

## ***U.S. Marine Mechanized Formations: 2003***

During *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, the organization of the mechanized lead element of the 1st Marine Division was very similar to the German Panzer Division of World War II.

<p><b>5th Marines in Iraq 2003</b>                  (3) Infantry Battalions                  (1) Tank Battalion                  (2) Artillery Battalions                  (1) LAR Battalion                  (1) CEB Company</p>	<p><b>German Panzer Division 1942</b>                  (4) Infantry Battalions                  (2) Tank Battalions                  (2) Artillery Battalions                  (1) Armored Recon Battalion                  (1) Engineer Battalion</p>
<p><b>1st Marine Division 1943 - 2003</b>                  (3) Infantry Regiments = (9) Battalions                  (1) Artillery Regiment = (3) Battalions                  (1) Tank Battalion                  (1) LAR Battalion                  (1) CEB Battalion</p>	<p><b>German Panzergrenadier Division 1943</b>                  (3) Infantry Regiments = (6) Battalions                  (1) Artillery Regiment = (3) Battalions                  (1) Tank or Assault Gun Battalion                  (1) Armored Recon Battalion                  (1) Engineer Battalion</p>

1. **Regimental Similarities.** 5th Marines had an attached artillery battalion from the British Army and a second LAR battalion during portions of the advance on Baghdad. In garrison at Twentynine Palms, 7th Marines lives and trains with an almost identical organization.
  - a. The 1935 German Panzer Division balanced (4) tank battalions with (4) infantry battalions. With experience fighting in Poland and France, the Germans increased the infantry-to-tank ratio by reducing tank battalions from four to three, and then two.
  - b. British and American tank divisions initially had little appreciation for the value of infantry, sometimes fielding six tank battalions for each infantry battalion. During WWII, all western armies followed the German lead toward a balanced force of tanks and infantry. In the British army, regimental identities prevented integration. By 1944, however, the American armored division was a balanced all-arms formation.
  - c. In 1944, new mechanized infantry units supported the balanced armored division. U.S. armored infantry battalions, in M3 halftracks, were trained at the armor school at Fort Knox. **The 5th AD, fighting in France, married every single tank with a halftrack-mounted squad.** British motor battalions were formed and trained exclusively to support tanks. Richard Simpkin in *Mechanized Infantry* described these organic “house infantry” units as a necessary component of all effective armored formations.
  
2. **Infantry Division Similarities.** Infantry formations have a more positional outlook and mission than armor formations. *If armor formations halt between moves, then infantry formations move between halts.* **The 1st Marine Division was organized in 1941 along the lines of the U.S. Army infantry division. It remains largely unchanged today. The single tank battalion is an infantry support unit. It is commonly parceled out to infantry units to provide heavy direct fire support. In most infantry operations, the tank is used as an assault gun.**

3. **Conceptual Differences.** Despite similar organizations, distinct differences exist between Marine formations and armor formations.
- a. Infantry leaders, infantry headquarters, and a preponderance of infantry units drive Marine Corps tactical thought and concepts. Conversely, in armored formations, infantry exists to get the tanks forward. Their mechanized infantry missions — to protect the tanks both on the move and in laager, hold defiles, and clear towns or woods — are all supporting efforts for the tanks. *Marines do not train to do this.*
  - b. All armies give lip service to the effectiveness of “cross-attached” units. In practice, only integrated units train to develop the common mindset, SOPs and personal trust needed for combat. In armored formations, mechanized infantry and tanks live, work, train, and fight together. This integration builds combined arms teams. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, Marine infantrymen, using newly attached tank phones or work-arounds for incompatible radios, coordinated tank maneuvers and directed tank fire. Marine leaders who listened to these talk-ons realized: *Marines do not train to do this.*
  - c. Marine amphibious vehicle units are a legacy of WWII requirements. Designed to shuttle multiple waves of infantrymen from ship to shore, they are not organized, armed, nor trained to fight as mechanized teams. When a separate AAV unit is temporarily attached to an infantry unit, it brings a separate leader, separate chain of command, and separate unit SOP to the fight. The Marine Corps requires flexible general-purpose amphibious units for ship-to-shore operations. The new EFV will challenge these long-held distinctions. The strength of mechanized infantry is its organic firepower. The mechanized infantry attack directs a small dismounted assault element at a vulnerable penetration point, supported by the overwhelming firepower of a vehicle-mounted support element. This tightly coordinated action is the essence of mechanized infantry. *Marines do not train to do this.*
  - d. Late in WWII, German Panzergrenadier divisions were reorganized with one assault gun battalion instead of a tank battalion. The low-silhouette, turret-less, tracked assault guns were found to better support the infantry. The Germans learned that when assault guns were attached to an infantry battalion before battle, there was not enough time to develop common tactics and teamwork. Some divisions then established “house infantry” – assigning a short squad to each armored vehicle. This squad trained to protect the vehicles by lifting mines, checking routes and bridges, digging and camouflaging the vehicle, and protecting the vehicle against anti-tank weapons. They were trained to fight with the vehicle by establishing fighting positions, observing targets and directing fires. Today when tanks are attached to infantry before battle, the same challenges apply. Tanks need protective infantry today more than ever, but *Marines do not train to do this.*
4. **Marine Requirements.** Marine formations are task-organized by combining standing units. Expeditionary requirements dictate this flexibility. Marine tanks are not independent breakthrough forces. Marine amphibious vehicles are not infantry fighting vehicles. Marine infantry are tasked with multiple roles supporting or being supported by multiple different types of units. The tradeoffs – between optimizing units for specific tasks or maintaining general-purpose units – and the reasons behind these organizational decisions, need to be understood by all Marine leaders.