Armor and Mechanized Infantry in Built-Up Areas!

by Major Rich Rouleau, Sergeant First Class Wesley Wyatt, and Sergeant First Class Martino Barcinas

The tank platoon roared up the road and stormed into Shughart-Gordon. As the M1s sprayed heavy machine gun fire at lower windows and doors, Bradleys hosed upper floor windows and roofs. The surprise and speed of the tank penetration shocked the OPFOR. A gleeful heavy team commander swaggered toward the brigade commander, expecting a well-earned slap on the back, maybe even a mention at the AAR. He was surprised to see the colonel's face darken with concern as the brigade combat team commander talked to his lead infantry unit.

Meanwhile, back in the MOUT complex, the armor platoon occupied the street like a beached whale waiting to be carved for its blubber. This time, however, no Eskimo would do the cutting; Geronimos of the 1-509 crept up to the windows overlooking the tanks. Their "knives" were smoking satchel charges hurled onto the decks of the exposed Abrams tanks. Yep, the heavy team would make the AAR all right.

Heavy team is the combined arms armor/mechanized company team of the Joint Readiness Training Center's rotational light infantry brigade. It functions as the heavy initial ready company for brigades during unit rotations to the JRTC. The heavy team can be tank heavy, mechanized infantry heavy, or a balanced team with equal tank and mechanized infantry platoons. Each has a specific MTOE, depending on whether it has a tank company headquarters or an infantry company headquarters. Because of this unique MTOE, each team can develop its tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) for operations in built-up areas. There are more generic TTPs that can be adopted or modified, regardless of MTOE. They are not intended to be the only solution, merely to illustrate how one unit can get the job done and complement existing field manuals. In addition, the U.S. Marine Corps' Project Metropolis provided a wealth of information and TTPs that can be adapted by Army mechanized forces to enhance crew and dismounted infantry survivability. U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 7-8, *Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad,* and Center for Army Lessons Learned Newsletter 98-10, "Light/Heavy Fighting in Restricted Terrain," outline integrating the light infantry and mounted forces.[1]

Because of these diverse requirements, the heavy team must be a multifunctional unit capable of operating as part of the brigade task force, battalion task force, or independently down to section level. The heavy team can have up to four maneuver platoons, a company headquarters section, and a brigade liaison team with a robust combat service and support slice. The tank platoons have four M1A1 or M1A2s. The mech platoons have four M2s and three dismount squads. The headquarters section has either two M1A1s or two M2s. Force XXI infantry company headquarters also has a weapons squad consisting of three sniper teams. The heavy team also has a maintenance contact team, communications team chief, medics with vehicles, engineers, air defense, and a heavy combat service support package from its parent battalion.

To apply these TTPs, you must understand the phases of offensive MOUT in accordance with FM 71-1, *Tank and Mechanized Infantry Company Team*, and additional planning considerations.[2]

There are four phases to offensive MOUT operations: recon the objective, isolate the objective, secure a foothold, and clear the built-up area. First, we must look at MOUT planning considerations and how they impact the heavy team as it applies to supporting a light infantry brigade. The planning considerations outlined in FM 71-1 are valid for the JRTC fight and should be followed as well as translated to the infantry task force commanders.[3] Offensive techniques in MOUT start with task organization.

Task Organization. The heavy team must plan on being task organized down to section level. The heavy team commander should assume the role of breach commander of the penetration force. The heavy team commander should have control of two penetration/breach teams to maintain the momentum and redundancy of the combat team. Team headquarters would have a headquarters tank section, an engineer platoon, a smoke platoon, and company trains. Teams 1 and 2 would each have

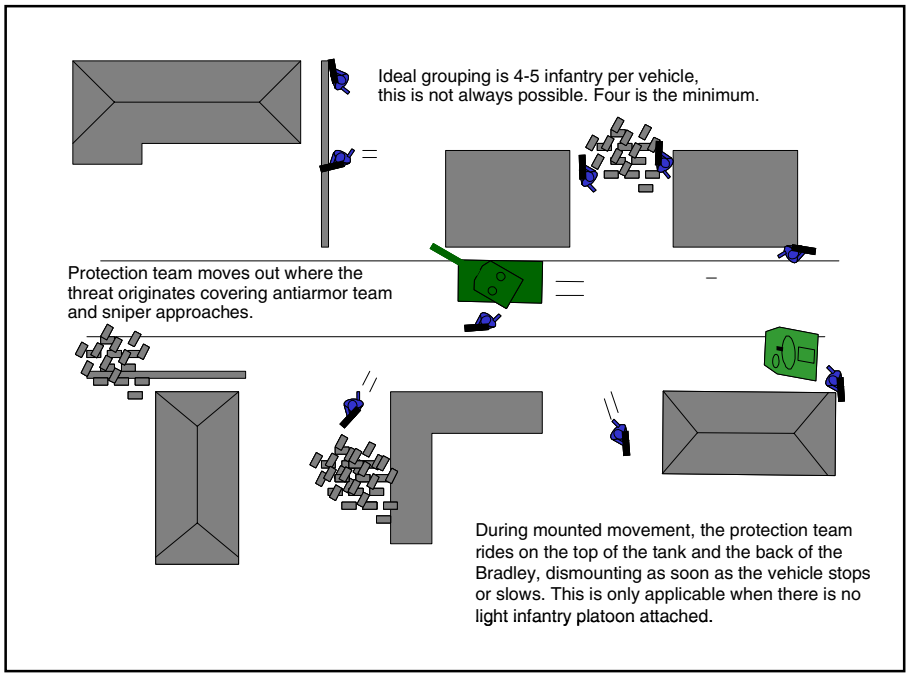

Figure 1. Tank and Bradley Protection

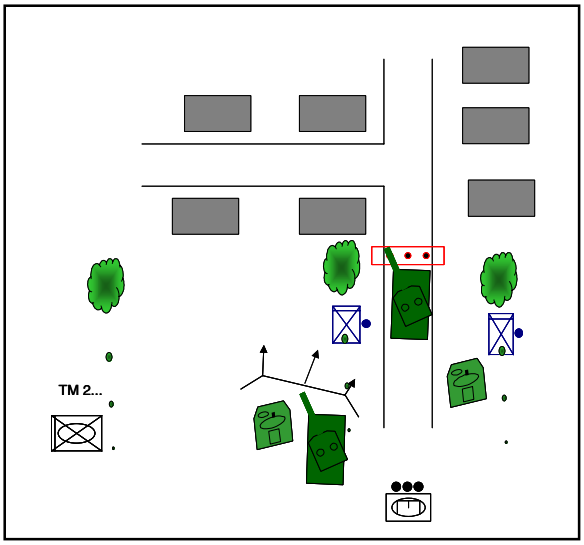

Figure 2. Breaching Method 2

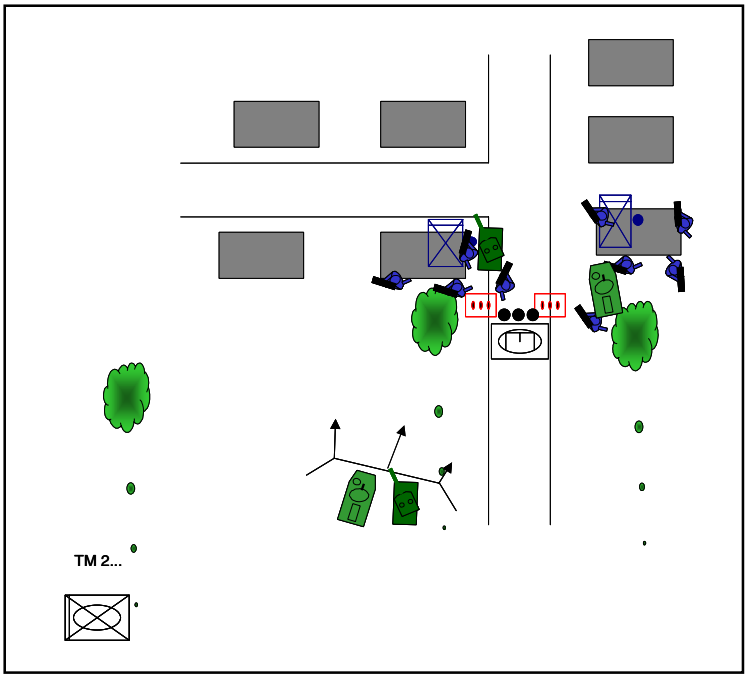

Figure 3. Breach Complete Method 2

a light infantry platoon, a section of two tanks with plow and roller, a section of two Bradleys with dismounts, a mine clearing line charge (MCLC), and an engineer squad. Platoons 3 and 4 would each have two sections of tank/Bradley wingmen.

The remaining two platoons are assigned the roles of outer cordon and combat team reserve. Due to this austere task organization, the heavy team must be given a clear and concise task and purpose, be prepared to assume several roles, and conduct centralized planning and decentralized execution.

Task, Purpose, Role, and Mission of the Heavy Team

"Team Heavy" will be part of the task force that secures a foothold in the town. It may have a follow-on mission to support clearing the built-up area. For this purpose, the team is task organized with its assets into a breach force, assault force, and a support force. Because of the restricted terrain, the team's operation could be limited to super-sized platoons or teams that execute the breach. They might conduct assaults and possible support missions on their own. In some cases, if the terrain is sufficiently restricted, the company can execute the breach in its entirety.

For example, the breach force and support force come from Team 1. The breach force consists of the tank/Bradley section with dismounts for local security and MCLC with engineers for mechanical breaching. The support force is the remaining tank/Bradley section with dismounts and a light infantry platoon. Team 2 provides the assault force. A thorough recon and overlay of the town should identify hazards for the MCLC. Avoid using the MCLC if there are overhead hazards such as power lines; this highlights the need to have a sapper squad available to conduct a manual breach. The MCLC is a tempting target for the OPFOR and its destruction can greatly hinder BLUFOR operations.

For extremely restricted terrain, the breach force might have one tank and one Bradley, plus dismounts with MCLC and engineers as a redundant means to breach. The support force consists of the remaining tank and Bradley. The assault force is the light infantry platoon. Team 2 is kept in reserve with a follow-on and assumes a follow-on and support role. Additionally, Team 2 can be OPCON to the clearing battalion. This keeps a redundant means for breaching and exposes the fewest number of friendly forces to the enemy. After Team 2 secures the foothold, it can support clearing the built-up area.

In either scenario, the heavy team still has its remaining two platoons to support the combat team's cordon of the town and can assist in clearing the built-up area or as the reserve. Teaming the Bradley section with the tanks as wingmen provides local vehicle security of the tanks and Bradleys as shown in Figure 1. This option provides the greatest security to armored vehicles from satchel charges and other dismounted threats. The armored vehicles, in turn, will be available to provide mutual support to the dismounted infantry platoons as they attempt to provide far side security or secure a foothold.

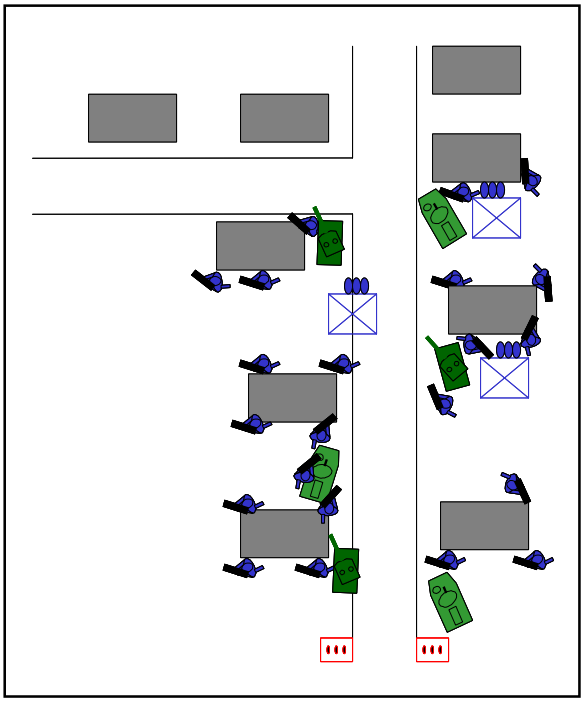

Figure 4. Clearing BUA Method 2

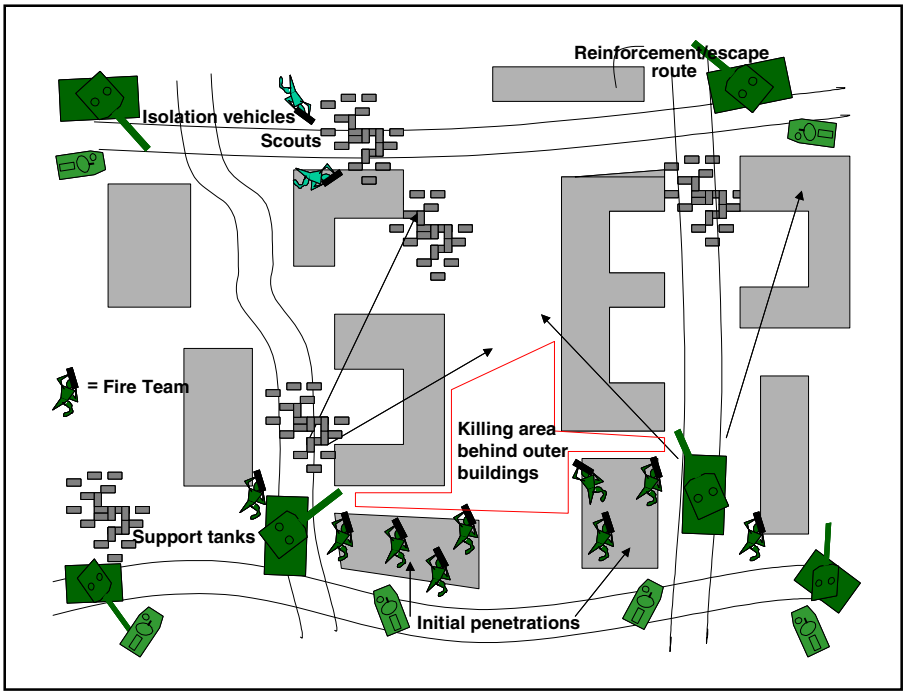

Figure 5. Combined Arms Clearing

How might it work? The commander responsible for securing the foothold determines where the penetration will occur through reconnaissance. Team Heavy moves forward and makes the initial penetration using one of the above listed methods. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate breaching method 2, with Team 2 OPCON to the clearing task force. Another key issue in mechanical breaching is the number of hits the roller can sustain and when to bring the MCLC forward to enhance its survivability. In Figures 4 and 5, Team 2 supports the clearing task force using the tanks to protect the light infantry as they move from building to building. The Bradleys provide mutual direct fire support to limit collateral damage, and dismounts from the Bradleys provide armored vehicle security. The other two platoons assist in cordoning the built-up area.

There is no definite method to keeping dismounts and armored vehicles alive in a MOUT environment. However, using combined arms techniques greatly enhances their chances.

Refinements. All operations can be improved. Equipment shortages or lack of the proper tools is nothing new. Those needs often stimulate force development. For example, sniper rifles would enhance operations for the tank company or its mechanized infantry platoons. They provide excellent overwatch with minimal risk of collateral damage. Marking systems for ground-to-air assets is another shortfall. The AIM-1 laser provides a higher density light than the AN/PAC-4C and can be distinguished with the trained eye. It, however, is not the cure for all lasing tasks.

Command and control of the beast is probably the heavy team commander's greatest challenge. Where is the best location for him and with what command and control platform? There is no right answer and it is probably personality driven. Historically, we find that the commander that goes into the built-up area in his tank becomes a fighter. He loses perspective of the team fight when he becomes engulfed in personal survivability. Therefore, the combat team loses its momentum and operations grind to a halt. In this scenario, the commander's primary purpose is to breach and secure a foothold, along with passing follow-on forces through. The heavy team commander may find himself occupying a room in a secure building with the ramp of his first sergeant's M113 up against a window, remoting his communications while synchronizing casualty evacuation and obstacle reduction.

The days of bypassing all built-up areas greater than 1 kilometer are gone for armor forces. Throughout the world, urban sprawl and modernization has made MOUT a fact of military life. These operations require unit leaders to carefully applying doctrine, training, leader development, organization, materiel, and soldiers. Finally, the unit should continuously refine its TTPs for combat drills and its ability to meet MOUT challenges.

Notes

[1]U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 7-8, *Infantry and Rifle Platoon and Squad*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 22 April 1992, Change 1, 1 March 2001; Center for Army Lessons Learned Newsletter 98-10, "Light/Heavy Fighting in Restricted Terrain," Fort Leavenworth, KS.

[2]FM 71-1, *Tank and Mechanized Infantry Company Team*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 26 January 1998.

[3]Ibid.

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