

Battlefront: First Echelon Organisational Changes v1.0

Battlegrouping



Thanks to lessons learned during WW2, NATO doctrine placed great store in forming mixed, task-orientated Battalion Battlegroups and Company Teams; typically by swapping companies between Tank and Mechanised Infantry battalions, then further swapping platoons between companies and then attaching higher-level sub-units such as artillery, engineers, air defence, etc. However, just as in WW2, this concept proved extremely difficult for short-service conscript armies to perfect.

NATO had only a handful of fully-professional armies during the 1980s: namely the armies of the UK, USA and Canada. These armies consisted entirely of volunteers, enlisted on relatively long-term engagements (normally 3+ years, with all NCOs and the majority of officers serving a lot longer, compared to the 2 years typical of a conscript army) and consequently were able to devote more time to training and tactics, added to the fact that their recruits were normally more receptive to training. As a consequence, these armies were able to form integrated, combined-arms, task-oriented battlegroups with the minimum of fuss and a great deal of proficiency.

The pure Infantry or Armoured Battalion (termed 'Regiment' in the case of British and Canadian armour), organised as per the TO&Es, was essentially a peace-time, administrative unit and bore little resemblance to the Battalion's combined-arms 'Battlegroup' organisation in war-time. However, note that specialists such as Reconnaissance, Marines, Paras, etc would indeed often fight as 'pure' units, due to the nature of their roles, but the potential for them to form combined-arms Battlegroups was also there.

Note that some of NATO's conscript armies (such as West Germany, Denmark, Norway, Italy and France) and some non-aligned nations (such as Sweden) organised many of their battalions permanently along fixed combined-arms lines (e.g. two companies of infantry and one of tanks or vice versa). While this provided a good balance of infantry and armour in most circumstances, the system lacked the inherent flexibility of the professional armies and effective armour/infantry cooperation was still difficult to achieve.

Other countries, such as the Netherlands attempted to form mixed battlegroups and combat teams, though often with unsatisfactory results. An official Dutch report into battlegroup doctrine, which studied the experience of other nations as well as their own, determined that conscript armies such as that of the Netherlands generally did not have the training or experience to carry it off effectively and that the most effective practitioners were the British and Canadian armies, where companies

were commanded by long-serving senior officers (i.e. Majors, as opposed to relatively Captains in all other NATO armies), backed up by a long-serving core of professional SNCOs.

While Battlegroups were theoretically organised and re-organised according to their allotted task, the most typical organisational modification was to swap one company with another unit, for a company of the 'other' type (armour or infantry). The companies would also swap platoons with each other, so that each infantry company would typically have a platoon of armour under command and each armour company would typically have a platoon of infantry under command. The Battlegroup would also have various divisional assets under command (e.g. FOs, FACs and engineers) and these would be allocated where required in the Battlegroup.

What this means in 'Battlefront: First Echelon' terms is:

1. Professional NATO (i.e. US, British or Canadian) Armour and Infantry Battalion BGs may swap MEs with each other to form combined-arms battalion 'Battlegroups'.
2. Professional NATO Armour and Infantry MEs may swap elements with each other to form combined-arms company 'Combat Teams' (e.g. a Tank Company attaching a platoon of 2x tanks to a Mech Infantry Company and/or a Mech Infantry Company attaching a platoon of 3x infantry and an APC to a Tank Company).
3. Within a combined-arms BG or Combat Team ME, Commander Troop units may command Vehicle units, while Command Vehicle units may command dismounted Troops and Gun units. Ordinarily, tank and infantry MEs may not be combined in this way (in order to reflect the inherent difficulties in infantry/armour cooperation), but these three professional armies trained hard to do this in war, so it seems appropriate to make an exception in this instance.
4. Other NATO* BGs and MEs with a Discipline Rating of 'Trained', 'Experienced', 'Veteran' or 'Elite' may also Battlegroup in the above manner but the entire BG will have their Discipline Rating dropped by one level.

* 'NATO' in this instance can also be taken to mean NATO-allied countries outside NATO (such as Australia and South Korea) and non-aligned countries with a similar level of training and proficiency (such as Sweden, Israel, Japan and South Africa).

