

OPERATIONAL LESSONS LEARNED

1. INTRODUCTION:

In the aftermath of the battle at FS/PB Jaeger a number of observations were made by the actual combatants as to how a mobile patrol base is optimally defended, to include techniques which were employed during the action. Additionally, suggestions were made as to how, in an ideal situation, such defenses may be improved.

2. OPERATIONS:

a. Item: Defense of Armored Vehicles in Mobile Bases.

(1) Discussion: During the FS/PB Jaeger attack, APC were deployed in the open around the base perimeter. In the initial phase of the action, these prime targets were destroyed by rocket fire from outside the wire. Since the increased employment by the Viet Cong of RPG weapons poses an increasing threat to armored vehicles, maximum precautions must be taken at all times to ensure their defense.

(2) Observation: Engineer excavation equipment should accompany tracked vehicles to dig them in at night or push up berms to achieve hull defilade. This is especially true when semi-permanent bases are established. Permanent positions should be sandbagged.

b. Item: Standoff Material for M113 A.C.

(1) Discussion: In many places in the Delta it is impractical or impossible to prepare excavated positions for armored personnel carriers. The laterally located fuel tanks render these vehicle extremely vulnerable to rockets employing the Monroe Principle, as a hit to the side usually ignites the gas tanks. A standoff burster system would appreciably reduce this vulnerability.

(2) Observation: Thin metal plates or PSP and wooden planking affixed to the sides of the vehicle, several inches from the armor plate, would upset the shape charges employed in RPG weapons, and would be partially successful in warding off severe damage to the vehicles.

c. Item: Ground Mounts for .50 Caliber Machineguns.

(1) Discussion: In event that APC's cannot be dug in, and are positioned above the ground, ground mounts would prove invaluable for achieving grazing fire with the .50 caliber machinegun. Also the gun could be dismounted and employed ground mounted were the vehicle to be knocked out.

(2) Observation: Due to the flatness of the terrain in the Delta regions,

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grazing fire can be achieved at long ranges. The height of the M113, when not dug in, allows delivery of plunging fire only. For maximum versatility, ground mounts for .50 caliber machineguns should be made available for all M113 APC's.

d. Item: Supplementary Positions for APC Crews.

(1) Discussion: The 5th Bn 60th Inf (M) (-) at FS/PB Jaeger had prepared supplementary positions with overhead cover adjacent to their vehicles. When their tracks were hit, the crews displaced to the bunkers to continue the fight.

(2) Observation: All bases should have supplementary positions with overhead cover, stocked with ammunition and supplies. This precludes losing combat potential if the armored vehicle or primary position is rendered untenable.

e. Item: VT Artillery Support.

(1) Discussion: FS/PB and other isolated bases should have bunkers, for those personnel not occupying armored carriers, with overhead cover of sufficient depth to allow firing VT artillery rounds directly over the position.

(2) Observation: In the event a FS/PB comes under violent

attack, and is in danger of, or is, penetrated, friendly personnel can “button up” at a prearranged signal, and VT artillery fires can be called in on the position.

f. Item: Hard-Kits for M113 Armored Personnel Carriers.

(1) Discussion: Due to the position of the main armament on the M113, the entire head and upper torso of the gunner are exposed, rendering him an extremely vulnerable target to enemy small arms fire.

(2) Observation: Maximum effort should be devoted to obtaining turrets or hard kits for the main gun of the M113 APC.

g. Item: Foam-Type Fire Extinguishers.

(1) Discussion: The M113 has a semi-automatic CO2 fire extinguishing system for the engine compartment; this, however, proves insufficient for the fires started by RPG. A foam-type extinguisher located in the interior of the vehicle which could be heat or hand operated, might save tracks which would otherwise be lost through secondary fires. A system which would automatically spray the interior might prove best.

(2) Observation: A foam extinguishing kit warrants further developmental OPERATIONAL LESSONS LEARNED CONTINUED:

investigation. In lieu of a more sophisticated system, equipping APC with large, hand operated foam extinguishers would assist in saving armored vehicles from secondary fires.

h. Item: Clearing Fields of Fire.

(1) Discussion: Paddy dikes and a large mound had been left intact around the FS/PB Jaeger perimeter. The Viet Cong forces were thus able to infiltrate undetected across the open, flat terrain within 25 meters of the perimeter. Initial fire was from point blank ranges.

(2) Observation: In addition to cutting vegetation, all obstructions on the terrain which might serve as cover for attacking forces should be employed for razing small dikes and levees within effective RPG

range of a base perimeter.

i. Item: Emplacing M18A1 Claymore Mines in Banks.

(1) Discussion: To guard against early expenditure of Claymore mines during a multi-assault attack, they should be emplace in three or more separate banks, with each bank having a distinct identification code on the activators. Firing of the number one row of claymores during the initial assault would leave two (or more) complete rows of mines for subsequent assaults.

(2) Observation: Use of claymore mines should be closely coordinated and well organized. If laid in banks, prearranged signal could be employed to control activation of Claymore Defenses in depth.

j. Item: Control of Civilian Population Around Base Areas.

(1) Discussion: Prior to the attack on FS/PB Jaeger large numbers of civilians were observed in the adjacent rice fields working at times in close proximity to the base perimeter and defensive wire. It was further reported that several children activated trip flares near the wire. During and subsequent to the attack, it was noted that several of the Claymore mines had been deactivated.

(2) Observation: Roving perimeter patrols should keep a constant vigil over civilians working near a fire support base to prevent them from reconnoitering the positions, covertly digging emplacements, tampering with mines, or activating anti-intrusion devices. Indigenous personnel should not be permitted to approach within two hundred meters of the perimeter.

k. Item: Perimeter Defense in Depth.

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(1) Discussion: Under ideal conditions defensive perimeter should be organized with inner and outer perimeters. The inner perimeter would consist of the command group, organic indirect fire supporting weapons, and a reaction for each reserve. The... gaps in the outer perimeter, or

should the situation dictate, it could be used as a counterattacking force to repel enemy penetration. In the event the outer perimeter become untenable the defenders would have supplementary positions in the inner perimeter in which to fall back.

(2) Observation: Supplementary positions and rapid reaction forces are possible in a perimeter type defense, if two defensive rings are employed.

l. Item: Communication:

(1) Discussion: During the attack of FS/PB Jaegar, the Viet Cong jammed the battalion net. The unit had been operating on the same frequency for an extended period. After the attack, two AN/PRC 10 radios on the battalion frequency were found among the enemy bodies.

(2) Observation: Command frequencies should be changed on a periodic basis, with alternate frequencies assigned to circumvent the effects of electronic jamming.

m. Item: Alternate Wire Communications:

(1) Discussion: Defensive positions could be improved by digging in wire communications lines to all bunkers and command locations. In the event primary communications with radios fail, command and control could still be exercised through the use of telephone.

(2) Observations: All units occupying defensive bases should be equipped with sufficient TA1 and/or TA 312 field telephones to interconnect all positions. This would provide flexibility in the communications system.

n. Item: Thorough Briefing of RTO:

(1) Discussion: When the commander of Company B was killed during the FS/PB Jaeger attack, his radio/telephone operator carried on in the absence of an office, maintaining communication and keeping the battalion headquarters informed of the situation until an officer assumed control.

(2) Observation: RTO's should be well briefed at all times, and be encouraged to use utmost initiative in maintaining communications.