



# ARMOR-INFANTRY INTEGRATION LESSONS LEARNED

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**Editor's Note:** During the events highlighted within the article, the M10 Booker — formerly known as Mobile Protected Firepower (MPF) — was being tested for the U.S. Army as a program of record. Since then, the M10 Booker program was canceled. Regardless, the tactics, techniques, and procedures of infantry-armor integration discussed within can be adapted to any armored platform.

Throughout the latter stages of 2024 and early 2025, 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment had a unique opportunity to train and fight an opposing force (OPFOR) alongside the Booker Test Detachment, an armor company of tanks known as Charlie Company, 73rd Armor Regiment. Though the M10 Booker program was ultimately canceled, the training and testing period of over six months enabled a rare, sustained relationship between a light infantry battalion and an armored force. While it is common to have a similar task organization at a combat training center (one that incorporates non-organic armored platforms), we found that integration did not come easily. Indeed, such partnerships must be cultivated and sustained for effective combined arms maneuver.

This article briefly highlights 10 areas worthy of leaders' attention moving forward.

**Increased protection and speed led to opportunity when leveraged appropriately.** We continually referred to the Booker by its original name "mobile protected firepower;" these three important words gave the necessary symbiotic relationship between any mounted and dismounted force. The "mobility" came in the form of a fast-moving asset that could gain an advantageous position

*Soldiers assigned to 3rd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment breach a razor wire barrier on 20 March 2024 during a Joint Readiness Training Center rotation at Fort Polk, LA. (Photo by PFC Luciano Alcala)*

or exploit opportunity in a fraction of the time of our light Infantrymen. While our battalion typically used the M10 in a support role, we experimented with using it to quickly assault objectives and open routes. Moreover, we found that we could rapidly reinforce areas where our forces were more or less successful in making gains against a free-thinking OPFOR. The "protected" element enabled these gains, often moving through fire that would have otherwise limited a light element. Finally, the "firepower" inherent to an armored force was effective at detecting and destroying enemy forces at an extended range beyond that which is organic to light infantry units. From the optics on a main gun to the simple elevation beyond human height, these platforms enable more than many might appreciate. Moreover, powerful, non-guided rounds pass through much more than the dismounted anti-tank systems.

**Rehearsing actions on contact were critical to ensuring the only casualties were those inflicted on the enemy.** The process of working through standard operating procedures for marking/visual indicators, communications, how to move in vicinity of tanks and dismounts, and where each element should be cannot be understated. Units should start with a full force walk-through of drills. Ideally, these are done with armor crews in their vehicles and infantry personnel moving in an open area. These efforts help everyone understand positioning and work through friction before having to deal with the enemy at the same time.

**Light infantry rarely deals with high-caliber rounds and their impact on surface danger zones.** Initial integration training must include a discussion between tank crews and dismounted infantry personnel about the risk associated with being around the tank when certain rounds, particularly sabot, are fired from a main gun. Consequently, dismounts learned to stay low and maintain an appropriate distance from their tanks. Alternatively, tank crews put thought into which rounds were in their ready rack given proximity to those dismounted forces.

**Dismounted routes vs mounted routes and concealment.** Leaders quickly learned that there are differences in how infantry and armor leaders view terrain. Armor crews preferred to fight in open terrain that dismounts could not wait to get away from. Because the idea behind the Booker was to support dismounted infantry, the unit primarily moved off-road. In doing this, armor crews realized they would have trouble taking the same routes; therefore, the unit developed a practice of having infantry visually clear routes while they moved so the tanks could quickly move into place when needed.

Due to noise concerns, armor elements would remain 1-2 kilometers away, but infantry elements quickly realized just how fast these elements could move up to support. Many times, the very road the armor elements were traveling on was designated as a phase line or restrictive fire line, given its clearly identifiable nature. These designations helped simplify communication between two forces coming together, typically while in contact.

Still, armor elements regularly moved into the woods even if it meant taking down some vegetation in the process. Roads are important terrain for both sides, and sometimes moving just a little bit off the road makes a huge difference. This seemed uncomfortable at times for armor crews, but

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they gained confidence in their capabilities and a better understanding of their limitations. Armor elements also had to learn they needed to move into vegetation immediately every time they stopped.

**Early planning better enables integration.** Like any enabler element, the earlier leaders integrate into planning the better the plan will be. Armor platoon leaders were constantly reminded of the importance of being in the hip pocket of company commanders during planning so the commander understood employment considerations. Many times, as is likely to happen in an actual scenario, the armor elements were pulled away during troop leading procedures (TLPs) (for us it was often testing related, but in combat it could be for maintenance), but when they were part of the planning process early, the platoon leader would still be able to properly prepare their elements.

**Communications remain key.** Though the Bookers were equipped with Integrated Tactical Network (ITN) capabilities, armor crews are very used to using Joint Battle Command-Platform (JBC-P) while most of the 82nd Airborne is working with the Android Tactical Assault Kit (ATAK). Rifle companies ended up loaning a few ATAK systems to their Booker counterparts, and it was incredibly valuable for battle tracking. Whatever primary, alternate, contingency, emergency (PACE) plan the supported unit is using, it's worth going through several communications exercises and ensuring supporting leaders understand what nets they need to be on. In addition to anticipated comms challenges using new vehicles, it took some time to get everyone on the same systems and nets. When all is lost, old fashioned hand-and-arm signals are crucial.

**Armor-Infantry "wingman" pairing.** Booker armor crews were very uncomfortable being out of sight with their wingman, which initially resulted in them being right next to each other in the dense vegetation. As we dug in more, we came to understand the



Paratroopers in the 82nd Airborne Division maneuver as a firing squad during a live-fire exercise at Fort Bragg, NC, on 27 July 2025. (Photo by SPC Aiden O'Marra)

anxiety about potentially being destroyed and explained to them that dismounted infantry could report on their status and request assistance in the event the tank was destroyed. In these instances, small units still had an armored wingman that could quickly move in to support, but that wingman might be slightly offset watching down another avenue of approach. Combined with the dismounts, the two vehicles were still mutually supporting.

**Command and control (C2) relationships are an important start.** We had to make clear that platoons or sections were being attached to an infantry company or platoon and that they needed to talk directly to those commanders. This seems obvious, but with the platoon and company leadership also on the battlefield, there was a tendency to revert to organic chain of command, and C2 waters became muddled. Armor assets were the most frequently re-tasked assets on the battlefield so their ability to change radio nets and understand the broader C2 structure was pivotal.

**Rehearsals, over and over.** The importance of spending time training alongside each other, seeing what the other sees, and rehearsing together cannot be understated. Rehearsals were a pivotal reason we were able to increase our pace, build lethality, and suffer fewer casualties as we continued to launch attacks against a similar-sized enemy with the benefit of being in the defense.

**Call the experts early.** Our combined training approach started with classroom sessions focused on capabilities, best practices, and historical vignettes. They were followed closely by an informal “petting zoo” to get leaders side-by-side around the vehicles with time to go through the finer points of these large pieces of equipment. As we moved into operations, we kept experts closely tied into battalion-level planning processes to make sure we accounted for every-



*Leaders with the 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment and C Company, 3rd Battalion, 73rd Armor Regiment, conduct a rehearsal during a training exercise at Fort Bragg, NC. (Photo courtesy of author)*

thing from sustainment to protection. This significantly mitigated challenges we otherwise would have faced.

The lessons learned throughout this experience were not groundbreaking, but they did highlight a gap in experience that many infantry leaders have in how to best integrate and fight alongside an armor force. Regardless of what the platform may be, maneuver leaders should seek every opportunity to conduct combined arms training with armor and infantry forces side-by-side to increase understanding and reinforce fundamental principles of warfighting.

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*M1A2 Abrams Main Battle Tank crews assigned to the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division move into an area occupied by simulated enemy forces during a JRTC rotation at Fort Polk on 18 March 2024. (Photo by PFC Luciano Alcala)*