

The Infantry Squad Part 2: How Did We Get Here?

By Chris Raynor
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Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment provide suppressive fire on a target during a training exercise at Pohakuloa Training Area, Hawaii, on June 6, 2012, as part of the Theatre Security Cooperation Program. Blank and live fire exercises are a critical part of infantry training, allowing Soldiers to practice infantry tactics in realistic scenarios. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Daniel Kyle Johnson, 2nd BCT, 25th ID)

Part one (<http://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2018/March/Infantry-Squad-Part-1/>) of this article covered the development of the infantry squad and its doctrine. With the lessons from World War I and World War II fresh in their memory, Army infantry leaders discussed how to apply those lessons to redefine the size, combat power, and doctrine of the squad. From this point, we will discuss how those lessons turned the squad into a weapon system and how those decisions effected the Army in Korea and Vietnam.

A Weapon System

"A combination of one or more weapons with all related equipment, materials, services, personnel, and means of delivery and deployment (if applicable) required for self-sufficiency."¹

With years of tactical and doctrinal refinements, along with advances in equipment and weapons, the infantry squad's traditional role became increasingly flexible. This adaptability allows them to have a symbiotic relationship with armor, artillery, helicopters and other weapon systems. The continual improvements in doctrine, training and equipment morphed the infantry squad from a unit of Soldiers, all with the same equipment, to a more versatile weapon system, capable of taking on different missions.

Development of Infantry Specialization

Field Manual 3-12.10, *The Infantry Rifle Company* (https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/fm3_21x10.pdf), separates infantry companies into four types: infantry, ranger, heavy and stryker, each with its own doctrine, capabilities, and unique mission.² This installment will examine the squads in the heavy and infantry companies, as they have the closest ties to the 1946 infantry conference, along with how changes and developments impacted the Korean conflict and the Vietnam War.

In the early days of WWII, the German blitzkrieg tactics of the late 1930s created a new paradigm: no longer was warfare fought in trenches, trading inches of territory at a time. Now, due to the mechanization of infantry units, changes to the front lines were measured in miles.³ With improvements in speed and weapon development, the U.S. Army began integrating tank battalions with infantry divisions and developed doctrine for tank infantry support. To allow infantry Soldiers to keep up with the speed and distance tanks could cover, the Army created armored infantry and mounted them on M2/M3 half-track personnel carriers.⁴

The armored infantry's role was to protect tanks from enemy infantry and anti-tank units. While armored squads were smaller than traditional squads, this deficiency was made up with increased firepower from the half-tracks' M2 .50 caliber and M1918 .30 caliber machine guns. When the situation required, they could also call on tanks and other specialized vehicles equipped with anti-tank guns and mortars to provide fire support.⁵

After WWII, armored infantry doctrine continued under the name of mechanized infantry, as vehicles changed from the half-track to the M113 Armored Personnel Carrier in the 1960s and 70s. In the 1980s, the M2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle added better protection, giving the infantry a better platform to fight from while providing increased firepower. In addition to the improved protection and weapons, the Bradleys were able to keep up with the M1 Abrams Main Battle Tank.

In 2002, the Army introduced the M1126 Stryker Combat Vehicle, which was designed to transport a full squad and came in several configurations. With the different models of Strykers, a Stryker Brigade Combat Team closely resembled a 1940s armored infantry regiment. Although the vehicles change, doctrine remains the same, and interoperability became the infantry squad's hallmark.⁶

Today, the rapid pace of combat has changed infantry movement on the battlefield. To help infantry Soldiers keep up with the faster pace, infantry brigade combat teams now have access to a variety of vehicles and helicopters to conduct operations. In addition to traditional maneuver methods, specially identified IBCTs can conduct airborne and air assault operations.

Airborne:

In 1942, the first of the parachute infantry regiments stood up at Camp Toccoa, Georgia.⁷ The 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment (WWII Airborne) was designed to be a light and mobile parachute infantry regiment. Doctrine in FM 100-5, *Field Service Regulations, Operations* (<http://cdm16040.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll9/id/24>), dated 1941, stated:

Parachute troops may be considered as the advanced guard element of air troops or other military or naval forces. They constitute a powerful surprise factor and usually are employed in conjunction with air landing or mechanized troops in the path of the main ground effort, or close in rear of the enemy front line.⁸

Combat jumps made by WWII airborne infantry helped solidify its inclusion into Army doctrine, providing a valuable resource for war planners when a rapid deployment was needed to restrict enemy access, capture key points, or shape the battlefield.⁹ Since their inception, airborne infantry squads have jumped into every major conflict.

Air Assault:

At the start of Vietnam, helicopters improved infantry movement on the battlefield. They gave planners the capability to deploy forces over the enemy or into positions to block them. With their tactical mobility, helicopters could conduct lightning raids to eliminate enemy command structure, communications, and logistics trails. Lessons learned through the use of helicopters in Vietnam solidified air assault doctrine.⁹

Korea

In June of 1950, the outbreak of hostilities on the Korean peninsula came too soon for the Army to follow through with all of the changes suggested by the 1946 Infantry Conference. At the time of the North Korean invasion, the changes made to infantry squad doctrine included a change in tactics and reducing the squads to nine men. The weapons intended to support the tactical and doctrinal changes were still under development. The effect of the developmental lag for suitable weapons and a change in doctrine meant Soldiers had to go into combat with outdated weapons and without a suitable lightweight machine gun.¹¹

To meet the increased demand for firepower at the squad level until a new machine gun was developed, the Army added an additional BAR to every squad.¹² The additional firepower continued until 1957 when the M60 Machine Gun took its place.

At the end of the Korean conflict, leaders reviewed the lessons learned and found that the nine-man squad size met doctrinal needs and proved to be the right size for the squad leader's command and control.¹³

NCO In Action:

Sgt. Einar H. Ingman, Jr., Company E, 17th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, distinguished himself for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty. On February 26, 1951, during an attack on enemy positions, the leading squads of the assault platoon were pinned down by withering fire wounding both squad leaders and several men. Ingman, a corporal at the time, assumed command, reorganized and combined the two squads; then, while moving from position to position, he designated fields of fire and gave advice and encouragement to the men.



Upon discovering an enemy machine gun pinned down his men, he charged it, threw a grenade into the position and killed the crew with rifle fire. A second enemy machine gun opened fire, inflicting additional casualties and halting the platoon's attack. As Ingman charged the second position he was seriously wounded by



Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. Einar H. Ingman Jr. (U.S. Army Photo)

changed the second position, he was severely wounded by fragments from an enemy grenade. With incredible determination, he killed the entire gun crew before falling unconscious. As a result, his squad secured its objective, forcing more than 100 enemy soldiers to retreat.¹⁴

Ingman was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Harry Truman on July 5, 1951.

During Ingman's funeral

(<http://tomahawkleader.com/attachments/2015/IngmanTribute2015.pdf>) in 2015, the pastor of the Grace Lutheran Church, Mark Ziemer, summed up Ingman's character by saying, "Ingman lived, not as a war hero, but as someone who did his job."¹⁵

Vietnam

After Korea, the Army again changed the rifle squad size. Despite the outcome of the 1946 conference and four major studies (all of which agreed with the conference's conclusions), Army leaders changed the squad size from nine men to eleven and returned to the 1940s doctrine of fire and maneuver.¹⁶

As the Army entered combat operations in Vietnam, the squads were built around two fire teams and a squad leader. Each fire team in the squad was made up of a fire team leader, an automatic rifleman with an M60, an assistant gunner, and a grenadier armed with an M79 Grenade Launcher. The balance of the squad was made up of three riflemen who, depending on the mission, could be attached to either of the two fire teams. A typical configuration consisted of two riflemen attached to Alpha fire team and the third attached to Bravo fire team.¹⁷

In Vietnam, infantry squads were equipped with the M14 Rifle, the M60 Machine Gun, and the M79 Grenade Launcher. However, the negative characteristics of the M14 design troubled many infantry soldiers. Chambered in 7.62x51mm NATO, its weight (nine pounds) made it heavy to carry, while the large caliber gave it a tendency to climb when fired on automatic, making it difficult to keep on target. These factors limited its effectiveness during patrols in the jungle.¹⁸ In 1965, the M16 Rifle replaced

the M14 as the infantry's primary weapon. With the early versions of the rifle designated for the special forces community, it quickly became a favorite due to its light weight and shorter length, which made it ideal for the jungle. The rifle initially had some problems, which were fixed in 1967 when it was modified and reissued as the M-16A1 Service Rifle.¹⁹

NCO In Action

Staff Sgt. Franklin D. Miller, 5th Special Forces Group, served as team leader of an American-Vietnamese long-range reconnaissance patrol. On Jan. 5, 1970, while on a long-range patrol mission, one of the team members tripped a booby trap, wounding four Soldiers. Miller, knowing the enemy was alerted, quickly administered first aid and directed the team to defensive positions. Within minutes, Miller saw the lead element of a platoon-size enemy force moving to their location. Concerned for their safety, he directed the team to a more secure position while he remained behind to meet the attack.

Single-handedly, Miller repulsed determined attacks by a numerically superior enemy force and forced them to withdraw. Miller then rejoined his team and organized an emergency extraction. As a helicopter landed to pick up the patrol, the enemy launched another attack, driving off the rescue helicopter. Miller then led his



Staff Sgt. Franklin D. Miller (top right) and his Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, SOG team. (U.S. Army photo)

team in an attack to drive back the enemy before it could overrun his small patrol. Although every member of his team was injured, including himself, Miller moved to engage the attackers. From his position, Miller gallantly repelled additional attacks by the enemy before a relief force reached the patrol location.²⁰

Miller was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Richard M. Nixon on June 15, 1971.

After his actions in Vietnam, Miller remained in the Army, eventually retiring as a command sergeant major in 1992. After his retirement he continued to visit Fort Bragg and Camp Mackall North Carolina to brief students and share his message:

retirement, he continued to visit Fort Bragg and Camp Mackall, North Carolina, to meet students and share his message.

"Share your fears only with yourself, share your courage with others, and you will inspire people to do incredible things."²¹

After Vietnam, the Army once again conducted studies to determine the effective size of an infantry squad. They tested several variations of weapon configurations, manpower, and firepower to determine a definitive answer. These studies concluded that a squad leader could effectively control five to seven men. They also verified the inclusion of a portable machine gun and acknowledged that once a squad experienced casualties, the fire and maneuver/fire team concept was no longer viable. With this evidence, the Army returned to the nine-man squad doctrine which continued throughout operations and wars in the post-Cold War years.²²

Ongoing Effects

The development of the infantry squad has not halted, it continues to evolve in today's more complex world and as technology advancements provide additional capabilities. To keep up this progress, Army leaders continue to research and develop improvements in squad resiliency and lethality, such as improved weapons, communication equipment and improved support services, like engineering and medical.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, the U.S. military has fought against extremist groups and insurgent organizations where the focus was on company and platoon tactics. The Army has not faced an opponent in recent history who could meet them on equal footing. However, with growing threats from North Korea, the emergence of China, and the resurgence of Russia, U.S. Army leaders realize that the possibility of hostilities with a peer or near-peer competitor is likely. As a result, the Army continues to maintain dominance, support Soldiers on and off the battlefield, and adapt doctrine to meet challenges posed by an ever-changing environment.

Notes

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