

parts of the mortar, such as the traversing and elevating mechanisms, should be only lightly lubricated to prevent a possibly abrasive paste of sand and oil from forming.

The desert is different in so many ways from other environments in

which we normally employ mortars. Now that we are again faced with the possibility of conducting desert operations, we need to reexamine these differences. Only by learning in advance what needs to be done can we be sure that responsive indirect fire from our

mortars will be available when it is needed.

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Winning at the NTC: Defeat at Brigade Hill

MAJOR VERNON W. HUMPHREY

Small units have to be well prepared to fight the defensive battle, and this includes mobility and defense in depth. Sometimes the units that go to the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin for their 14 days of training learn these lessons through defeat, as one unit did at a place called Brigade Hill.*

The area in which this particular battle took place is a bowl-shaped valley measuring about six kilometers from north to south and seven kilometers from east to west. The floor of the bowl is slightly undulating and is cut by many small gullies that offer cover and concealment for small elements. Larger gullies or wadis offer considerable cover and serve also as excellent avenues of approach. The entire area is bisected by the "Irwin River," actually a paved road with designated "fording sites."

The key terrain in the area consists of Hill 876, the Dumbbell, the

922-955 hill mass, the fording sites themselves, and Brigade Hill. The passes between Hill 876 and the Dumbbell, and between the Dumbbell and the 922-955 hill mass, are quite restrictive since the hills themselves cannot be traversed by vehicles and can be climbed only with difficulty by dismounted infantry. Although it is dominated by the higher hills to the west and south, Hill 780 does provide cover and concealment for forces approaching from the east (see accompanying map).

THE MISSION

The U.S. task force was ordered to defend in sector, against an attack from the east, with its initial battle line running from Hill 876 to the Dumbbell to the 922-955 hill mass.

The task force's plan called for its Team Alpha to defend initially in the vicinity of Hill 876. Its Team Bravo was to defend in the vicinity of the Dumbbell, while its Team Charlie was to defend the pass between the Dumbbell and the 922-955 hill mass. Obstacles, consisting of antitank ditches, wire, and mines, were to be constructed in the passes. The com-

panies were also directed to reconnoiter positions in the vicinity of Brigade Hill.

At first light, several units reported OPFOR movement. Most of the reports concerned small units moving at high speed. On the heels of these reports, motorized OPFOR elements drove past the U.S. task force's TOC. The task force commander ordered the task force to fall back to positions near Brigade Hill.

One team had just been resupplied, but it pulled out and left its log pack on the ground. As the task force pulled out, its attached engineer company could be seen working on the obstacles. Not aware of the task force's pull-back, the engineers continued working, and eventually "went into the bag" without firing a shot.

The task force raced pell-mell for the Irwin River, with each team commander choosing his own route. Eventually, Team Bravo took up a perimeter defense in the immediate vicinity of Brigade Hill. Teams Charlie and Alpha took up perimeter defenses about 1,000 meters apart along the edge of the major wadi to the west of Brigade Hill. None of the companies covered fronts of more

* This is the third in a series. The views expressed are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Defense or any element of it.

han 300 meters. All company positions were under continuous observation by OPFOR motorcycle scouts, who could be seen about a kilometer to the rear of each company.

About two hours after the task force arrived in its new positions, smoke and dust on the horizon heralded the arrival of the OPFOR's motorized rifle regiment. With little opposition, the first motorized rifle battalion crossed the Irwin River just to the north of Brigade Hill. Because rolling terrain masked the fires of Teams Alpha and Charlie, the OPFOR battalion was able to bypass Team Bravo with few losses.

About ten minutes later, another motorized rifle battalion drove straight into the gap between Teams Alpha and Charlie. The latter team, which was tank heavy, found its fires masked by the terrain; Team Alpha managed to fire only one TOW round.

With the OPFOR battalion streaming through the gap, Team Alpha began to disintegrate. A BTR-50 drove into the rear of one of Team Alpha's platoons, and the OPFOR soldiers dismounted and aggressively attacked and destroyed one squad. The other two U.S. squads in this platoon watched the attack but gave no assistance. The OPFOR squad then turned on, attacked, and destroyed each of those squads. Unable to start

their BTR-50, the OPFOR soldiers, on foot, followed in the wake of the OPFOR attack and engaged and killed two other U.S. squads that had been bypassed.

With the U.S. task force now faced with total defeat, Team Charlie received the order to pull back. As it pulled out of its defensive perimeter, the task force found itself driving into the flank of a third motorized rifle battalion. A few U.S. tanks opened fire, but Team Charlie's commander, interpreting his orders to move as precluding him from engaging the OPFOR, ordered a cease fire. The OPFOR battalion then turned parallel to Team Charlie, attacked its flank, and destroyed it in about three minutes.

ANALYSIS

Counterreconnaissance and intelligence-gathering by the U.S. task force during this operation were poor. The initial reports of six OPFOR reconnaissance vehicles had been made by two different observers who saw the *same vehicles*. These two sightings had been added together at the TOC, and this had given the impression that a full OPFOR motorized rifle battalion had penetrated the battle lines. This impression had been reinforced when one of the OPFOR reconnaissance vehicles had driven

past the TOC, firing a machinegun. (More than one U.S. unit at the NTC has been chased out of its initial positions by the OPFOR's reconnaissance elements in just this way.)

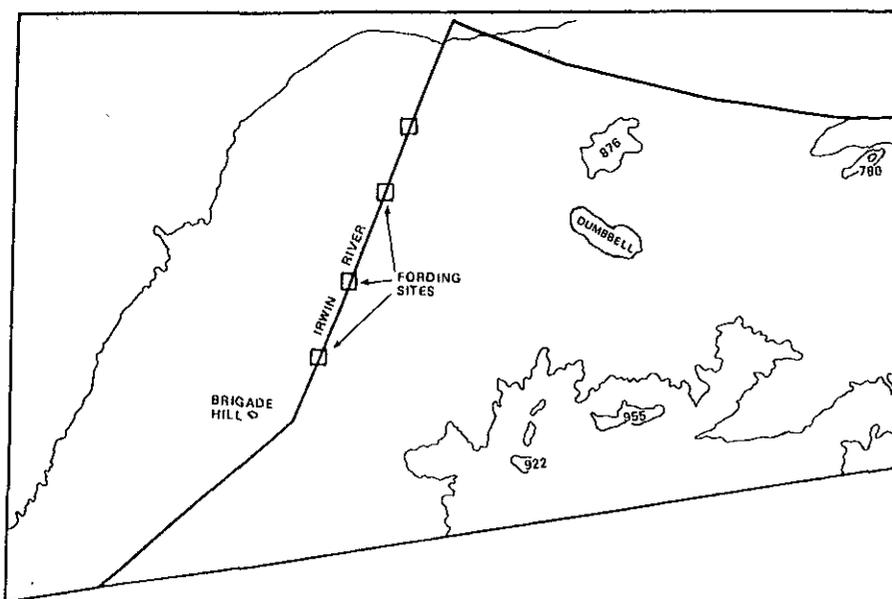
Neither the task force's positions near Brigade Hill nor the routes to them had been reconnoitered. No one on the U.S. side seemed to realize that the gently rolling terrain would prevent the units from firing on the fording sites from the defensive positions along the wadi. Too, the movement to the new positions was confused, and command and control broke down completely, as evidenced by the loss of the engineers.

Once in their new positions, the U.S. company commanders were not sure of their locations or boundaries and seemed to be unable to improvise an effective defensive plan, probably because they did not know the task force commander's intentions. Little or no coordination was made between teams, as evidenced by the gaps in the position. No one checked the positions, although there was plenty of time. There was no fire support plan, and only one fire mission was called during the entire action.

Service support played a significant role in the action. The abandonment of a log pack — after 72 hours without hot food, and with little remaining fuel or water — was especially demoralizing to one team. Team Alpha was able to fire only one TOW round, because that's all its TOW section had, and no one in the task force knew its ammunition status. In a previous engagement, several tanks from the task force had been evacuated with full loads of ammunition aboard. These tanks had not yet returned, and the ammunition was sorely missed.

The speed and shock of the OPFOR attack was demoralizing to the U.S. units. When the OPFOR infantry came in behind their tanks, the U.S. units considered themselves already beaten and were unable to muster an effective defense.

Things might have gone differently in this battle if the U.S. task force had used an alternative plan such as the following one:



The task force establishes OPs on Hill 876, Hill 955, the Dumbbell, and Hill 780, and reinforces them with TOWs and tanks. The scout platoon mans the OPs.

Obstacles are placed in the same places as called for in the original plan, but infantry squads are dug into them. TOWs and tanks are positioned to fire on the obstacles. Platoons, protected with wire and close-in minefields, occupy strongpoints at the fords in the Irwin River. The main battle position is established on the first ground west of the Irwin River from which fire can be placed on the fording sites.

During the initial stages of the battle, the scout platoon passes information to the task force's S-2, who carefully evaluates it. The infantry units in the obstacles engage the OPFOR reconnaissance elements to prevent any penetration of the obstacles themselves.

As the OPFOR main force approaches, the scout platoon brings it under artillery fire and keeps fire on the OPFOR all the way in. When the OPFOR reaches the obstacles, the dug-in infantry engages the breaching force, picking off engineers, killing exposed crewmen, and knocking out vehicles. At the same time, the scout platoon brings tank and TOW fires to bear on the OPFOR's flanks and rear. The tanks and TOWs located near the fording sites add their fires.

The OPFOR must now fight three separate battles — a short range bat-

tle at the obstacle, a long range battle with the forces near the fording sites, and a third battle with the scout platoon on their flanks and in their rear. The OPFOR can either stop to fight it out with the scout platoon and dug-in infantry or press on and take its casualties.

If the OPFOR elects to fight it out, its units will certainly pile up, lose their momentum, and offer a lucrative counterattack target. If the OPFOR units move on, the tanks and TOWs near the fording sites can move back to the main battle positions, the scout platoon can follow the OPFOR and fire on it from the rear, and the entire process will repeat itself when the OPFOR hits the dug-in infantry at the fording sites.

Thus, several lessons can be learned from the defeat at Brigade Hill:

- Initial contact reports can be unsettling — and are usually grossly inflated. Care must be taken to winnow the chaff from the wheat. This is best done by putting scouts well out and by working hard to get accurate reports from them.

- Counterreconnaissance is essential. The OPFOR reconnaissance elements won the opening round of this battle with a total of six vehicles.

- Nothing is more important than killing the enemy. Commanders and leaders should never pass up an opportunity to deal a lethal blow, no matter what else they're doing at the time.

- Carefully planned and coordinated defensive positions in great depth are essential. Linear positions, particularly if not coordinated, are as fragile as eggshells.

- Commanders and leaders at all levels must know the task force commander's intentions and must be trained to implement these intentions. As a minimum, unit leaders must be trained to always maintain contact with adjacent elements and to coordinate their defenses with those elements. This should be automatic.

- Without service support, the best plans are useless. Weapon systems without ammunition, men without food and water, and vehicles without fuel are also useless.

Small units must be trained to *fight*. Regardless of how hopeless the situation appears, small units that are prepared to sell their lives dearly can often turn the tide, while units that give up are usually slaughtered like sheep.

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OPFOR Shooting Gallery

CAPTAIN NOYES B. LIVINGSTON III

After reading an article in *INFANTRY* about an indoor "combat theater" in Italy, the S3 of my National Guard battalion decided to

adapt the idea for our unit. (See "Combat Theater," by Sergeant First Class Jimmie Ferguson, *INFANTRY*, March-April 1981, page 41.) The

theater in Europe used, among other things, a movie projector and a computer to conduct marksmanship training; ours would have to use the less ex-