

Task Force Initiatives

by Lieutenant Colonel K.D. Boyd

The focus of this article is on the armor and mechanized infantry battalion task force (TF). It is a collection of ideas that worked well for Task Force "DESERT ROGUES," 1st Battalion, 64th Armor, 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized). The purpose for writing is to share techniques that worked during mounted combat in the Gulf War, enabling great soldiers to do their jobs a little better.

Task Force Movement

Until the final Operations Order (OPORD) was written and approved for release, there were few certainties about the enemy situation other than the Iraqi defense on the Kuwaiti border. It was this uncertainty that caused several assumptions and decisions to be made about TF movement and support structure.

Field Manual (FM) 71-2, *Tank and Mechanized Infantry Task Force*, outlines seven movement techniques: column, wedge, V, echelon, line, box, and diamond. All have advantages and disadvantages, but terrain is always a factor when selecting a particular formation. The key is to choose one that fits, train it to standard, and rehearse it until every vehicle commander understands it and can execute it regardless of conditions.

Task Force Desert Rogues consisted of two tank and two mechanized infantry companies. The task force commander chose task force diamond (Figure 1). The requirement for speed was the determinant in selecting this movement technique. This formation allowed the leadership to develop a few basic battle drills that the TF could quickly execute without losing momentum.

The belief that the field trains would/could not help the TF during movement determined their location with the forward support battalion (FSB) and consequently the structure of the support platoon. The support platoon was designed to carry as much Class I, III(B), III(P), and V as possi-

ble. The platoon was organized for rapid resupply of the TF; more on the support package later.

The scout platoon was 4-6 kilometers in front of the task force, spread over a 5-7 kilometer front. Each section used a Global Positioning System (GPS) for accurate position reporting. A tank company led the main body with mechanized infantry companies on the flanks and the second tank company trailing. The mortar platoon followed in the center, behind the lead tank company. The threat of enemy air was low but one Vulcan was with the tactical operations center (TOC), and another moved with the admin-logistic operations center (ALOC).

The TF commander's guidance was to minimize the number of wheeled vehicles, except for HEMTTs, in the formation. Therefore, only five wheels moved forward with the combat elements: two in the support platoon (platoon leader and sergeant); one in each aid station with trauma kits; and one carrying the Stinger platoon sergeant moving with the support platoon.

During hours of daylight and good visibility, the trail tank company moved in front of the support platoon and recovery section to facilitate fast battle drills to the front or flanks of the formation. At night, the support platoon moved in front of the trail tank company for greater protection. The recovery section always trailed.

Support Platoon

The support platoon was the lifeblood of the task force. Any item required for battle was on a combat vehicle or in the support platoon. The field trains carried all non-essential equipment and traveled with the forward support battalion (FSB). The support platoon was organized as shown in Figure 2. Vehicle modifications were the first order of business during Operation DESERT SHIELD. The lead HEMTTs received radios.

This allowed the platoon leader or platoon sergeant to talk to any lead ve-

hicle, which was always commanded by a noncommissioned officer. The two wreckers (5 and 10 ton) already had radios (MTOE authorizations). Spare tires were in the 1½-ton trailers. We learned this lesson the hard way late in the ground war after abandoning several trailers because we had no assembled spare tires and no time to stop and repair them. Pulling trailers with flat tires quickly caused damage to the prime mover.

Refuel on the move (ROM) was a critical battle drill rehearsed innumerable times. This subject warrants a separate article, but each column of the support platoon was designed to support a company during a ROM. Each column was independent and tailored to a specific type company (i.e., tank or mech). This was particularly true of peculiar Class V and Class III(P) requirements. However, each column also had sufficient generic stocks to support any company in case of vehicle loss or breakdown.

Within each column, cargo HEMTTs (M977s) carried tailored Class V packages. The scouts, mortars, and HHC(-) were also supported with specific vehicles. Cargo 1½-ton trailers were loaded with Class III(P) products tailored to the type of vehicles being supported (Abrams vs. Bradley). Vehicles carrying Class III(B) (M978), water, and a limited number of Meals Ready to Eat (MRE) rounded out the supporting column.

The platoon leader and sergeant each controlled two columns. The ALOC kept track of fuel consumption using reports from the companies. The TOC monitored the status and plotted future ROM sites. After the commander approved a recommended ROM site, the TOC would issue the order to the ALOC, which in turn would order the support platoon to execute a ROM. In hours of daylight, each first sergeant (traveling in the company maintenance M113) would drop back to the trail tank company, pick up his support column, and guide it forward to his company. At night, they moved to the center of the diamond formation and met up with their column in the vicinity of the TOC. To simplify identification, each column of HEMTTs fixed two colored glow sticks to the front of each vehicle, helping the first sergeant find them; different colors were used for

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each column. The support platoon leader and sergeant were responsible for getting the columns to the two mentioned link-up points. After completion of resupply (task force goal of one hour), the process was reversed.

Battalion Maintenance Section

This section was leader intensive. It included the battalion maintenance officer (BMO), the battalion maintenance technician (BMT), the battalion motor sergeant (BMS), and several of the best mechanics. Vehicles consisted of three M88 recovery vehicles and the direct support (DS) maintenance team M113 vehicle equipped with secure, dual net FM and GPS.

Maintenance sections at company and battalion level, were task organized and their equipment and repair parts organized around time lines. The specific items carried were based on the requirement for the mechanics to replace any item within 15 minutes. If the vehicle could not be repaired within that time, it was left with its crew for the BMO traveling behind the trail tank

company. Each company formation included its M113 maintenance vehicle and M88 recovery vehicle with several mechanics. Selected line items from the prescribed load lists (PLL) were stored on both vehicles.

Battalion maintenance vehicles also carried selected PLL lines. Their timeline for vehicle repair was 45 minutes. If the vehicle still could not be repaired (15 minutes by company and 45 minutes by BMO), it was left with its crew for the HHC commander leading the field trains (part of the brigade support area) approximately three to four hours behind the task force.

Task Force TOC

One modification was done to the M577 command post carriers in the TOC and ALOC. Four 5-ton cargo truck driver's seats were installed in all M577s (Figure 3). This initiative was a lifesaver to all occupants who traveled the 370 kilometers into Iraq. They had comfortable seats, well positioned to post maps and write reports, and in a position to catnap when appropriate. Everyone wore a Combat Vehicle Crewman (CVC) helmet to monitor an assigned net. This minimized noise and confusion inside the vehicle and maxi-

mized individual concentration, future planning by the second in command, and battle captain battle monitoring.

Summary

There is nothing magical about any of the ideas or initiatives performed by Task Force Desert Rogues. Hundreds of innovative techniques were used by many superb units. The successes of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM are attributable to those magnificent units and their leaders and soldiers.

All the ideas presented in this brief article worked. They involved training to a standard, a few inexpensive pieces of materiel, and the adherence to established doctrine.

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