-

tem. The communications structure in the M109 had to provide redundant, long range voice and data links to higher and subordinate headquarters. Our challenge was to maintain communications with the corps commander at potentially great distances while retaining communications with the regimental combat team. To accomplish these tasks, the regiment installed four SINCGARS radios used primarily for the regimental command and O/I nets and the corps command and O/I nets. The M109 van was equipped with whip antennae for the FM radios; therefore, the RTAC required no time to establish communications. The TAC personnel assembled OE-254s to increase the range of the FM radios when time permitted.

The regiment enhanced the TAC's communications capability by providing an MST-20 Single Channel Tactical Satellite (TACSAT) with an omni-directional antenna; this system established the communications link between the regimental commander and the corps commander. The regiment effected a voice and data link using a Multi-Subscriber Radio-Telephone (MSRT) equipped with a Crypteks secure fax. This equipment allowed the command group to pass information quickly and securely to the squadrons and to the corps. To pass selected, non-secure information, the regiment equipped the TAC with a 3W cellular phone. Although cellular phones were used rarely in tactical environments,

they provided another reliable form of communications at the regimental commander's disposal. The redundancy of the TACSAT, MSRT, Crypteks fax, four SINCGARS radios, and cellular phone ensured that a continuous communications link between regimental commander and the corps and squadron commanders remained intact.

The TAC used trailer-mounted, twin 3kw generators to furnish power to the M109 van. Twin generators provided continuous power and allowed the crew to service one generator while the other was in operation. With both generators mounted on a single trailer, the M109 van pulled its own power generation source. At least one generator was always operational; however, the M109 could operate for a limited time using the vehicle batteries. The two generators and the M109's battery guaranteed that the TAC always had power to operate.

Besides the considerable communications ability, the commander required an all-weather, day/night environment conducive to command and control of the regiment. The van's hard shell offered protection from the elements and a dry, comfortable work area. To control the climate inside the TAC, the van was fitted with a 3,000 BTU heater and 3,000 BTU air conditioner. With a controlled environment, the TAC could conduct 24 hour operations while providing necessary environmental control to the communications equipment. The

HQ-6	HMMWV	Regimental Commander Commander's Driver	COL SPC
HQ-3	HMMWV	Regimental S3 RS3 Driver	MAJ SPC
*HQ-66	M3A2	Commander's Gunner Assistant Gunner Driver	SSG CPL PFC
*HQ-33	M3A2	RS3 Gunner Assistant Gunner Driver	SGT SGT SPC
HQ-37	M109	Truck Commander (Shift NCOIC) Driver	SSG PV2
HQ-36	HMMWV	RTAC NCOIC Driver	SFC(P) PFC
HQ-33 (Engineer)	M577	S3 Engineer Battalion Track Commander Driver Crewmen x 3	MAJ SFC SPC SPC
*HQ-66 (Engineer)	M113	Commander, Engineer Battalion Track Commander Driver	LTC SSG SPC
*HQ-66 (Artillery)	M113	FSCoord Track Commander Driver	LTC SSG SPC
HQ-38	M113	RS3 Battle Captain x 2 RS2 Battle Captain RS2 Battle Captain Driver Generator Mechanic Shift NCOIC Shift NCOIC	CPT CPT SFC PV2 PV2 SFC SSG
HQ-6P	OH-58	Pilot Crew Chief	CW2 SPC
	HMMWV	Air Liaison Officer Assistant	MAJ SSGT
*During battles, the command vehicles moved forward.			

Table 1

regiment mounted two fluorescent lights from a Modular Command Post System tent which proved to be significantly cooler inside the M109 than the standard lights built into the shelter. To ensure light discipline, we constructed a custom-fitted boot to fit over the exit of the truck entrance to the tent. The boot prevented light from escaping and provided more room to operate when temporarily halted. The additional space allowed the regimental commander to plan and conduct rehearsals in limited visibility conditions forward on the battlefield.

With an all-weather environment and an effective communications platform, the next concern was the battle-tracking system. The TAC crews used two map boards: a current operations map consisting of friendly and confirmed enemy locations, and an intelligence map, consisting of templated enemy lo-

cations and likely courses of actions. The consolidation of enemy and friendly locations on one map provided the regimental commander with a timely picture of the regiment's battle space. To assist the commander in making decisions based on the current situation, the TAC maintained combat power charts down to the troop level. Each of the regiment's combat systems was included on these charts. With this system in place, the TAC could provide the commander, the TOC, or the corps headquarters with the friendly and enemy situations and the current combat status of the regiment.

The equipment was the infrastructure of the TAC. With an unflinching communications architecture, a secure, comfortable work area, and a simple battle tracking system, the TAC was successful in assisting the regimental commander in fighting the regiment.

Personnel

The next challenge was to tailor the TAC personnel manning to accomplish the mission both inside and outside the vehicle. The main constraint of the TAC was the limited space inside the van; only five personnel could effectively work inside. To remain effective, the TAC required a staff tracking enemy and friendly operations and a command and control element to supervise the security and operations outside the TAC. To accomplish these tasks, the regiment utilized the soldiers at the TAC as shown in Table 1.

The crews that operated inside the TAC aided the commander by providing him with a clear picture of the friendly and enemy situation. A normal shift at the TAC consisted of an S3 battle captain, an S2 battle captain, and a shift NCOIC. During battles or other peak times during the operation, two S3 battle captains surged to enhance battle tracking and command and control of the regiment. Maintaining S2 and S3 battle captains in the TAC allowed outstanding situational awareness. The S2 battle captain maintained a situation template on the intelligence map and posted known enemy locations on the operations map. Enemy locations transposed on the operations map provided the regimental commander a clear picture of the battlefield and facilitated analysis of the enemy's courses of action.

The battle captains were assisted by the shift NCOIC who tracked and reported required information, i.e., combat power and unit locations. The shift NCOIC also maintained the equipment inside the TAC. He ensured that communication with higher and subordinate headquarters was maintained and that all equipment inside the van remained combat ready.

While the crews inside the TAC were tracking the battle, an outside crew ensured that the TAC remained secure and provided for continuous operations. The crew outside allowed the soldiers inside to focus on their primary task, aiding the regimental commander.

To ensure success, the regiment assigned an SFC(P) as the TAC NCOIC. He developed and supervised the security plan, supervised maintenance, and

ensured that the TAC received necessary logistics support. With a senior NCO operating in this capacity, the battle captains were able to focus on their duties and to maintain a sleep plan.

Support

The TAC never lacked for logistical support because the regimental HHT 1SG ensured that we received a LOG-PAC daily, and sometimes twice a day. To facilitate the HHT commander in his logistical planning, the TAC submitted a logistics request to HHT daily. Face-to-face communications with the LOGPAC personnel, and an accurate estimate of the logistical support required, expedited the process. A clear communications link to HHT, an NCO who monitored the TAC logistics status, and a supportive chain of command set the conditions for success.

Operations

Operations inside the TAC were similar to those in any TAC. Normally, the regimental commander and S3 fought forward from their Bradleys. Occasionally, during battles when the regiment was spread across a wide front, the S3 operated from the TAC while the regimental commander utilized his command console in the UH-60. The TAC provided an excellent platform for the S3 to recommend critical decisions: priorities of fire for high payoff targets, close air support, and committal of the reserve. The TAC provided a command and control center to communicate with subordinate, higher, and adjacent unit headquarters and the regimental commander. The S3 could track operations effectively throughout the regiment's battle space.

Security

With the regimental commander, the S3, and at least two battalion commanders sometimes at the TAC, it became a high value target, and security was a chief concern. The majority of the TAC's security was passive, although available weapons systems were used to help secure its perimeter.

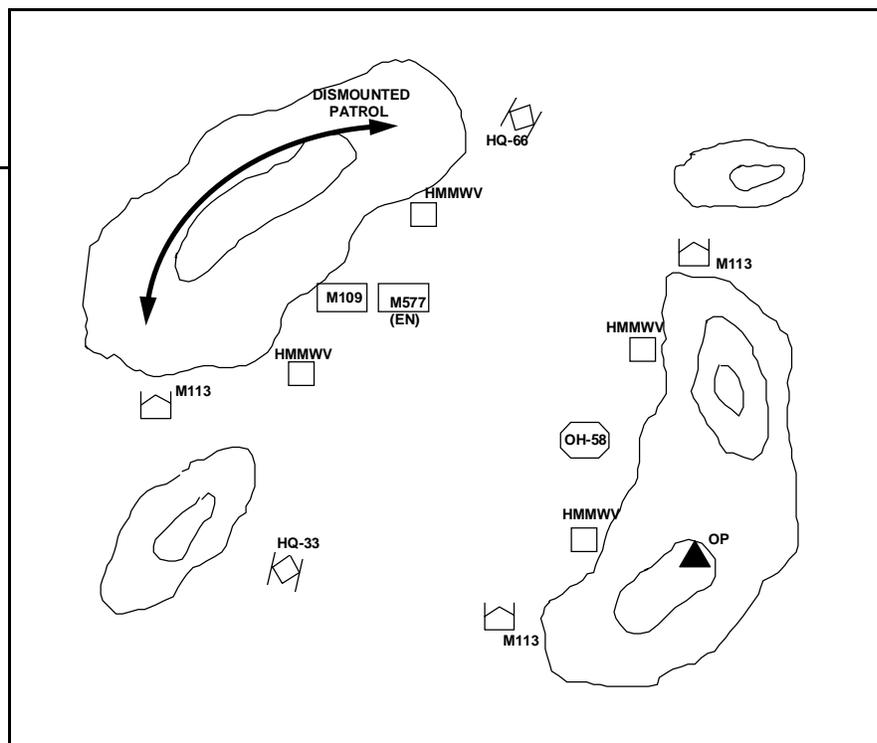


Figure 1. RTAC configuration in an unsecure area with command Bradleys

To prevent detection, the TAC relocated at least once a day. Because the TAC was extremely small, breakdown took only 20-30 minutes, much faster than the Regimental Tactical Opera-

tions Center (RTOC). To decrease the time required to displace the TAC, soldiers kept all equipment stowed, including their personal gear. The only time-consuming processes remaining

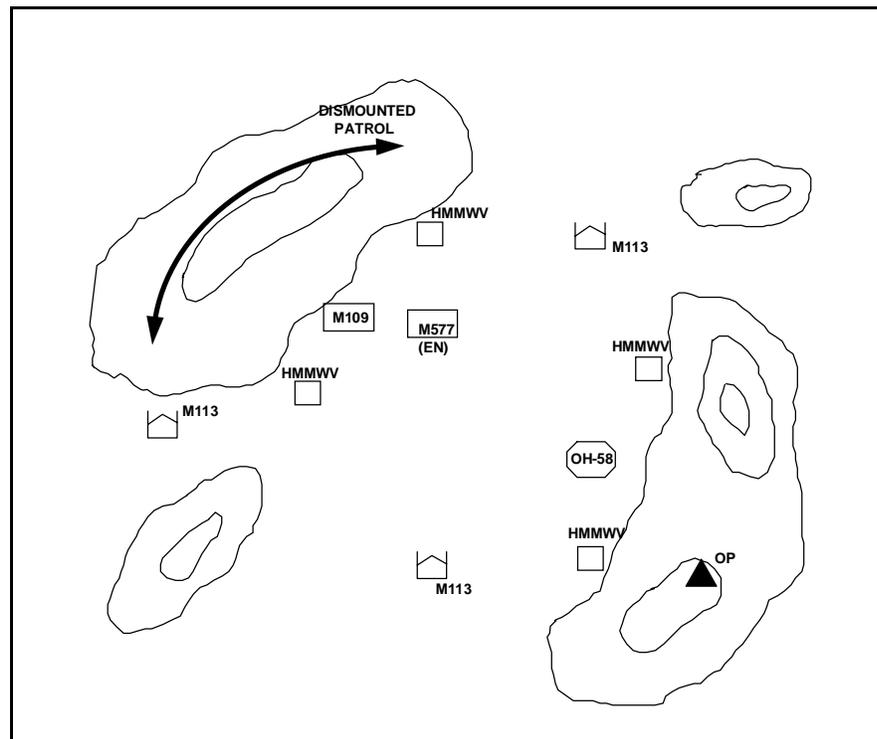


Figure 2. RTAC configuration in an unsecure area without command Bradleys

were the disassembly of the OE-254 antennae and the combat rolling of the camouflage nets. Realizing that this equipment required the most time to assemble and disassemble, the NCOs meticulously trained their soldiers on these tasks. To decrease the set-up and breakdown time, the TAC decreased the soldiers on security and inside the van and utilized them to prepare for displacement. While the soldiers broke down the TAC, a small quartering party departed to recon the new location.

While most of the TAC soldiers were breaking down equipment, the S3 battle captain not on shift would fly to the new location using the OH-58. If the OH-58 was unavailable, the quartering party used a HMMWV or an M113. The OH-58 would provide early warning until local security was established. Smooth quartering party operations facilitated the movement of the TAC into new vehicle positions and limited the signature of a command post entering the area.

The considerations used in choosing TAC locations were simple: defensible



The regimental TAC and its twin 3kw generators.

terrain, cover and concealment from mounted and dismounted observation, excellent communications with subordinate and higher headquarters, and accessibility to the regimental commander.

The TAC, due to its small size, could easily hide in wadis and ravines, which made the TAC virtually invisible unless the observer was within 200-300 meters. The only exposed parts of the TAC were the antennae heads.

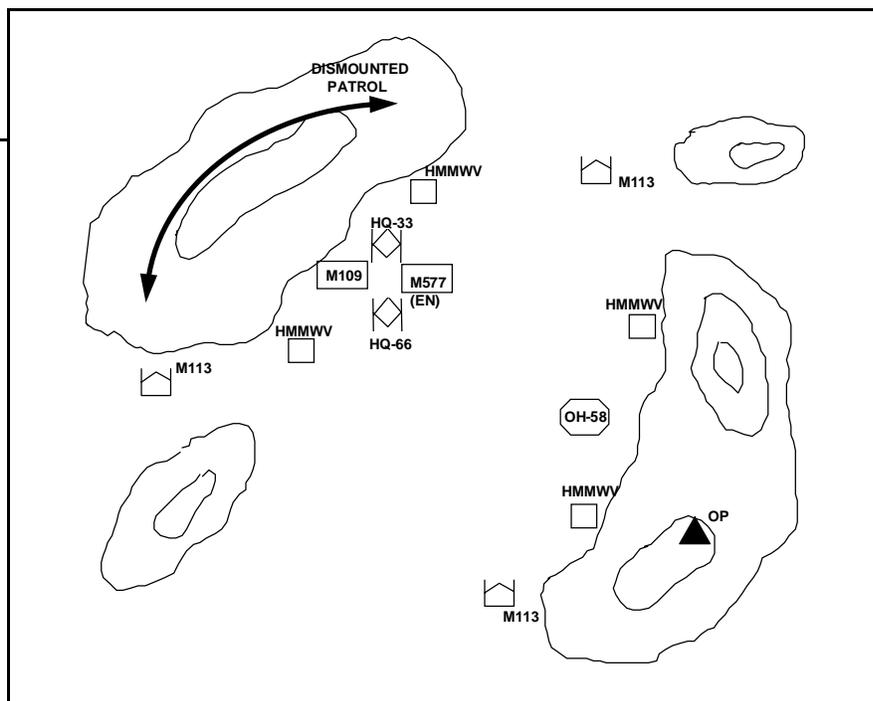


Figure 3. RTAC configuration in a secure area

Besides passive security, the TAC established a 360-degree perimeter around the M109 van. The two command Bradleys defended the most likely avenues of approach. The three M113s secured the remainder of the perimeter. To prevent a dismounted attack, an OP and a patrol secured the dismounted avenues of approach (Figure 1).

When the command vehicles were away from the TAC, the S3 M113 would defend the most likely avenues of approach and the perimeter would be reduced in size (Figure 2). When the TAC was located in a secure area, the command Bradleys were placed ramp to ramp under the SICUP (Figure 3).

Deployability

The regiment deploys the TAC as the Regimental Assault Command Post. In this capacity, the TAC serves as the initial command and control node controlling the reception of the regiment. The TAC is deployable on a C-130 or larger aircraft and has the organic equipment to control the regiment.

Summary

The 3d ACR TAC is a viable alternative to conventional TACs. Its communications platform, battle tracking ability, and stealth allow it to aid the commander in the command and control of the regiment. Its personnel manning and the climate control system allow the TAC to remain combat effective over long periods of time. Small and mobile, the TAC provides the 3d ACR with the flexibility to quickly establish a command post to successfully control regimental operations. The smaller command post facilitates the regiment in rapid deployment operations with no degradation in communications capability.

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