



Future Infantry Structure

Lt. Col. Detlef Rausch, Director of the Infantry Future Development, German Infantry School, outlines how lessons from Afghanistan are informing Germany's future force structure and capabilities

The Infantry School's mission comprises the development and formulation of the Infantry's fundamentals, in the areas of conceptual planning, doctrine training and organisation as well as the procurement and use of defence materiel. It is also tasked with the co-ordination of the future development of three infantry branches – light infantry, mountain infantry and airborne infantry and the common fields of infantry operations and dismounted close combat. The German Army today comprises ten infantry formations with different weapon systems and equipment but which are generally comprised of three nearly identical companies. When deploying infantry forces to out of area operations, eight armoured infantry battalions can also be called upon. At the Bundesheer, responsibility for the Armoured Infantry is with the Armour School.

Germany first deployed infantry overseas in 1993 in Somalia (UNOSOM II) with subsequent deployment to theatres including the Congo and the Former Yugoslavia. From 2001 to the present day Germany has also contributed troops to ISAF. Over this period the force structure of the German army has experienced a total of five different transformation phases, will all seeing reductions. This however is changing with the lessons learned from current operations.

ISAF operations

Lt. Col. Rausch, Director of Infantry Future Development said, "The ISAF mission through has maintained high capability requirements and operational intensifies. The infantry component increased each time a new contingent is deployed."

The Army provides the core of more than twenty German units in Afghanistan. Amongst them two training and protection battalions, including four manoeuvre companies, two recon companies, two engineer companies and five headquarters or headquarter supply companies. The training and protection battalions are staged as Mazar-i-Sharif and Kunduz and comprise

different small combat support elements. The composition and organisation of the operational battalions in Afghanistan still vary considerably from the basic structure of the infantry battalion in Germany although the two are converging at an increasing pace.

The main elements conducting operations in close co-operation with the armed forces of the Afghan national Army are two training and protection battalions comprising two infantry companies and supporting elements.

Lt. Col. Rausch said, "With the assignment of augmented capabilities, especially as far as the reconnaissance company and intelligence are concerned, we are breaking new ground as to the command and control and command post functions. We have shown that the basic structure of the German infantry at platoon and company level are both sustainable and effective on operations. The size however of the Task Force headquarters is considerably larger than the peacetime establishment."

The main differences at the platoon and company level are in vehicle equipment. The Fuchs APC has explained Lt. Col. Rausch, proved very effective, admittedly with specific equipment optimised for the operations in Afghanistan. The Marder infantry fighting vehicle is the standard fighting vehicle of the armoured infantry and has also been successful in theatre. The Dingo and the Eagle are additional deployment-specific procurements. The lessons learned from operations, has led to the decision being made to keep a vehicle mix in Afghanistan that comprises the Dingo the APC Fuchs, the Eagle and Marder.

For the infantry units on ISAF Combat operations, engagements have become the rule not the exception and are typically confronted with opponents in section to company strength. In the western part of the area of operations the German troops typically have to conduct long range options whereas in the Kunduz area they have a more limited radius. Germany has lost 45 soldiers during the ISAF campaign.

Lt. Col. Rausch said, "In most cases the opponent fires

first. The ammunition documentation on our side is quite high and the effectiveness of our weapons, especially at ranges exceeding 200m and against targets in defilade does not meet our expectations. The level of protection of both our vehicles and our equipment is however good. The Marder's armament has proved effective and other vehicles will soon be equipped with an automatic grenade launcher and heavy machine gun."

The opponent typically retains the initiative, making effective use of cover and blends with the indigenous population to avoid being engaged by mortar artillery or aircraft fire. The Taliban vary their methods between sniper fire at range of ranges of 800-1500m, AK-47 in salvos at ranges exceeding 300m and opening fire at very close ranges between zero and 20m.

Lt. Col. Rausch said that the current approach of the enemy is typically to engage friendly force with long range small arms weapons, even at ranges exceeding 300m which requires the capability at the infantry section level to engage selected targets at ranges at up to 600m. He commented, "Reports from theatre say that the target effectiveness of 5.56mm standard rounds at ranges exceeding 300m is insufficient. Troops in theatre use the 7.62mm MG3 machine gun to engage enemy targets at ranges greater than 300m. Furthermore, some designated marksmen at squad level have been equipped with 7.62mm G3 rifles with telescopic sights for the engagement of individual targets. In the medium term, the German infantry needs follow on weapons to replace the MG3 and the G3 rifle."

In addition, improvements to marksmanship training at the Infantry School have also been made, to optimise soldiers' ability to conduct quick response fire fights at close range and maintain the capability to precise engage target at long ranges. Lt. Col. Rausch said, "We believe that with the implementation of the new marksmanship training [in September], we are on the right track. Apart from mounted large calibre weapons, anti-tank weapons such as Panzerfaust 3 and the Bunkerfaust have also proved effective against targets in defilade in Afghanistan. From 2012 we will have additional options, namely the

► 40mm airburst ammunition for the Automatic Grenade Launcher.”

Full spectrum

In addition to dismounted combat against an asymmetric adversary in urban terrain, German infantry will have to keep its capability to conduct air mobile operations. Their air transport ability will remain, as will the ability to operate in difficult terrain and under extreme climatic conditions.

“Furthermore, there are two important trends concerning the development, Lt. Col. Rausch commented. “Firstly the active and passive protection of our forces of the soldier and the vehicles mostly against IED attacks and sniper fire and secondly direct and indirect fire support capability at ranges of between 600m at squad level and 8Km at battalion or regiment level.”

For the German Army, the lessons identified in theatre, show that the capability profile of the Army in general

and the infantry in particular must be wide ranging. Lt. Col. Rausch said, “The future capability profile of infantry forces and force employed follow a three step approach from the bottom up. The all arms basic soldier skills, are skills that are non specific to the infantry but apply to all arms and branches. Second, basic infantry capabilities, comprising the capabilities and skills defined as mandatory for all infantry battalions’ effectiveness in the entire spectrum of intensity which are paramount. The overarching objective is that the German infantry is in full command of all offensive options. In addition, some formations like mountain infantry and airborne infantry are specialised but these specialisations are built on the basic capabilities and the result that the major portion of the capability profile in the battalion is identical.”

The future

Lt. Col. Rausch said, “From 2015, the Infantry will presumably be composed of forces whose capabilities

and equipment will differ significantly from those of today. However, despite all the improvements in leadership and armament always the single soldier, the corporal, the sergeant or the officer will remain as the centre of gravity - those who have to make the decisions. On the one hand, the challenges for our leaders are steadily increasing; physical strength, psychological robustness, intellectual capacity and political sensibility. They will have to be met in any operation over the full spectrum of military activities. On the other hand, levels of decision making have to be developed from the divisional level in the framework of a heavy NATO led operation down to the leaders of convoys, patrols, observation posts add checkpoints. This tendency has significant consequences on the training of our squad and platoon level leaders in Germany.” ■

Lt. Col. Rausch was speaking at Rheinmetall’s Infantry Symposium 2010



Lessons from Afghanistan have resulted in new requirements to enhance engagement capabilities over 300m © Rheinmetall