The Enhanced Rifle Company

Continuing the need for change

by Maj Chad A. Buckel

The mission of the Marine infantry company is to defeat the enemy by fire, maneuver, and close combat and to conduct other operations as directed across the range of military operations.[1]

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In the previous articles of this series, we established that the battlefield has fundamentally changed. Improvements in unmanned systems, electronic attack, and the proliferation of advanced weapons has created an environment where an adversary can create a local "multi-domain combined arms overmatch" of our forces.[2] In the Ukraine, separatist and Russian forces expertly married up reconnaissance unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) with long-range indirect fire assets to devastate Ukrainian formations; in Lebanon, Hezbollah forces massed precision shoulder-fired weapons to devastate Israeli armored forces, and in the Levant, Islamic State fighters use armed drones to scout out and attack their foes with devastating effects. The introduction of unmanned systems, along with the proliferation of electronic attack and long-range precision fires, fundamentally changes the battlefield and therefore fundamentally changes the type of units that can effectively operate in that environment. The infantry rifle company must undergo a change in its TO&E as well as a change in the types of Marines that it employs to be effective and dominant on the 21st century battlefield.

We have already discussed that the recruiting and training of infantry Marines must change to better staff the Marine Corps infantry organization. We have also discussed a fundamental shift in the manning and equipping of the rifle squad to ensure that it is capable of maneuvering and winning on the modern battlefield. These changes will have a natural effect on how the platoon and company are staffed and equipped; however, to fully exploit these changes, the rifle platoon and company must also change its manning and equipping.

In this article, we will discuss proposed changes to the rifle platoon, weapons platoon, and rifle company within the infantry battalion. These changes will reflect the proposed changes to individual training and the rifle squad; they will also reflect the reality of the modern battlefield. I will make an argument to further push down coordination and fires to support squad and platoon maneuvers while properly enabling small unit leaders to execute mission-type orders. Above all, this article will argue that our current TO&E cannot survive on the modern battlefield; a reorganization is required to ensure its lethality.

A concept called the CLT (company landing team) was developed and experimented with over the past eight to ten years. This concept has failed to come to fruition primarily because it is ill defined and not at all resourced. Many people call a reinforced company a CLT, but what they fail to see is that bolting on capabilities does not make a CLT. To truly get after the concept of a more capable company, with the ability to better task organize to mission specifics and integrate outside resources, the Marine Corps must make a bottom-up refinement of the company TO&E. This article will not argue for the CLT concept but for enhancing organic company capabilities to fight and succeed on the modern battlefield.

The *Marine Corps Operating Concept* (*MOC*) 2016 states,

> Tomorrow's fights will involve conditions in which "to be detected is to be targeted is to be killed." Adversaries will routinely net together sensors, spies, UAS, and space imagery to form sophisticated "ISR-strike systems" that are able to locate, track, target, and attack an opposing force[3] …
>
> We must acquire the offensive capabilities to raise and detect enemy signatures across the spectrum, quickly and accurately assign meaning to what we observe, and rapidly take action to exploit any opportunity.[4]

The enhanced platoon and company will see small handheld technologies that will allow them to enter in and contest the electromagnetic battlespace, better prosecute fires, and exercise point reconnaissance of an objective area. It

will become the bedrock of a new family of systems that allows the Marine Corps small unit leaders to create a local overmatch against the most sophisticated enemies and destroy them via multiple forms of fires.

The rifle platoon is the basic maneuver element for the rifle company and its characteristics are essentially the same as the company.[5]

The Rifle Platoon

The rifle platoon will continue to be the basic maneuver element of the rifle company and will continue to serve as a planning cell and employer of the rifle squad and attached enablers. The modern battlefield will not and should not change this construct. What does need to change are the resources that the platoon brings to the fight. The platoon headquarters must have the organic capability to provide more than just planning and coordination capability. It must be capable of providing reconnaissance, electronic attack, and defense and counter-UAS (CUAS) support, especially if we want to fully exploit the enhanced rifle squad.

Currently, the platoon headquarters consists of a second lieutenant and a staff sergeant. They are charged to administer, train, and employ the Marines under their command. They do this though planning and coordination but do not have the ability to resource or support squad- or platoon-level operations unless resources are attached down to them. The enhanced platoon would bring organic capabilities to better support and integrate its maneuver elements via intelligence gathering and fires.

The enhanced rifle platoon would consist of three 15-Marine rifle squads with a five-Marine headquarters section for a total of fifty Marines. The platoon commander and platoon sergeant would be joined by an 0621 Field Radio Operator, an 81mm forward observer (FO) who would be joint fires observer certified, and an 0311 unmanned aircraft system (UAS) operator. All five of these Marines would carry the M4A1 as their personal weapon.

The UAS operator would employ a system similar to the Aeryon Labs, Inc., SkyRanger, with a range of three kilometers and a flight time of 50 minutes.[6] This would complement the fire team and squad UAS platforms and provide a mid-range bridge between the close-in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets of the fire team and squad and the medium range assets of the company. With this asset, the platoon commander would be able to scout routes, cover dead space, and observe enemy action on or beyond the platoon objective area. The UAS operator would also carry a lightweight portable VHF/UHF jammer. Such radio jammers are available on the open market, can jam drone and radio frequencies, and can come equipped with omni-directional antennas. They have a relatively short range (100m-1,000m), which would allow for employment within the platoon's battlespace. A military version of this civilian technology would allow the platoon to affect enemy transmissions in the close fight and deny them their intelligence and C2 (command and control) assets. It would also enable the platoon commander to engage in electronic attack in support of squad and platoon operations and would complement the fire team and squad CUAS capabilities.

The radio operator would carry the current and emerging family of radios for tactical communications. This Marine would also operate a handheld radio direction finder similar to the Rohde & Schwarz DDF007 Portable Direction Finder, allowing the platoon to detect radio emissions from enemy radios and unmanned systems. This capability would also complement the UAS operator's ability to either send the UAS to investigate the source of the transmission or to jam the signal. It would also aid the platoon commander in finding smaller unmanned systems by tracking them or their base station electronic signature.

The combination of radio direction finding, VHF/UHF jamming, a trained FO, and a small UAS (SUAS), with extended beyond line-of-sight range, would give the platoon commander multiple options for combined arms, extended reach, the capability to reconnoiter and affect the electronic battlespace, and the ability to target and call for fires in support of platoon or squad operations. With the addition of three extra Marines and a few pieces of gear, the platoon's reach and lethality will move from 800 meters to about 3,000 meters.

The weapons platoon is the basic fire support element for the rifle company. It provides the company with organic machine gun, mortar, rocket fire, and antiarmor defense.[7]

The Weapons Platoon

The enhanced weapons platoon would also see some fundamental changes. These changes would be more along the lines of the type of equipment employed vice a complete reorganization. There are many ideas and arguments about how to "upgrade" the company weapons platoon. Sea Dragon 2025 posited the introduction of a UAS section with light UAS and counter-drone systems, the introduction of armed UAS, and the removal of the anti-armor section.[8] As we have seen, this article takes a different approach and argues for the integration of UAS and CUAS assets to the fire team level, vice creating a standalone section.

The enhanced weapons platoon would retain the same basic structure, a medium-machine-gun section, an anti-armor section, and a light mortar section. The changes would be in the weapons and systems employed and the

capabilities inserted into this platoon. Let's begin with the anti-armor section.

Anti-Armor Section

SEA DRAGON 2025 called for the abolishment of the anti-armor section and the introduction of the Carl Gustav rocket system into the squads. I am unsure if this is the right answer. The introduction of the Carl Gustav into the squad is a good idea, but the abolishment of the anti-armor section is not. In January 2017, the MCTOG (Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group) ran a wargame of an infantry battalion air assault 300 miles from the sea base. The findings of this wargame established three critical capabilities for such an operation: longer-range anti-tank weapons (4,000-5,000m), lethal surface-to-surface fires capable of air assault deployment and effective against armor, and tailorable mobility packages.[9] If we take these findings as truth, then removing an anti-armor capability at the company level is foolish. Instead, we should redefine the 0351 MOS field. These Marines should be trained to employ the FGM-148 Javelin anti-tank missile and still retain a breaching capability. By placing the Javelin system into the rifle company's weapons platoon, you will give each company six organic precision missile systems, and with a range of four kilometers, you begin to answer the identified requirements from the MCTOG wargame.

Mortar Section

The 60mm mortar section would retain its three-gun construct. The changes would come to the size and capability of this section. The current 60mm mortar section consists of ten Marines (a section leader and three guns with three Marines apiece). The proposed mortar section would expand to sixteen Marines. This would consist of four Marines per gun and four Marines in the headquarters section. The headquarters Marines would consist of the section leader, who would be FDC (fire direction center) trained, and three UAS- and FO-trained Marines, who would carry and employ an armed UAS such as the AeroVironment Switchblade. With a range of ten kilometers, this system would be a perfect complement to the 60mm section.[10] The Marines who operate the system could adjust fires or execute a strike with it. This capability would once again answer part of the requirements from the MCTOG wargame and extend the operational reach of the rifle company.

We need to enhance the capability of the rifle company to fight and succeed on the modern battlefield. *(Photo by Sgt Dengrier Baez.)*

Machine-Gun Section

The machine-gun section would essentially remain unchanged. The current model and construct works for today's operations. The only proposed change is to update the weapons system they employ. The TEXTRON Systems' Lightweight Small Arms Technology (LSAT) discussed in "The 15-Marine Rifle Squad" also has a 7.62mm medium-machine-gun variant. The TEXTRON Systems data sheet touts that the weapon, with an 800 round load out, and its telescoped and caseless ammunition provides a 27-pound reduction in weight from the M240 medium machine gun.[11] What is not clear is if the range and accuracy is equal to or better than the M240.

Fire Support Team (FiST)

The FiST would still be led by the platoon commander. The normal external attachments to build out this team (artillery FO with scout and radio operator, naval gun fire liaison officer, forward air controller) would still exist. The team would employ a SUAS, such as the SkyRanger, to help with the prosecution of fires. The company FiST would also receive training on fire support coordination center procedures and how to clear fires. With the proliferation of JFOs down to the squad level, companies would be capable of establishing zones of action and controlling and clearing their own fires. This is a reality that is already taking place operationally and at Service-level exercises, yet no formal construct or training exists for it.

The weapons platoon sergeant could also be employed in a few other ways. This Marine could take the job of the "operations chief" within the company headquarters, thereby alleviating an unnecessary and often gapped 0369 billet. This Marine could also be trained as a joint tactical air controller and be integrated into the company FiST. If that were to occur, then he would own the air space, unless a FAC were to join the team, or he could be pushed forward of the company FiST to prosecute targets if the FiST were tasked to clear fires.

The Company Headquarters

The company headquarters currently consists of thirteen Marines.[12]

The Marine rifle platoon will continue to be the basic maneuver element. *(Photo by Sgt Dengrier Baez.)*

Many of these Marines (such as the intelligence specialist, logistics Marine, and administration Marine) do not reside within the company. They are tasked out as needed from the battalion headquarters. According to the "Total Force Structure Management System: Unit TO&E Report," each company rates an operations section of seven Marines.[13] What the company headquarters does not account for are radio operators or a corpsman, and they do not provide any special capabilities to the company as a whole. The proposed enhanced company headquarters would increase to fifteen and would infuse critical capabilities into the company structure.

The company leadership would see no change. It would still consist of the company commander, company executive officer, company gunnery sergeant, and company first sergeant. Their duties would see little change, yet they would be aided by the addition of some key enablers. They would be supported by two 0621 radio operators to enable C2 of the company operations.

The company would have an 0111 NCO attached to them. This Marine would be a direct link to the battalion administration section and ensure that all administration requirements within the company were completed. He would add tremendous value in the execution of the day-to-day operations of the company and would no doubt speed up the execution of administrative matters. The company "administrative section" would also contain an 0311 company clerk and property NCO, who would also serve as the operations NCO and ensure the functioning of the company command post during operations.

The company leadership would see no change.

The new logistics section would retain its 0481 landing support specialist. This Marine must be trained and capable of performing helicopter support team operations, which would give the company organic sling load capabilities, and would be joined by a 2111 small arms repair/technician and a 2171 electro-optical ordinance repairman. These two Marines would double as the armory custodians, thereby replacing the two 0311 NCOs who currently fill this duty. By integrating these two MOSs into the company, the maintenance and repair of weapons and optics could be executed in a shorter time span and defused down to the company level.

The new intelligence section would retain its current 0231 intelligence specialist, who should be capable of conducting tactical questioning and intelligence analysis and operating the company SUAS, the AeroVironment RQ-20B Puma. By training this Marine to execute tactical questioning, we will ensure that the company can gain information from local populations, detained persons, and persons of interest. The 0231 would also be trained to operate biometric data collection systems in support of population control efforts during stability operations, would be a direct link to the battalion intelligence section, and would ensure that pertinent intelligence requirements are met, that post-patrol reports are collected and disseminated, and that captured persons and equipment are properly documented, packaged, and shipped.

The intelligence section would also employ two 2621 communications signals collection operators. These Marines would complement company-level electronic surveillance and attack capabilities and add another layer of fire support to the company commander in the execution of company operations. They would come from a battalion team attached to the battalion (think of current fire support team arrangements). With these Marines, the company would possess the ability to execute operations in the physical and electronic domains and influence enemy activities in both.

The new medical section would be run by an 8403 special operations independent duty corpsman. This Sailor would be in charge of training and employing the corpsmen within the company and would bring a level of tactical trauma care to the rifle company that currently does not exist. This would allow for better care during dispersed operations, especially when the air or surface bridge is contested by enemy activities.

Conclusion

The enhancements to the overall company TO&E drive toward a singular goal, to make the company and its associated maneuver elements more

lethal and more capable on the modern battlefield. If we, as an organization, truly seek to fight and win our Nation's battles, we must fully realize and understand how tomorrow's wars are going to be fought. Our Cold War training, organization, and equipment are not optimal for modern combat. We must not only have the ability to integrate capabilities into the platoon and company, but we must infuse those capabilities into those organizations. By increasing training, issuing gear, and embedding critical MOS capabilities, we will allow the company to employ a suit of capabilities that complement each other and can force any potential enemy into a combined arms dilemma. To truly be successful in a distributed 21st century fight, we must rethink and reinvest in the way we train, man, and equip the rifle company.

Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCRP 3-10A.1, Infantry Company Operations*, (Washington, DC: October 2014).

2. Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group, "MCTOG GCE 2030 Air Assault Wargame Quick Look Report Preview," (Twentynine Palms, CA: January 2017).

3. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Operating Concept: How an Expeditionary Force Operates in the 21st Century*, (Washington, DC: 2016).

4. Ibid.

5. *MCRP 3-10A.1.*

6. Aeryon Labs Inc., SkyRanger Datasheet, (Ontario, Canada: April 2017), available at www.aeryon.com.

7. *MCRP 3-10A.1.*

8. Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, "SEA DRAGON 25 Iterative Assessment," (Quantico, VA: 8 September 2016).

9. "MCTOG GCE 2030 Air Assault Wargame Quick Look Report Preview."

10. AeroVironment Switchblade Datasheet, (Monrovia, CA: April 2017), available at www.avinc.com.

11. TEXTRON Systems LSAT Datasheet, (April 2017), available at www.textronsystems.com/lsat.

12. Headquarters Marine Corps, *United States Marine Corps Total Force Structure Management System: Unit TO&E Report*, (Washington, DC: February 2017).

13. Ibid.