

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

COMPANY C
2D TANK BATTALION, 2D MAR DIV
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From: Commanding Officer, Company C 2d Tank Battalion
To: Commanding Officer, 2d Tank Battalion

Subj: CHARLIE COMPANY, 2D TANK BATTALION AFTER ACTION REPORT,
OPERATION AL FAJR

1. The purpose of this report is to capture the observations and lessons learned from Company C, 2d Tank Battalion combat operations during Operation Al Fajr (previously known as Operation Phantom Fury) from November 2004 through January 2005 inside the city of Al Fallujah, Iraq.

2. The following AAR items were compiled from all 3 tank platoons, HQ tank section, and combat trains. POC for this AAR is Capt R.J. Bodisch.

R.J. BODISCH

The following ITEMS are extracted from the full report:

ITEM: Integrated Tank-Infantry Team TTPs

DISCUSSION: We continued to refine our TTPs as Operation Al Fajr unfolded combining the effects of Tanks, AAVs, Engineers, and Infantrymen on the urban battlefield. This was mostly due to the fact that most of us did not have integrated tank-engineer-infantry training in CONUS (where the focus was mostly on SASO) and that CONUS-based urban training centers are unable to support tanks and engineer vehicles. Luckily, we had a few weeks before Operation Al Fajr to train with 3/1 and 3/5. During Al Fajr, our tank-infantry team conducted detailed clearing, a tank section would lead down trafficable streets with infantry clearing adjacent buildings. Tanks would be used to soften enemy strong-pointed buildings using tank main gun (120mm HEAT was the preferred choice). For particularly stubborn strong-points, 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. Due to our precision weapons systems tanks were the weapons of choice against enemy in strong-points in order to minimize collateral damage. Effective means of target marking for tanks by the infantry included M203 and colored smoke grenades. We had situations where artillery forward observers and ODA sniper teams talked on the tanks from their OP positions, maneuvering the tanks into firing positions to kill insurgents taking cover behind fortifications with main gun. When operating in the urban environment, location of your position, enemy targets, etc become crucial 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 accepted for all location reporting and for requests for fires. The rifle companies of 3/5 and 3/1 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, tanks have a lot of deadspace/blindspots around them. Tanks in the urban environment must have heat shields to keep the exhaust from burning infantrymen using tanks as cover or attempting to communicate with the crew on the T/I phone. Charlie Company tankers never felt vulnerable with the infantrymen of 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 soft-skinned 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 as well providing flank security for tanks.

RECOMMENDATION: Push integrated tank-infantry-engineer training down to all units in CONUS and experiment with various TTPs such as the ones above. This integrated training must occur at CONUS facilities that can fully support limited building reduction and support armor and engineer assets in order for infantry and tank company leaders to better understand the effects and capabilities of the armor and engineering assets in the urban environment. The current urban training centers that the Marine Corps utilize often refuse to support training with tanks and dozers and thus a great training opportunity is lost forcing many units to have to generate effective TTPs in theater or under combat conditions.

ITEM: Integrated Tank-Infantry Training

DISCUSSION: Training was conducted with both battalions (3/1 and 3/5) before Operation Al Fajr to ensure proper tank-infantry integration. We conducted our training in 2 phases. The first phase was via classroom lectures, handouts, and locally generated smart-cards that detailed tank capabilities and limitations in the urban environment and our requirements from the infantry and what tanks can provide. This established the foundation for tank-infantry integration. The second phase consisted of full rehearsals with Plt Cmdr and/or 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 breaching, movement/bounding techniques, infantry location while tanks are firing main gun, tank-infantry communications, infantry overwatch to cover tank deadspace while buttoned up, and marking techniques for tank direct fires.

RECOMMENDATION: All tank and infantry leaders need prepared urban tank employment smart-cards on hand. Training opportunities can pop up at a moment's notice and all TCs need to be able to conduct ad hoc training to their infantry brethren. Most importantly, these smart-cards need to be standardized (SOP driven) so all tank and infantry leaders are on the same sheet of music and no conflicting information is disseminated. Training must be conducted between tanks and infantry to ensure seamless integration.

ITEM: Task Organization

DISCUSSION: During the initial assault into the city of Al Fallujah, Charlie Company, 2d Tank Bn (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. 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' over-head, 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. During the latter part of Phase III and into Phase IV operations, Charlie Company Tanks supported 3 different infantry battalions with missions in support of Stability and Security Operations (SASO) ranging from integrated patrols, Quick Reaction Force (QRF), attack to clear, and Entry Control Point (ECP) and Humanitarian Assistance (HA) site security.

RECOMMENDATION: Ideally, one tank company would be task organized to support one infantry battalion. Operation Al Fajr proved that we can make do with less as typical in the Marine Corps by splitting 14 tanks with 2 infantry battalions (6 and 8). However, to achieve better shock effect and to truly weight a main effort, it would have been ideal if 1 tank company could be dedicated to 1 infantry battalion. Later, C Company Tanks was expected to support 3 infantry battalions. This is very difficult to accomplish considering the high OPTEMPO and subsequent maintenance requirements of these tanks. A single tank company should not be expected to task organize with more than 2 infantry battalions as expected maintenance and rest/refit will become difficult to conduct. Furthermore, the principles of warfare of mass and fires will lessen the shock action that tanks bring to the battlefield if they are piecemealed and spread too thin. An additional tank company should be sent in support of RCT-1 and eventually RCT-8 in order to accomplish current and expected troop to task missions.

ITEM: Combined Arms- Tank Company FiST

DISCUSSION: CAS employment was a non-factor for the tank company due to a lack of a FAC as well as the fact that the tank company was always detached to infantry companies. However, the tank company FO was heavily used. We did not get an artillery Lieutenant, instead we got a Reserve Corporal from M, 4/14 and he was a true asset to the company. We got him over a month before Operation Al Fajr, 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 the maingun while simultaneously calling for fire. During

one particularly intense firefight, he was able to call 120mm army mortar fires on enemy that took cover behind a berm. Later he was credited with 12 confirmed kills. For the tank company FiST, you must have at least an FO capability during all combat operations. Additionally, as tanks typically lead all infantry attacks, the tank FO was nearly always in the best position to adjust indirect fires.

RECOMMENDATION: It would have been more helpful to have a permanently assigned Forward Observer from Camp Lejeune. After Operation Al Fajr, the company had to detach the FO back to his parent unit. The FO's role is critical to the company and he needs to be part of the company for the entire deployment as he is a vital member of a tank crew and should participate in all tank crewmen duties to include all operations, maintenance, training, etc.

ITEM: M1A1 Tank Communications/MDACT

DISCUSSION: The Tank Grunt Phone was a true force multiplier and the infantrymen used it all the time to talk the tankers on to targets. Unfortunately, the grunt phone is at a vulnerable area in the rear of the tank and the box is fragile. Due to the Byzantine nature of Fallujah, many of the grunt phones were damaged or completely torn off as the tanks had to maneuver or pivot steer to reorient and often with hatches closed. The latch is cumbersome and grunts were almost never able to secure it properly. Additionally, the Charlie box in the grunt phone has too many switches and not easily comprehended by infantrymen. Most of my tankers duct-taped the settings so that it would be set on the proper intercom setting and the grunts couldn't inadvertently hit the wrong switch. The high-powered VHF radios in the tank also proved to be the most reliable with the fighting units and during countless occasions we were used to relay comms between rifle companies and to higher headquarters. As for radio nets, platoon nets were used for all platoons while the second radios were used to communicate with the infantry platoon or company they supported. We never monitored anything above the company, the company HQ tankers fought as a tank section and were there to support grunts on the ground. During crypto changes, comm Marines would add the new fills during the re-supply before the time period took effect filling 3 channels with new fills and keeping 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. The tank leader has an MDACT mounted in his HMMWV and he used it periodically to monitor the chat. Higher units used chat and this gave him tremendous situational awareness of what higher and adjacent units were doing. MDACT is used primarily for chat and C2PC (there is also an embedded GPS and it will give you a moving map display). Blue Force Tracker (BFT) was also used and we have one in the Comm Chief's up-armored HMMWV. He used it much like the MDACT, moving map display with imagery and position location of friendly units.

RECOMMENDATION: Specific complaints on the MDACT include: it is mounted too 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). **The grunt phone also needs to be improved**, specifically, the box, which needs to be strengthened and have a simpler operating handle design that grunts can quickly open and close.