

CHAPTER 1

LIGHT, AIR ASSAULT, AND AIRBORNE INFANTRY DIVISIONS

The mission of light, air assault, and airborne infantry divisions is to close with and destroy the enemy as well as to control land areas, including population and resources. These divisions make optimum use of offensive, decentralized, irregular-type operations by highly trained small units. Infantry divisions are austere and capable of conducting independent operations for only 48 hours. They are experts in urban warfare, jungle warfare, and infiltration operations and can kill enemy armored vehicles on any battlefield.

LIGHT INFANTRY DIVISION

The organization of the light infantry division (Figure 1-1) provides it the flexibility to accomplish global missions on different types of terrain and against a variety of enemy forces. It differs from other infantry divisions in both design and concept of employment.

The light infantry division is the most rapidly and strategically deployable of the various types of US divisions. It is organized to fight as part of a larger force or a joint task force in conventional conflicts, or independently in operations other than war. The ability of its command and control structure to readily accept augmentation forces permits task organizing for almost any situation, in almost any environment. The factors of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops and time available) largely determine the augmentations required for the division. (Common augmentation includes helicopters, artillery, military police, truck units, engineers, psychological operations (PSYOP), and civil affairs.

Although employed as an entity, the division disperses widely throughout a large area and conducts synchronized, but decentralized, operations, primarily at night or during periods of limited visibility. It achieves mass through the combined effects of synchronized, small-unit operations and fires rather than through the physical concentration of forces on the battlefield. Massing of light division forces occurs only when the risk is low and the payoff is high.

At the tactical level, the best use of the light force is as a division under corps control. The corps commander must ensure that the mission assigned to the light force capitalizes on its capabilities. The division conducts operations exploiting the advantages of restricted terrain and limited visibility.

AIR ASSAULT DIVISION

The air assault division (Figure 1-2) combines strategic mobility with an extremely high degree of tactical mobility within its area of operations (AO). The air assault division conducts combat operations with infantry, aviation, and the necessary CS and CSS to strike overextended distances and terrain obstacles to attack the enemy—deep, fast, and often.

Airmobile divisions provided the US Army the operational foundation for air assault division operations. However, the air assault division conducts more than airmobile operations. It is important to recognize the distinction between airmobility and air assault. Airmobility is the use of Army aircraft whenever and however they improve our ability to fight. Essentially, movement of troops and equipment from one secure area to another is conducted with the helicopters which depart the AO after insertion. Conversely, air assault operations involve combat, CS, and CSS elements (aircraft and troops) deliberately task-organized for tactical operations. Aviation assets are completely integrated with ground forces. Additionally, air assault operations generally involve insertions and extractions under hostile conditions, as opposed to mere air movement of troops to and from secure locations about the battlefield.

Once deployed on the ground, air assault infantry battalions normally fight like those of the infantry division; however, normal task organization of organic aviation increases firepower and permits rapid aerial redeployment. The essence of modern-day air assault tactics is rapid tempo of operations over extended ranges by air assault task forces. Execution of successive air assault operations enables the division commander to seize and maintain the initiative.

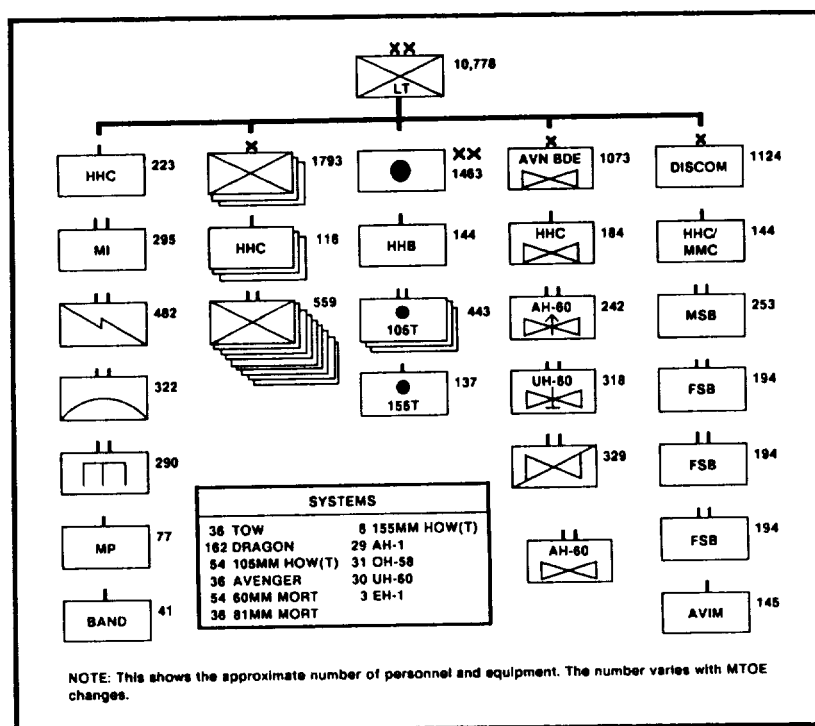


Figure 1-1. Light infantry division

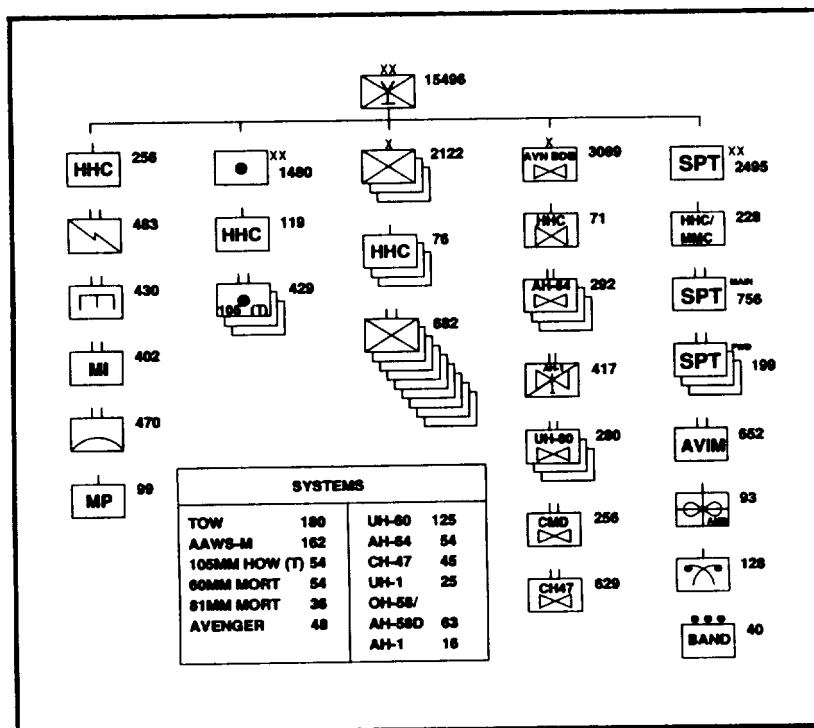


Figure 1-2. Air assault division

For deployment purposes, the Army considers the air assault division a “heavy” division. Planning normally envisions rapid deployment by strategic airlift of a tailored brigade package, followed by the remainder of the division by sea. Deploying the full air assault division by sea requires slightly less sealift than deploying an armored division.

The air assault division is best employed as a complete division in high-tempo, offensive operations, capitalizing on vertical envelopments and vertical turning movements. It is ideally suited to conduct either a major portion or all of a corps’ deep operations, particularly in exploitation and pursuit. In the defense, the division is well-suited to conduct economy of force operations over vast frontages, reserve operations, or covering force operations and other corps security missions.

The air assault division operating at full tempo consumes 400,000 gallons of JP8 fuel daily, essentially making it an armored division for logistics support. The corps makes special provisions to sustain the air assault division, particularly in deep operations. Often, joint assets

such as intratheater airlift are required to sustain the division.

AIRBORNE DIVISION

The airborne division (Figure 1-3) is organized to deploy rapidly anywhere in the world—

- To conduct combined arms combat parachute assault to seize and secure vital objectives.
- To rescue US nationals besieged overseas.
- To reinforce forward-deployed forces.
- To serve as a strategic or theater reserve.
- To conduct large-scale tactical raids.
- To occupy areas or reinforce friendly or allied units beyond the immediate reach of ground forces.
- To capture one or more intermediate staging bases or forward operating bases for ground and air operations.

The airborne division conducts airborne assaults in the enemy’s rear to secure terrain or to

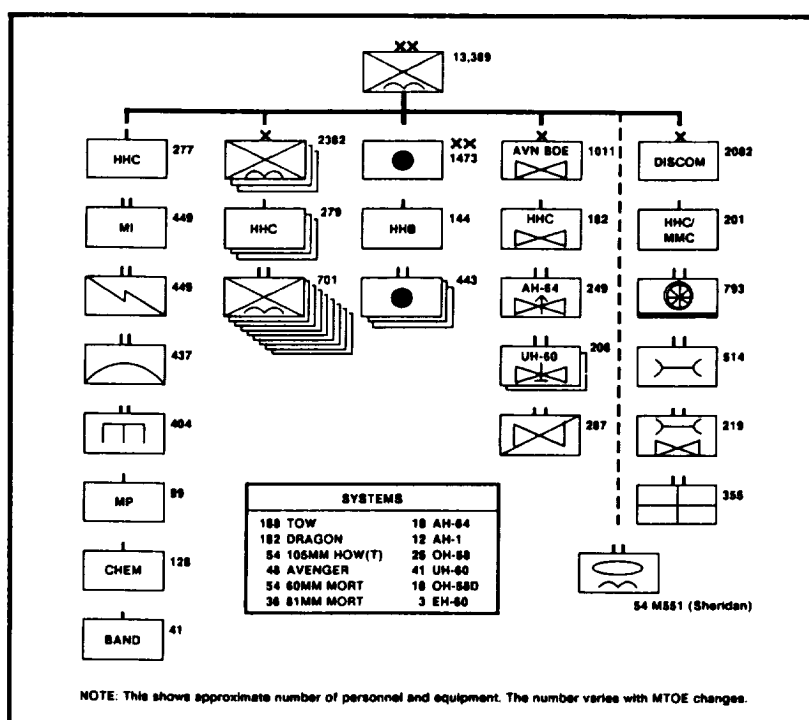


Figure 1.3. Airborne division

interdict routes of resupply or enemy withdrawal. It is ideally suited to seize, secure, and repair airfields to provide a forward operating base for follow-on air-landed forces. It can conduct missions normally assigned to infantry divisions.

The airborne division achieves surprise by its timely arrival on or near the battlefield. The aircraft range and instrumentation capability allow the Air Force to accurately deliver the airborne

division into virtually any objective area under almost any weather condition.

Because the airborne division is tailored for airdrop operations, it can be employed rapidly. All equipment is air transportable and, except for aircraft, must be air-droppable. All personnel are trained for airborne operations. Once deployed on the ground, airborne infantry battalions fight like those of other infantry divisions.