

The Case for Organic Mobility:
Enhancing the Tactical Tempo of the Infantry Battalion
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Introduction

In today's operating environment, the ability to maintain tempo is what gives the Marine Corps freedom of action to impose its will on the enemy. The days of marching mass formations across Europe are gone. In the current fight, Marines must move quickly to the decisive point in the battle space. The manner in which the Marine Corps now motorizes infantry battalions is inefficient and inhibits responsiveness to exploit potential successes. The Marine Corps should provide the infantry battalion an organic motorized capability to achieve greater tempo at the tactical level.

Background

Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 (MCDP-1) states that "Speed is a weapon" and defines focus as "the convergence of effects in time and space on some objective." "We achieve surprise by striking the enemy at a time or place or manner for which the enemy is unprepared...The ability to take advantage of opportunity is a function of speed, flexibility, boldness, and initiative."¹ *U.S. Marine Corps Concepts and Programs 2008* claims that "Today's operational environments demand speed, agility and mobility of ground forces to respond to if not

anticipate an adversary's actions."² The current command relationships with motor transport support units and the equipment the Corps is using makes it difficult for infantry battalions to achieve and maintain this focus as well as exploit opportunities and successes.

Current Motorized Capability

Currently, a combat logistics battalion (CLB) in direct support of an infantry regiment is capable of providing transportation support to only two infantry companies at the same time. The mission essential task lists (METL) for the Marine Logistics Group (MLG) and the CLBs include the general task of providing transportation support, but does not specify troop transport.

Additionally, the supported-supporting command relationship between the infantry battalion and the CLB for transportation assets makes it difficult to task maneuver elements to take advantage of an opportunity quickly when transportation is required. Although transportation assets in direct support of the infantry battalion may be collocated with the battalion, those assets still receive their tasks from a movement control center (MCC) within the CLB. Additionally, these assets might not be solely dedicated to troop movement and may be required to

transport equipment during large displacements, such as a change in the area of operations (AO).

The lack of ownership of transportation assets also makes training difficult for the infantry battalion. More often than not, battalions will first meet and train with their supporting motor transport operators at the end of their pre-deployment training during Exercise Mojave Viper. This should be an evaluation and refinement exercise rather than initial training. Some battalions will not receive these Marines until they are in theater, which dramatically hinders the effectiveness of combat convoy operations and other mounted patrols. Motor transport operators need to be well trained in the supported unit's standard operating procedures, immediate action, and battle drills prior to deploying. Relationships need to be formed and implicit communication needs to be fostered.

The division truck company also supports the infantry battalions. A division truck company has approximately 135 medium tactical vehicle replacement (MTVR) 7-ton trucks in its table of organization (TO). These MTVRs are in general support of the division and provide support for equipment and troops in the division command post, communications company, and other division subordinate commands aside from the infantry regiments. If they have no other tasks or

requirements, 1st Marine Division's truck company can support the movement of only three of the 12 battalions. The truck company is tasked by the movement control center within the division G-4, and the platoons have no habitual relationships with the supported battalions.

Battalions deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) are currently operating as motorized companies. However, the Highly Mobile Multi-Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV), MTRV, and Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles have not proved effective platforms for this task organization. The MTRV, although an important asset to Marine Corps operations, is not a good fighting platform and serves better for supply convoys than for offensive and security operations. The MRAP has proved to be even less maneuverable off of main supply routes than the MTRV. It cannot make sharp turns at normal march speeds and is prone to rollovers.³ HMMWVs will always have an important role as mobile support by fire platforms and for security operations as part combined anti-armor platoons. However, trying to motorize and fight a rifle company utilizing a mix of HMMWVs and MTRVs is not ideal. HMMWVs lack the troop capacity and MTRVs lack the mobility and seamless transition to dismounted assault.

Proposed Motorized Capability

The infantry battalion should be motorized with wheeled, expeditionary troop carriers under the operational control of the infantry battalion commander. The vehicles should be operated by 0311 riflemen licensed by the battalion. To comply with MCDP 1, the vehicles should "be easy to operate and maintain, [be] reliable and...require minimal specialized operator training."⁴ The vehicle should be capable of transporting one infantry squad. This capability will enhance the maneuverability of infantry companies while affording them greater mobility than currently provided by the MTRV.

The Marine Corps is currently in the technology demonstration phase of the Marine personnel carrier (MPC) program development. This medium lift personnel carrier will complement the joint light tactical vehicle's (JLTV) light capability and the expeditionary fighting vehicle's (EFV) heavy lift capability. The MPC will be capable of carrying nine to twelve combat loaded Marines. No specific design has been identified, but this is exactly the type of capability that should be under the control of the infantry battalion commander.

Furthermore, the vehicle should be armed with a medium or heavy machine gun to defend the vehicle and allow it to

serve as a mobile support or attack-by-fire platform. This machine gun should be mounted on a remote operated small arms mount (ROSAM) or similar system such as Gunslinger or Crows II to provide the vehicle with the lethality and gunner survivability needed on the modern battlefield. The ROSAM, for example, has a stabilized, shoot-on-the-move capability and a magnified digital day and thermal night sight. The ROSAM can mount a M240 (7.62mm), M2 (.50 cal), or GAU 17 (7.62mm electric mini-gun). However, the extreme ballistic consistency of the GAU 17 produces a minute beaten zone, which makes it difficult to hit troop targets while mounted on the ROSAM.⁵

Granted, infantry regiments will require a maintenance section to provide level 2 maintenance. Regiments who rate the vehicle sets should have operational control of maintainers who rotate from the general support combat logistics regiment (CLR) within the MLG in their Marine expeditionary force (MEF). Third echelon maintenance and parts would be provided by the direct support CLB.

Counterarguments

One counterargument is that the Marine Corps is a light infantry force and should not become a mechanized infantry

force which would then replicate heavy capabilities already provided by the U.S. Army. The Marine Corps is trying to get away from a heavy vehicle footprint it has acquired from sustained combat in Iraq. We must get away from our vehicles and be amongst the people. Another combat vehicle will not be effective in the mountains of Afghanistan.

Marine battalions are being asked to cover large AOs in both Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. In counter-insurgency (COIN) operations in which forces must move quickly to the decisive point and rapidly react to intelligence to defeat or detain the enemy, they must be able to have organic control of mobility, especially in theaters in which heliborne assault support is limited. Infantry Battalions will still maintain their light infantry capabilities and will not always employ or deploy with these vehicles. Providing select infantry regiments or battalions a transportation asset they can fight from does not mean that the Marine Corps will be transformed into a mechanized or motorized infantry force. Battalions will continue to task organize for missions and deployments in order to maintain maximum tactical and operational flexibility. In fact, these vehicles would be given to battalions not in the Marine expeditionary unit (MEU)

deployment cycle. Battalions in the MEU deployment cycle will still maintain the standard boat, track, and helicopter company organization.

The Marine Corps cannot afford to continue investing money in another expensive vehicle program. The Department of Defense invested \$Billions in the MRAP and the Commandant is not sure how we will employ them in the future.

With an ailing American economy, one could argue that now is not the time to bridge a needed operational capability with another expensive principle end item. However, a basic, simple, armored wheeled vehicle capable of carrying an infantry squad and focused on the future would be much more cost effective than a continuous cycle of expensive interim, temporary solutions for today's challenges. These "Band Aids," such as the MRAP, have proven ineffective. Although extremely survivable, their lack of mobility makes them irrelevant. Additionally, continued focus on a wheeled troop carrier will reduce long term costs associated with maintaining and fueling tracked vehicles.

The EFV is the current "program of record" for the Marine Corps' next generation armored combat vehicle. This capability gap is already being addressed.

The EFV will provide the Marine Corps with an impressive amphibious capability with improved range, lethality, and survivability. However, the EFV should be focused on supporting Marine Corps amphibious operations units such as a battalion or potentially regimental landing team. In this arena, the EFV provides the Marine Corps a new strength, but a tracked vehicle is not what battalions operating independently or as part of regimental combat teams need to conduct rapid, deep assaults inland or stability operations assuming that the particular operation does not require heavy armor such as tanks. As the Marine Corps refocuses itself as the nation's force in expeditionary amphibious operations, there will still exist the need to conduct these stability operations as part of "The Long War." Additionally, the EFV will still be under the operational control of the assault amphibian unit commander and does not afford the infantry battalion commander the same flexibility and responsiveness as organic assets. Maneuver warfare does not require that Marine units deploy on-line and clear enemy territory in-

zone. Assaults will often take the shape of penetrations or columns attacking along established main and alternate supply routes on which wheeled vehicles can utilize their speed to contribute to shock and surprise.

Conclusion

The MPC program should seek to acquire or develop a simple wheeled, armored troop carrier with a ROSAM or equivalent. These vehicles should have the capacity to transport a combat loaded infantry squad. These vehicles should be given to select Marine infantry battalions and be under the control of the commander and not the supporting unit. Doing so will give Marine infantry battalions the tools to achieve tactical tempo and focus and establish relevance across the large areas of responsibility to which they are assigned in the current COIN environment. The Corps must be ready for future long range, rapid attacks deep inland from the littorals.

End Notes

1. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, *Warfighting*.(Washington D.C.: U.S. Government as represented by the Secretary of the Navy, 1997), 40-43.
2. *2008 U.S. Marine Corps Concepts and Programs* (Washington, D.C.: Program Assessment and Evaluation Division, HQMC, 2008), 111-120.
3. Richard Lardner, “Fatal MRAP Rollovers Prompts Warnings” Military Times.com, http://www.militarytimes.com/news/2008/07/ap_mrap_072408/.

The author also witnessed this as the officer in charge of a team of Marines testing weapons and communications accessories for the Cougar MRAP at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, CA in February 2008 for the Marine Forces Pacific Experimentation Center.

4. *Warfighting*, 65.
5. The author witnessed this as the officer in charge of a team of Marines testing the GAU-17 on a ROSAM on range 109 and range 500 at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, CA in March 2008 for the Marine Forces Pacific Experimentation Center.

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