

THE FOURTH RIFLE COMPANY OF THE AIRMOBILE INFANTRY BATTALION

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30 November 1965

SUBJECT: The Fourth Rifle Company of the Airmobile Infantry
Battalion

1. PROBLEM. To determine whether the infantry battalion in the airmobile division should be organized with three or four rifle companies.
2. ASSUMPTIONS.
 - a. The number of maneuver elements of the infantry battalion airmobile division is the factor under consideration.
 - b. The specific organization of these elements is not a consideration.
 - c. The infantry battalion, airmobile division regardless of configuration can be furnished the necessary combat support and combat service support.
3. FACTS BEARING ON THE PROBLEM.
 - a. Military doctrine, tactics, and techniques for the employment of the division are contained in FM 61-100, dated June 1965. (1:3)
 - b. The mission of the airmobile division and the infantry battalion, airmobile division is stated in the Airmobile Division Supplement to the Infantry Reference Data. (7:2 & 102)
 - c. Present organization of the airmobile division and the infantry battalion, airmobile division is as stated in the Airmobile Division Supplement to the Infantry Reference Data. (7:2 & 102)
 - d. The infantry battalion, airmobile division is the airmobile division's basic tactical element. (7:2)
 - e. The three infantry companies of the infantry battalion, airmobile division are the infantry battalion's basic tactical element. (7:102)
 - f. The airmobile division in the U. S. Army force structure is currently engaged in combat operations in the Republic of Vietnam.
 - g. These combat operations are of the counterinsurgency type.
 - h. In counterinsurgency operations the most common mission assigned to the infantry battalion, airmobile division is one of area control. (Annex A)
 - i. In area control operations, a one third reserve is maintained by brigade, battalion, company and platoon. (Annex A)
 - j. A "normal" area for an infantry battalion, airmobile division can be as large as 265 square miles. (4:6)

- k. Command and control in the infantry battalion, airmobile division is greatly enhanced through the use of aerial observation posts, aerial relays, and aerial vehicles. (4:6)
- l. The 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate) is currently engaged in combat operations in the Republic of Vietnam.
- m. The battalions of the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate) habitually deploys for combat with a fourth rifle element. (6)

4. DISCUSSION.

- a. Standard divisions are strategically tailored prior to deployment by the assignment of combat battalions (airborne, infantry, mechanized infantry, and tank) in types and numbers appropriate to the division's mission and its anticipated operational environment. This standard division can control and administer up to 15 combat battalions. Maneuver elements of the division are re-inforced by or cross attached to other maneuver elements to organize the division for combat. (1:3)
- b. Prior to deployment, the airmobile division organization was fixed at eight infantry battalions. The division was given the mission of conducting counterinsurgency operations in the Republic of Vietnam. (7:2)
- c. One of the inherent tasks in counterinsurgency operations is gaining control of the population and resources of the area of operation. The mission normally assigned to the combat battalions of the division to accomplish the counterinsurgency mission is one of area control. (4:41)
- d. Two salient features of the area control operation are the amount of combat power of the battalion that is held in reserve as a reaction force, and the extremely large area over which the battalion must gain and maintain control. These two requirements must be balanced. The battalion commander must evaluate his need for reaction forces (reserves) against the degree of difficulty of gaining and maintaining control over his area of responsibility. When this is done, he arrives at a proper mix of operating forces versus reaction forces. Usually one of the two must be slighted. (Annex A)
- e. To accomplish the area control mission, the battalion commander must have immediate control of his units. In addition to the normal methods of command and control, the battalion commander makes extensive use of aerial observation posts, radio relays and aerial vehicles to maintain immediate control of his units. By the use of all means of command and control the battalion commander is able to maintain tight control of his committed elements. (4:41)
- f. Tactics and techniques, such as area control, practiced in training are merely a point of departure. Lessons learned in combat are nearly always the best basis for improving doctrine. The experience of the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate) is a good example. The infantry battalions of the brigade were faced with the dilemma of arriving at a proper mix of operating forces versus

reaction forces. The battalions solved this by forming a fourth rifle company from other elements in the battalion. The addition of the fourth rifle element has assisted this unit in accomplishing its mission. (6)

- g. Other solutions could have satisfied the requirement for additional forces equally as well. The scope of the missions assigned the battalions could have been reduced. Additional rifle strength from other sources could have been assigned to the brigade. In actual practice though, the battalions solved the requirement for additional forces by internally reorganizing. (6)

5. CONCLUSIONS.

- a. The most common mission in counterinsurgency operations is one of area control.
- b. In area control operations, following the one third rule on reaction (reserve) forces, the operating forces of the infantry battalion, airmobile division are reduced to eight rifle squads.
- c. In area control operations, the battalion must carefully balance forces assigned to operations against reaction forces.
- d. Through the use of aerial vehicles, aerial relays, and aerial observation post the command and control in the infantry battalion, airmobile division is as good if not better than other infantry battalions.
- e. Experience of the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate) indicates that there is a need for an additional rifle element in the battalion.
- f. Assignment of an additional rifle company to the infantry battalion, airmobile division would enable it to more effectively accomplish the mission of area control in counterinsurgency operations.

- 6. **RECOMMENDATIONS:** That a troop unit change request and an equipment modification list be submitted to change the the table of organization and equipment of the infantry battalion, airmobile division to include a fourth rifle company.

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ANNEXES:

A - Area Control Operations
X - Bibliography

CONCURRENCES: (Omitted)
NONCONCURRENCES: (Omitted)
CONSIDERATION OF NONCONCURRENCES: (Omitted)
ANNEXES ADDED: (Omitted)

ACTION BY APPROVING AUTHORITY:

Date:

Approved (disapproved), including (excluding) exceptions.

Signature

ANNEX A--Area Control Operations, (4:41-45).

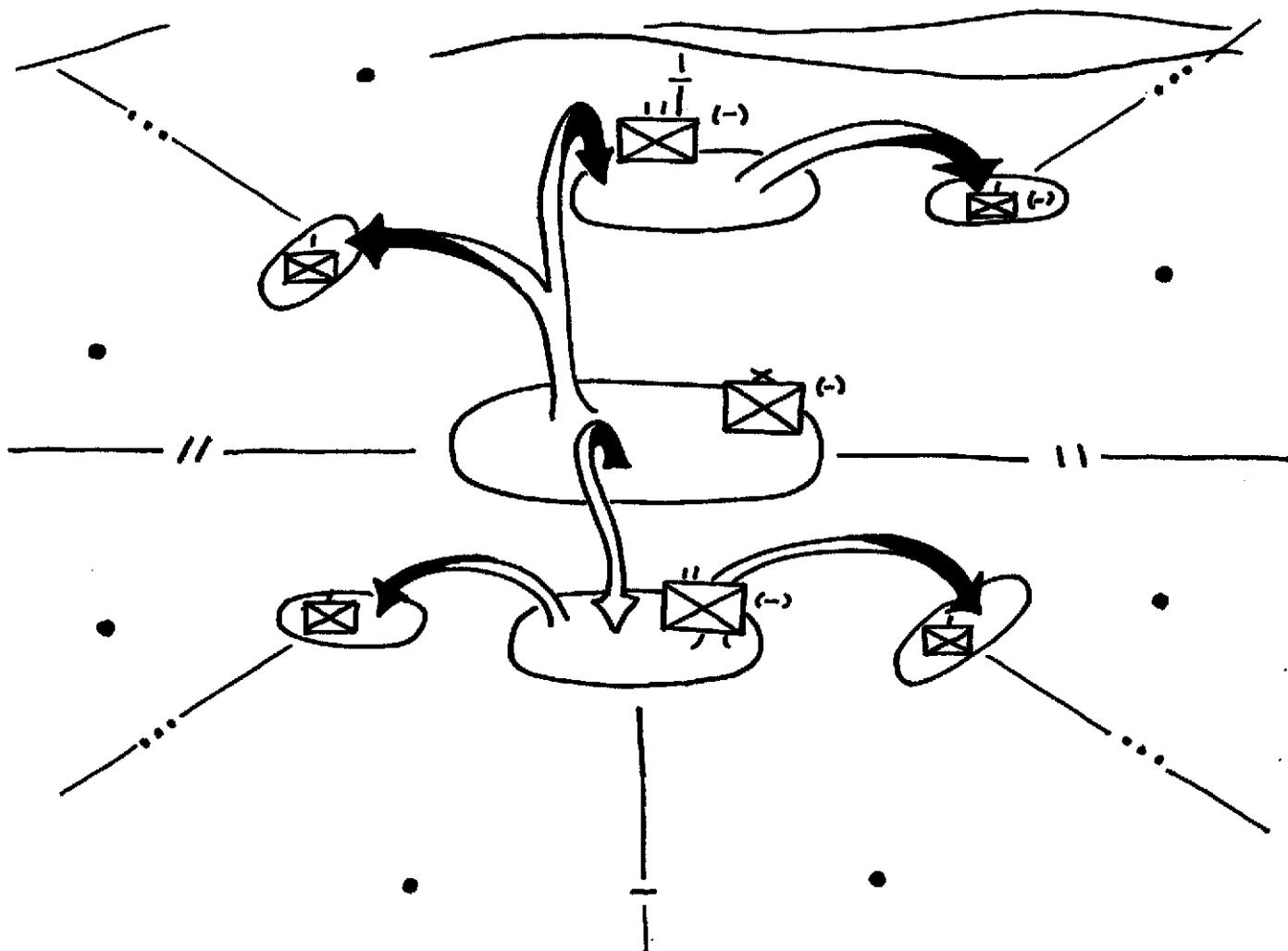
1. GENERAL: This annex outlines a specific example of how the airmobile infantry battalion would be deployed in a typical operation. This example illustrates how airmobile capabilities are employed in situations where they have greatest application.
2. AREA CONTROL OPERATIONS, AIR LINES OF COMMUNICATION.
 - a. Appendix 1 illustrates schematically a concept of employment of the airmobile battalion as part of a brigade force. The environment is an underdeveloped area controlled by enemy irregular forces. The mission of the brigade force is to destroy the enemy force and establish control over the area. Initially, the enemy force is dispersed and operating throughout the area. The friendly force is supported across difficult or impassable terrain by an ALOC. Supply is by Army or Air Force aircraft. Friendly forces have air superiority. Operations include the following.
 - (1) An airmobile infantry battalion task force will seize and secure the brigade base of operations. After the base is secure, the battalion may either become the brigade reserve or be utilized in extending the brigade area of influence by seizing and securing a battalion base of operations.
 - (2) The battalion, after seizing and securing a base of operations, then seizes and secures two advance company bases, retaining one company as the battalion reaction force. The forward companies establish advance platoon strongpoints.
 - (3) When the battalion has secured all of its positions, it conducts a systematic search to locate and eliminate the enemy forces within the perimeter formed by the platoon strongpoints. Aerial surveillance and rapid movement of units are used to locate, isolate, and defeat the enemy in detail. Rifle company and battalion reserves are maintained on a constant alert to assist friendly forces. Sectors of surveillance and responsibility are assigned to the rifle companies so that once control over an area is established, it can be maintained.
 - (4) The battalion reserve conducts reconnaissance in force and raids when the situation dictates. Surveillance is conducted by both air and ground.

CONTINUATION OF ANNEX A

b. Conduct of the operation.

- (1) Speed and surprise are stressed throughout the operation. Each committed forward battalion will normally be allocated an assault helicopter company with appropriate aircraft support, on an on-call basis. After elements of the battalion have been airlanded in the initial assault, the on-call helicopter company is used primarily for subsequent employment of the battalion reserve. On-call support for movement of reserve platoons of the forward rifle companies is also planned. When planning these missions, consideration must be given to location of aircraft in relation to response time.
- (2) The battalion is normally assigned a specific area of responsibility. Its base of operation will normally be an extended distance from the brigade base. Once the battalion has secured its base of operations, the battalion commander assigns specific areas of responsibility to two rifle companies, retaining one company as the battalion reaction force. Each company subsequently seizes and secures a company base. In turn, the companies establish advance platoon strongpoints. Each forward company and platoon normally retains a reserve of one-third of its force.
- (3) When enemy forces are located, immediate measures are taken to eliminate them through decisive offensive action.
- (4) Each base of operations and strongpoint maintains adequate amounts of supplies for its support during short periods in which the ALOC may be interrupted.
- (5) During non-flying weather, ground patrols are increased.
- (6) An immediate plan for recovery is made at company level and forwarded to battalion and brigade. It will include size of landing areas, type formations for lift helicopters, location of sling loads, and location of loads for support helicopters.

APPENDIX 1 TO ANNEX A



• PLATOON STRONGPOINT
○ UNIT BASE

ANNEX X--Bibliography.

1. FM 61-100, The Division (Washington, D. C.: Department of the Army, June 1965).
2. FM 7-20, Infantry, Airborne Infantry and Mechanized Infantry Battalions (Washington, D. C.: Department of the Army, May 1965).
3. ST 61-100-1, The Division (Air Assault Division Supplement) (Fort Belvoir, Va.: United States Army Combat Developments Command, March 1965).
4. ST 7-20-1, Infantry Battalion Air Assault Division (Fort Belvoir, Va.: United States Army Combat Developments Command, September 1964).
5. Report, Field Test Program Army Air Mobility Concept (Fort Benning, Ga.: Test Evaluation and Control Group Project Team, 15 January 1965).
6. Orientation, 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate) Ft. Benning, Ga.: Conducted by the Briefing Team from the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate), November 1965).
7. Infantry Reference Data, Airmobile Division Supplement (Fort Benning, Ga.: United States Army Infantry School, September 1965).