

the aviation unit's problems in this regard and should never forget that if his supporting aircraft are not properly maintained, they will be subject to failure in flight, a condition that usually brings with it undesirable results.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Army Aviation devotes more time, effort, and money to safety than does any other agency. Several safety-related items should be particularly noted by all ground units:

- The pilot-in-command is the final authority for the safe operation of the aircraft.
- Every Army flight is controlled

and monitored by the use of flight plans. It is imperative that unless a flight plan is changed en route the aircraft remain on its intended route as filed on the original flight plan.

• Standards for scheduling crew rest must be adhered to, and ground commanders must acknowledge and support crew rest if they really want to prevent aircraft accidents.

The organizational changes that are now taking shape in the Army's basic structure will put Army Aviation side-by-side with its combat arms brothers, but aviation and ground units cannot wait for all of the TOE changes to take effect before they start working together more closely.

They should be taking specific steps now toward tighter integration if their mutual potential is to be fully realized.

Education is the key to this integration; greater combat power is its inevitable result.



CAPTAIN KEVIN G. SCHERRER, an Engineer officer, is a UH-1 platoon leader in the 503d Aviation Battalion, 3d Armored Division where he previously served as Assistant Operations Officer. He is a 1977 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy.

# Attack Helicopters

LIEUTENANT RONALD M. BUFFKIN

In recent issues of *INFANTRY Magazine*, Major General Sam Wetzel has concluded his Commandant's Note with "Practice Combined Arms."

While many infantry commanders, fortunately, know the full meaning of these words, there are still others who do not. Too often, commanders fail to integrate and use all the elements that make up the combined arms team, and one of these neglected elements is the attack helicopter (AH), the Cobra. It is highly maneuverable, has great firepower, and can be used in a number of different ways.

The infantry commanders who may not be aware of the attack helicopter's value to the combined arms team should find these guidelines useful.

First, the commander has to decide when helicopters can be used to the best advantage. An Army helicopter company (AHC) performs best when it is part of the commander's overall ground scheme of maneuver, and it should be used when concentrated combat power and mass fires are needed. Its ideal target consists of large mobile armored or mechanized forces. It should not be used against well-fortified, dug-in positions; one tank is never worth one attack helicopter.

In situations where no effort has been made to suppress the enemy's air defense weapons, the AHC aeroscout should be allowed to use the unit's supporting field artillery or tactical air assets to neutralize any air defense threat he encounters when positioning the AHC.

The terrain also must be carefully considered in any decision to use attack helicopters. Cobras are thin-skinned and need terrain that will provide protection, a standoff capability, and covered and concealed routes in and out of the target area.

If the target and the terrain are suitable, if the AHC will be fighting in conjunction with friendly ground forces, if concentrated combat power and mass fire are needed, and if air defense threats have been suppressed, then the situation is ideal for attack helicopter employment. Rarely will all these criteria be met at the same time. But one unique capability of the AHC is that its mobility makes it flexible in dealing with the rapidly changing requirements of the modern battlefield.

Once a commander decides to use

attack helicopters in a battle, he can improve this flexibility by providing them the time and the intelligence they need. Cobras are not magic dragons that appear on the scene by cruising forward at 120 knots with guns blazing. They have the same speed and security considerations that all maneuver units have.

Nap-of-the-earth flight, used to insure the helicopter's survival close to the enemy, is slow and deliberate. Because helicopters don't have the armor protection of ground fighting vehicles, they have to keep terrain between them and the enemy.

The best way for a commander to

that would be impossible for other combat aircraft. While low ceilings are not a problem for the AH, visibility can greatly influence its effectiveness.

### FIREPOWER

The 3,700-meter standoff capability provided by the Cobra's TOW gives it long-range antiarmor firepower. When the visibility drops below one-half mile, though, the AH's ability to acquire targets and use its standoff capability is reduced. The commander should be guided by



reduce the time an AHC needs to move and still be responsive to his needs is to put the AHC's aeroscouts to work as soon as it is practical. He should allow the aeroscouts to operate well forward early in the battle.

The aeroscout's primary mission is to see the battlefield, to acquire targets, and to coordinate the movement of the attack helicopters. He needs to coordinate with the company team or the task force commander. He does this through either secure radio or face-to-face contact.

A third major consideration for the commander is weather and darkness. Of all the air assets available to a maneuver commander, Army aviation has the best capability for fighting in poor weather. Because of the helicopter's unique maneuverability, speed, and operating envelope, an AH can maneuver on the battlefield in weather conditions

the AHC's liaison officer or its commander in deciding how visibility is affecting its operation.

Night combat is the least suitable for AH operations. The AH can fly at night, but its night vision and fire control equipment is not yet totally compatible with the requirements of the modern battlefield. This means that if a situation arises where the AH is needed at night, careful coordination and deliberate planning must be made in advance. The NOE mode of flight is extremely hazardous at night and it makes movement to a target area slow. Depending on the night vision equipment limitations of the AH, the target area will have to be illuminated either by the AH's 2.75-inch rockets or preferably by the maneuver unit's artillery or mortars.

The commander must also plan for adequate rest for the helicopter crews. Crew rest policies are dictated by Army Regulation 95-1 and by

various local directives. They provide for the maximum effective use of aviation assets and basically establish a time limit on how long each day an aviator can perform pilot duties. The AHC commander will keep the maneuver commander informed of the condition and availability of his air crews. It is important that the maneuver commander recognize this factor.

When the AHC is placed under the control of a maneuver element, the AHC will send a liaison officer to the supported headquarters. This officer will pass missions and tactical information to the AHC and advise the ground commander on the employment of his helicopters. The liaison officer is usually equipped with a quarter-ton or an M880 type vehicle complete with secure radio equipment for communicating with the AHC. This officer needs access to all the intelligence and operations information that is normally made available to other subordinate maneuver units. He should be located with the element that is fighting the battle at the time. This may be the brigade tactical operations center, the commander, or the S-3. In this way, the AHC can be most responsive to the commander. The liaison officer is the critical link in the chain of events that leads to the effective use of the AH.

If an Infantry commander understands these major points concerning the use of attack helicopters, and if he has a general knowledge of FM 17-50, Attack Helicopter Operations, he will be better able to use attack helicopters as part of his combined arms operations.



LIEUTENANT RONALD M. BUFFKIN is a company flight operations officer with the 501st Aviation Battalion (Combat) in Germany. Commissioned from the Officer Candidate School, he is an Army aviator and has served as an aeroscout section leader and as an attack helicopter liaison officer to maneuver units.