

INFANTRY LETTERS



ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCES

The article "Dismounted Night Attack," by Lieutenant Colonel William A. DePalo, Jr., (September-October 1985, *Infantry*) raises some important issues that should be examined closely. What he has done is a classic case of deductive reasoning, going from the specific to the general, using only one example to support his conclusion.

In this case he has taken the results of a dismounted night attack during REFORGER 85 and deduced from it that "the unsupported, nonilluminated, dismounted night attack remains a highly effective and desirable part of our offensive doctrine," and further that "there is no reason, therefore, to believe that only special operations forces can conduct dismounted night attacks." He says, "The mechanized infantryman, if he is well prepared to do so, can also . . . conduct successful night attacks."

It has long been accepted that one of the most important ways to prepare for future encounters is to use the results of past encounters. But maybe the most important point for the would-be user of past examples to remember is that only insofar as one can count on the essential conditions of a given situation remaining the same can one count on essentially the same outcome. As Sir Julian Corbett, a noted British military and naval historian wrote, "The value of history in the art of war is not only to elucidate the resemblance of past and present, but also their essential differences."

With that in mind, we would like to look at the essential circumstances that contributed to the success of Colonel DePalo's attack.

He says, "Through stealth, [the dismounted infantryman] can move over virtually any kind of terrain, maneuver around choke points, and, in many instances, walk onto an objective undiscovered and therefore unopposed."

The attack itself was successful in that "all elements had crossed [the river] undetected and regrouped to begin infiltrating the objective." Further on, he states that "night is the ally of the infantryman and negates many of the advantages enjoyed by a defender who occupies good defensive terrain and has sophisticated optics and weapon systems."

The implication of all this is that his battalion slipped past the defenders totally undetected, except for "a single brief interruption when an enemy machinegun opened fire on the right flank company."

That is his side of the story.

We were the squadron commander and the S-3 of the unit that faced him, and we have a slightly different view of the battle (not surprising, since opposing forces often have completely different views of the battle). Let's look at an interpretation of these events from our side and see if some unique circumstances may have contributed to his success—essential circumstances that may or may not be transferable to future battles.

For starters, however, his units were not "undetected." They were seen even before midnight by line crossing patrols from the blue side (even though these were against the rules, as was his scout screen). They were further picked up in the thermal sights of both the M1 tanks and the M901 ITVs, both of which were deployed well forward. The patrols were tracked even before they approached the line of departure. So stealth did not contribute to their success, but, as Colonel DePalo states, they did manage to seize their objective. How?

The first essential circumstance that allowed this success, even though detected, was REFORGER artillery play. We have been on more than a dozen REFORGERs over the past ten years and can tell you that artillery is virtually worthless to the tactical commander in these exercises. This is because the cumbersome system used to allocate

credit for artillery is unworkable. Many commanders stop using artillery because they know they will never get credit for it, and there are other things they can do with their time.

Did we call for artillery on these dismounted patrols? Yes, almost 100 calls for fire directed against them were sent to the DS 155mm battalion that was supporting our squadron. Our maneuver umpires (who normally do not give credit for artillery, as only artillery umpires are supposed to do this, according to the REFORGER umpire book) declared that the patrols would have been devastated by all of this artillery. They tried to give credit, but the results were insignificant.

The second essential circumstance made the little credit that was given worthless to us.

During REFORGER, casualties on the attacking side came back to life after two hours while casualties for the defenders came back after four hours. Not only did they come back to life, they were allowed to continue on with their patrol, even while "dead." Thus, the patrol leader could afford to completely disregard artillery. Since he wasn't attacking anything, merely infiltrating, he didn't need any combat power to continue, and the loss of men was insignificant.

Why didn't we maneuver to counter the dismounted patrols? Simple! For safety reasons, no mounted night tactical maneuver was allowed. Thus the tracked vehicles of the covering force were also ineffective. Also, the covering force vehicles were not issued any blank ammunition, so even this was not played. (Whoever "fired" on the right flank company must have been from the attacking battalion's own scout forces; it wasn't any of the covering force units.)

Could one, then, count this night dismounted infantry attack a success? Absolutely! It was a classic example of gamesmanship. It was a brilliant use of the quirks of REFORGER to gain a tac-

tical advantage. There is nothing wrong with this. We have been challenged over and over to break out of the conventional mode of thinking and to look for innovative solutions to problems. The night dismounted attack took advantage of several inherent limitations in REFORGER tactical play and made the most of them.

This is normal during REFORGER. REFORGER attacks by armor and mechanized infantry units are characterized by pressing the attack at all costs and concentrating lots of units in one small area—with attacking units coming back to life in two hours and the defenders in four hours, it doesn't take long for an attacking force to build up an overwhelming advantage. There is no free maneuver during REFORGER because of maneuver damage limitation. Tracked vehicles are essentially road and trail bound.

What does all this have to do with the dismounted infantry attack? Just this. REFORGER is not the place to either argue or develop *tactics*. It is a great test of logistics and command and control at the battalion level. It may also be a good test of operational level skills. But the one thing it is not is a good test of tactics. And that is because the essential circumstances of combat are not there.

If Colonel DePalo expects to fight a mechanized unit with no night sights, ineffective artillery, and no ammunition and one that cannot or will not maneuver at night, and if he expects that his casualties will move while dead and come back to life in two hours, then maybe he can use this particular example as one on which to base his future plans. We hope, for the sake of his soldiers, that he does not.

None of this invalidates a night dismounted infantry attack—not even a night dismounted attack against a mechanized force. But neither can this particular exercise be used to validate any tactical doctrine. It is therefore ludicrous to use this example to bolster the argument for night dismounted attack.

Using historical examples is a time-honored means of preparing for the next war. But there are as many cases of nations and individuals using the wrong lessons as there are of using the right ones. The key is to make sure that one

uses situations that approximate, *in their critical circumstances*, the situation one is trying to prepare for. And we don't really think Colonel DePalo has done this.

No one is faulting his soldiers for their admittedly magnificent physical feat. But at the same time, that feat bore little relation to the kind of battle we expect to fight in Europe, and to say that it does is to do a disservice to the Army, but most especially to the dismounted infantryman.

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MORE ON NIGHT ATTACK

I concur with the theory behind Lieutenant Colonel William A. DePalo, Jr.'s article "Dismounted Night Attack." Since I was an umpire during this operation of the 1st Battalion, 10th Infantry, I would like to make some comments about it.

During a REFORGER exercise, a mechanized infantry battalion is held to the constraints of the exercise, one of which limits tracked movement during hours of darkness. Umpires, controllers, and commanders must coordinate and plan so as not to allow the control restrictions to become tactical distractions. To control the battle and calculate the odds, each umpire must know the details of the maneuver commander's intent, and during this particular exercise better communications would have helped.

To reinforce Colonel DePalo's intentions, I recommend a closer look at the capabilities of the mechanized infantry. Its combat power can be increased if forces are concentrated toward the main effort of an attack. Such a course of action would have improved this battalion's ability to sustain the effort of the division and may have allowed the attack to continue into the main battle area. But a main

attack was not included in the battalion's plans.

The battalion compromised its mobility when the drivers and track commanders were removed from their vehicles and ordered to contribute to the dismounted attack. Carrier teams, tanks, and TOWs could have been tasked with reinforcing the main attack or with providing continuous support by overwatching the dismounted element. Then the M113 armored personnel carriers could have carried the 60-pound rucksacks for the dismounted elements, leaving the soldiers with only the weapon systems required to complete the mission. A planned link-up operation using control measures would have made it easier to consolidate later and rejoin the dismounted elements with their tracks.

In this particular battle, trucks were used incorrectly and inefficiently. Wheeled vehicles carrying light infantry to a secured dismount point previously seized by a scout section or by the lead element of a maneuver unit would have served the effort more effectively. This technique would have allowed a more efficient use of both men and equipment, and the force would have had stronger soldiers ready to fight, instead of soldiers who had just walked 14 miles in a foot of snow. Selected tracks could have been used to carry mission-essential equipment and to help distribute the logistical needs of the battalion.

One simple control measure would have been to have TOWs move into overwatch and 107mm mortars support the forward elements' movement to the river. When the dismounted units reached the river, the TOWs would have moved forward to overwatch, the tracks would have moved forward with rubber boats, and the trucks would have been prepared to resupply the effort.

The battalion's mission was to penetrate the enemy's covering force. Analyzing the operation, I consider it to have been a successful infiltration but not a successful attack. Bypassing the enemy's covering force supported the principles of infiltration, while a penetration is designed to destroy the enemy force and with it the coherence of the defense.

The infantry should always train for

dismounted night attack, which is the most effective operation for disrupting the enemy's defensive plan. By combining the audacity of the dismounted soldier with the mobility of the mechanized infantry, we can destroy the coherence of an enemy's defense.

PAUL J. CANCELLIERE
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FOG BOUND

Your excellent magazine is read with great interest by all members of the British Army Staff in Washington and elsewhere in the United States and the United Kingdom.

I was interested to see in the INFANTRY News section an item about the Abrams M1A1 (November-December, p. 9). It is undoubtedly a superb tank, and I very much look forward to seeing it "in the flesh."

I would, however, like to comment on the final paragraph of that item, which claims that "The tank's thermal imaging and laser sighting systems enable the gunner to fire accurately through dense fog, smoke, or dust while the tank is traveling at combat speeds."

Excellent though the thermal imager and laser rangefinder may be, they will not operate through *dense* fog, thermal screening smoke, heavy fuel smoke, or thick dust clouds.

Water droplets and water vapor severely degrade the performance of thermal imagers and lasers. In light mist, fog, or rain, they will continue to operate but at reduced ranges and with less definition. In heavy rain thermal contrasts are drastically reduced and it becomes very difficult to distinguish targets from their backgrounds, except at very short ranges. In dense fog, thermal imagers and lasers "penetrate" little better than the human eye or a vehicle headlamp. Thermal imagers will, as claimed, operate through conventional smoke as though it did not exist, but some *lasers* will be defeated by the same smoke. These are mainly neodymium yag lasers, which comprise the majority of the lasers in military service throughout the world.

The M1A1 will, of course, have a CO₂ laser that *can* penetrate conventional smoke and can therefore be operated with thermal imagers. However, *thermal*-screening smokes are being developed, and some heavy fuel smokes currently used by Warsaw Pact forces may often "blind" thermal imagers and lasers. Dust can also have a "blinding" effect, but much depends on the size of the dust particles and the thickness of the dust cloud or screen.

These comments are in no way intended as a criticism of the excellent M1A1 tank, but I am sure you will agree that it is very important that soldiers be well aware of both the capabilities and the limitations of the equipment they use. They should certainly not *overestimate* those capabilities.

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JUST ONE

In reference to the article by Colonel Huba Wass de Czege, "Three Kinds of Infantry," in your July-August 1985 issue (and the response by Major R. McMichael in the November-December 1985 issue), I would like to offer the following views.

I personally believe that there are not three different kinds of infantry and that there is no need for three. There is only one type of infantryman, and he is employed differently in different scenarios and units.

Arming the "armored infantry" with submachineguns accomplishes one thing: It renders the dismounted infantryman unable to influence his immediate area beyond a range of 50 meters.

Having served in light infantry, airborne infantry, and mechanized infantry, I see no real differences beyond extra equipment and employment. Despite all the arguments to the contrary, I have found it quite easy to move from one "kind" of infantry to another. The basic training required is the same, and the tactical employment of the different "kinds" is not all that difficult.

The idea of institutionalizing three different types of infantry with, one assumes, three different MOSs and training programs would put a strain on the training base and fix a problem that doesn't really exist.

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AUTHOR RESPONDS

Reference the letters by Captain Cormier and Sergeant Holmes in the November-December 1985 issue of INFANTRY (p. 5) in response to my article on extended FTXs for RC units (May-June 1985, p. 42), I would like to make some comments.

First, I would like to commend Sergeant Holmes on some of the excellent points that he made. I know that most Reserve Components now train throughout their annual training period in the field. Some even train at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, and there is no better training available.

But during the 1970s, and when I was working on this article in 1981, many units did not train during the middle weekend, nor did they train for an extended period in a field environment. I am sure there were some that did, even then, as in the case of Captain Cormier's unit. If they did they should be commended, for they are truly superior to most RC units in all aspects of training.

It appears that my article may have been somewhat obsolete, but I remain firm in my opinion of this kind of training, and if there is still a unit somewhere that does not fully benefit from this kind of training, then the criticism will have been worth it.

On another subject, I enjoyed immensely the article "Longstreet and Jackson," by Captain Michael A. Phipps (November-December 1985, p. 29).

I agree with Captain Phipps that Longstreet was not given the credit he so richly deserved. Probably the most apparent reason for his unpopularity was his perceived performance at Gettysburg. He made several efforts to persuade Lee to

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change his tactical plan at Gettysburg, but, for some reason, Lee actually thought he could win the battle and end the war.

After the battle, many of Longstreet's subordinate commanders blamed him for the defeat, maybe not knowing what discussions had actually taken place. When he made his feelings known after the war, this naturally made him very unpopular. And his becoming a Republican after the war and joining with old friend Grant in rebuilding the South made him a marked man. As Captain Phipps points out, he became a scapegoat.

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PROVOKED

Although I usually do not indulge in writing rebuttals to letters in your "INFANTRY Letters" section, Lieutenant Mark A. Dorney's letter in your September-October issue (p. 4) has provoked me to do so.

Having served for 25 months as an infantry company commander, and having personally organized and run 36 squad-level live fires (all with movement) and 14 platoon level live fires (again all offensive in nature), I take issue with Lieutenant Dorney's entire thesis.

Captain Thomas P. Kratman's article ("Concerning 'Safety,'" May-June 1985, p. 10) and its companion piece ("Training Realism and Safety," by Paul A. Dierberger, May-June 1985, p. 12) represent a lucid, rational argument for reviewing AR 385-63 and, more important, for reviewing all division safety regulations that serve as guidelines for live-fire exercises.

My first point is that though MILES is a good system it is no substitute for live fire: it reinforces some poor tactical techniques (hiding in tall grass, for example), and the soldiers know they are shooting blanks. Scoring grenades or anything else does not improve realism. There is a tremendous psychological difference between throwing a grenade on a range and on a live-fire exercise.

The control measures that need to be

emphasized are lines of departure, over-watch positions, and boundaries.

Live-fire exercise scenarios must conform to doctrine. There must be no "administrative" periods—there will be none in combat. We must suppress the attitude that "In real life we'd do it this way, but because of safety we do it that way." An operation is either tactically sound or it is not. Safety is also a real world planning consideration. If doctrine calls for us to do things we're forbidden to do, either doctrine or the regulation must be changed. Include a realism briefing as well as a safety briefing to tell the soldiers the standards expected of them in terms of realism.

Accidents are the cost of doing business. Just as we know accidents are going to happen with aircraft and vehicles, we should accept that accidents will happen on live fires. We must not be cavalier about it, and we must take all available precautions, but when controls inhibit the imagination of the maneuvering unit, an exercise ceases to fulfill its primary mission—preparing the soldier for battle.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Abstracts of papers and workshop proposals are invited for the U.S. Army Combined Seminar on Human Technology/Stress Management to be held in Indianapolis on 4-8 August 1986. The deadline is 30 April 1986.

Topics for the seminar include soldier selection and placement, soldier and unit performance in the areas of physical, mental, and stress management skills or morale, and unit cohesion and esprit.

Abstracts should address these five criteria: What does the technology propose to change? What evidence supports the technology's claims? At what target populations is the technology directed? What are the essential characteristics of the technology? What are the cost and benefit factors?

For information, write Commander, U.S. Army Soldier Support Center,

ATTN: ATSG-DSS (Bridges), Fort Harrison, IN 46216-5060, or call (317) 542-3878.

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WRITING BOOK

I am preparing for publication a full-length book that I have tentatively entitled *Line of Departure*. I would like very much to hear from soldiers who served with me between 1950 and 1975, and I ask them to contact Ms. Julie Sherman for further details.

Ms. Sherman can be reached at P.O. Box 187, St. Lucia, Queensland 4067, AUSTRALIA.

I appreciate any help that can be given to me.

DAVID H. HACKWORTH
COL, U.S. Army, Retired

BOOK ON KHE SANH

I am writing a narrative account of the Siege of Khe Sanh (January-April 1967) and need some detailed personal accounts from participants.

I would appreciate hearing from anyone who served at or in support of the Khe Sanh Combat Base (including air and artillery) during the siege.

My address is 1149 Grand Teton, Pacifica, CA 94044; telephone (415) 355-6678.

ERIC M. HAMMEL

