

Improving the Tank Scout

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Improving the Tank Scout

Contemporary Issues Paper

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Within the Marine Corps' tank battalions is a unique asset that is often improperly employed and not well known within the other components of the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF): the scout platoon. While the tank battalions recognize the importance and value of the scout platoon, they are restricted from employing scouts to their full potential due to the platoon's inflexible structure and limited capabilities. Often, tank battalions must utilize the TOW (tube launched, optically tracked, wire guided missile) anti-tank platoon to supplement its reconnaissance requirements. By combining the scout and TOW platoons and establishing formal scout training, the tank battalion can enhance its organic reconnaissance capabilities.

The Scout Platoon

Capabilities

As the tank battalion's "primary source of organic combat intelligence," the scout platoon provides tank units with reconnaissance, security, and counter-mechanized capabilities. These capabilities are essential for shaping the battle space and conducting tank battalion operations.¹

Organized into a headquarters section and two scout sections, the 24-Marine platoon conducts zone, area, and route reconnaissance. Other missions commonly assigned to scouts

¹ United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-12: Marine Corps Tank Employment* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2005), 10-1.

include liaison with other units; quartering party duties; traffic control; Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical (NBC) detection and surveys; limited pioneer and demolitions work; and area security.²

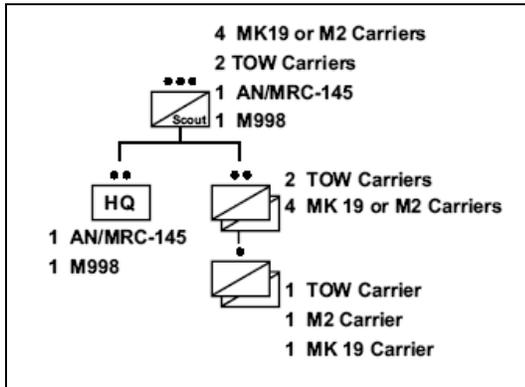


Figure 1: Scout Platoon Organization
(From: MCWP 3-12, February 2005)

Limitations

While capable of performing several missions, the scout platoon's current organization and lack of formal training inhibits its full potential. The two section structure of the platoon limits both the number of routes that may be reconnoitered as well as the number of observation posts (OPs) it can operate. Dismounted activities in general, whether conducting patrols, reconnoitering obstacles, or simply maintaining contact with the enemy are severely degraded by its lack of manpower.³

² Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-12: Marine Corps Tank Employment, 10-2.

³ Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-12: Marine Corps Tank Employment, 10-2.

When conducting screening missions, scouts have a very limited ability to destroy or repel enemy recon units with its direct fire weapons. However, counter-reconnaissance is easily accomplished when the scout platoon combines its direct fire assets with indirect fires. Unfortunately, they are rarely task organized with a forward air controller or forward observer unless their specific mission is to prepare the battlefield (by registering targets, for example). Scouts are often trained informally in Call For Fire (CFF) procedures, but this is not a reliable skill. Controlling indirect fires not only enables the scouts to maintain contact with the enemy longer, but also to develop the situation more effectively and increase friendly tempo. Another training deficiency for the scout platoon is its ability to breach or emplace obstacles and barriers. Without this capability, the effectiveness of a route reconnaissance is severely limited.

Weak command and control, a combination of poor training and organization, is another major limiting factor to the proper employment of the scout platoon. Under the current structure, a Lieutenant commands the scout platoon. While administratively controlled by a Headquarters and Services (H&S) Company, the Lieutenant reports to an over tasked operations officer. Although this is practical for administrative issues, the H&S Company's focus on supporting the tank companies (i.e. tank

maintenance) hampers the training and development of the scout platoon. The scout platoon commander must rely on his one or two years of fleet experience complemented by the wisdom of the platoon sergeant. While the platoon sergeant may have ample experience as an infantryman, he may not be as technically proficient at conducting scout-specific missions.

Relationship with TOW Platoon

The TOW platoon is another valuable asset of the tank battalion. The TOW platoon's primary mission is counter-mechanized operations, but it also performs secondary security

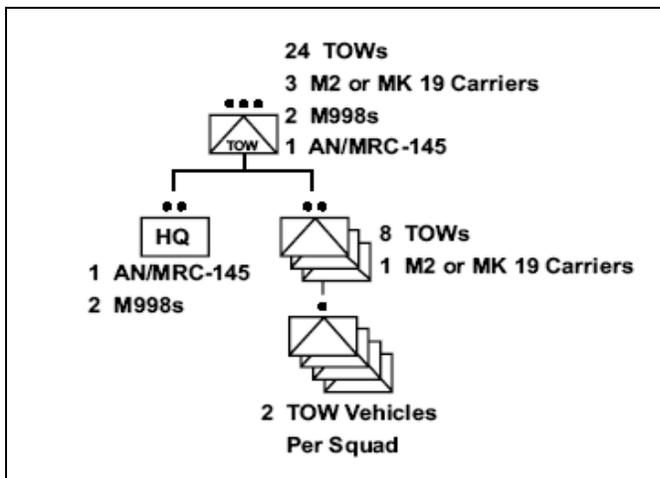


Figure 2: TOW Platoon Organization
(From: MCWP 3-12, February 2005)

missions.⁴ The tank battalion may be required at times to conduct a forward reconnaissance and flank screens simultaneously. Due to the limitations of the scout platoon, the TOW platoon may be tasked to supplement this security mission. While the 68-Marine platoon is robust enough to support multiple missions, once again the weak command and control inhibits efficient

⁴ Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-12: Marine Corps Tank Employment, 10-3.

employment. Without a centralized command and control of the reconnaissance and security missions, the tank battalion jeopardizes a unity of effort between the two platoons.

Reorganization-RAA Company

Together, the two platoons have enough manpower to perform multiple missions. For example, if a tank battalion conducts a tactical movement in column, it may require a recon party, flank security, and additional security for the command element. One solution under the current structure is to have scouts conduct the forward recon and task the TOW platoon with the flank screen and command element's security.

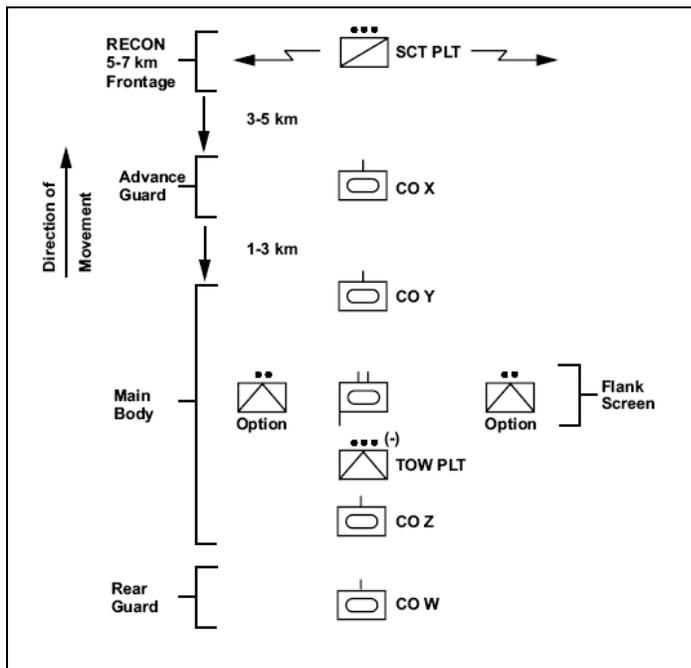


Figure 3: Tank Battalion in Column Formation (From: MCWP 3-12, February 2005)

While a section of TOWS might be appropriate for the flank screen mission, a TOW missile may not be the best weapon to protect the command element against a dismounted ambush. If the two platoons were combined

into a single Reconnaissance and Anti-Armor (RAA) Company, the company commander could properly task organize in order to support the three missions.⁵

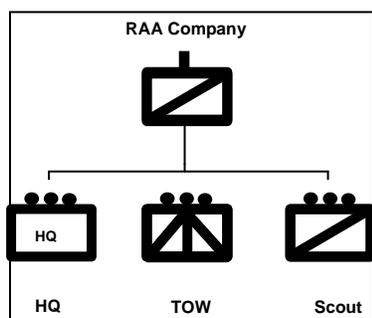


Figure 4: RAA Company Organization

It is feasible to task organize appropriately with the current structure of independent platoons; however, it would be much more efficient for a centralized command and control element to facilitate these multiple yet complementary missions. Also, the addition of a company headquarters element would better focus the training of the platoons due to its inherent responsibility to employ these assets. The RAA company commander and operations chief could also be attached to the alpha and bravo command element and serve as "recon chiefs" - conduits of reconnaissance information that satisfy the intelligence officer's (S-2) collections requirements.

The negative aspect of this proposal is the requirement for a headquarters element which would include at least one additional officer (company commander [Capt-1802 military

⁵ For a lack of a conventional organizational name, the author chose to refer to the proposed unit as the Reconnaissance and Anti-Armor (RAA) Company.

occupational specialty]) and one staff non-commissioned officer (company operations chief [MSGT-0369 military occupational specialty]). With only two active-duty and one reserve tank battalion, the additional requirement of three captains and three master sergeants would not significantly impact manpower levels. Doctrinally, a company headquarters has a first sergeant and executive officer, but a single captain and master sergeant could easily manage the administrative matters, training, and tactical employment of two platoons.⁶

Training

Scout ITS

The easiest and most important way to enhance the tank battalion's reconnaissance capabilities is to properly train scouts for the mission. Currently there is no formalized training for tank battalion scouts or Light Armored Reconnaissance (LAR) Battalion scouts in the Marine Corps. LAR battalion scouts, who are all 0311 infantrymen, receive on the job (OJT) training at their battalions. Tank battalion scouts, who are all 0352 TOW Gunners, are even less formally trained.

During Operation Iraqi Freedom I, the 2d Tank Battalion's scout platoon was augmented with reserve component Marines from 4th Tank Battalion. Out of the platoon's 42 enlisted Marines,

⁶ United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Reference Publication 5-12D: Organization of Marine Corps Forces* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2005), 4-7.

only one had received formal scout training (at the U.S. Army Scout Leaders Course). While, the active duty Marines had received extensive informal training, most of the reservists had not even handled the Table of Organization (T/O) weapons (i.e. Mk19 40mm and M2 .50 caliber machine guns).⁷

In order to begin correcting this deficiency in training, the individual training standards (ITS) for a scout must be established. Since the Army has already established such standards for their own scouts (who perform the same missions as Marine scouts), the Marine Corps would only need to adopt the same standards and refine as necessary, specifically in the case of LAR scouts. Figure 5 provides a sample of critical tasks required of an Army cavalry scout, MOS 19D.⁸

Task Number (from STP 17-19D2-SM)	Task Description
04-3303.02-0037	NAVIGATE WHILE MOUNTED
052-196-2004	DETERMINE STREAM VELOCITY
052-196-2101	DETERMINE PERCENT OF SLOPES
052-196-2102	DETERMINE RADIUS OF CURVES
052-196-2103	DETERMINE GAP WIDTH
171-091-1019	BUILD A QUICK SMOKE SCREEN
171-091-1023	SUPERVISE VEHICLE RESUPPLY
171-121-4030	CONDUCT VEHICLE TACTICAL NAVIGATION
171-121-4064	PREPARE LOGISTICAL STATUS (LOGSTAT) REPORTS
171-121-4065	DIRECT VEHICLE TACTICAL MOVEMENT
171-122-1061	MAINTAIN PROPERTY ACCOUNTABILITY
171-123-1003	ESTABLISH ACCOUNTABILITY OF TOE EQUIPMENT
171-123-4014	GUIDE A HELICOPTER TO A LANDING SITE

Figure 5: Sample of U.S. Army Cavalry Scout Critical Tasks

⁷ Zummo, Matthew. "Scouts in OIF (interview)," 31 January 2006, personal e-mail (1 February 2006).

⁸ United States Army, *Soldier Training Publication 17-19D2-SM: Soldier's Manual Cavalry Scout MOS 19D Level 2* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2004), ii-iii.

AMOS

In the Marine Corps, "scout" is not a military occupational specialty (MOS), but a billet. In 1986, the Light Armor Vehicle (LAV) follow on operational test and evaluation (FOT&E) final report even recommended a separate MOS for scout infantry.⁹ By creating an additional MOS (AMOS) for scouts, it would make establishing a training pipeline much easier. This AMOS would also assist in future assignments for staff non-commissioned officers (SNCO's) who would better serve in the roles of platoon sergeant or company operations chief if they had prior experience in either RAA Company or LAR battalion.

Scout Course

Tank and LAR scouts require similar skill sets such as CFF, advanced mounted/dismounted patrolling, route/bridge classifications, demolitions, obstacle construction/reduction/breaching, etc. When these skills are reflected by an AMOS designator, the Marine Corps must determine an efficient and effective manner to train to the required individual standards. There are several solutions to accomplish this training with varying degree of resource requirements. The simplest and most economical solution is to utilize the Army's Program of

⁹ *Light Armored Vehicle (LAV) Follow-on Operational Test and Evaluation (FOT&E) Final Test Report* (Quantico, VA: 1986), 187.

Instruction (POI) for entry level scouts and tailor it to the Marine Corps' unique requirements. The LAR community would be the logical proponent due to their greater number of battalions and scouts. Based on this POI, an LAR battalion from each coast could host a course two or more times annually for all new scouts. At the conclusion of the course, all Marines are trained to the established standards and receive the new Scout AMOS. This approach is simply a more formal version of OJT based off of published training standards. One disadvantage is the exclusion of the reserve component Marines from 4th LAR and 4th Tanks; however, this could be mitigated by sharing the POI with the respective commands.

A more costly solution for developing entry-level scouts is to include a course at the Schools of Infantry (SOI). The advantage to this course of action is that the quality of instructors and consequently the quality of instruction will be superior. While SOI may have the infrastructure to support such a course, the additional resources such as designated instructors and time may be difficult to accommodate.

Conclusion

While often overlooked, the scout platoon has the potential to improve the warfighting capabilities of not only the tank battalions, but also the rest of the MAGTF. By focusing on the scout platoon's organization and training, the current

limitations of this unit can be mitigated with minimal time and resources. Combining the TOW and scout platoons will improve the tank battalion's reconnaissance immeasurably. The Marine Corps can fulfill its obligation to properly train entry level scouts with a simple investment of a few weeks of training and minimum supporting resources such as training aids. The scout platoon is a small unit, yet it performs a vital role in the successful execution of combined arms operations. Enhancing the tank scouts benefits the entire MAGTF.

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