

HEADQUARTERS  
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# LIGHT ARMOR OPERATIONS

## CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE .....	ii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION .....	1-1
CHAPTER 2. COMMAND, CONTROL, AND COMMUNICATIONS .....	2-1
CHAPTER 3. CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS .....	3-1
CHAPTER 4. LIGHT ARMOR PLATOON .....	4-1
CHAPTER 5. LIGHT ARMOR COMPANY .....	5-1
CHAPTER 6. LIGHT ARMOR BATTALION .....	6-1
CHAPTER 7. COMBAT SUPPORT .....	7-1
CHAPTER 8. COMBAT SERVICE SUPPORT .....	8-1
Appendix A. Airlift Operations .....	A-1
Appendix B. Light Infantry Division .....	B-1
Appendix C. Airborne Division .....	C-1
Appendix D. Air Assault Division .....	D-1
Appendix E. Fratricide Reduction .....	E-1
Glossary .....	Glossary-1
References .....	References-1
Index .....	Index-1

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## **PREFACE**

FM 17-18 is the Army's manual containing doctrine, tactics, and techniques for the employment of light armor units. It will assist light armor battalion commanders, their staffs, company commanders, and platoon leaders in the conduct of combat operations with light infantry. It also provides light infantry leaders with a familiarization of the capabilities of light armor units and offers techniques for deploying them effectively. The tactics, techniques, and procedures discussed in this manual also apply to armored units when employed as part of a light infantry operation.

This manual addresses two objectives. First, it gives an overview of doctrinal principles for the employment of light armor forces. Secondly, it describes tactics, techniques, and procedures for light armor platoons, companies, and battalions where they may differ from armored forces.

This manual is fully compatible with doctrine as contained in FM 100-5, and is consistent with current doctrine in FM 100-15 and FM 71-100. It assumes that the user has a fundamental understanding of these manuals and FM 101-5-1, FM 71-2, FM 71-1, and FM 17-15. It serves as a reference for personnel involved in the conduct of training.

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Unless this publication states otherwise, masculine nouns and pronouns do not exclusively refer to men.

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

The land warfare strategy of the US military has changed. The nation no longer relies on large, forward-deployed forces, supported by reinforcing forces from the continental United States (CONUS). The military forces have developed a strategy of rapidly projecting combat power from CONUS to protect national interests. The Army now focuses on deploying and fighting as part of contingency and reinforcing forces. Light armor gives the Army a versatile, deployable, and lethal force structure that can operate with light infantry-based contingency forces worldwide.

CONTENTS	
	Page
Section I. The Role of Light Armor . . . . .	1-1
General . . . . .	1-1
The Scope of Operations . . . . .	1-3
Light Armor in Operations Other Than War. . . . .	1-4
Section II. The Threat. . . . .	1-6
The Potential Threat Array . . . . .	1-7
The Operational Environment . . . . .	1-7
Section III. Light Armor Capabilities and Limitations. . . . .	1-8
Capabilities . . . . .	1-8
Limitations . . . . .	1-8
Section IV. Fundamentals of Light Armor Employment. . . . .	1-9
Offensive Operations . . . . .	1-9
Defensive Operations . . . . .	1-10
Retrograde Operations . . . . .	1-11
Reconnaissance Operations . . . . .	1-12
Security Operations . . . . .	1-12
Battlefield Operating Systems . . . . .	1-13

## Section I. The Role of Light Armor

### GENERAL

Light armor will use its unique capabilities to conduct combat operations, often in support of contingency plans, across the operational continuum (peacetime, conflict, and war). It will be required to operate in a wide range of political, military, and geographical environments. Its tactical missions include providing security, reconnaissance, and antiarmor firepower to the light infantry division (LID) or airborne corps, as well as standard armor operations to engage and destroy enemy forces using mobility, firepower, and shock effect in coordination with other combat arms. These missions may require rapid strategic and tactical deployment worldwide.

**M8 Light Tank.** Currently, light armor units are equipped with the M551A1 (TTS) armored reconnaissance airborne assault vehicle. The M551A1 will be replaced by the M8 light tank. The light tank will be an air-deliverable, all-weather, mobile, protected direct-fire platform. It will be able to engage enemy bunkers, buildings, armor systems, and personnel in close or built-up terrain. The light tank has a three-man crew and is armed with a 105-mm cannon with autoloader and caliber .50 and 7.62-mm machine guns.

The light tank will add a new dimension to the combined-arms capability of light forces, but it is not intended to replace the main battle tank. *The primary purpose of M8 light tank forces is to operate with light infantry during rapid-deployment contingency operations (CONOPS).* They immediately provide the rapid-deployment commander with an armored system that can counter a variety of threats until heavier forces arrive in theater. Initial light tank forces can be air-delivered using low velocity air drop (LVAD) procedures, followed closely by forces arriving by airlifting transportation assets (see Appendix A).

**Missions.** Light armor forces may be required to support the following missions:

- Operations other than war, such as—
  - Insurgency/counterinsurgency.
  - Combating terrorism.
  - Emergency relief operations.
  - Shows of force and demonstrations.
  - Noncombatant evacuation operations (NEO).
  - Strikes and raids.
  - Peacekeeping and peace enforcement.
  - Other operations as specified by higher commanders.
- Rapid reinforcement of forward-deployed forces.
- Wartime contingency operations.

These missions will require separately supportable light armor units to conduct a variety of tasks, including—

- Close assaults with light infantry.
- Reduction of strongpoints, bunkers, and roadblocks.
- Operations in built-up areas (BUA).
- Defense with light infantry.
- Force security.
- Flexible, mobile reserve operations for the light infantry task force (TF), brigade, division, and corps to provide rapid response to enemy mounted forces.
- Rear area operations.

**Contingency Operations.** Light armor is most likely to be employed as part of CONOPS, which dictate an increased role for armor operating with light forces. Light armor significantly reduces the risks light forces face during CONOPS. Its capabilities also enhance the combat capability and lethality of the light force.