Mortars in MOUT

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Fighting in cities is not something that Infantrymen look forward to. At best, it is fraught with uncertainty and guaranteed to be extremely hazardous. And while the current doctrine of both the United States and the Soviet Union tends to downplay fighting in cities, one look at a map of Europe will show that military operations in urban terrain (MOUT) will be unavoidable in any future fighting there. Tactical commanders at all levels will almost certainly have cities or towns within their sectors of responsibility.

Although mechanized infantry battalion commanders will have various means of fire support available in a MOUT situation, their most responsive and perhaps most effective fire support will come from their own mortars. They must understand, though, that their mortar units are going to encounter some difficult problems in rendering that support.

For example, the terrain in an urban area, especially that in a large urban complex, probably will not offer many dependable firing positions. There may be some parks, courtyards, and lawns that can be used for firing positions, but more often the mortars will have to be positioned in less ideal places, such as on hard-surfaced areas — cobblestone walks, or asphalt or concrete streets.

In the latter cases, sandbags (if they are available) might be enough to steady the baseplates, but they may not be enough and crew members may have to physically stand on the baseplates to stabilize the guns when they are fired. Crew members may also find themselves holding the bipod legs in place if they expect to get any accuracy at all from their rounds. The aiming posts should present no problem — they can be secured in cans filled with dirt or rubble, or they can be driven into sandbags.

The mortars should be positioned so that they have the greatest possible overhead and mask clearance. They

should not be placed on top of or inside a building, because the shock of their firing could cause the structure to crumble, or the overpressure could cause casualties among the crews.

If the mortars can stay in one place for some time, the crews can improve their positions to protect themselves from direct small arms fire — from snipers, in particular. If the guns cannot be dug in, their crews can build parapets around them from sandbags or dirt-filled ammunition boxes. If neither is available, rubble, which should be abundant, can be stacked to provide protection.

In some situations, the mortars may have to be moved frequently to keep them from being detected and destroyed by the enemy's counterbattery fire. At such times, a careful reconnaissance of multiple firing positions must be conducted and the gun crews must be prepared for sudden and rapid moves to new positions.

The ammunition to be used in any given situation will depend, of course, upon the fire missions the supported units call for.

If high explosive rounds are to be used, their fuzes should be set at either "quick" or "delay" to get the most from their suppressive or casualty-producing effects. (Proximity-fuzed rounds are not particularly useful, because an opposing force can usually find some kind of overhead cover in an urban area.)

White phosphorous rounds are useful in obscuring or covering the movement of friendly units, but they should be used carefully because they can easily start fires.

If the supported friendly units are attacking at night, illumination rounds should be used to burst directly over the opponent's positions. If the friendly units are defending, illumination rounds should be fired to burst behind the friendly positions. In many MOUT situations, however, illumination rounds will not be particularly effective because of the shadows cast by any still-standing buildings — par-

ticularly the high-rise kind.

It will be up to the battalion commander to decide how he wants to use his mortars and whether he wants them kept on or taken off their vehicles. For example, he may decide to place his entire mortar platoon — or a section of it — under the operational control of a single infantry company. Or he may decide to keep the platoon under his direct control to better concentrate its fires on selected targets.

When they are left mounted on their vehicles, the mortars can be positioned more easily, but only if the tracks can be maneuvered through the rubble. The vehicles will also provide the crews with more protection as well as with stable firing platforms.

Almost every war that has been fought during the past 50 years has seen infantry units engage in MOUT operations — at Hue and Quang Tri in South Vietnam, for instance, and, more recently, in Beirut. Such operations are almost certain to take place in any future war as well. If they do, the mortar, because of its high trajectory and immediate responsiveness, will be the Infantryman's most valuable indirect fire support.

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Motorcycle Scouts

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The 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized), in its efforts to find the proper mix of heavy and light forces, has been testing a number of different organizational concepts. Recently, during two weeks of desert training at the National Training Center, it used three motorcycle scout sections provided by the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). Both divisions learned some valuable lessons from the experience.

The motorcycle scouts linked up with the two heavy task forces allocated to the exercises — one armor, the other mechanized infantry — in their respective desert assembly areas two days before the operation began. Later, they rotated between the two task forces.

The heavy units had no experience in how to use motorcycle scouts, and the scouts, for their part, had only recently completed two weeks of training on their new 250cc vehicles and had not tested them in the desert. But once representatives of both units started talking, the concepts involved were worked out, and each side came to appreciate the capabilities and limitations of the other.

MISSIONS

During the intense combat operations that followed, the motorcycle scouts conducted several specific missions: They reconnoitered zones, areas, and point locations; conducted listening and observation post, counter-reconnaissance, and linkup operations; provided security for tactical operations centers at task force and brigade levels; located OPFOR obstacles; and acted as messengers and guides.

The motorcycle scouts, working in teams of two and using the terrain to mask their movements, were able to move to places no other military vehicle could possibly get to undetected. Their quiet engines made them virtually undetectable as reconnaissance vehicles.

When the scouts were forced to move in areas without cover, their motorcycles' small profiles and mobility saved them from being hit by small arms fire. They could cover the gaps between task forces and the intervals between teams to counter the OPFOR's reconnaissance efforts.

The M16s the scouts carried, like all the other weapons used at the National Training Center, were equipped with MILES (Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System) gear. The scouts also carried VIPERs; this weapon gave them an anti-vehicle capability when they needed it either to break contact or to