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TITLE

THE INADEQUACY OF MECHANICAL TRAINING IN LIGHT WEAPONS
AND ITS EFFECT ON COMBAT ACTIONS

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Roster Nr. 130

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PREFACE

30 January 1956

My thanks go to Colonel Henry E. Kelly, USA, Ret., Advisor to Human Research Unit No. 3, CONARC, for his stimulating ideas concerning the material covered in this monograph. My appreciation to Captain Lloyd L. Burke of Advanced Class No. 1, for certifying to and augmenting the story of his actions on Hill 200, Korea. The Librarians of The Infantry School Library saved many valuable hours by their generous and courteous guidance in finding material.

I hope the annexes showing the locations of the illustrated battle actions will be used freely to help clarify the combat narratives.

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.

Charles H. Nulsen jr.

INTRODUCTION

While reading through many small unit actions in connection with this monograph, I noticed a marked repetition of light weapon failures. Many times the weapon would "quit" at a decisive moment in the battle. Upon further investigation I discovered that in a surprising number of cases the firer, rather than the weapon, was at fault. The evidence began to point directly to improper or insufficient individual training in basic mechanical functioning of light weapons. It is of this discovery that this monograph deals.

My broad subject is, "Present Training Methods Do Not Adequately Train Individuals For Combat." My personal feelings are that we ought to place more emphasis on the basic concepts of soldiering - of which mechanical training is certainly a part. The emphasis must be placed on physical training, drill, discipline, inspections, and weapons training, sacrificing all other subjects if necessary. These are the subjects that provide us with soldiers of whom we are proud and that instill those qualities which every commander desires of his subordinates on the battlefield. I say this because I have spent four years in infantry regiments training our soldiers for battle. Approximately three of these years have been as a company commander. I have seen at first hand the way our soldiers receive a smattering of these basic subjects before they pass on to newer and broader subjects. And always they lack the fundamental knowledge of their

weapons.

It has been the rule rather than the exception to have all ranks come to me and say, "Sir, we need more weapons training". It is this inherent interest in weapons, dating perhaps from as early as their "Cowboys and Indians Days", that we should strive to keep alive and develop.

The scope of this monograph will not permit proposals of any major changes in training as the above mentioned thoughts show a need, but rather I would like to discuss the need for more and a method of implementing better training in mechanical functioning of the Garand Rifle, Light Machine Gun, and Browning Automatic Rifle, subsequently referred to as the M-1, IMG, and BAR. Two combat examples from the Korean War will serve to illustrate how insufficient training in assembly and care of the light infantry weapons led to defeat of two platoon size units. Another combat illustration will show how a soldier well grounded in knowledge of weapons remedied a malfunction in his machine gun and led his comrades to victory.

For obvious reasons my thoughts will be directed toward infantry training of the two-year draftee, the three-year "one enlistment" man, or the new six-months active duty man. These are the people to whom we have to teach the basics fast and soundly.

The major difficulty which I encountered in my research is the fact that very few soldiers or officers stop to analyze weapons malfunctions in combat, and they

almost never report them. Also, it is human nature for an individual to blame his mute weapon for malfunctioning rather than his lack of knowledge of the weapon and lack of ability to take care of it.

DISCUSSION

The heart of this monograph is the concept that we should dwell on the basic lessons of soldiering and de-emphasize the more advanced training. By basic subjects I mean physical training, drill, inspections, discipline, and weapons. By advanced training I mean all other subjects that are intended for the soldier to know throughout his training period in the United States Army. Because we give the soldier so much to learn during the eight-hour training day he does not retain that which is essential when he needs it the most. It would be best to concentrate on the basics for a four-hour training day and then we would at least have well grounded soldiers.

In a recent article entitled, "In Training We Must Put First Things First", Lt Col Jack J. Wagstaff, a former battalion commander of mine, had this to say about training. "We must work from the ground up. First a competent soldier, then a competent army. Can each man keep himself, his equipment, and his barracks clean and in serviceable condition? Does he know his weapons? Is he familiar with all weapons of his company? Does he respond to orders?"

"Once the individual is trained, then we can think about unit requirements.

"Haste makes waste. The overall approach should seek as its objective fewer different subjects in any given period of time, fewer classes and fewer training hours. Less emphasis on quantity and more emphasis on

quality could be a cornerstone to more effective training." (7:50)

He goes on to say that weapons training is so broad and encompasses so much, "it becomes immediately obvious that the training program must commit hours and hours of training time to weapons if every man is to know what a trained soldier should and must know about his weapon." (7:51)

This is only one voice among many that agree upon where to place the emphasis of training. Ask any officer who is familiar with the details of training our young soldiers for combat and the answer will be the same.

Here are some other thoughts expressed by Brig. Gen. S.L.A. Marshall, who has been engaged in human research in the Army in three wars.

"The Army's peace-time policies and programs intended to make the soldier an 'informed' individual and a better qualified citizen, can make no valid claim to efficiency until they are pointed mainly toward giving the soldier utmost efficiency in the practice of arms under combat conditions." (5:139) "Holding hard to the line concentrating on making the American a superior fighter, through better knowledge of arms and how to use them, the Army would at least strengthen its interior position. Readier men would come of it even though events should force us to a shorter training interval." (5:142) "There is a school of thought that he should be fed everything under the sun during the indoctrination

procedures which are supposed to condition him to soldiering, and that we dare not treat him outright as a warrior with an imaginative interest in the tools of his trade." (5:139)

Specifically, I feel that the knowledge of arms should be emphasized more during the period of mechanical training of light infantry weapons. Because it was found that the carbine was such a controversial weapon in Korea and the pistol is primarily a self-defense weapon, all discussion will be limited to the IMG, BAR, and M-1. I have found that a soldier thoroughly grounded in the small details of weapons' nomenclature, functioning, and assembly tends to stimulate his own desire to teach men with a lesser knowledge in weapons. A soldier so motivated often spends extra hours showing the newer soldier assembly and functioning of his weapon. This soldier who knows his weapons intimately usually displays a high degree of confidence. This confidence reflects favorably upon his abilities as a soldier and, in turn, gains him respect and high esteem among the soldiers of his unit. A soldier that can stand alone on his knowledge of weapons will not be reluctant to explore other facets of military training. In barracks' room discussions the man who knows his weapons commands the floor.

Yet during the mechanical training phase of the IMG, M-1, and BAR the Army Training Program sets aside only four, six, and ten hours respectively. This is all the formal mechanical training that is allocated for an

entire training year. Taking 48-44 hour weeks, allocating 4 weeks time for non-training activities, we arrive at a figure of 2112 training hours. It takes only simple arithmetic to figure that less than one percent of the training time is spent on knowledge of the three basic light infantry weapons. One of the conclusions made by 1st Lieutenant Dixon C. Rogers in his monograph of a few years ago is that, "mechanical training in automatic weapons must reach the point where the soldier can reduce stoppages under any conditions." (6:49) If we are to fall in line with these thoughts there is only one deduction - more time for mechanical training.

In the historical examples that follow we find the effects of weapon malfunction are demoralizing and more often than not have a direct bearing on the results of the action. Before I present the Korean actions, some assumptions have to be made. Here I rely upon the authoritativeness of S.L.A. Marshall's research in Korea. "Without exception all infantry company actions given detailed study in the Korean Campaign include numerous examples of weapons' failures, not all of the causes of which were ascertainable." (5:17) It was found that "Company Commanders do not make systematic checks of their weapons' failures. Higher commanders rarely require this of them and do not take persistent interest in the subject. In consequence, practically all information sent forward on this subject is incomplete, colored by opinion, and unreliable." (5:xviii)

Because of the difficulty in obtaining suitable

after-action reports on weapons failures and the reluctance of individuals to blame themselves, or to blame lack of training, it is necessary to make a reasonable assumption as to the percentage of such failures that might be directly attributed to the individual. General S.L.A. Marshall gives the percentages as follows - "Self evidently in perhaps twenty-five percent of these cases, although the weapon was blamed as the circumstances were reported, there was reasonable ground for suspecting that the firer was at fault. This does not allude to the failures which come of inadequate maintenance, failure to clean, improper oiling, and so on." (5:17)

"Viewing the problem as a whole within the infantry line, it would be conservative to say that ninety-five percent of the difficulty was innate in command and human failure, rather than in structural fault in the ordnance." (5:19)

It is with these cases that can be prevented by professional knowledge and proper training that this monograph is concerned.

In illustration, two of the three combat examples that follow portray the negative consequences of light weapon failures, and one shows the successful results of a properly trained soldier eliminating stoppages in his IMG and going on to accomplish his mission.

ILLUSTRATION NO. 1 (2:3)

It was at the beginning of the Korean War. The day before, the first action of the conflict had taken place

just north of Osan and south of Seoul (See Annex A). Lt Col Charles B. Smith's battalion combat team of the 21st Infantry had met a strong North Korean Force and was now withdrawing toward the village of Pyongtaek, some fifteen miles south of Osan. The day was 5 July 1950, it was late afternoon, and it had been raining all day. The First Battalion of the 34th Infantry Regiment, part of the 24th Division, had just been ordered to set up a blocking position 3,000 yards to the north of Pyongtaek. "A" Company on the left and "B" on the right, with "C" in reserve near Pyongtaek (See Annex B). Company "A" is the unit with which we will be concerned. The Company was commanded by Captain Leroy Osburn. He had 140 men and officers. He placed his 1st Platoon on the right. A 17-man roadblock, commanded by Lt Herman L. Diskell, was on the extreme right between the railroad embankment and the road to Osan. The roadblock was in such a position that when his men were in their fox holes they could not see the other elements of the company. The 1st Platoon covered the widest front, it was disposed on the low ground in a rice paddy. The 2d Platoon was in the middle, on the northern slope of the hill occupied by "A" Company. Its Platoon Leader was Lt Robert R. Ridley, and the Platoon Sergeant was SFC Roy E. Collins, a combat veteran of World War II. Sergeant Collins' later actions form the basis of this illustration. The 3rd Platoon was to the northwest of the 2nd Platoon. Let us focus our attention on the 2nd Platoon. The actions and conversations of the men at this time were typical of

that of the entire company. They dug their fox holes in the red Korean clay, talking among themselves as to how soon they would be back in Japan, and comforting each other with the thoughts that this was just a police action and no real combat would come their way. They kept digging until nightfall, when the Company Commander ordered only normal bivouac interior guard. The rest of the company slept or tried to sleep in the steady rain that caused their foxholes to fill up with water. The Battalion Commander had sent out a patrol from "C" Company to blow a bridge some 600 yards to the north of "A" and "B" Companies' position. This was done at about 0300 hours on 6 July. The explosion startled the 2nd Platoon but all were quieted when they learned the cause. At 0430 hours Sergeant Collins began to stir and awakened the rest of the platoon. He instructed everybody to open and eat their C rations while they had an opportunity. Light was just beginning to show as Sgt Collins was half finished with his can of beans. He looked out to the bridge that had been blown earlier by the patrol from "C" Company and saw what appeared to be several tanks. Sgt Collins turned to his Platoon Leader, Lt Ridley, and called, "Sir, we have company." Lt Ridley, remembering that Lt Col Smith's Battalion from the 21st was supposed to withdraw this way, exclaimed that it must be the 21st. Sgt Collins then said that the 21st didn't have tanks. By that time upwards of thirteen tanks and at least a battalion marching in a column of fours were detected approaching the first two tanks. Capt Osburn and the

Battalion Commander appeared on the high ground in the 2nd Platoon sector and spotted the force moving towards their position. The Battalion Commander identified them as North Koreans and called for 4.2 fire. As the guns had been registered the day before, the rounds were soon in the air. When the first shell landed, the entire North Korean Force scattered. The tanks buttoned up and lowered the muzzles of their guns directly at "A" Company's position and started firing. Upon the impact of the first round, which was slightly over the 2nd Platoon's position, Sgt Collins and two other World War II veterans started shouting for their men to fire. The response was slow and only after constant prodding by the squad leaders did any man fire at all. Others looked like they wanted to but couldn't get their M-1's to work. The Koreans formed skirmish lines and started advancing towards the position of "A" and "B" Companies. After ten minutes the 2nd Platoon began delivering a small amount of effective fire, with about one-half the platoon firing. The volume was not enough to stop the Koreans. On the right, "B" Company was pulling off the hill. Capt Osburn gave the order to cover "B" Company's withdrawal, but "A" Company's fire was so ineffective that the cover for "B" Company was nil. The Battalion Commander told Capt Osburn to withdraw when "B" Company had been covered. The sight of "B" Company leaving and seeing their fire was not able to stop the Koreans, the men in "A" Company started their own withdrawal action. Some broke and ran, others just walked off. There were a few

casualties now and panic spread. Capt Osburn got hold of his platoon sergeants and platoon leaders and tried to organize an orderly withdrawal, but the company did not reach any semblance of order until the men had reached Pyongtaek.

During the period that the men were assembling and waiting in Pyongtaek, Sgt Collins decided to find out why the 2nd Platoon had failed to fire effectively in the face of the enemy. He discovered that out of thirty-one men in his platoon, twelve failed to fire because they claimed their rifles would not work. Sgt Collins checked the rifles and found them broken, dirty, or improperly assembled. This was over one-third of Sgt Collins' rifles. This more than likely was the case with the other platoons as the 2nd Platoon represented a good cross section of the regiment.

DISCUSSION

Had these weapons been firing there may have been sufficient effective fire placed on the Koreans to force them to delay their attack. As a result, many of the men in "A" Company that were hit might have lived to fight another day. The author had this to say about this action in his discussion at the end of the chapter, "The inability of the troops to remedy minor weapons malfunctions is further indication of inadequate training." (2:18)

ILLUSTRATION NO. 2 (4:115)

This small unit action centers around the 2nd Platoon of "G" Company, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Division.

"G" Company was commanded by 1st Lieutenant Rivet, the 1st Platoon by M/Sgt Felix Acoste, the 2nd Platoon by 2nd Lieutenant Dale G. Hollingsworth, and the 3rd Platoon by 2nd Lieutenant Lester King. The time was 25 November 1950. This was the day that the Chinese Communist Forces joined the North Korean Forces and made a surprise attack across the Yalu River against the United Nations' Eighth Army. The place was on the line near Sinhung-dong on the Chongchon River. (See Annex A) This spot was popularly described as the "Gauntlet Area" by Brig. Gen. S.L.A. Marshall. "G" Company relieved "C" Company of the 38th Infantry Regiment on line about dusk. Although "C" Company positions left much to be desired, the Commander of "G" Company let the men slip into the non-mutual supporting positions left by "C" Company. No patrols were sent out because the men were too tired to care. The platoons and CP were disposed according to Annex C. The 3rd Platoon was the only platoon in radio contact. None of the members of "G" Company expected to see the enemy any time in the near future.

At light on the 26th, Lt Hollingsworth tried to contact Lt Rivet by taking his messenger and personally walking back the 1200 yards to the Company CP. What he did not know was that the Company CP had been overrun the night before and Lt Rivet killed. Half way to the CP he ran into a small group of Chinese soldiers. He decided that they were a small headquarters group of

the Chinese Communist Forces. He doubled back to his own platoon position to prepare them for any attack that might be forthcoming. He did not bother to notify the 1st Platoon of the Chinese Communist soldiers that he had seen in the immediate area. He pulled in one outguard squad to form a perimeter and began relocating his automatic weapons. He placed his IMG so that it would fire to the southwest towards the enemy headquarters. One AR went along the same line, a second covered the approaches from the south and southwest. A third AR defended the west slope, and a fourth was placed with the outpost squad. It was still early in the morning and a heavy fog hung close to the ground. Observation was poor. Suddenly the sound of a bugle broke the stillness. Light small arms fire began to be received in the 2nd Platoon's position. Partly because of the wooded area on the western slope of the hill and partly because of thick fog, the Chinese Forces had come to within thirty yards before the defenders knew that they were there. Upon discovery of the enemy infiltration, Lt Hollingsworth shouted for the IMG to fire - it gave two good bursts, then it quit. Lt Hollingsworth again shouted, "Work the bolt, work the bolt." The gunner responded, pulled the trigger, nothing happened. The gunner yelled, "My gun won't work." The BAR man next to him shouted, "My gun's jammed." Immediately came a call from another BAR position, "My gun's gone too."

Every man in the 2nd Platoon had heard the cries. Lt Hollingsworth, sensing the demoralizing effect of

having the automatic weapons go out, decided to withdraw his platoon. After the battle he stated, "I knew that the crying out about weapons' failures had unnerved my people. It hurt worse than the technical failure. The force knew in a moment that their automatic power had run out." (4:127)

The 2nd Platoon withdrew to the north towards the 1st Platoon. After going some 500 yards from their initial defensive positions they had a twenty minute rest. There they repaired one AR but could not get the IMG and two other AR's to fire. From there Lt Hollingsworth's Platoon joined the 1st Platoon and eventually rejoined the regiment at the CP.

DISCUSSION

Disregarding the tactical mistake of not having mutual support between platoons, the failure of the automatic weapons and the failure of the individuals to take immediate action in the excitement of the situation, demoralized the platoon to the extent that they were forced to withdraw. Had the IMG and BAR's fired properly, or at least been put back into action immediately, the story might have been different and "G" Company's position could have been maintained. Because no attempt was made to find out the cause of the stoppages, (if the attempt was made no written record survived) we will have to apply General Marshall's assumption to the case and use our own good judgment as to what might have happened had the gunners known their weapons thoroughly and cared for them in the proper manner.

ILLUSTRATION NO. 3 (3:128)

It was during the 1st Cavalry Division's "Operation Commando", the day October 28, 1951 near Chong-dong, Korea on Hill 200. The unit was "G" Company, 5th Cavalry Regiment, and on that day it was led by 1st Lieutenant Lloyd L. Burke. Hill 200 was 900 meters high, almost straight up, overlooking the Imjin River, thirty-five miles north of the 38th parallel. (See Annex A) "E" and "F" Companies had already been stopped, trying to secure Hill 200. Major Tom Giboney, the Battalion Operations Officer, had directed "G" Company to seize the objective. Lt Burke, who had been ordered out of combat because of his thirteen months on the front lines, volunteered to lead the company. There were no officers and only thirty-five men left in "G" Company.

Hill 200 had a series of heavily fortified positions in three tiers. Each tier contained a bunker with a labyrinth of communication trenches connecting the tiers. In the first stages of the attack, Lt Burke went on a one-man armed reconnaissance. In the process of reconnoitering the enemy replacements, he neutralized the first two tiers by firing a borrowed M-1 at grenade-throwing Chinese soldiers. He tossed the grenades back into the Chinese positions as fast as they were thrown at him. After he had scouted the uppermost bunker he returned to his men who, in the meantime, had become engaged in grenade throwing themselves. Lt Burke grabbed a light machine gun, its tripod, three boxes of ammo, and again

darted to the top of Hill 200. He loaded his first belt and set his sights on a trench full of Chinese soldiers who were busily occupied with the men from "G" Company further down the hill. His first burst took a heavy toll. They were so stunned that it was seconds later before they reacted. When the gun started up again there was a mass exodus from the trench. At this crucial moment the gun jammed. Lt Burke worked the bolt and it fired again. Once more the gun jammed. This time Lt Burke had to work on the gun. During the pause a Red soldier sighted him and started throwing grenades. One fragment nipped him in the hand. He was so engrossed in his job of restoring the weapon to an operational status that the blood from the wound was never noticed. Lt Burke's full facilities were aroused to meet the situation. His detailed knowledge of the light machine gun instinctively guided his hands in speedily reducing the stoppage. Once his gun began firing again the rout continued. The victory was completed by the men of "G" Company attacking up the hill and reinforcing the fires from Lt Burke's machine gun. By this time he had taken it from the tripod and was firing it cradled in his arms. His field jacket was wrapped around the barrel, protecting him from the hot metal.

DISCUSSION

A soldier with a lesser knowledge of the machine gun, and little or no practical experience in training,

would have given up when the gun jammed. In this case the immediate action taken on the machine gun by a soldier who knew his weapon, sustained the attack and brought about success of the mission. (See Annex D)

CONCLUSION

Far too many subjects are presented to the soldier during his training in the United States Army. It is difficult to recognize where the stress is laid. We should separate the "chaff from the wheat" and concentrate on basic instruction, in particular weapons instruction. In battle, when the platoon leader commands, "Follow Me", it is the light infantry weapon and how well the soldier behind it is trained in its use that counts. Yet the Army Training Program devotes only twenty hours to the basic knowledge of the most important light infantry weapons, the M-1, IMG, and BAR. Our negligence in realizing where the emphasis should be placed and our failure to solve our shortcomings, have caused sub-standard weapons performance in combat.

Continuous emphasis in mechanical training of our light infantry weapons should be maintained during all training cycles of the Army Training Program. Only in this way can we be assured that our soldiers will be proficient in their weapons should they again be called upon to fight.

I have two proposals to present. The first is an obvious means to secure more emphasis on the mechanical training. That is, to schedule more formal training in the Army Training Program. The second is to inject into the firing courses on the 1000-inch ranges of the M-1, IMG, and BAR, a period where the firer actually disassembles and assembles his weapon at his point during

the firing. This would create good practice of making certain that the soldier can assemble the weapon properly. The determining factor of course is whether the weapon will fire or not after he has assembled it.

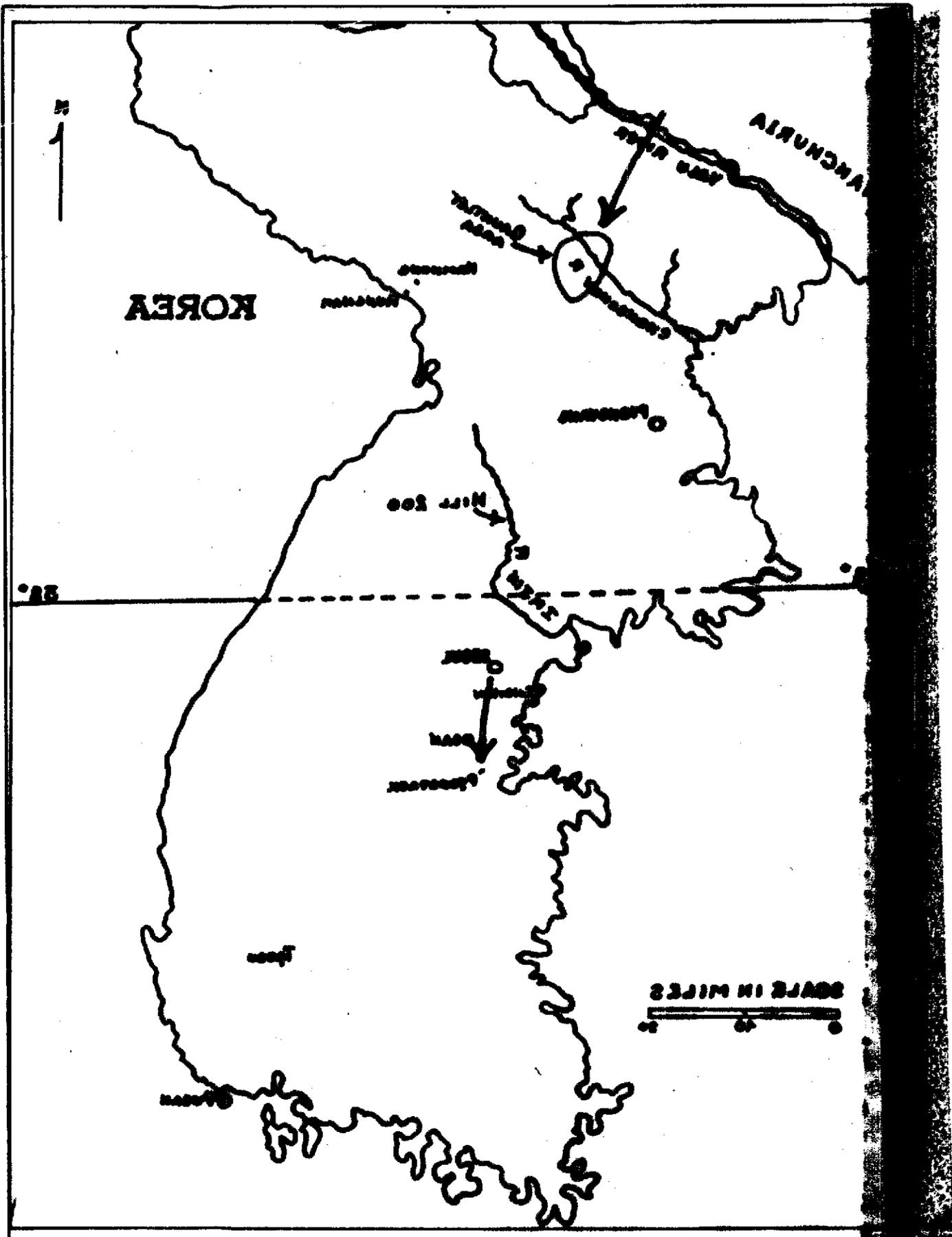
Another benefit to be derived from this practice is that it will give the soldier practical experience in "tearing down" his weapon while firing. This can simulate the time when he would have to work on his weapon while firing in combat.

I sincerely believe that more time spent on teaching our soldiers the fundamentals of our weapons will reward us many times over during the ultimate testing period of combat.

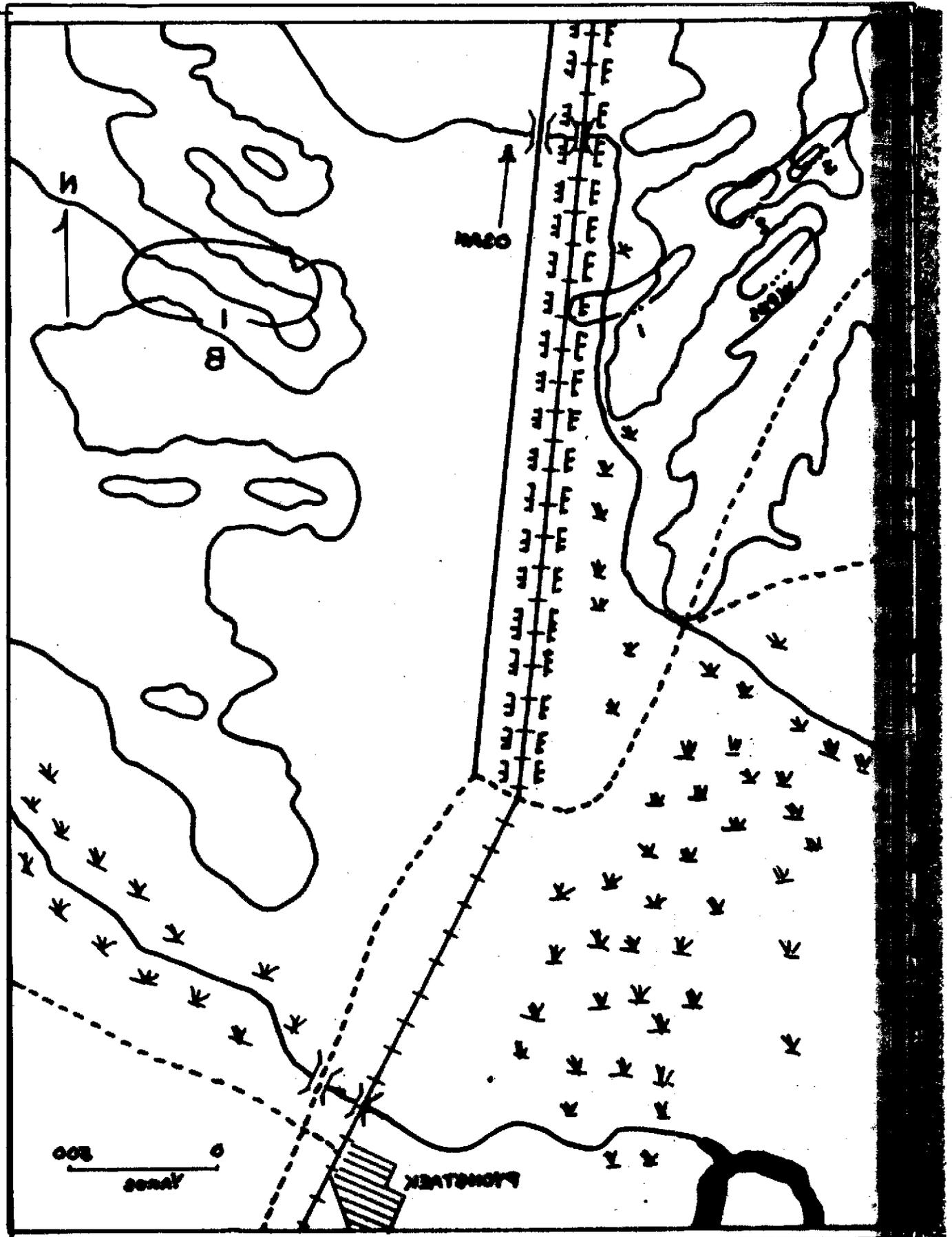
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7. Wagstaff, Jack J., "In Training, We Must Put First Things First", The Army Combat Forces Journal, January 1956.
8. Burke, Lloyd L., Capt, Inf., interviewed at Fort Benning, 14 January 1956, summary attached as Annex D.

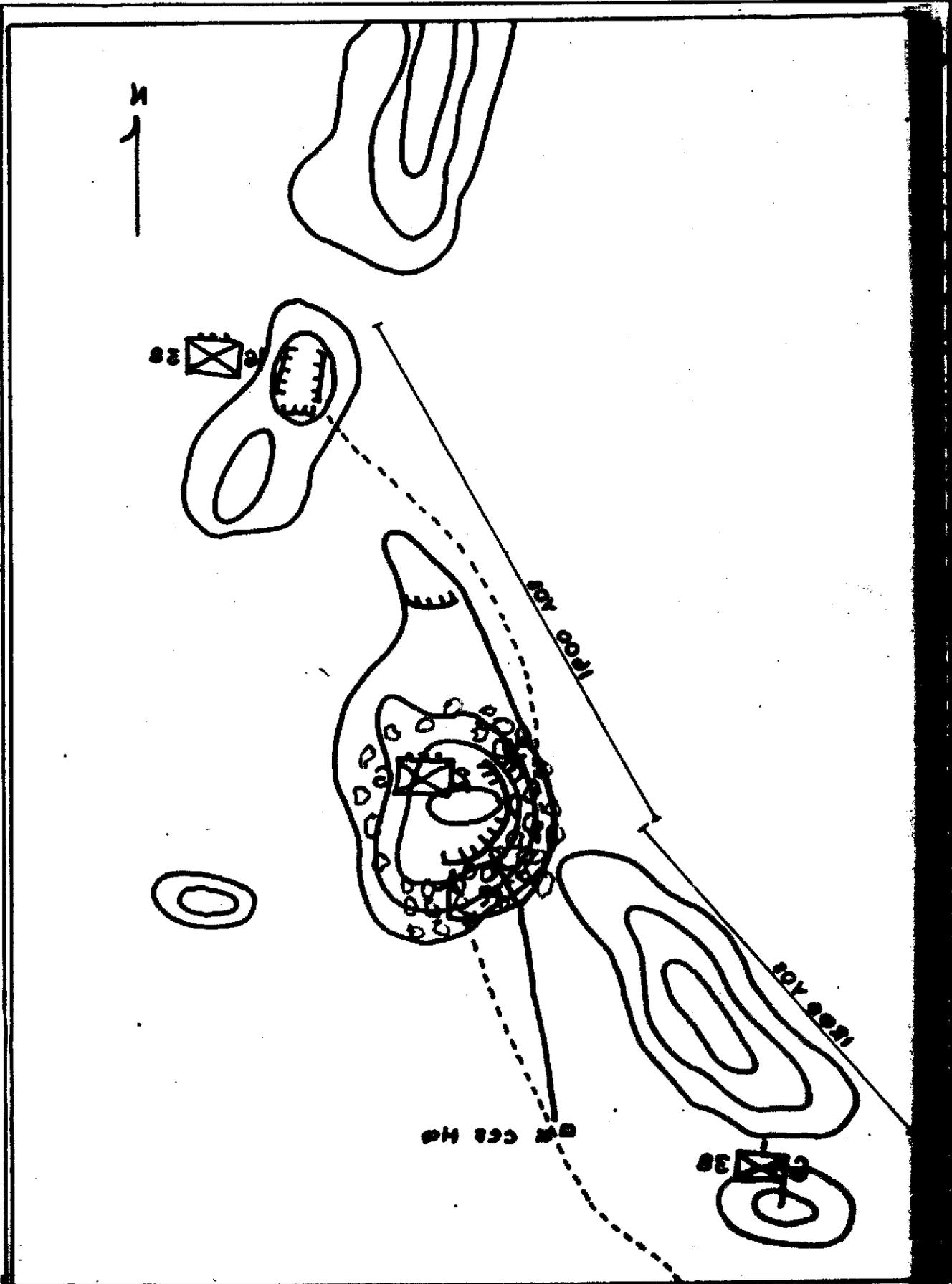
ANNEX A (MAP OF KOREA)



ANNEX B (DISPOSITIONS OF "A" AND "B" COMPANIES,
34TH INFANTRY, ON 5 JULY 1950)

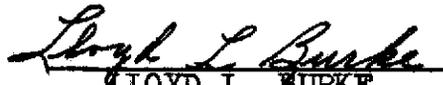


ANNEX C (DISPOSITIONS OF "G" COMPANY, 38TH INFANTRY,
ON 25-26 NOVEMBER 1950)



ANNEX D (INTERVIEW WITH CAPT LLOYD L. BURKE)

The statements concerning my actions on 28 October 1951 that appear in this monograph are true to the best of my recollection. I had great difficulty in getting my machine gun to fire again. After pulling the bolt to the rear I had to constantly tap the cover in order to insure proper functioning of the belt feed mechanism. I also had to pull the belt several times in order to keep the rounds seated properly in the feed way. I feel that had I not been well trained in the light machine gun, I might not have been able to place the gun into operating condition.


LLOYD L. BURKE
CAPT INF