

Maintaining Tank and Infantry Integration Training

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Subject Area Training

Maintaining Tank and Infantry Integration Training  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

During the Battle of Grozny, a Chechen fighter said, "The Russian infantry wouldn't get out of their BMPs to fight, so their tanks had no infantry support. We just stood on the balconies and dropped grenades on them as they drove by underneath."<sup>1</sup> The idea that infantry needs to support tanks in restricted terrain or that tanks become easy targets for dismounted enemy soldiers is not a new concept. The Marine Corps understands this concept, but it does not train to it until time of war. As a result of lessons learned in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), tank and infantry integration training has become a requirement at the small unit level. This integration training needs to remain a training priority after the conclusion of OIF in order to sustain required skills for future combat operations.

## **HISTORICAL EXAMPLES OF THE NEED FOR INTEGRATION**

Tanks were introduced to the modern battlefield during World War I to break the stalemate of trench warfare. They were designed to counter the machine gun and barbed wire that were causing horrific casualties from trench warfare. During The Battle of the Somme, the first thirty-two tanks were introduced into battle. The infantry did not know how to fight with them effectively, the available tanks were spread too thin and the

tanks quickly outran the infantry. Although they crushed the wire obstacles, crossed the trenches, and killed the Germans, without infantry support the tanks were eventually destroyed.<sup>2</sup> The United States military leaders debated throughout the war the best way to employ tanks.<sup>3</sup> The problem they continuously encountered was tanks outrunning the infantry.

Between World War I and World War II, the Marine Corps did not conduct tank and infantry integration training and would have to learn these skills on the battlefield<sup>4</sup>. The first use of Marine tanks during World War II was at Guadalcanal. B/1/2 attacked the island of Tananbogo and was quickly pinned down from Japanese defenders. The company commander requested reinforcements and tank support. Only two light tanks were initially available and they went ashore with two infantry companies.

The two tanks lead with infantry following in trace to support their movement. Due to poor communication between tanks and infantry, the tanks outran their infantry support. Heavy fire pinned the infantry down, and the tanks were left alone. In an effort to orient himself and link up with the infantry, the tank platoon commander stuck his head out of the tank and eventually was killed. The tank had to leave the fight and return to the rear to get medical attention for their commander. The second tank also attempted to return to the infantry, but

got stuck between trees and was overrun by enemy infantry and destroyed.<sup>5</sup>

This first tank engagement provided the Marine Corps with many valuable lessons. In an environment in which the tanks cannot maneuver freely, infantry needs to be in support at all times. The tankers understood this, but did not have the ability to communicate with the infantry. Communication is key for tank and infantry integration to work. The tanks and infantry need to move together. When the tank moves, the infantry remain at its side and protect the tank from enemy infantry. In order for this to work correctly, the tank crew and infantry need to communicate. During this battle, the radios in the tank did not work with the infantry radios. This is easily solved with hand and arms signals, flags, or a number of other techniques, but since the tanks and infantry never trained together in this type of environment, disaster followed instead.

As the war progressed, lessons learned from previous battles were generally applied, but at times were lost as a result of inexperienced commanders. During the Battle of Tarawa, a commander sent four heavy tanks forward without infantry support. Three of the tanks did not return due to receiving antitank fire at point blank range, and the fourth tank was set afire by a hand-thrown gasoline bomb.<sup>6</sup> Although

there were times like this where the tanks were forced to fight without infantry, the Marine Corps learned that tanks and infantry need to fight as a team.

Today, the Marine Corps is relearning how to integrate tanks and infantry during combat. Prior to the Marines participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom I (OIF I), there was no training between the tanks and the infantry they were going to support except during CAX (Combined Arms Exercise) training.<sup>7</sup> This training equates to the Mobile Assault Course and Final Exercise, which trains with a Tank Company Team and Mechanized Infantry Company Team, but not at the squad or platoon level. In Iraq, the Marines obtained minimal training in tank and infantry integration before going into combat. 1<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalions *Lessons Learned: Conduct of MOUT in Fallujah, Iraq, April 2004* stated, "Many techniques and procedures were devised 'on-the-fly' and tank crewman and infantry leaders came up with schemes to employ the tank."<sup>8</sup>

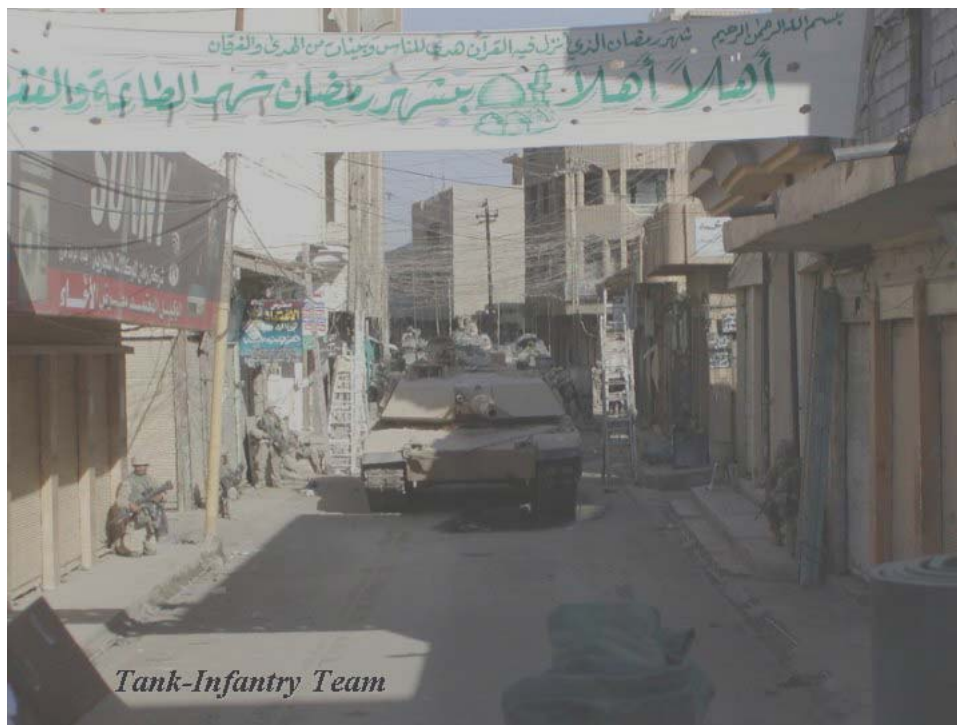
The companies that are currently preparing to rotate to Iraq are receiving "great tank/infantry training in preparation"<sup>9</sup> according to one tank company commander preparing to deploy this summer. Now that standardized training programs have been initiated for tanks and infantry, the Marine Corps needs to maintain them after the fighting stops.

## CURRENT TRAINING PROGRAMS

Tactical Training Exercise and Control Group (TTECG) provides a training package "to train and exercise units in the command, control, and coordination of combined arms in support of maneuver warfare."<sup>10</sup> Ten infantry battalions rotate through this training each year with artillery, engineers, tanks, air, and combat service support. The training focuses on company and battalion level training, but only offers training down to the infantry rifle platoon level at Range 400 with the purpose of training techniques and procedures to attack a fortified position with organic and attached weapon systems.<sup>11</sup>

A new course that TTECG first offered in December 2004 is the Tank/Infantry Coordination Course (TTIC). The course objective is to see "dismounted infantry effectively integrate attached armor assets to perform coordinated fire and maneuver against the enemy".<sup>11</sup> This course is a step in the right direction in that it task organizes an infantry platoon with a tank section to integrate for the conduct of their training. Everything from communications, security, maneuver, and firing will have to be rehearsed and then exercised. This training will be live fire and not in a MOUT (military operations in urban terrain) facility. Unfortunately, units participating in CAX are not required to conduct this training.

March Air Reserve Base has become a key training area for units deploying to Iraq. By using an abandoned housing area as a large MOUT facility, our Marines have been able to prepare for upcoming battles in cities like Fallujah and Baghdad. The training here is based off lessons learned from Project Metropolis. The Project Metropolis Interim Report states, "Tanks, while helping to cut infantry casualties in half, were killed or immobilized themselves only 8% of the time."<sup>12</sup> Most of the units deploying to Iraq have gone or will be going through tank and infantry integration training at March Air Reserve Base.



Tank from C Co, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tank Bn maneuvering through the streets of Fallujah with infantry providing security. November 2004.

TTECG and March Air Reserve Base are the only two Marine training facilities that offer tank and infantry integration



training. Other USMC officer schools (The Basic Course, Infantry Officer Course, and Expeditionary Warfare School) only teach integration at the company and above level, while the basic armor and infantry schools for the enlisted Marines do not teach any tank and infantry integration training. All other training requires infantry and tank battalions to coordinate their own training. With the many other training requirements already scheduled, finding the time, resources, and space make this difficult.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Tank and infantry training integration is a requirement. TTECG is taking steps in the right direction, but the Tank Infantry Coordination Course needs to be a requirement. If it is only an option, then it will not be conducted due to time constraints. Tanks also need to be part of the Range 400 series. Only a section of tanks would be required for this training and units could rotate tank sections as the infantry companies rotate through the series. Sub-caliber munitions could be used to simulate the main gun with Hoffman devices to simulate the blast. In addition, the tank and infantry battalions need to seek opportunities to integrate their training. This could be a simple classroom period of instruction or a three-day field exercise.

The MOUT facility aboard Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center - 29 Palms is the only Marine Corps MOUT facility with tanks and infantry units on the same base, which can also support large tank and infantry integration training scenarios. The tank units which have conducted training at this MOUT facility rated it as "useful orientation, but would like to see more realistic training with a thinking enemy that is educated on threat tactics."<sup>13</sup> This MOUT training needs to be a requirement to increase the Marine Corps combined arms fighting in towns and cities. The Marine Corps has been talking for years about how MOUT is an inevitable future battlefield, but we have no required combined arms training to ensure we are prepared for it. Time is the obvious concern and the Marine Corps needs to weigh how important MOUT warfare is compared to mountain or jungle warfare. It seems to be more likely that the Marine Corps will be fighting in future cities than other types of terrain.

## **CONCLUSION**

X-File 3-35.18, *Fundamentals of Infantry/Tank/Mechanized Integration*, states, "Tanks never fight alone. Our experience-both Army and USMC-in OIF confirm that tank/infantry teams will be a routine part of future urban operations."<sup>14</sup> The Marine Corps tank community has been arguing the need for tank and

infantry integration training since tanks first entered the battlefield. The tank and infantry community both understand the need for this training, but due to time, resources, and space available, the training is rarely accomplished. Marines end up training as they are they stepping off across the line of departure into combat. As Operation Iraqi Freedom comes to a close in the future, the USMC needs to maintain tank and infantry integration training so Marines are not placed in this predicament again.

## END NOTES

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