

Implementation of the Hunter Killer Platoon

Utilizing the arms room concept;
from weapons platoon to hunter killer platoon

by MajGen Julian D. Alford

“Groups of foot soldiers remain to this day among the most powerful and influential forces on the battlefield.”¹

“The Infantryman has been, continues to be and will remain a durable element of the battlefield even as technologies and combat environments changes.”²

As our force structure changes in accordance with *Force Design 2030 (FD 2030)*, we must adapt our infantry weapons training and employment techniques and procedures. We need to be creative about how our forces are trained and task-organized to operate in a distributed manner across the world’s littoral regions, with a specific focus on the Indo-Pacific Area of Responsibility. Achieving this end is one of our Commandant’s foremost priorities. As such, the infantry community now has an ideal opportunity to modernize a core part of an infantry company, the weapons platoon, into the far more capable formation: the hunter killer platoon.

Background

Since 1941, with some exceptions, the Marine infantry rifle company has had three rifle platoons and one weapons platoon.³ Since World War II, the weapons platoon has been comprised

of a machine gun section, an assault section, and a mortar section. These sections have typically included six medium machine guns, six shoulder-fired rockets, and three 60mm mortars, respectively. This organization was not by chance; it was a result of a tactical decision made to support the maneuver of the company’s three rifle platoons by fire. In theory, it provided each rifle platoon two medium machine guns and two shoulder-fired rockets (employed in pairs), and one 60mm mortar section to support them.

Adapting for the Future

As part of *FD 2030*, our Commandant is considering the redesign of our infantry companies, eliminat-

ing the weapons company, weapons platoons in the infantry battalion and certain 03XX military occupational skills (MOS), while creating a multi-disciplinary Marine 03XX. This Marine must be capable of employing all weapons within the rifle company. This concept is best understood with the image of an arms room that allows Marines to choose the best and most lethal weapons to support a wide array of missions. With the introduction of the “arms room concept,” our Corps must consider how we will train our future multi-disciplinary Marines on the employment of machine guns, rockets, mortars, and the addition of loitering munitions, also commonly referred to as “unmanned top-down attack munitions” or Organic Precision Fires (OPF), at the company level. OPF-Infantry and OPF-Mounted is one of our Commandant’s top investment priorities.

The Commandant has expressed concerns with the current structure of the Infantry as it re-structures for *FD 2030*: “I am not confident that we have adequately assessed all of the implications of the future operating environment on the proposed structure of our future Infantry Battalion.”⁴ The Commandant has directed continued experimentation so all proposed changes to the infantry

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battalion should remain subject to scrutiny and additional change if deemed necessary. Currently, the proposed removal of the weapons platoon from each rifle company within the infantry battalion requires us to restructure how we train and fight. Without a dedicated weapons platoon, multi-disciplinary Marines will have to assume roles historically filled by Marines with a MOS associated with one particular weapon system. This will reduce the number of Marines available for maneuver in many fire and maneuver scenarios. Any rifle platoon of three rifle squads would be effectively reduced to two squads whenever machine guns, rockets, or mortars are needed for a support by fire element/mortar firing position.

As was the case at the start of the last century, war's character is changing dramatically. The recent Nagorno-Karabakh conflict offered a glimpse of the increased lethality of loitering munitions against vehicles and equipment in the open. Such unmanned munitions—employed by Azerbaijani infantrymen proficient in their ability to find and destroy the enemy with loitering munitions—were credited with destroying 185 main battle tanks, 89 armored fighting vehicles, 182 artillery pieces, 73 rocket launchers, 451 trucks, 26 air defense systems, and 14 radars in just a few weeks. In the process, these new organic infantry weapons proved critical to breaking the will of Azerbaijani's foe.

The Value Proposition

An investment in loitering munitions for our infantry companies will exponentially increase their lethality. These capabilities will also enable the company commanders to shorten kill chains in support of the maneuver elements while, importantly, maintaining all-weather organic fires capabilities with ranges that extend dozens of miles. The challenge—and opportunity—before us is to determine how to usher in this transformation while *still* maintaining the ability to employ three rifle squads in a platoon.

Since the “maneuverists’ movement” began in our Corps in the 1970s, Marines have prided themselves on be-

ing warfighters who understand that quickly closing on an objective requires timely and sustained suppression. *Suppression is the critical infantry task*, for without suppression on a contested

er platoon: weapons organic to the arms room. Utilizing the arms room concept for the Hunter Killer platoon will allow three weapon systems for each section to choose from based on the METT-TC

“Soldiers will be able to win every ‘intimate’ fight decisively. Technology to achieve dominance in the close fight is cheap: better, lighter and impenetrable body armor; shoulder carried precision missiles that can kill tanks and bunkers at long range; and ‘smart’ small arms that can ‘home’ on to individual targets without aiming.”⁵

battlefield, maneuvering invites annihilation. This mindset has been proven repeatedly in training and combat. As such, in order to continue to fight and win in the envisioned 2030 Marine Corps, the multi-disciplinary Marine needs to be taught how to employ and maintain organic weapons for suppres-

for each specific mission set. All multi-disciplinary Marines will be trained at the fourteen week Infantry Marine Course (IMC). Following successful completion of IMC, Marines selected to serve in the hunter killer platoon will be trained for an additional four weeks on weapon systems organic to the hunter

The hunter killer platoon within the rifle company will allow for continued training and growth of the multi-disciplinary Marines selected to be in the hunter killer platoon upon arriving to the FMF.

sion in support of maneuver at the new Infantry Marine Course prior to joining their FMF units. This instruction must incorporate how capabilities such as those employed in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict support maneuver at ranges greatly exceeding (i.e., by more than seven times) those that light and medium mortars have been able to provide over the past seven decades. The hunter killer platoon enables an infantry company to improve its vital fire support and suppression capacity without sacrificing one third of its maneuver strength.

The Hunter Killer Platoon

From weapons platoon to hunter kill-

killer platoon. The hunter killer platoon within the rifle company will allow for continued training and growth of the multi-disciplinary Marines selected to be in the hunter killer platoon upon arriving to the FMF. Continued growth and progression for Marines will require non-commissioned officers to return to the School of Infantry and receive advanced training at the Advanced Infantry Training Battalion. This model is similar to that of the 75th Ranger Regiment as it relates to their Ranger Assessment and Selection Program I and II.

1. Fires Section

Three 81mm mortars, three 60mm

mortars systems, and three Hero-70 systems within the organic fires section in the arms room. Three Marines per tube, a two-man FDC, and one section leader. Three Marines will man each weapon system selected for employment based on the METT-TC analysis.

2. Machine Gun Section

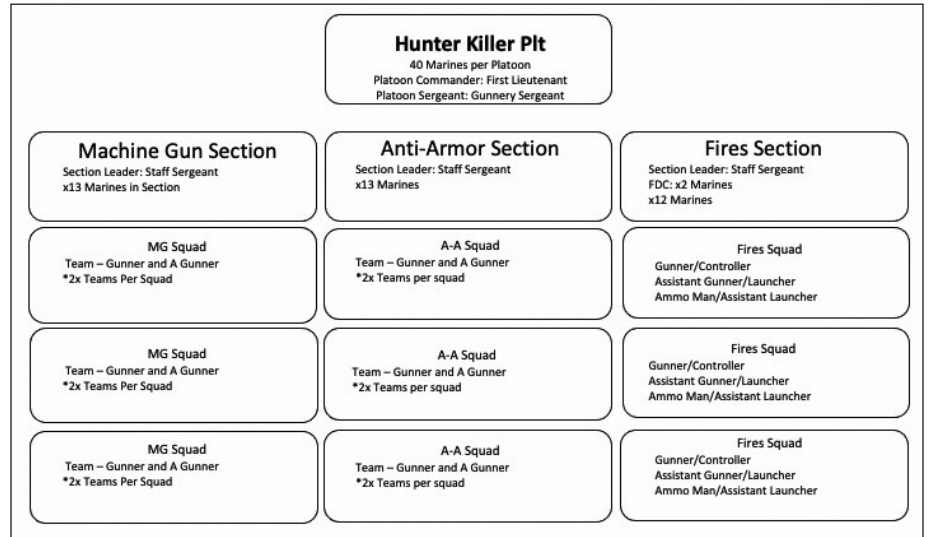
Six M240 machine guns, six .50 cal M2A2 machine guns, and six MK-19s in the machine gun section within the arms room. Two Marines per machine gun, two machine guns per squad, and one section leader. Weapon systems are selected based upon the METT-TC analysis. (Assistant gunners can be supplemented by multi-disciplinary 03xx Marines when MG squads are attached to the rifle platoon.)

3. Anti-Armor Section

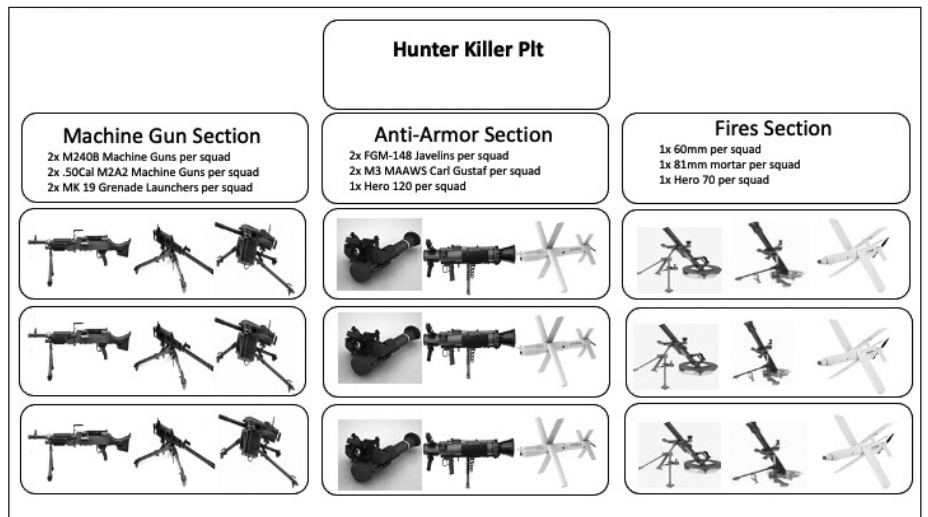
Six FGM-148 Javelins in the anti-armor section (leverage the F Model Missile until procurement of the G Model), three Hero-120 systems, and six Carl Gustafs. Six Anti-Armor Scout teams, two Marines per system, and one section leader. Weapons systems are selected for employment based on the METT-TC analysis.

The hunter killer platoon has forty Marines which represents net new growth. This translates into 120 additional Marines per battalion or 2,520 Marines for the 21 infantry battalions of the 2030 Marine Corps. This will allow our Corps a giant leap in capability enhancement for the base unit; the infantry company of *FD 2030*. The implementation of the hunter killer platoon will allow this company to operate unsupported while dispersed, distributed, and disaggregated across the littorals.

With the creation of the hunter killer platoon within the infantry company, our Corps' foundational unit of deployment will now possess all-weather, close- and long-range fires out to at least twenty miles. To maximize the effectiveness of this new formation, the Marine Corps must expeditiously invest in and train Marines to use loitering munitions. Systems such as the Hero-70 and or the Hero-120 will provide precision close- and long- range fires at the



Proposed Hunter Killer Platoon Organization. (Figure provided by author.)



Proposed Hunter Killer Platoon weapons systems. (Figure provided by author.)

company level while enhancing time on target, providing intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance, enhanced communication, and precision fires. Maintaining the required skills for Marines to employ mortars at the company level will allow for the company to have an all-weather organic fires capability despite the atmospheric and weather conditions within the littorals. Based on the threat, the company commander has the ability to employ close range fires in support of maneuver with 81/60mm mortar assets, employ close range precession strike fires with the Hero-70 or long range anti-tank precision fires with the Hero-120 loitering munition platform. Loitering munitions

have changed the character of war much like the machine gun of World War I, perhaps validating an assertion made five years ago that the “machine gun of the twenty first century” is the armed drone.⁶

The hunter killer platoon will shorten the kill chain at the tactical level and allow targets to be destroyed faster and at a further distance. Additionally, the hunter killer platoon better enables multi-disciplinary infantryman to hone and sustain the level of proficiency needed to employ machine guns, fires, and anti-tank missiles on a distributed and decentralized battlefield. This will provide the type of expeditionary, mobile, and responsive fires needed to con-

front threats across the kinetic spectrum without compromising on the number of available maneuver formations at the platoon and company levels.


Summary

The Marine Corps is at an inflection point in its history and the rifle company is poised to lead the way into the future with a tactically sound, historically grounded, and innovative task organization. The hunter killer platoon will provide the tactical lethality needed to confront a peer competitor or irregular force without presenting an easily exploitable vulnerability from either enemy. In 2006, the Israeli Defense Force discovered the vulnerability of its tanks against well laid, anti-armor, guided missile ambushes. Similarly, Iraqi and Syrian forces found their armored vehicles easily found and targeted by weaponized drones beginning in 2015. This is to say nothing of the United States' own experiences against landmines and improvised explosive devices over the last twenty years. The hunter killer platoon and the arms room concept will allow the rifle company of tomorrow to both exploit peer competitors' reliance on legacy systems while remaining light and mobile enough to deny the enemy a similar opportunity.

In order to create such a structure, the Marine Corps will need to quickly invest in loitering munitions, the infrastructure to support such systems training, and the required personnel to train our Marines going through the Infantry Marine Course, IOC, and subsequent advanced infantry training courses. Most importantly the Marine Corps will need to invest in the additional 2,520 Marines to implement the hunter killer platoon in each of the 21 infantry battalions. The recommended proposal of the hunter killer platoon is not only in line with the CMC planning guidance; it is a force multiplier for our combat effectiveness and efficiency in support of Naval Concepts such as Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment and Expeditionary Advanced Based Operations. The hunter killer platoon offers a way to elevate the combined arms effects and lethality of

HERO-70

Home Tactical Systems Hero-70




Hero-70, Loitering Weapon Systems (uvisionuav.com)

- Extremely lightweight at 7kg, the Hero-70 smart loitering system has a LOS datalink rank of 40km Perfect for light vehicle targets, the solution can ensure 45 minutes of flight time while carrying a warhead of more than one kg.
- Weight: 7 kg
- Warhead: 1.2 kg
- Range (LOS): 40km
- Endurance (min): 45min
- Engine: Electrical
- Launch: Canister

HERO-70. (Figure provided by author.)

HERO-120

Home Tactical Systems Hero-120



Hero-120, Loitering Weapon Systems (uvisionuav.com)

- Ideal for anti-tank missions, or other strategic objectives, the Hero-120 is the largest of the short range systems. It carries a 4.5kg warhead and can endure an extended flight time of 60 minutes.
- Weight: 12.5 kg
- Warhead: 4.5 kg
- Range (LOS): 40km
- Endurance (min): 60min
- Engine: Electrical
- Launch: Canister

HERO-120. (Figure provided by author.)

the future infantry company through increased weapons proficiency as well as maneuver flexibility and capacity.

headquarters where rockets (Bazookas) were also held for allocation as required.

Notes

1. John English, *On Infantry*, (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1981).
2. Ahmed Hashim, *Development of the Squad: Historical Analysis*, (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 2000).
3. From January 1944 to May 1945, the weapons platoon was re-designated a machine gun platoon with the F Series Table of Organization for Rifle Companies. The machine gun platoon had three medium machine gun sections while the 60mm mortars were moved to the company

4. Mark Cancian, "Military Force in FY 2021: Marine Corps," *CSIS*, (November 2020), available at <https://www.csis.org>.

5. Capt John J. Forgione, "Airborne Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance in the Baltics," (student paper, Maxwell AFB, AL, Squadron Officer School, 2021).

6. MajGen Bob Scales, *Scales on War*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016).

