

## LAV: What It Can Do

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By the end of this year the first light armored vehicles (LAVs) will arrive in the FMF. The long wait and anticipation for their arrival will finally be over. Many things, however, are left to be done, such as the training of vehicle crews and maintenance personnel, the solution to unseen logistic support problems, and the development of tactical doctrine for the LAV battalion. This article will attempt to suggest concepts concerning LAV employment and tactical use.

Any discussion of LAV employment must first consider what the vehicle is capable of and, just as importantly, what it is not capable of. First and foremost the LAV is not a tank. It will be vulnerable to direct fire from almost any armor-penetrating round, regardless of the caliber. It will not be able to

move across open terrain with the impunity of a tank or conduct a high speed frontal assault against anything other than the most lightly armed defensive position. It will not provide the using force with a great deal of shock action or overwhelming firepower.

If this is what the LAV is not, what does it contribute to our force structure? In a nutshell the LAV offers mobility, speed, and flexibility. Its 25mm chain gun will be effective against other light armored vehicles and in support of a dismounted ground assault. It will provide a much needed vehicular capability for the Corps' flexible response forces. The Marine Corps has always prided itself on being highly mobile, capable of embarking forces rapidly and inserting them worldwide in a timely manner. The problem revolves around the

amount of equipment, particularly heavier type vehicles, such as tanks and self propelled artillery, that can be mounted out with the initial forces arriving on the scene. With space at a premium it was difficult, before the LAV, to have any vehicle with even a minimal amount of firepower, armor protection, and mobility arrive on the scene early. Now that is changed. Transportable in adequate quantities by sea and air (5 per C-5A), the LAV can be there right at the onset of any operation.

The LAV experiences its greatest limitations in offensive combat. Due to its light armor and lack of overwhelming firepower, its use as an assault vehicle is questionable. It is capable of using mobility to maneuver on the battlefield, but the use of covered and concealed routes must be emphasized as the vehicle does not possess great survivability. Employing available LAV units in mass will enhance their chances of survival by improving mutual support and grouping together the firepower that it does possess. Piecemeal attacks will be defeated piecemeal by any even moderate-

cannot move under their own power would have to be abandoned. Minor repairs and maintenance can be performed at rest stops or in temporary assembly areas, but extensive stops for major repairs would risk the command. Seriously damaged vehicles could be left in place for later recovery by advancing friendly forces, or if convenient, evacuated by CH-53E helo. Replacement vehicles could be transported to the force in the same way. This type of helicopter "towing service" depends upon the air and antiair threat in the area and the enemy's ability to locate the force by spotting the helicopter traffic.

Here is the crux of the logistic plan. The resupply of the LAV force must be coordinated and planned so that the force is not excessively endangered when resupplied with spare parts, fuel, ammunition, food, and water.

Medical planning and POW planning are closely tied to the logistic problem. Except for emergency cases, wounded Marines would be evacuated by helicopter during resupply. The mobility of the vehicles eliminates the need to evacuate those with minor wounds. Again the need to evacuate wounded must be weighed against the possibility of the enemy locating the force.

Prisoners of war, when taken, may be handled in one of two ways. The force would have little capability to handle many prisoners. After prelimin-

ary interrogation, low ranking prisoners could be released. Prisoners whose rank makes them possible intelligence sources should be taken with the LAV force and evacuated with resupply helicopters.

Logistics planning must be detailed and thorough if the LAV force is to operate within the enemy's territory and survive. The LAV is more likely to survive a vague and ad hoc scheme of operations than a sketchy logistics plan.

*Command and Control:* A well thought-out plan for command and control and the communications to execute it are as important as the logistic plan. Adequate means to coordinate supporting arms and pass intelligence are extremely important. The lifeline of the LAV force will be its means to communicate logistic and fire support requirements back to the MAGTF commander.

The MAGTF commander must allow the LAV commander the greatest flexibility in carrying out his mission. The movement of the LAV force will be driven by its knowledge of the strength and type of opposing forces it encounters. A good MAGTF commander will give the LAV commander his head.

This operating flexibility does not, however, negate the requirement for detailed planning in command and control. The force must use rally

ly equipped enemy. The LAV's greatest asset in the offensive mode is in its mobility. It can position forces rapidly at critical points on the battlefield. It also can be effective at night using the cover of darkness to conceal movement up to and beyond the enemy's forward elements. However, offensive activity will not be the vehicle's long suit due to its inherent deficiencies.

The LAV will be able to capitalize more frequently on its positive characteristics in defensive operations. As part of a covering force, LAV units will be able to screen the elements in the main battle area. Task organized with tanks and TOW, its capabilities could be upgraded to handle both guard and covering missions. A reconnaissance/cavalry type mission is perfectly suited for LAV units. It places them in a position where maneuver and speed are imperative and can be exploited to compensate for lack of firepower and armor protection. Such covering force elements would augment our traditional reconnaissance elements inserted by air or foot. So capable could the vehicle become in this

area that a strong case could be made for giving the LAV to reconnaissance units and upgrading their roles.

Once the LAV units complete their covering force mission and are withdrawn behind the forward edge of the battle area several potential missions are possible. The LAV unit could become part of a counterattack force. If this is done, the offensive deficiencies of the unit must again be considered. Task organization with tanks is a must here. Their employment should not position them where they would be required to blunt a penetration, but should emphasize striking deep against infantry units moving forward or against the enemy's advanced command, control, and logistic elements. Here, once again, the LAV must be pitted against targets that it can handle, such as mounted infantry and other soft skinned vehicles.

Another sound mission for the LAV units in the defense is rear area security. We can expect the enemy in a high threat scenario to launch air mobile and paratroop forces against our rear areas. The LAV unit is ideal to move out and re-

spond to such landings and insertion. The 25mm chain gun will be a very effective system against the HIND D/E and other helicopters. This is an ideal mission for the LAV in that once again the mobility features are maximized and armor and armament deficiencies minimized.

This has been a brief attempt to suggest some concepts for LAV employment. The acquisition of this vehicle will add greatly to the capability and flexibility of the Marine division. However, the LAV must be employed properly. We must learn to protect our armor assets and not squander them in what Guderian called "pennypackets." We must hoard them, mass them, and use them when a significant decision can be reached on the battlefield. This is true for tanks as well as LAVs. The doctrine we develop must be sound. It must maximize LAV capabilities, maximize the possibility of mission success, and maximize the life expectancy of the Marine riding inside. Developing and refining such a doctrine is one of our current challenges.

points, assembly areas, and other control measures to handle every conceivable situation. Rendezvous points must be designated in case the force becomes scattered. Beyond internal command and control measures, detailed measures are required to prevent the LAV company's destruction by friendly forces. Also, when the LAV company operation comes to an end, the measures to conduct the link-up operation must prevent friendly fire casualties.

All the the command and control measures must be designed to operate and to allow positive control in an environment of electronic and counterelectronic warfare.

### SUMMARY

The Marine Corps no longer plans to land into the teeth of enemy defenses. The ability of LCACs to open 70 percent of the world's coastline enables the MAGTF to land on undefended or lightly defended beaches. The lack of mobility inherent with the majority of the landing force prevents the total exploitation of the LCAC's capability. It does no good to place combat power ashore if that power cannot influence combat at the objective. The LAV's mobility can overcome this distance problem. The basic concept of a fast, highly mobile force conducting independent operations

supporting the primary force is not new. It is new, however, to a generation of Marines tied to the speed of an LVTP-7 and the mobility of a 6x6 truck. The emergence of the LAV and the development of the LCAC provide expanded opportunities for Marines to counter the strengths and to exploit the weaknesses of future highly mechanized adversaries.

The MAGTF commander must recognize that utilizing an LAV company in such a manner as discussed in this article is fraught with danger. Disaster, however, also walks hand-in-hand with timid tactics and old concepts when facing an opponent with numerous mechanized forces.

The LAV company commander must be bold to a point just short of recklessness. This boldness must be grounded in a firm knowledge of the strengths, weaknesses, and capabilities of his men and their vehicles and combined with a detailed understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, and capabilities of his opponent. His staff planning must be immaculate, for the survival of the company depends upon planning as much as coolness under fire.

Only by bold, innovative, and detailed planning followed by swift and aggressive leadership can the MAGTF decisively defeat the highly mechanized enemy it will face in the future. USMC