



CONFIGURING ARMORED BATTLEGROUPS IN THE LAND FORCES

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The configuration of military forces in the land forces, especially battlegroups, is a solution for using only those components and microstructures of a military force, at a tactical level, that can be successful in military operations with minimal costs and losses. In modern military operations there is a need to use combat groups that have, as a result of their configuration, a military structure with mobility, firepower and high protection. These conditions can be met by armored vehicles on wheels or tracks, not necessarily tanks, organized in armored battlegroups. The configuration of armored battlegroups in the land forces must respect the principles of the use of military forces in military operations.

Keywords: armored battlegroups; configuring; mobility; firepower; protection; capabilities.

The planning and execution of military actions and operations in the modern battle space will no longer be able to be carried out by military forces or structures organized only by their category, specialty or quantity. It is becoming more and more pressing to configure the forces with those qualitative components and microstructures that can emphasize the existing elements of the combat space, from the ground to the weather conditions at the time of the military operation.

Thus, military operations in modern battle space will be performed by structures with a configuration depending on the mission or objectives to be fulfilled, the nature and value of enemy forces that are in battle space and the nature of own forces available at the time of the military operation.

The combined use of different combat structures in military actions is not necessarily new, the method being used since ancient times when commanders grouped in a single structure, under a single command, cavalry with infantry to achieve victory. Later, the Roman army combined the effect of catapults with the actions of infantry and cavalry in the military actions of that time. More recently, since World War I, there have been several attempts by military commanders and planners to find new tactics, techniques, and methods for using available forces, by temporarily grouping at least two or more different forces structures for fulfilling

a specific mission, respectively breaking through the enemy's lines for that time.

More recently, in order to overcome the situation of the belligerent forces during the First World War, namely the static war, based on trench warfare, each of these parties tried to change in one way or another that tactic by using other techniques to configurate the available military forces.

Thus, to change the result pursued by the German army used *Stormtroopers*, in German *Stoßtruppen*, shock troops, who were trained to fight specific infiltration tactics, part of the new German method of attacking the enemy's trenches, and thus fulfill their purpose.

In the British Army, the trend has been to support the use of combined forces in attack, especially artillery, machine guns and infantry using decentralized fire control and a single command system.

Although the French army intended, through the proposals of captain Andre Laffargue¹, to develop the infiltration tactics and techniques existing at that time, they did not implement them. These proposals referred to the fact that the first wave of an attack had to identify the positions of defence difficult to conquer but not to attack them but only to fix them, letting the subsequent waves to do so.

The Russian army successfully used large-scale shock and infiltration tactics in June 1916 during the Brusilov² offensive, but due to the February 1917 Russian Revolution, their development was not continued.

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Practically, every belligerent part of the First World War tried one way or another to change the way their forces were organized and configured in order to achieve victory in their military campaigns.

The battlegroup, translated from the term "battlegroup", has an etymology that is directly related to the historical evolution of the military.

Battlegroup (British term, BG abbreviation) or Task Force (US term, TF abbreviation) in the military theory of these armies, is "the basic component of the constitution of an army's fighting force"³.

During the Second World War, the first battlegroups appeared in both Germans' and the Allies' armies, as we know them today.

In the German army they were called *Kampfgruppe* (abbreviation KG), representing an ad-hoc assembled combat formations, usually a combination of tanks, infantry, artillery including antitank elements generally organized for a particular activity or operation.

A *Kampfgruppe* could differ in size from a corps to a company, but the most common was a formation of *Abteilung*⁴ size, respectively battalion level.

One of the commanders of the German army at that time who understood and used the effect produced by the combination, especially of tanks with aviation, in the execution of a military operation, was *General Heinz Guderian*. He used, as a method of configuring forces, throughout the war, as commander of tank structures, especially tank and aviation forces, as well as combat support forces, being successful in the military campaign against the Russian army.

Among the armies of NATO member countries, I consider as representative the army of Great Britain and that of the United States of America in the configuration of forces in battle groups of different sizes and values.

In the British Army a battlegroup is defined as an "assembled group of maneuvering combat forces formed on the basis of a command of a combat unit, organized for a specific mission"⁵.

The large number of options for grouping forces to form battle groups led to the development and detailed establishment of specific tactics, techniques and procedures. Moreover, it was necessary to establish the doctrine and tactical options available to commanders and staffs of land battlegroups.

The approach to the use of combat forces combined in combat actions is a tactical concept underlying the doctrine of this army, which accepts the idea that combat forces and units are much more effective when operating in a "combined" manner than when acting separately. Thus, the British designate a battlegroup as the unit of maneuver of basic assembled combat forces consisting of the combination of combat subunits, combat support and service support.

Battlegroups are usually grouped under the command of a brigade headquarter. Exceptionally, they may be placed under the direct command of a division headquarter to perform a specific task. The fundamental benefit of such a battlegroup is the synergy created by the grouping of combat forces specially designed for a specific mission. Moreover, a battlegroup has a task-based mission organization. In order for the mission organization to be able to put into practice a battlegroup must "be able to regroup at both day and night and have common skills throughout the battlegroup but also of the subunits in the composition that will allow the success of the regrouping, and the use of redeployed elements"⁶.

In the U.S. army, in terms of the brigade, as a major unit of reference in planning and conducting all types of operations, we find another perspective on the concept of battlegroup. Thus the new types of brigades were introduced, based on a battlegroup configuration (*brigade combat teams*—BCTs) which, although smaller, are just as or even more effective in major combat operations and stability operations and are much better in interaction with tactical elements other than the basic ones.

Because the new BCTs, considered brigade-level battlegroups, are smaller than the base brigades of the divisions, the army can deploy them in larger numbers and therefore can more effectively meet the geographic combat requirements of the command, while it also ensures a high operational tempo of the army.

At the level of the US military land forces, three types of brigade level battlegroups have been established: mechanized (*Heavy Brigade Combat Team*—HBCT), infantry (*Infantry Brigade Combat Team*—IBCT) and Stryker (*Stryker Brigade Combat Team*—SBCT)⁷.

Regarding the battlegroups, the mechanized battlegroup (*Heavy Brigade Combat Team*—HBCT)

replaces the armored or mechanized brigades of the mechanized divisions, and those separated from tanks, mechanized and armored regiments. These HBCTs have tanks and mechanized infantry in standardized maneuvering battalions of assembled joint forces are able to defeat the military forces of any country when fighting "force-against-force" and are organized to fight in a system of combined forces by at company/team level.

A particular aspect of these battlegroups is that they are organized with self-sustaining capabilities, in the battle space, for up to 72 hours⁸.

Regarding the infantry battlegroup type (*Infantry Brigade Combat Team—IBCT*), designed as a light force, it replaces the special brigades of the airborne, air assault and light infantry divisions. This brigade is the "lightest", based on dismounted infantry, capable of airborne or air assault operations, being designed to operate in restricted terrain.

Regarding the Stryker battlegroup type (*Brigade Combat Team—SBCT*), the newest type is a lightly armored motorized infantry brigade. SBCT combines the deployment capacity of IBCT with the characteristic mobility of HBCT. It is usually structured on three infantry battalions with armored vehicles. SBCTs have some features that other infantry units do not have, the Stryker vehicle offers the advantage of greater mobility along with additional protection⁹.

A closer analysis of the geopolitical context and the security environment of which Romania is a part, and taking into account NATO's military relations with non-Alliance states, shows that there is a need more than ever for an adaptation of national military structures to these possible challenges. Thus, some types of optimal military structures can be identified to face these challenges and how to use them in any possible scenario and in any specific environment.

In this context, following a closer analysis of the military forces of the Member States of the Alliance and of their doctrines, concepts and how to use them in military operations, it is necessary to implement them, with implicit adaptations, in national military structures. All these concepts, of the representative member states of NATO, regarding the use of military structures in military operations start from the principle of combining the effects of the combat power of the forces of different specializations (tanks, infantry, helicopters) in

one, in the same place, at the same time and with maximum effort.

In essence, we must focus on identifying the type of military structure or structures that meet some of the essential requirements of the modern battlefield: high firepower, mobility and extended endurance, equipped with high-performance equipment and trained in specific environments and the possibility of logistical autonomy as much as possible.

A possible solution for a military structure that meets these requirements, at least theoretically and based on the experience of the forces of the representative NATO member states, is at this time the battlegroup. Going further, an armored battlegroup, in which to set up the available armored fighting vehicles, can be a solution for organizing the forces of a mechanized/armored brigade.

A battlegroup can be a combined or joint structure, for a temporary time, under a single command, intended to fulfill a mission received from the higher echelon.

This armored battlegroup must be able to be realized in a very short time, to be functional, to be modular in relation with other existing combat structures, to be equipped with modern equipment with high mobility and firepower, to ensure protection staff, its communications system being reliable and having a clear picture of the tasks and missions that it can perform.

Another aspect of reasoning compels us to consider the organization of a hypothetical enemy. Romania is on the eastern flank of NATO and in our vicinity there is a world military power that could polarize military forces and means without a specific identity to act to fulfill a variable range of goals. We must ask ourselves the following questions: what organization can these forces have?, what equipment do they have?, how do they act in the tactical field?, how do they use the forces and means available in combat?.

Hence our concern to identify which military structures can counteract these actions of the military forces of a hypothetical enemy. Specifically, how own forces can be organized tactically so that the result obtained after their employment is exclusively favorable to own forces, what kind of principles could be used and how the systems related to these forces should be restructured or adapted.



According to FM 100-2-1¹⁰, a possible hypothetical enemy has in its organization and as a way of use in military operations *mobile groups*, respectively, when the enemy is weakened and does not have credible reserves, the second echelon of the army can organize the group of mobile forces consisting of a tank corps or mechanized (normally 1-3 reinforced divisions with highly mobile combat and logistic support elements). *The mobile group* differs from the standard second echelon in that it expects it to go into the depths of the enemy's defence and be able to support itself without additional help. This mobile group will be used by the hypothetical enemy to attack the reserves, headquarters and logistics elements of its own forces. Through this action, if it succeeds, it compels our own forces to polarize other forces, in the depths of own battle space, in order to be able to face the threats of this mobile group. This involves adapting the plan of operations of our own forces or even changing it. We can certainly deduce that if the hypothetical enemy can organize high size mobile groups, respectively corps or division, he can also organize lower size mobile groups, brigade, regiment or battalion level to be used in the same way as mobile division or army corps level group.

These possibilities of a hypothetical enemy compel us to identify solutions in the organization and use of our own forces so that we can counteract its actions in a timely manner.

Increasing the destructive effect, accuracy and speed of reaction, the emergence and development of highly efficient reconnaissance, directing, guidance and hitting systems have produced profound changes in increasing the combat potential of forces, especially if they are organized and used in combination, in a battlegroup. Consequently, certain missions and tactical rules were reconsidered and changes were especially imposed in the identification and organization of structures with a greater combat power and mobility.

Taking into account all the above, I think that in our army we must consider the opportunity to configure and use battlegroups of different types and sizes, the study of the conditions in which commanders would decide to use forces in a slightly different way than the classic based on the requirements of the modern battlefield. Here

we refer both to the essential aspects that must always answer the 5 "C" (who, what, where, when, why?) but also to other requirements regarding the adaptation of tactics and techniques and combat systems to the specifics of some situations that may occur in the battle space.

Next, what will be analyzed are the organization and use of tanks and armored vehicles in mechanized brigades, or more recently armored brigades, within an armored battlegroup structure that can be configured and used in the land forces.

An armored battlegroup refers to its configuration with armored means of combat, on wheels or tracks, not exclusively tanks.

In my opinion, an armored battlegroup is a tactical military structure formed by attaching to tank structures, for example to the tank battalion, company or platoon level structures, as a whole or in part of subunits, a number of infantry subunits equipped with infantry fighting vehicles and combat support subunits necessary for this military structure to fulfill a specific mission. The mandatory condition for the battlegroup to be armored is that all forces be equipped with armored equipment, on tracks or wheels. As for the command of this military structure, it may belong to the tank battalion or a staff especially generated for the mission to be performed.

In order to support the use of tanks and armored vehicles in armored battlegroups, we need to pay attention to the following factors: the combat power of a battlegroup in which to use tanks and armored vehicles increases significantly, the mobility that such a battlegroup can have and especially the speed with they can act on the enemy is very high, the possibility of performing maneuvers over large spaces and especially in the depths of the enemy's battle space recommends these battlegroups as the most effective in military operations of land forces.

In my argument for the organization of armored battlegroups within the mechanized/armored brigade, I support, mainly, the organization and use of at least two tank-based battlegroups and two infantry-based battlegroups equipped with infantry fighting machines. Depending on the tactical situation, the number of battle groups and their composition may be different.

As a possible example, I would like to bring the following: the mechanized brigade is organized, in



principle, on combat forces, respectively infantry and tanks battalions with a number of armored vehicles that may differ depending on the organization, combat support forces and logistics forces¹¹. The organization may result, at least theoretically, in the following armored battlegroups: an armored battlegroup organized on two tank companies with two infantry companies, two armored battlegroups organized on one tank company and two infantry companies and one battlegroup organized on two infantry companies. An infantry company remains as a reserve for the mechanized brigade.

The battlegroups in which armored vehicles predominate will be used for offensive actions, battlegroups organized on infantry will be used for defensive actions and the battlegroup consisting only of infantry can be used as a reserve, for force protection actions, ensuring points of mandatory crossing, the destruction of air assault troops and the fixation of the enemy.

The above example is theoretical; the real organization of the battlegroups is given by the tactical and terrain situation. It is very possible that their architecture might be different from the example given above, but in essence, by organizing battlegroups in which the tanks and armored fighting vehicles are used, the aim is to achieve the desired goal and final state.

A major influence on the organization of battle groups is played by the enemy and its organization for combat and implicitly the form of combat and maneuver adopted by our own forces. An optimal option would be to organize a battalion-level armored battlegroup, consisting only of tanks, infantry fighting machines, self-propelled ground artillery and armored anti-aircraft artillery, for the *decisive operation* of the mechanized brigade and two to three armored battlegroups for *shaping operations*.

This armored battle group relies, in particular, on the use of tanks and infantry fighting vehicles to achieve the desired result or final state, namely the defeat of the enemy through bold offensive actions, quickly and firmly executed.

Certainly, in all military operations in which armored battlegroups will be used, anti-armored helicopters will also be used to fight against enemy helicopters and armored vehicles. In this case, the combat power of the battle group increases and will lead to an increase in personnel confidence in achieving success on the battlefield.

The configuration of an armored battlegroup takes into a consideration a careful analysis of the needs/possibilities ratio and on this basis the determination of the optimal structure of combat forces, combat support forces and logistics forces suitable for the mission to be fulfilled. Ideally, the respective armored battlegroup should be strengthened in proportion to the mission to be accomplished and the existing threat. It must be taken into account that the resources of forces and means of the brigade are limited, and in the situation of setting up battlegroups, the basic element being the structure of forces and means at that time and some possibilities of support from the upper echelon.

The actional structure of an armored battlegroup must be balanced, the combat forces corresponding to the mission and the support forces proportional to the size of the fighting forces and the specifics of the mission. Its actional possibilities therefore depend directly on the composition of the brigade and the degree of its capabilities.

One factor influencing the formation of armored battlegroups is the support forces, and in particular, the artillery and air defence forces. The more forces we have at our disposal, the more battlegroups can be configured. Depending on the tactical situation and the terrain, it is not necessary to configure many battlegroups, but only as many as are needed, but with a high combat power. An armored battlegroup without air defence is very vulnerable on the battlefield to the air threat and the possibilities of use in combat are reduced. Also, the lack of artillery can negatively influence the fulfillment of the mission.

The fundamental advantages of armored battlegroups are the mobility and combat power generated by the group of forces set up for a specific mission. Referring to the organization for the mission, an armored battlegroup must be able to regroup quickly, day and night, in any operation and be composed of subunits of tanks, infantry and combat support forces collectively trained, allowing the possibility of regrouping and putting into operation the elements already deployed.

Regardless of the specificities of the grouping, the full potential of the armored battle group can be developed only if the collective training and command unit are performed at the highest degree of discipline.



Based on his estimate and plan, the brigade commander will organize for the mission one or more armored battlegroups by attaching or reinforcing with subunits or elements within the structure of the brigade taking into account the available tank structure. The organization of the forces for the mission must be the most appropriate for the accomplishment of the entrusted mission.

In order to outline our image of how a battlegroup organized at the level of the mechanized/armored brigade works on the battlefield, we tried to highlight the role of the two main combat forces, tanks and infantry, but also of their combination during combat, both in the operation offensive as well as in the defence operation. The role of combat support forces and logistics forces is no less important, but we intend to bring to the fore aspects of combat power and maneuverability of tanks and infantry equipped with infantry fighting vehicles in battlegroups.

The combat power of an armored battlegroup is generated by the combined use of tanks and infantry fighting vehicles in a certain way during military operations. The combat power of the battlegroup can be increased or decreased depending on the mission it has to fulfill.

Regarding the maneuver, the unrestricted terrain is favorable to conduct military operations characterized by the efficient use of tanks and armored vehicles within the armored battlegroup. In this field, the infantry supports the forward movement of the tanks by ensuring immediate safety, maintaining key points, clearing enemy trenches and increasing direct fire with light weapons and anti-tank weapons. Restrictive terrain increases the vulnerability of armored battlegroups by reducing the speed, mobility and reduced fire power advantages of tanks and infantry fighting vehicles.

To best exploit the offensive capabilities of an armored battlegroup's force, tanks and mechanized infantry must work together to pursue the common goal. Each of the elements of the battlegroup provides a degree of direct support to the other element. If they act separately, both tanks and infantry, there is a good chance that they will be neutralized or taken out of battle quickly.

At the level of mechanized/armored brigades we consider that this way of using tank and armored structures (infantry fighting vehicles) can be

applied to fulfill precise purposes and here I refer, in particular, to the organization of battlegroups consisting of tanks, infantry, helicopters and combat support forces.

In order to configure the armored battlegroup, the units and subunits that are to be part of it require a regrouping in a certain area or district established by the brigade commander. Regrouping is, in principle, a simple action but requires practice and training. Regrouping within the battlegroup or between such groups may take place before or during the operation. This takes time and if not done at the right time it can result in the loss of this favorable moment as well as the loss of the armored battlegroup.

Usually, a battlegroup organized within the mechanized brigade may include¹²:

- a battlegroup headquarter;
- 3 to 5 maneuver groups, usually consisting of infantry, armored and if there is the possibility and aviation elements;
- 1 reconnaissance subunit supported, when necessary, by armored vehicles, infantry, aviation or engineering reconnaissance vehicles;
- 1 maneuver support subunit which may include guided anti-tank weapons or grenade launchers;
- 1 to 3 artillery subunits/units;
- 1 to 3 air defence subunits/units;
- an engineering structure to which is added the organization for the mission of the means specific to the service;
- logistics elements: logistics support detachment, part of the logistics of the "parent" unit for each fighting unit, a medical subunit.

Although the battlegroup can be considered to replace the term "detachment", a difference can be made between them: high flexibility in the organization/composition of the battlegroup, high degree of independence, accentuated maneuvering role and independence in actions, obtaining the desired effect of combat power due to the accumulation of combat potentials of the components. The detachments are organized mainly for a single mission, precise and often led by the upper echelon while at the level of the battlegroup its commander has freedom of action and can perform several tasks both specified and implied.

Conclusions

We consider that the theoretical aspects presented from the specifics of the British and US armies can be a documented reference point in the development of the concept of organization and use of armored battlegroups, in which to configure the tanks and armored vehicles of the mechanized/armored brigade with the amendment to achieve the concordance with the reality and the specific military existing at the moment in the Romanian Army.

For supporting any approach in adopting the concept of armored battlegroup, we must consider some doctrinal aspects regarding the use of the armored battlegroup, tactics, techniques and methods that are applied at this tactical level and a series of missions of the elements that configure a military structure organized on a mission.

The configuration of the armored battlegroups must respect the principles of use in combat of the structures that will compose it.

This manner of configuration and employment in combat of armored battlegroups can increase the efficiency of the specific tasks and missions of the land forces, efficiency characterized in particular by speed, strength and accuracy of maneuver, loss reduction, economy of forces and means, covering a wider range of possibilities in the tactical field.

Regarding the use of tanks combined with other branches and especially with infantry and combat helicopters, which is not necessarily new, taking into account that in the Romanian military literature a number of ways of combined use of these forces have been developed, I want to emphasize that in order to accomplish a mission or seize an objective in the battlefield, it is best to find the optimal solution for configuring the forces available for battle, in a battlegroup, the most suitable being an armored battlegroup, so that once put into action it achieves the planned result. Certainly, a well-organized armored battlegroup with tanks, mechanized infantry, armored vehicles and supported by helicopters and other combat support forces will defeat the enemy when it is on defence and will break through the enemy's defence on the offensive. A major contribution to achieve success is brought by the maximum exploitation of the terrain and the weather conditions.

As a general conclusion we can say that it is absolutely necessary to identify the optimal solutions for the organization and use of military

forces and implicitly of tanks and armored vehicles within the structures of the land forces, in military operations. These solutions for organization and use must be able to be used successfully against a hypothetical enemy. Once identified, these solutions can be put into practice, first at a lower tactical level to eliminate any possible gaps. This implies the elaboration of a normative framework, respectively specific regulations and instructions that are in line with the reality on the ground regarding the capabilities of combat equipment and weapons systems of the land forces.

NOTES:

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2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brusilov_Offensive accessed on 22.05.2020.

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_group, accessed on 22.05.2020.

4 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abteilung>, accessed on 24.05.2020.

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7 FM 3-90.6, *The Brigade Combat Team*, Headquarters Department of the Army, Washington DC, 4 August 2006, p. xvi.

8 *Ibidem*, p. 12-1.

9 *Ibidem*, p. A-7

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