29 November 2004

Some Armor-Infantry Integration MOUT Observations

By Capt Robert J. Bodisch

Gentlemen,

My platoon commanders and I are still working through our AAR but I wanted to at least push out some observations that ya'll may find useful.

Task Organization: My tank company (14 tanks) was distributed among 2 infantry battalions. 6 tanks composed of 3rd Plt and the Bravo Section from 2nd Plt attached to 3/5 and 8 tanks composed of 1st Plt, the Alpha Section from 2nd Plt, and the HQ section attached to 3/1. I will speak from my experience of fighting with 3/1. Usually we had a section or platoon of tanks attached to a rifle company along with 2 AAVs and 1 to 2 D-9 dozers. The tanks would lead down the streets as a section which allowed for overwatch and quick tow if necessary. The infantry would clear along both sides of the street from the trail tank back providing close-in security for the tanks' overhead, flanks and rear while other grunts were tasked to clear buildings as required. The AAVs and infantry HMMWVs would travel further back along with the D-9s.

TTPs: Tanks would be used to soften enemy strongpointed buildings using tank main gun (120mm HEAT was the preferred choice). For particularly stubborn strongpoints, the D-9 dozer would then further reduce the building after tanks finished engaging with main gun. Tanks would then provide overwatch for the dozer's reduction while the infantry was poised to continue clearing operations. Tanks were often the weapon of choice against enemy in strongpoints and taking cover behind walls. We even had situations where artillery forward observers and even ODA sniper teams requested tank support and talked on the tanks as they maneuvered into firing positions to kill insurgents hiding behind walls with main gun. When operating in the urban environment, location of your position, enemy targets, etc become very important due to the geometry of fires (we had multiple battalions operating in the same city). 6 digit grids were never accepted, only 8-10 digit grids were used for all locations and all requests for fires. The rifle companies were very good about providing dedicated dismounted security for the tank sections, especially critical in the urban environment as we were buttoned up and when that happens, we have lots of deadspace around the tanks. My tankers never felt vulnerable with 3/1 and 3/5, we were fully confident that they were always in position to protect our flanks, topside, and rear. AAVs were used for a variety of tasks, as logistical and ammo carriers, security for escorting D-9s or other softskinned vehicles going back to the Firm base, BAS, etc, or for medevacs. They were also used, when possible, to provide suppressive fires with MK-19 and .50 cal. AAVs expended a lot of ammo, speaking of ammo...

Ammo/Weapons: MPAT-OR was not really used too much during clearing operations as it tended to make a smaller breach and would often penetrate through several buildings. In this environment where friendly units are everywhere, geometry of fires often determine round selection. Although my 3rd Plt Cmdr didn't necessarily have this same experience. MPAT-OR in any case was designed to reduce rubble and we tried to use all of this ammo up front at the beginning of the attack, reducing the jersey and hesco barriers that blocked our avenues of approach. HEAT still proved to be better for those types of targets with regular MPAT effective as well. Remember the word about the HEAT round needs at least 30m to arm when leaving the guntube? Well many of my tankers due to the nature of the city were forced to engage at distances even closer than that, and for nearly all engagements less than 30m, HEAT still seemed quite effective and proved to have a lot of killing power (combination of the explosive punch and overpressure). Nearly all engagements throughout the operation were below 200m and section volleys were employed when practical to achieve as much shock effect as possible. All battlesights were set for 200m. We thought we might get the APERs round (this would definantly have been useful). This round has over 1000 tungsten steel balls and is designed to take out entire squads of enemy formations with 1 round. It is essentially a 120mm shotgun shell. The amount of ammo we have fired since the operation kicked off is staggering and continues to climb. My company has fired close to 1600 main gun rounds, over 121,000 7.62mm, and over 49,000 caliber 50 rounds. Nearly all the tanks have exceeded well over

120 operating hours and this continues to climb. The loader's M240 was pretty much a non-player, in fact when mounted will reduce the TC's visibility when buttoned up (as we were nearly all the time!) and prevented the TC from traversing the .50 cal over to the left side of the tank. One of my Master Gunners fortunately pointed this out early in our training and nearly all loader's 240s and mounts were removed before the operation, of course this freed up an extra gun for the COAX which in some cases was needed. For .50 cal reloading, many TCs traversed the CWS toward the loader's hatch, the loader would keep his hatch just barely open enough to load the box of ammo into the weapon and the TC only needed to charge the weapon. This helped minimize exposure outside the tank when in a "hot" area. One thing about the .50 cal, I really wish it had a thermal sight built into it for employment at night. The grunts loved our weapons systems, more importantly they saw us as having precise weapons systems, the most accurate on the battlefield by far.

Comms: The Grunt Phone was a money-maker. The grunts used it all the time to talk us on to targets. About the only place we tac-marked the tank was on this piece of gear so the grunts knew who they were talking to. Unfortunately, the grunt phone is at a vulnerable area in the rear of the tank and the box is fragile. The latch is cumbersome and grunts almost never were able to secure it properly. Hopefully MARCORSYSCOM and improve this. Due to the narrow streets and architecture of the buildings and walls literally lining the streets, many of them were damaged or completely lopped off as the tanks had to manuever or pivot steer to reorient. Other effective means of target marking for tanks included M203, sniper rifles and smoke grenades. The FAC/FO radio mod was very useful. My FO was able to call for indirect fire support without clobbering or using up my 2 radios and still have intercom capability. Great piece of gear but when my tank was damaged by RPG fire to my guntube, we were back on a regular tank with only 2 radios. As for radio nets, platoon nets were used for all platoons while their second radios were used to communicate with the infantry platoon or company they supported. I never monitored anything above the company, I fought as a tank section same as all my other tankers and was there to support grunts on the ground. On hundreds of occasions I was called over the grunt phone by a LCpl, "Hey Tanker, I need you to move your tank down to the next block and engage the red house on the left with main gun!" To which I replied, "Aye, aye LCpl, just tell me what you need!" At least I was a highly paid section leader! During crypto changes, my comm dudes would perform that during the resupply before the time period took effect and we would fill 3 channels with new fills and keep the other 3 with old fills just in case our supported infantry units didn't switch over in time (which happened several times, not surprising for units under fire). Eventually when all forward units had the new fills, we would fill the remaining channels at the next resupply. MDACT- yes the time has arrived for MDACT. Since my original tank was damaged by an RPG on day 2, I didn't use this piece of gear too much, but I do have some complaints with it. It is mounted to close to the .50 cal handle, the angle of the screen is limited due to it being mounted on the turret wall and cannot be seen easily, MDACT will go into hibernation after only a few minutes and even while you are using it (you have to push the enter button to reawaken it). Again, maybe MARCORSYSCOM can look to improve this. My tank leader had an MDACT mounted in his uparmor HMMWV and he used it periodically to monitor the chat. Chat was used by all the key players and this gave him a lot of situational awareness of what higher and adjacents were doing. MDACT is used primarily for chat and C2PC (there is also an embedded GPS in it and it will give you a moving map display). Believe it or not, the RCT actually employed this thing and EPLRs actually worked every now and then. Blue Force Tracker (BFT) was also used and we have one in my Comm Chief's uparmored HMMWV. He used it much like the MDACT, moving map display with imagery and position location of friendly units.

Fire Support: Air was pretty much a non-player for me but my FO was heavily used. I didn't get an artillery Lieutenant, instead I got a Reserve Corporal from M/4/14. He was a true asset to the company. I got him over month before this op, he became a fully integrated member of the HQ tank section, working on the ramp, conducting PMCS, completely qualified in the loader's station, etc. There were times when he loaded my maingun while simultaneously calling for fire.

Mine Plows: I only had 1 in the company and it was a non-factor. The tank that had it mounted ended up setting it down after the 2d day of operation as it severely restricted maneuvering in an already restricted environment. I believe the Blades would have been useful, however, as all my tanks were asked to knock down walls many times, especially when the D-9 was down or not available. The blade would have helped us with wall breaching and obstacle reduction.

Breaching: This brings me to breaching for the infantry. We used our tank hulls to make breach points for the infantry. Caution must be given however to ensure you try and use the front of the hull at a 90 degree angle or else you risk damaging the fragile fenders. Obviously if the D-9 or some other engineer asset is available then that should be used. Main gun was used as well, many, many times. HEAT seemed to make the largest entry points. With the crappy construction quality of the buildings we encountered, even .50 cal was used to make breaches to some effect.

Wingman Concept: Already alluded to above, I rarely allowed the section to be split and held fast to tanks operating in sections. This proved very useful as we had a couple of incidents of tanks aborting and needing a hasty tow back to a more secure area where troubleshooting or M88 recovery could take place. All tanks were pre-rigged with tow cables. The wingman concept also allowed for us to better acquire targets and when the lead tank was engaged by well concealed RPG teams from close ranges, he was right there to destroy them. Another good reason to keep them together on the same attack axis was for ammo transfers, he can take the lead while you take the trail and conduct ammo transfer as needed. That's another skill that needs practice, luckily we conducted numerous ammo transfer drills and this paid off, as ammo transfers were done quickly.

Training: Tank-Infantry integration requires mucho training. We conducted our training in 2 phases. The first phase was via classes, lectures, handouts, and smartcards that detailed tank capabilities and limitations in the urban environment and our requirements from the infantry and what we can give them. This established the foundation for tank-infantry integration. The second phase consisted of full rehearsals with Plt Cmdr and Plt Sgts from both tank and infantry platoons providing on the spot instruction and correction. We conducted this training at the FOBs in built up areas, focused on where infantry needs to be while the tanks are firing the main gun, where they need to be to provide the required overwatch to cover the tanks' deadspace while buttoned up, and movement techniques during clearing operations.

LOGPAC: I kept my logpac out of the city, although they were still subject to some intense periods of enemy rocket and mortar fires. This reduced the danger to the resupply and also allowed the tankers to dismount and conduct operator level maintenance (like walking track, checking fluids, etc). LOGPAC was conducted once a day by the numbers with ammo, refueling, POL resupply, chow & water resupply, mail in that order. My tank leader commanded the LOGPAC consisting of 5 gun trucks (3 were up-armored), 2 LVS (CL V, refueler), 1 MTVR (CL III POLs, CL I), and 1 M-88. We had the 1stSgt, the armorer, the mechs, ammo dude, corpsman, comm dudes, and embedded media in the trains. The gun trucks provided local security during LOGPAC and we always did service station which included delivery of mail and other CL I supplements. Main gun ammo became a problem to resupply within several days as many did not expect that many rounds to be fired (even though me and Capt Meyers predicted a huge ammo expenditure in the planning process). My LOGPAC resupplied all my tanks with 3/1 and 3/5, the battalions sometimes augmented with fuel.

Maintenance: Battalion plussed us up with a lot of mechs and having our own 3rd echelon capability and spare tanks proved to be a difference maker. This enabled maximum combat power to be pushed forward all the time. Now major maint will be an issue as the hours and optempo are catching up with us on tanks that have operated continously since 2-1 began.

Night-driving: Practice this now! Organize your combat trains as early as you can and assign them as crews just like you do for your tanks. They need crew cohesion like tankers and this helps when practicing IA drills. Due to the short daylight hours here and other tactical considerations, you will do a lot of night driving. My company prefers no lights at all, no blackouts, nothing that emits visible light. IR lens covers are great, my tank leader even has them on his HMWWVs. Ensure all your drivers, from tanks to LVS to HMMWVs and those wheeled vehicle gunners are proficient in this. Treat every LOGPAC as a combat movement, my tank leader always briefs them the plan, the route, IA drills, escalation of force, etc even if the resupply seems routine and repetitive. They are so proficient now, that very little radio traffic is required and as soon as the LOGPAC site is selected each gun truck knows exactly what position to occupy.

Other: Thank God the power to the city was cut off before our tanks rolled in. Nearly every street had literally dozens of electrical lines hanging low (turret level), many of these lines were frayed, cracked,

damaged, etc and our tanks got entangled in much of it. Some tanks had wire cutters, for those that didn't our infantry on the ground cut the wires for us. Luckily no one was injured by low hanging wires, mostly due to SA and the crew being buttoned up.

Target acquistion was challenging in the urban environment, sectors of scan were often limited to the depth and width of a narrow street. There were times when insurgents sprinted across the road so quickly that we were unable to bring our weapons to bear in time. Still, I always told my TCs that they would never give blanket authorization for their gunners to fire unless they issued the fire command. In this environment, I would rather risk not engaging insurgents than come close to a blue on blue situation. Usually, if the first guy made it across he always had buddies (insurgents don't usually operate alone) not far behind and when insurgent #2 and 3 attempted to sprint across, they were almost immediately cut-down by COAX.

Going Firm. When the grunts went firm, that meant minimum manning for them for their posts and local security and maximum rest for their grunts. For my tankers that went firm with them this wasn't the case. When attached to the grunt firm base within the city, our tanks were expected to provide security for the company they were attached to and we never went below 50% watch in the tank. For continuous sustained ops, this puts a lot of wear and tear on thermals, EAPUs, engines on for the EAPUs that didn't work, expenditure of gas, etc. Our tankers usually operated on less rest than our infantry counterparts until I pulled as many of my tanks back to our tank AA outside the city while the infantry went firm. For future urban ops, I would highly recommend this as part of the battle rhythm. When the grunts go firm, tanks are not usually going to be employed, they are better off in a more protected area (TAA, tanks coiled outside the city) that allows maximum crew rest and maintanance (LOGPAC located nearby). The compromise to the infantry was keeping my tanks on a 10 min strip alert as a QRF while infantry went firm. This was easy, you do radio watch anyway when conducting TAA ops.

Well that is it for now, gotta go take care of other issues.

S/F
Charlie-6
Comanche-6