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SURPRISE, WHEN ATTAINED BY STEALTH, IN AN UNSUPPORTED, NON-ILLUMINATED NIGHT ATTACK IS THE SUPREMELY DECISIVE ELEMENT IN THE ULTIMATE SUCCESS OF THE MISSION.

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PREFACE

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I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to the librarians of The Infantry School Library for their assistance in the preparation of this monograph.

"The point of view expressed in this paper is that of the author - not necessarily that of The Infantry School or The Department of the Army."

John B. Blount

INTRODUCTION

"Fundamentally, every night attack is only a more intense form of surprise." (8:224) Karl Von Clausewitz made this statement in his famous book ON WAR. He went on to say, "Surprise lies at the foundation of all undertakings, without exception, only in very different degrees, according to the nature of the undertaking and other circumstances." (8:142)

The purpose of this monograph is to support by discussion and the use of historical examples the premise that surprise, when achieved by stealth, in an unsupported, non-illuminated night attack is the supremely decisive element in the ultimate success of the mission. This study will confine itself exclusively to the unsupported, non-illuminated type to the exclusion of the supported, illuminated night attack, which the author feels does not lend itself as well to the attainment of surprise.

During World War II and the recent Korean conflict, night operations became a normal tactical technique. Department of the Army recognized this development and ordered an increase in the amount of night training.

Fighting at night, however, is not a new development. As early as 1239 B.C., records indicate that Gideon's defeat of the Midianites was accomplished by a well planned and well executed night attack. (9: 159-165) Within the past two centuries, Clausewitz relates that Frederick The Great, during the Battle of Leignitz in 1760, gained a brilliant victory over Laudon by changing his positions at night and thereby gaining complete surprise when the battle resumed in the morning. (8:144)

The achievement of surprise is as important to the soldiers in the attack as it is to the officers who lead them and unless both are thoroughly trained in the proper methods of attaining it, then a valuable weapon has been lost.

DISCUSSION

Most professional men, before undertaking any task, however small, invariably ask the question, "Why?" So it is logical for us to reason why we undertake this fearful task of attacking an unseen enemy at night. The following reasons are offered with the full reservation that there may be others equally as justifiable:

1. To avoid heavy losses that could be incurred by attacks in daylight.
2. To combine with day attacks in order to complete or exploit a success, gain important terrain for future operations and prevent the enemy from improving his defenses.
3. To decieve the enemy and capitalize on the surprise inherent in night combat. (6:157)

The word surprise has many definitions. Perhaps it would be well for us to examine them briefly before any discussion of just how surprise is attained at night. The dictionary defines it as follows: "To come upon and attack unexpectedly." (10) A more cogent definition is expressed by Major D.J.O. Fitzgerald of the British Army, in a prize winning essay. "Surprise in war is the process of taking the enemy at a disadvantage by sudden or unexpected action." (7:36)

It is with the idea of capitalizing on the surprise inherent in night combat that we are primarily concerned with in this study. Surprise, like good fire support, just doesn't happen. It must be planned for with all the carefulness and cunning of which we are capable. It is well to realize that surprise is obtained chiefly through secrecy. Some of the measures used to secure secrecy in a night attack are:

1. Restricting the size and activities of parties engaged in reconnaissance and other preparations.
2. Periodically placing concentrations in other areas.
3. Illuminating other areas to mislead the enemy.
4. Attacking at an unexpected hour from an unexpected direction.
5. Keeping rifles loaded and locked during movement and allowing firing only on order of designated leaders.
6. Prohibiting smoking, use of lights, talking (except to transmit orders or instructions, and then in a whisper), and the use of shiny or noisy equipment.
7. Using silent weapons during the advance and attack.
8. Darkening faces and hands.
9. Using a slow rate of advance from the line of departure, so that the entire unit can move in silence and maintain contact between men.
10. Using patrols to knock out enemy listening posts and outguards just before the assault forces reach their locations. (4:312)

Night combat, although considered a normal fighting technique in most units, is listed as a special operation in our field manuals. It is considered a special operation because of the characteristics which are peculiar to night fighting. In after dark fighting there is a decrease in the effectiveness of aimed fire. This favors the attacker in that it allows closer formations. There is a corresponding increase in the importance of close combat. (4:202)

"Night attacks psychologically favor the attacker who knows what he is doing, whereas the defender is assailed by doubts, apprehensions and fear of the unknown." (4:202) The Chinese Communists made excellent use of this psychological advantage while attacking at night during the Korean conflict. Their favorite trick was to blow bugles and tin horns in an effort to deceive the United Nations Forces as to the size and direction of attack.

Major disadvantages which may influence a commander's decision in ordering a night attack are difficulties encountered in troop movement, troop leading, and in maintaining control, direction and contact during the conduct of the attack. (4:202)

Once the decision to attack at night has been made, careful consideration must be given to whether or not surprise can be gained by stealth. This is most likely to happen when attacking a hastily prepared position and there is a strong likelihood that the outer defenses of the position can be bypassed or eliminated. (4:207)

If it is felt that surprise can be attained, then a non-illuminated, unsupported night attack should be made. To ensure that this type of night attack is clearly defined, the following definitions are quoted from Department of the Army Field Manual:

"A non-illuminated night attack is one made under the cover of darkness using only light from natural sources." (4:204)

"The unsupported night attack is one which is designed to allow the assault unit to advance within assaulting distance of the objective without the aid of supporting fires." (4:207)

Comments made by personnel in one division which operated in the Pacific Theatre during World War II were highly in favor of the non-illuminated attack. Their report said, "The darker the night the better. A light rain is better yet. Our operations on moonlight nights have not been too successful." (3:2)

A battalion commander had this to say about the unsupported night attack. "A night attack, preferably just before dawn, is the most effective way to take a limited objective. (1000-1500 yards) One time we jumped off at 0700 hours, without preparatory fires, completely surprising the enemy and capturing a German town quite easily. Surprise was nearly lost, however, when a man accidentally discharged a rifle he had failed to lock. Since then we have allowed sufficient time for each leader to personally check each weapon in his unit before the jump off." (2:1)

When stealth is relied upon to achieve surprise for a unit, the effectiveness of the night training prior to the attack will in large measure determine the success or failure of the mission. Stealth is an individual proposition and like a chain, is only as strong as its weakest link. One poorly trained soldier who fails to adhere to the lessons learned in training can jeopardize the success of the entire unit. The author feels that the teaching which pertains to night training, as outlined in FM 21-75 is sound, but that only through long hours of diligent practice after dark can the average soldier

become a well trained night fighter.

No commander should attempt to surprise an enemy at night unless his troops have been well trained in the various techniques so necessary when moving by stealth. Some of these techniques are:

1. The use of the physical senses to a greater degree.
2. Light discipline.
3. Night movement.
4. Passing of obstacles.
5. Finding and maintaining direction.
6. Night firing.
7. Security (5:34-61)

The British were very successful with their night attacks during the early battles of the desert campaign. The fact that they did succeed is attributed not only to their skill and bravery, but also to the fact that the German and Italian soldiers were negligent in their light discipline. Had the night training of these enemy soldiers been more proficient, then the results of the combat example listed below might have been different.

"In World War II the Germans and Italians at TOBRUK were very careless. The British recorded every light they saw. When the British attacked, they had most of the German and Italian positions on the front lines spotted." (5:39)

It should be emphasized that surprise is only one of the fundamental principles which must be followed if any night attack is to

be successful. Simplicity of plan, careful preparation, training, definite and easily identified objectives and cohesion in execution are the other principles which help insure surprise. (4:202)

During research prior to writing this paper, the author found many excellent historical examples which he feels adequately support his statement that surprise, when achieved by stealth, in an unsupported, non-illuminated night attack is the supremely decisive element in the ultimate success of the mission. The historical example described below was felt to be the one which would best illustrate this premise.

HISTORICAL EXAMPLE

GENERAL SITUATION: The Battalion Commander, 1st Bn, 115th Infantry was called to Regimental Headquarters on October 5th, 1944 and given the mission of seizing SCHIERWALDENRATH, Germany; capturing or destroying its defenders and withdrawing. The attack was originally scheduled to be heavily supported by artillery and air, but shortly after the receipt of the order it was learned that none of this support would be available. Because of the lack of fire support and the nature of the terrain, the battalion commander decided to attack at 0400 hours, 7 October under the cover of darkness, relying entirely upon stealth to achieve surprise.

On 6 October, the Company Commanders were acquainted with the plan and made their reconnaissance from the village of KREUZRATH and the town of BIRGDEM. They noted that the terrain in front of KREUZRATH was flat and bare offering no cover between the village

and the objective. It was also apparent that a number of houses and trees formed a sort of "island" in front of BIRGDEN. (See map)

This island was in enemy hands and Regiment directed that the 3rd Bn, then occupying BIRGDEN, seize the island simultaneously with the attack by the 1st Bn. Because of the island's critical location, it was decided to attack across the open plain from KREUZRATH and withdraw the shorter distance to BIRGDEN, depending upon the 3rd Bn to clear the route.

The shorter route to the objective through the island, looked attractive at first, as it provided more cover to the attacking forces. However, it was decided that the small enemy force stationed in the island might detect the attacking force and alarm the units in the objective.

PLAN OF ATTACK: The battalion would attack with two companies abreast, each in a column of platoons, widely deployed. The third company would follow in platoon waves, fifty to seventy-five yards apart. A company of Engineers, attached to the battalion for the demolition mission, was to come in last, close on the heels of the third company. The 81 MM mortars would support the operation from the rear of BIRGDEN. (See map) The heavy machine guns were to come in with the engineers and then proceed to the rifle companies where they were to remain attached.

Company C was assigned the left half of the town and Company B the right half. Company A was to cover the rear or south portion. The leading companies were to move across the plain as quietly as possible until discovered and then rush the defenders with fixed bayonets. There was to be no stopping until the company objectives

were reached. Company A was to mop up its area and prepare for a counterattack from the direction of LANGBROICH.

No preparatory fires were planned because the ultimate in stealth and surprise was desired. However, protective fires were planned and all unit commanders issued an overlay so that individual concentrations were available on call if support became necessary.

The withdrawal was to be made over the short route to BIRGEBEN, where the battalion was to take up new positions. The line of departure was the northern edge of KREUZRATH.

THE ATTACK: The battalion moved into the assembly area in KREUZRATH at 2400 hours and crossed the LD at 0400 hours. The night was brightly lighted by the moon, but fortunately for the attackers a medium ground fog blanketed the area and restricted visibility for 150 yards.

The attackers moved silently. They passed an enemy outpost located in a windmill without being detected. Finally, at 0428 the first shot was fired. It was followed by a few more shots and then silence. Then the fire fight began in earnest, but it was evident that the battle was going according to plan. One by one the companies started checking in with the good news that the situation was well in hand.

The surprise had been complete. The unexpected attack caught the enemy's reserve in the cellars, where they either surrendered or were taken care of with hand grenades.

At 0610, all companies were on their objectives and organizing for the defense. The engineers pushed through Company A and commenced their demolition work.

Counterattacks supported by tanks were launched against B and C Companies. The two companies held their positions until the engineers had completed their demolition mission. As soon as withdrawal was authorized, the battalion moved to BIRGDEN.

RESULTS: The attack was extremely successful with the battalion suffering only minor casualties. The enemy lost 54 killed, 99 wounded, and most of the town destroyed.

ANALYSIS: This unsupported, non-illuminated night attack is an excellent example of the achievement of surprise by the proper use of stealth. When the battalion commander made the decision to attack at night without the help of preparatory fires, he realized that in order to move across the open terrain in front of the objective, his battalion would have to move noiselessly and take the enemy unaware.

Complete surprise was attained by this battalion. The assault was made close to the enemy positions with fixed bayonets. The mere fact that most of the reserves were trapped in the cellars and were either captured or killed is an indication of the high degree of surprise achieved.

The battalion was fortunate in having the ground fog offer an added cloak of invisibility. It had not been planned for, but was indeed welcome.

The excellent use of stealth, coupled with the withholding of any preparatory fires and careful planning at all levels enabled the attacking force to achieve surprise and complete its mission.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Surprise is the most decisive element in an unsupported, non-illuminated night attack.
2. Surprise is obtained chiefly through stealth and strict adherence to the fundamental principles of the night attack.
3. A non-illuminated, unsupported night attack affords an excellent opportunity to achieve surprise by the proper utilization of stealth.

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