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Combined Armor Operations at the Unit level

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Abstract

The Amor force has prepared itself for current operations by conducting exercises in Europe, Korea and the Balkans. Our Cold War and post Cold War Exercises gave us valuable lessons that we have incorporated into our fighting force. We continue to identify and overcome modern technological issues that will only serve to make the combined armor team stronger. With the assistance of our long standing and new alliances the team will win the Global War on Terrorism and prepare itself to fight and win future conflicts.

Combined Armor Operations at the Unit level

The United States can win the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) by overcoming the barriers of training, equipping, communicating and logistical resupply for a combined multinational force.

The complexities of the current Global War on Terrorism can only be won if we fight as part of a Combined Arms Team. With the strain of conducting combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan the United States Army must rely on the assistance of our long standing and new alliances. At the unit level the Armor force has been preparing for many years now. Starting with the combined operations exercises of the Cold War and post Cold War era, and then refining those skills with the Peacekeeping operations in the Balkans and finally with the current operations in the Middle East the alliance is strong and ready. As we work through some of the modern challenges of Armor warfare the force is posturing itself to win this conflict and prepare for the next set of challenges whatever they may be.

The United States Army conducted Joint Military Combined arms exercises beginning in 1967 with the first Return of Forces to Germany (REFORGER) this was a yearly exercise designed to strengthen the joint military readiness of several nations, these nations were the United States, Germany, Great Britain, France, and the Canadian Army. In the event of a Soviet incursion into Western Europe from the Soviet staging bases in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, the coalition would use the Military Airlift Command (MAC), Military Sealift Command (MSC) and the Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRV) to move Soldiers into Western Europe for Operation REFORGER. The objective was to fall in on pre-positioned equipment in Combat Equipment Sites along the West Germany, France Border. The assumption being that the first, third and fifth Corp along with the three Cavalry regiments, 3rd ACR, 2nd ACR and 11th ACR

could hold the line for a period of five day with the assistance of our NATO partners. These Joint exercises were curtailed in 1993 with no plans to resume them. Concurrently starting in 1976 and ending with the last full scale maneuvers in 1993 the United States and the Korean Government conducted Team Spirit, a joint/combined exercise designed to evaluate and improve the interoperability of the US and Korean forces. The operation drew on the same resources as REFORGER MAC, MSC, and CRV. Team Spirit exercises were purely defensive in nature enhancing the commands war fighting capabilities and deterrent value. Following the end of the Cold War the United States began a series of combined arms exercises with several of its NATO partners. Spanish Replay was held for three years in the mid-nineteen nineties on the high plains desert at Zaragoza Spain, and was designed to integrate the Spanish Armor, which formally had been modeled after the Soviet era doctrine, with the United States Armies combined arms doctrine. In light of the developing Balkans crisis, the Soviet Union and the United States ran a series of Peacekeeper exercises in 1994 and 1995. The purpose of which was to began interoperability of the two forces in a joint peacekeeping/peace enforcement operation prior to execution. Along with the mentioned exercises NATO along with the United States did perform many more combined exercises in an effort to unify and strengthen our abilities on the modern battlefield. These exercises did bring to light several areas that needed improvement, such as standardized ammunition, fuel requirements for vehicles, communication barriers both radio and spoken language, standard operating instructions for all levels of the combined arms team, and interoperability of theater equipment such as Air Defense, and Nuclear, biological and Chemical warning systems. While we did learn a considerable amount, which we are applying to the Global War on Terrorism now, with the new technology being fielded on the modern battlefield

and the next enemy still unknown the NATO alliance should consider resuming combined arms exercises at the first opportunity.

Following the Peacekeeper exercises the United States and her coalition partners Canada, Nordic, British, Austria, Eurocorps, Holland, and the Russia contingent entered Bosnia for the Implementation Force (IFOR) in December of 1996. The lesson we learned and applied during the Cold War exercises were invaluable, however several problems did persist. The biggest of problems arose from the first time that NATO and the Russian Army had performed a real world operation together. The Russian Army was not prepared to support logistically the forward deployed Battalion, mainly due to her own internal political issues. Subsequently it fell to the United States Army, who had responsibility for the Russian contingent, to provide life support and logistic requirements to the Battalion. The same issues NATO had overcome in training now had to be overcome during an operational mission. Because of the non-standard equipment the Russian Battalion brought to the table we found it necessary to locally purchase parts to keep their vehicles operating. Additionally since we would not provide them with one of our radio sets, it was necessary to provide an American Army officer to the Russian camp in order to know what the Battalion was up to and to provide us with a logistic package request, so we could keep the Battalion in the fight. Both Armies learned invaluable lessons on each others strengths and weaknesses. Following the capitulation of the Serbian Army after the Air campaign of May 1999, the First Marine Expeditionary Unit and the US Army's initial entry force followed the Serbian retreat from Kosovo. The Russian Government wanted control of the Capital city of Pristina, which was not originally their sector of responsibility, and ordered the Battalion in Bosnia to pick up and road march overnight, to seize and hold the Airport at the capital. This had two major effects first it left the Russian zone in Bosnia completely unmanned, and second it

forced the NATO commander to redistribute the zones as we were occupying the province. IFOR was the first time since Desert Shield/Storm that the Army, Air Force, and Marine Corp were conducting combined operations in a tactical environment. All three forces had fielded new radio systems since our last operations together and the radios were not compatible with each other. The end result being we not only had Liaison Officers (LNO) with our NATO partners which we had planned for, we had to provide LNO's to the Marine Corp so we could conduct combined arms operations with our sister service. The experience we gained during the peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and Kosovo greatly prepared us and our coalition partners to conduct the combined arms operations in Afghanistan and then Iraq. With this knowledge we will continue to improve and eventually win the Global War on Terrorism.

With our entrance into Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) we still have not solved our communication crisis with the Marine Corps; however we can now communicate directly with strike aircraft from the US Air Force and Navy. Where the Marine and Army boundary line meets outside of Baghdad the two units much exchange daily operations information via secure e-mail. The purpose of which is to know each others locations in order to avoid friendly fire incidents, and avoid opening a seam between boundary lines that might be exploited by the insurgents. OIF has added a number of nations to the arsenal that were formally members of the Warsaw Pact, such as Estonia. Since Estonia has such a small standing Army the Government only commits one platoon each to Iraq and Afghanistan. This platoon is embedded with an armor unit in theater and we conduct constant joint operations with these small well disciplined units. The Platoon Commanders are almost always veterans of the Russian/Afghanistan war, and are extremely well seasoned fighters, even though they did not participate during joint training exercises the platoons perform well during combined operations. As always we still must provide

an LNO with our radio set, since security precludes us from allowing them to sign for our secure sets. The Estonian Defense Forces do not use the same Rules of Engagement that we do, this is partly due to their past involvement with the Warsaw Pact. We will not engage an insurgent until several factors have been met, i.e. the Soldier must see a weapon/or explosive device, and on a one for one basis the Soldier must believe his life or the life of his comrade is in danger. The Estonian Defense Forces do not subscribe to those rules, if while on patrol the platoon is sniped at, all the Soldiers start shooting, in every direction. The benefit is the insurgents learn quickly where the Estonians are and will not engage them; instead the insurgents will wait for the next American patrol. With the assistance of our long term coalition partners, and the addition of the former Warsaw Pact forces, we will continue to improve during combined arms operations in the combat environment and win the Global War on Terrorism.

With the combined arms teams' moving into the 21st Century more and more off the shelf technology is finding its way into our formations. Each branch of the services has its own unique requirements for conducting combat operations, while our sister armed forces, that we fight alongside, also have their own unique requirements and abilities. Communication or the lack thereof, on the modern battlefield has again reared its ugly head. While the US Military and several of our coalition partners have jumped into the new age, most cannot afford to. The result being we have fielded several different versions of the SINGARS communications sets, and the FBCB2 system for the Army and Marines, the systems will not talk to each other because of our unique battlefield missions. Additionally not all of our combined arms ground forces partners have access to our level of secure communication, and there is no plan to incorporate them into it for fear of a breach of national security. Since we are moving toward common graphics that are sent via secure communications as opposed to the old hand jammed acetate overlays, we are

providing more and more LNOs to serve as the conduit between secure and non-secure communication. We must overcome our own internal off the shelf communications dilemmas and incorporate our partners into the secure environment in order to bring a quick close to the ongoing conflict, and posture ourselves for the next mission.

Combined Arms Operations at the Company, Battalion, and Brigade level is how we will win the current conflict and future operations. The benefits of Combined operations mean that the distribution of fire power among several nations in the conflict does not require a herculean effort on one countries part. When we put more friendly armor into a compact battle space, we increase the odds of success exponentially, couple that with a trained and capable Command and Control structure and the probability of success swings heavily in our favor. Finally as we have seen and currently exploit, most of our logistics packages are inter-changeable with our long standing partners. Such as NATO standard 9mm or 5.56mm ammunition can be used by almost all our partners. Tank ammunition is the same 120mm combustible cartridge capable of being fired from an American, British, German, or Canadian tank. All of our tactical vehicles use the same type of fuel. While we still have hurdles to negotiate, we have learned from our past experiences and we are capable of finding, closing with, and killing the enemy, in whatever environment we might find ourselves.

In conclusion, the Armor combined arms team starting training and equipping itself for the Global War on Terrorism beginning with REFORGER and Team Spirit. The benefits of these exercises identified and overcame weaknesses in tactics, C2, communication, and logistics. While we progressed through the Balkans we incorporated new alliances, and they became an integral part of the combined Armor force. The 21st century has brought new challenges in

communications that we will overcome. With the current abilities of the combined arms team we will win the Global War on Terrorism and prepare for future challenges.