

# The Joint Readiness Training Center And Light/Heavy Integration: Defensive Operations

by First Sergeant Paul E. Thompson Jr.

*The first article in this series appeared as the cover story in the July-August, 1998 issue of ARMOR ("Light/Heavy Integration at the JRTC"). The series was written to help armor platoon leaders or platoon sergeants facing light/heavy situations, either at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) or in an actual deployment.*

*The first article gave an overview of the JRTC battlefield and "experience," along with some tips to make training successful. Future articles will cover offensive operations, planning considerations, and the capabilities and limitations of light infantry and armor. —Ed.*

## Planning Phase

Tank platoons participate in the company defense by performing one or more of the following operations:

- Participating in the counterreconnaissance/security zone effort
- Defending a BP
- Displacing
- Counterattacking
- Acting as a reserve

When defending a battle position, the platoon may be asked to destroy, block, or canalize enemy forces. They may be asked to retain terrain, or displace to occupy subsequent battle positions. In the counterattack or reserve mission, the tank platoon conducts tactical movement to occupy BPs or attack-by-fire positions.

The platoon also executes hasty attacks, assaults, or other actions based on the commander's intent. Tank platoons should be retained under the tank platoon leader's control and made an integral part of the company's defense.

Reconnaissance and efficient time management during the planning phase are keys to a successful, coordinated company defense. Planning will continue into

the preparation phase as the company commander gains more information.

It is critical that the infantry company commander identifies where he wants to kill the enemy. The commander must make sure all the platoon leaders are clear in this regard. At JRTC, there is little open ground, aside from the drop zones. OPFOR armor will avoid open areas at all costs. JRTC is close, wooded terrain that is broken up by dense underbrush in wet, low-lying areas. This terrain provides perfect avenues of approach for enemy dismounts. The streams that are characteristic of Fort Polk (and other less than ideal examples of "tank country" in the world) also have stream crossings for various types of vehicular movement. At times, the place where the infantry commander wants to kill the enemy will only have a kill zone extending out to 100 or 200 meters. Planning for employment of the tank platoon should include potential displacement routes, additional positions, and counterattack contingencies.

During the commander's reconnaissance, the tank platoon leader must identify, record, and mark the tentative TRPs, decision points, fighting positions, and routes he thinks the platoon will use in executing the defense. It is important that the platoon leader bring sufficient day and night marking materials (i.e., engineer stakes, tape, chem lights, or thermal paper). The tank platoon leader should record exact eight-digit coordinates of each position in the platoon. This will allow him to relay this information to the commander. The tank platoon leader should also know the location of all the other units in the company. This will aid him if he gets called to help one of these other units, will reduce the chances of fratricide, and will allow him to plan and rehearse routes to and from those positions.

## Intelligence

Identification of mounted **and** dismounted avenues of approach and prob-

able enemy formations/support-by-fire positions enables the commander to best position the company's platoons. This will include analysis of available fields of fire and observation. Platoon leaders can then determine positions (to include individual tank positions in the tank platoon) which best allow their platoon to mass fire into the company engagement area.

Subordinate platoons should complete reconnaissance by conducting initial coordination between adjacent platoons. The establishment of mutual support is vital. Mutual support allows the coverage of dead space. It also promotes infantry's understanding of the positioning of the tank platoon in addition to subsequent movement plans during the operation.

An additional consideration is the need to analyze terrain to best utilize the capabilities of the infantry and tanks in the defense.

## C2

The primary concern in selecting fighting positions for the tank platoon is the platoon's ability to concentrate and mass lethal fires into its engagement area(s). The tank is the commander's fastest tactical asset and the best killer of enemy armor.

Dispersing positions laterally and in depth helps protect the company from enemy observation and fires. Establish company and platoon positions in depth and provide sufficient maneuver space in the tank platoons' positions to establish in-depth placement of tanks. Tanks will be placed 150-200 meters apart based on METT-T. Dispersal of tank positions reduces the tanks' vulnerability to enemy fires; however, it also increases the demands for local security in the area between the tanks. The commander should consider co-locating infantry with armor to assist in providing local security if he plans to have such wide dispersion in restrictive terrain.

Whenever possible, primary and alternate fighting positions should allow engagement of the enemy in the flank and from two directions. This provides the defender with a larger and more vulnerable target and, at the same time, confuses the enemy as to the actual location of the defense.

The commander should plan disengagement criteria and develop a resulting disengagement plan. The plan should identify a break point and provide overwatch between platoons. The tank platoon must prepare to provide internal overmatch if it is not provided by another platoon. The plan should designate disengagement criteria; routes to alternate, supplementary, and subsequent fighting positions and BPs; direct fire suppression; cover, concealment, and rehearsals; indirect fire and smoke; and obstacle integration.

### Fire Support

Platoon leaders can provide the FIST with nominations for additional targets in the battalion fire support plan. Platoon leaders should plan or request artillery targets on/at potential avenues of approach, choke points along the avenues of approach, possible enemy support-by-fire positions, obstacles, and dead space within the platoon battle space. When approved, each and every target will be registered with the firing data recorded in the firing element's FDC according to the availability of ammunition to ensure accurate and timely fires. Each target in the armor platoon's area should have a decision point overwatched by at least a tank crew or section. The decision point triggers the call for fire on a target to ensure the impact of rounds coincides with the enemy's arrival at the area targeted. The tank platoon's laser rangefinders or target designation capabilities (on the M1A2) enhance its effectiveness in triggering artillery fires using decision points. Consider the use of DPICM or FASCAM in an area where an enemy armor advance is expected.

### Mobility and Survivability

The company's survivability effort is in the BPs or strongpoints to protect vehicles, weapons systems, and dismounted elements. The defensive effectiveness and survivability of tanks is greatly improved by the preparation of hull or turret defilade firing positions. Two-tier fighting positions are the best. The company may consider using engineer assets to dig in ammunition prestocks at platoon BPs or in individual tank fighting positions.

The commander must prioritize the survivability effort.

In countermobility operations, the commander's intent should guide the emplacement of obstacles based on the following:

- Reinforcement of the scheme of maneuver and direct fire plan.
- Integration with existing obstacles.
- Employment in depth and positioning where they will surprise enemy forces.
- Coverage by direct and indirect fires at all times.

If the commander does not specify intent for obstacles, the armor platoon leader should plan hasty or deliberately employed obstacles to meet these purposes:

- Block the final assault of an enemy force in front of the platoon.
- Block the seams between tanks.
- Disrupt enemy forces that are assaulting on the flanks of the platoon.
- Shape the engagement area by forcing the enemy elements to turn, slow down, stop, or flank themselves at known ranges in the engagement area.

When supervising the digging effort, dig down, not up. Berms attract attention. Reduce spoil so that it blends into existing terrain. Tie down all antennas and cover all reflective surfaces. Make sure each firing position has a covered and concealed route to the next firing position.

### Combat Service Support

The platoon sergeant should ensure that basic loads are fully restocked. Consider pre-stocking and pre-positioning ammunition on the battlefield. The vehicles of the heavy team are the only ones that the tank platoon will be able to rely on for movement of this Class V should the need arise. Know locations of the forward and main aid stations. Plan and rehearse the CASEVAC plan. The combat capability of the tank platoon is directly related to logistics. Plan for tank recovery and maintenance.

### Preparation Phase

Preparation of the defense begins after the company commander has issued his order and ends at the "defend not later than" time specified in his OPORD. The infantry will put out a priority of work

and the armor platoon leader should issue his in accordance with the commander's wishes. Remember, there's a better than average chance that this commander has never worked with a heavy team and the armor platoon leader must be ready to offer suggestions as the resident "subject matter expert."

### Intelligence

OPSEC is critical during defensive operations. Effective OPSEC procedures will limit enemy reconnaissance efforts. Consider recommending to the commander the establishment of a screen forward to deny the enemy information through aggressive counterreconnaissance. The counterrecon force must have disengagement criteria, routes back out of the security zone, and a coordination made as to who will close the gap left for the counterrecon force to get back into friendly lines, along with recognition signals. The armor team, with remote sensors and the integration of infantry on dismounted avenues of approach, can give the task force a decided advantage.

### C2

The tank platoon can occupy BPs by hasty or deliberate occupation. Hasty occupation can occur during counterattack missions, after disengagement and movement to subsequent or supplementary BPs, or in response to FRAGOs reflecting a change of mission. Deliberate occupation can occur when the enemy is not expected or has not been located within direct fire range or a friendly element is forward of the BP with the mission of providing security for the occupying platoons. Begin from the enemy's perspective in the engagement area, with the reconnaissance party looking toward the BP. Driving the engagement area from the enemy point of view is very useful in confirming that the selected positions are tactically advantageous. Driving the engagement area also allows the killers in the BP to identify where and when the enemy will be engaged and destroyed in the engagement area.

Reconnaissance of the engagement area is complete when all leaders are certain as to where the commander wants to kill the enemy. The platoon leaders should then back brief the commander on the following issues: trigger lines, engagement criteria, fire patterns, disengagement criteria and plan, routes to supplementary or subsequent BPs, marking of primary and alternate fighting positions, individual tank positions, platoon sector or engagement areas, TRPs, OPs (if used), obsta-

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cles (if used), indirect fire targets including FPFs (if allocated), and dead space.

The commander must focus special attention on the addition of tanks to his task organization. The tank platoon leader coordinates with adjacent platoons and other company elements and ensures sectors of fire overlap and that his CS and CSS requirements are fulfilled.

Rehearsals are critical to ensure every soldier understands the plan. Specific areas include: passage of the counterreconnaissance force or other security force, closure of the lane, movement from hide positions to the BP, use of fire commands, triggers to initiate fires, preparation and transmission of critical reports using FM and digital systems, execution of the fire support plan, assessment of the effects of enemy weapon systems, displacement to alternate, supplementary, or successive battle positions, and the evacuation of casualties. Rehearsals begin as soon as the company issues its warning order. The company XO can move a series of vehicles through the engagement area to depict an enemy force while the commander and platoon leaders rehearse the battle from the company/platoon BPs. You can never do too much coordination and rehearsal.

Operations in restrictive terrain offer special challenges in the defense. A thorough reconnaissance is required to identify all mounted and dismounted avenues of approach. Special care is required to coordinate with adjacent units to ensure the maximum coverage of all approaches.

### Fire Support

All platoon leaders should confirm locations of artillery and mortar targets, adjust them if necessary, and mark them for daylight and limited visibility recognition. Decision points that will be used to request artillery on moving targets must be marked. Decision points are identified based on the enemy's doctrinal rate of movement, the terrain, the time of flight of artillery or mortar rounds, and the priority of the target.

### Mobility and Survivability

Engineer assets are key during defensive preparations and will be working except for maintenance checks and services. A member of the tank platoon leadership must physically link up with the engineers at the time directed in the company OPORD. They should physically escort them to each firing position, provide local security on site, supervise the digging of the position, and proof the position using

one of the platoon's vehicles. A logical choice to carry out this task is the senior tank commander because the PLD and PSG will be occupied handling other aspects of the defensive preparations. An escort should always remain with the engineer assets during their time with the company. Inform the commander of their progress and coordinate for movement between platoons. Your unit then escorts the engineer elements over to another company when all of your work is completed. The key factor is that the engineers must never be by themselves. The engineers are far too valuable and vulnerable an asset and every bit of their time must be monitored and productive.

Make sure firing positions are in the best place to maximize stand-off distance and/or the platoon's ability to mass fires from survivable positions. Make sure that firing positions are complementary, taking advantage of knowing the exact location of the start point, end point, and turns of any obstacles, and locating pre-plotted artillery targets on the enemy side of obstacles to ensure accurate calls for fire. This will help the platoon increase the number of kills it achieves in the defense. Delay of the enemy will also allow other assets of the brigade to be brought to bear on them, such as TACAIR or attack helicopters.

### Execution Phase

The tank platoon will be located in good hide positions behind its primary battle and/or fighting positions. While in the hide position, the platoon should employ all applicable OPSEC measures to limit aerial, thermal, electronic, and visual detection. It should deploy OPs to provide surveillance of its sectors of fire and early warning. It should be at the REDCON status prescribed in the OPORD. The hide position will not be located on or near obvious artillery targets.

During the defense, all leaders in the reporting process must avoid sending redundant or inflated descriptions of the situation. Report what you see. Do not analyze over the air. Leave that to the commanders and the intelligence types.

In a direct firefight with enemy armor, a tank platoon can expend main gun ammunition quickly. Planning and care must be taken to transfer ammunition and retrieve pre-stocks while continuing to keep fire on the enemy.

Displacement criteria are established in the OPORD. Time permitting, pre-stocks will be retrieved or destroyed to prevent use by the enemy. Displacement criteria

are based on a specific type and number of enemy vehicles reaching a specified location (sometimes called the break point) to trigger displacement. The platoon may have to cover its own displacement in bounds to subsequent positions.

The tank platoon is capable of conducting limited counterattacks. It can complete the destruction of the enemy forces in the company's assigned area, regain key terrain, relieve pressure on an engaged rifle platoon, or initiate offensive operations.

Some counterattack considerations follow:

- Counterattack by fire: Maximize weapon standoff and/or cover.
- Counterattack by fire and movement: Close with and destroy the enemy.

Some of the preceding information is covered in the draft copy of "Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Light Infantry Company Employment of Tank Platoons in Restrictive Terrain." It may or may not be the actual beginning of doctrine for Light/Heavy Integration in the U.S. Army. This information and the additional remarks are to give Armor leaders a starting point for reference. It is the Joint Readiness Training Center's hope that the information contained in this series of articles will be a real help to Armor leaders in the immediate future. Finally, there are again undoubtedly plenty of old tankers and cavalymen out there that could teach us more. If you have any comments please forward them to:

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