

Infantry, Armor Work Together on Mobile Protected Firepower

by COL (Retired) Christopher Stone

The Army's decision to move the Armor School back to Fort Benning, GA, in 2011, while accompanied by mixed emotions, proved to be a watershed year for the Army and Columbus, GA. As residents of Columbus, Phenix City and the Chattahoochee Valley enjoyed the prosperity that came with the return of the Armor School, the greatest and most endearing impact can be seen in the collaborative efforts between the infantry and armor commandants and their staffs.

The seamless transition of the Armor and Infantry Schools into one consolidated effort was vital to the success of Fort Benning, according to the commanding general at the time, MG H.R. McMaster. Under his leadership, MG McMaster set the conditions that allowed the Armor and Infantry Schools to thrive and grow into what is now two branches unified as one.

Today, one such effort is the addition and integration of mobile protective firepower (MPF) into the infantry formation. A critical shortfall that had been identified in the infantry formation for several years was finally addressed in a collaborative effort between the armor and infantry community. Fort Benning and the Maneuver Center of Excellence suddenly became the lead for the Army's doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership development, personnel, facilities and policies (DOTMLPF-P) assessment and materiel oversight of the MPF platform.



Figure 1. 82nd Airborne paratroopers, Fort Bragg, NC, integrate Armor vehicles to support combined-arms training. Infantry brigade combat teams are gaining organic light-armor MPF companies to provide them with more firepower to counter near-peer threats. (Photo by SSG Jason Hull)

The first challenge was ensuring that a comprehensive capabilities-requirements document was written and endorsed by both the Armor and Infantry Schools. This required daily input from both staffs during every phase of the DOTMLPF-P assessment. It had been decided very early in the requirements process that MPF would be manned by armor Soldiers, working in close support of infantry Soldiers. It was therefore imperative that the armor community remain actively engaged throughout this process.

This cradle-to-grave approach has been the foundation from which we continue to build the MPF program. As this program is now progressing, we have 19K armored crewmen working at Fort Bragg, NC, as part of 82nd Airborne

Division, testing two vendor prototypes. The MPF program success requires the continued input and emphasis by both the armor and infantry communities.

Another example highlighting the collaborative efforts generated by the Armor and Infantry Schools are in the area of reconnaissance and security. The Army capability managers for both the Armor and Infantry Schools have been diligently working on what capabilities the reconnaissance and security formations must possess in the future to achieve success in a peer-contested environment. This endeavor has been challenging because recommendations to change or alter the current force structure has a rippling effect that applies to everyone.

Also, infantry reconnaissance formations do not look the same as the armor formations, which precludes a cookie-cutter approach to formation design. However, working closely with the Armor and Infantry Schools has proven to be effective because of the ability to bring everybody together to focus on a specific problem set without distraction.

In conclusion, the fortuitous decision to merge the two most lethal and dynamic formations in the Army almost a decade ago has proven to be very effective in materiel and force design. Collaboration that at one time pitted branches against one another in competition of program dollars has become less challenging because collectively the Armor and Infantry Schools are involved in the overall prioritization of maneuver. In short, the decision to move the Armor School to Fort Benning wasn't that difficult. The Army just told the Armor School to go home.

Retired COL Christopher Stone is the deputy director, Army Capabilities Manager-Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), Maneuver Center of Excellence, Fort Benning, GA. Previous assignments include director, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command-IBCT, Fort Benning; deputy commander, 173rd Airborne Brigade, Vicenza, Italy; commander, 5th Ranger Training Battalion, Fort Benning; and executive officer, 75th Ranger Regiment, Fort Benning. COL Stone's military schools include Command and General Staff College, U.S. Army Inspector General's Course, Defense Department Inspector General's Course, Infantry Officer basic and advanced courses, and Ranger, Airborne, Jumpmaster and Air-Assault Courses. He holds a bachelor's of arts degree in international relations from the University of Delaware.

Acronym Quick-Scan

DOTMLPF-P – doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership development, personnel, facilities and policies

IBCT – infantry brigade combat team

MPF – mobile protected firepower