

NEWS FROM THE CTC

23 Aug 2018



Questions of MGS Platoon Relationships Within the SBCT



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Questions of MGS Platoon Relationships Within the SBCT

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The purpose of this article is to discuss the command and control relationship and employment of the mobile gun system (MGS) platoon within the Stryker Brigade. The observations have been collected by the JMRC Observer Controllers during the unit's rotational exercise.

The shrinking size of the MGS (mobile gun system) formation within the Stryker Brigade has created the question of how the platoon maintains a relationship with the Squadron it is aligned to support. The MGS platoon excelled at all assigned missions, providing the Squadron with exactly the firepower the platform is designed to deliver during a rotation. The Squadron's lack of experience utilizing the platoon was evident and raises questions of how we build experience and develop relationships between the Infantry Squadrons and the Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition (RSTA) Squadron's specialty platoons. Our first concern is, will this relationship continue to grow at home station in order to improve on the rotation, or will we start over? Second and most importantly, how can we develop habitual relationships and how can leadership ensure progress is maintained and improved after a Combat Training Center (CTC) rotation?

As early as arrival day one, desynchronization was evident when the MGS platoon arrived with more vehicles than were anticipated. Smaller discrepancies were noticed throughout, but strong leadership within the platoon overcame them. The primary friction point within the platoon during Reception, Staging, Onward movement, and Integration (RSOI) and deployment to the box was mission, or lack thereof. To overcome this, the platoon leader inserted himself into the Squadron planning process to find work for his platoon. While this course of action is functional, it is concerning that the MGS platoon assets are being overlooked and under-utilized during the pre-deployment planning.

Lack of a developed relationship between the Squadron and MGS platoon was most evident during the defensive phase of the rotation. The MGS platoon was tasked as a rear guard, essentially not integrated into the defensive plan of the squadron to maximize the effects of the 105mm cannon. Throughout the defense, the platoon was attached to all three Infantry companies at some point. Upon arrival to each company, the MGS Platoon Leader provided commanders with a capabilities brief and subsequent planning ensued. While this planning is necessary and proper, inexperience was observed and it should not start from scratch every time like strangers meeting for the first time. Improving the relationship between the companies and the MGS platoon leadership would streamline and improve the integration of such a powerful asset to the Infantry company.

The most concerning employment of the MGS platoon occurred during the Squadron's reactive counterattack. The platoon was directed on two separate occasions to attack in zone without support against a confirmed armor and light armor threat. ATP 3-20.16, The Mobile Gun System Platoon, states that:

The MGS platoon provides direct supporting fires to Infantry squads during the assault. Its function is to destroy or suppress hardened enemy bunkers, machine gun positions, and sniper positions. It also creates Infantry breach points in urban, restricted, and open rolling terrain. The MGS cannon provides the platoon with limited antiarmor, self-

defense capabilities. The MGS is not a tank, however, and should not be employed in the same manner as a tank; nor should the MGS platoon be employed in the same manner as a tank platoon.

Sending the platoon directly into battle against enemy main battle tanks and armored personnel carriers is doctrinally ill advised. If not for the lethality of the crews, this platoon would not have succeeded at all. The marginal success of the first instance was a negative teaching tool in that it enabled a second occurrence. Both times the MGS platoon destroyed multiple armor threats but received over 50% combat power loss in the process. As a last resort to defend at all cost, the MGS platoon can and will attempt any mission given; but it should not be used to offensively seek direct fire engagements with enemy main battle tanks.

As the rotation carried on, the relationship between the MGS platoon and Squadron improved greatly. When transitioning to the offense, the companies began to maximize the effects of the MGS in its support by fire and attack positions as doctrinally expected. It was obvious to us that this task had been planned and rehearsed during the rotation.



There are numerous ways that leadership can develop the relationship between the MGS platoon and their assigned squadrons. The Division Artillery model has shown promise in integrating the Fire Support Team (FST) down to the BN level, while maintaining collective control of fires personnel to develop the skills of their branch. Implementing events such as training meeting attendance or attendance staff planning exercises and processes can also help to integrate the MGS platoon to the assigned Squadron. Building a battle rhythm that included the MGS platoon in Squadron training on a regular basis can go a long way in improving the utilization of such a valuable Regimental asset. The important part would be to codify these functions in the SOP of the unit in order to develop and most importantly maintain these habitual relationships into the future.

The platoon leadership and Soldiers performed extremely well in the missions they were given. The Squadron at times put the platoon in less than desirable circumstances, but improved vastly in the integration and utilization of the platoon. The MGS platoon was already planning for a leadership change shortly after the rotation. We advised them to capture the lessons learned at JMRC in their platoon TACSOP to pass on. As Observer Controllers, we have the ability to influence and advise platoons directly while they are here, in this case, we were privileged to have a receptive and motivated platoon, which took our advice, and learned from their own experiences displaying improvement throughout the rotation. The Platoon leadership acknowledged our concerns regarding their working relationship with the Squadron and intended on continuing improvement after the rotation. Their success or failure will be evident the next time the MGS enters the Hohenfels Training Area.

