

# PAST TIMES



*EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is another in our recurring series of articles reprinted from previous issues of INFANTRY and its predecessors, the INFANTRY SCHOOL QUARTERLY and the MAILING LIST.*

*Slightly edited, the following articles appeared in the MAILING LIST, Volume XXVIII, 1944. The first, titled Combat Notes (pages 13-22), was written by a general officer who had commanded U. S. troops in action during World War II in both Europe and the Pacific. He had most recently served as an infantry division commander in*

*Europe.*

*The second article, Jungle Fighting Notes (pages 119-139), is presented without the drawings that accompanied the original article. Those drawings were used only to highlight specific points that were made in the then most recent edition of Field Manual 72-20, Jungle Warfare. We felt the specific narrative points were far more important than the drawings.*

*To us, these two articles have considerable relevance for today's infantryman.*

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## COMBAT NOTES

Many soldiers act as though all rules are suspended when they enter a combat zone. Individual sanitation is neglected unless the leaders are alert. Small items of equipment are abandoned. Water discipline is forgotten. Men expose themselves to observation until they learn better by harsh experience. They neglect their weapons. To prevent this slackness, troops must be so controlled and spruced up during training that they become proud of their disciplined qualities.

Bivouac discipline of green troops is often especially bad. An example was furnished by one unit on its first night in Normandy, where German reconnaissance planes often made sorties at night over Allied positions. When the first enemy airplane was heard over this outfit's bivouac, every man who could lay his hands on a weapon opened fire. The enemy could not have asked for better information than that provided by this futile fire.

### Bunching

The oldest complaint about our troops in battle is that they do not disperse sufficiently. Unfortunately, it is still true. Comparatively few casualties are caused by gunfire. The great majority of them are the result of mortar fire, which our enemies lay down with speed and accuracy. Instances in which a single mortar shell has caused a dozen casualties, including both officers and men, are not rare. It is evident

that our training must not only continue to emphasize the need for dispersion, but must increase the emphasis.

### Tanks

The invulnerability of tanks is largely a myth. This should be emphasized in training. When attacked by tanks, infantrymen must remain in place and kill the accompanying hostile infantry. In every observed instance on which these notes are based, German tanks did not continue the attack after their accompanying infantry had been killed or stopped by fire.

A feeling of great helplessness suffuses the individual infantryman when attacked by tanks. Often the terrain makes it impossible for organic antitank weapons to keep up with the foot troops. Therefore, the infantryman must be shown that the antitank rocket really is effective against tanks; that while riflemen are destroying the accompanying hostile infantry, rocket teams can stalk the tanks and destroy them. A realization of the effectiveness of this combination does much to eliminate fear of tanks.

Many of our troops fail to realize that they must cover the friendly tanks operating with them by actually delivering small arms fire all around them. But, unless friendly riflemen place a protective screen of small arms fire around a tank, it can be knocked out by enemy with rocket launchers, sticky grenades, mine strings, or other light weapons. Our training

for small infantry units working with small groups of tanks should include exercises in which ball ammunition is fired.

### Small Unit Tactics

Simple fire-and-movement tactics win the fight. This principle cannot be stressed too much. It is the one thing that will break a stalemate in battle. Whenever a unit is stopped by fire, some part of it must promptly return the fire, while some part initiates movement. There have been occasions when one or two men crawling toward the enemy's front or flank have actually caused him to break.

New troops can be led forward if they are required to fire liberally. The individual should be taught that, in many combat situations, no hostile targets are visible. Even so, he must fire at those points from which he thinks the enemy fire is coming. By this means, although the enemy may not be shot out, he will probably be neutralized; in any case, the effectiveness of his fire will be reduced.

The more vigorous the base of fire is, the greater the mobility of the maneuvering element. If all its rifle squads are thoroughly indoctrinated with this principle, a company or a battalion will seldom be "pinned to the ground."

Being "pinned to the ground" by the Germans for any length of time is certain to result in casualties. When the Germans stop an infantry unit for more than 10 or 15 minutes, they invariably punish it severely with mortar fire.

In training, complicated squad or platoon problems must be avoided. They are not worth the time they require to run. Simple, direct fire-and-movement problems, designed so that the leaders must act quickly and maintain control of their units, must be practiced again and again. Plenty of time should be given to this subject, even at the expense of curtailing more advanced training. The unit that knows how to fire and how to move under fire is a winning unit.

### Patrolling

Patrolling is weak in our units until the personnel have gained combat experience. The subject is of great importance, and not enough time has been devoted to it.

One phase which must be covered in training is that of organizing and planning patrolling along a battalion or regimental front. To tell a unit to "maintain contact with the enemy by vigorous patrolling" is inadequate and often dangerous. At best, it will produce little of value. Objectives must be defined, missions assigned, routes and alternate routes in both directions planned. Recognition must be assured. The entire plan must be designed to secure a chain of positive or negative information that will produce the desired intelligence.

A new unit must be carefully "broken in" to patrolling. Simple, easy missions should be assigned initially. But missions must be accomplished. If necessary, a patrol that fails should be sent out again. As the personnel acquire skill

and confidence, the difficulty of the missions can be increased. But it is hard to get good patrolling from a unit whose first patrols are badly shot up.

### Communication

Forward units often grow careless about radio security. Late one afternoon in France, a certain battalion radioed in the clear: "What is the effective strength of George Company?" Answer: "Approximately 80 men." Battalion "The old man does not wish you to advance beyond the church about 400 yards to your front." It is hardly necessary to point out the danger involved in such lack of radio discipline and the need for simple abbreviated codes for transmitting such messages.

### Junior Leaders

The training and development of lieutenants and noncommissioned officers must be continuous. Casualties among them are high; therefore, understudies must be trained. Commanders sometimes complain that their basic privates are not of noncommissioned caliber. Even if this is true, if they are the only soldiers available they must be trained. Three men should be trained for every noncommissioned officer position.

During training, noncommissioned officers should be given every possible opportunity to exercise authority—on the drill field, in bivouac, in barracks, on work details. They should be "bosses" in fact as well as theory. Information should be given through them, so that their men become accustomed to looking to them for guidance at all times. The squad leader, for example, should be the private's leader, teacher, and advisor in everything affecting his military existence. If a private needs an oil-and-thong case, he should go to his squad leader rather than to the supply sergeant.

Small units should go on independent training missions under their own leaders. The missions should be of such difficulty that they cannot be accomplished unless the leaders have real control of their units. In firing problems and other field exercises, control should remain with the junior leaders, and must not be usurped by safety officers or umpires.

### Companies

The biggest problem of the company commander in battle is to maintain control and direction. Training exercises to develop this technique must be practiced endlessly. The company must be able to advance, close, and change direction over all types of terrain, by daylight or in darkness. Each company commander must devise his own system of control to meet the conditions of the moment.

The technique of control must embrace the ability to

organize for an attack from a night security position. This is not easy. Many companies have great difficulty in getting off on time, in proper formation, and in the right direction for a dawn attack from a position in which immediate contact with an enemy has existed throughout the night. Even the problems of feeding and watering and resupplying ammunition under such conditions will be solved only when the company commander has effective and positive control.

Too much dependence on radio must be avoided. Extra company runners must be trained and used freely.

## **Battalions**

Everything noted above in regard to control of the company is applicable also to the battalion. Battalion commanders must be required to develop a positive control technique. They must be able to maintain direction through some system of effective but simple checks. These things must be done under all conditions of terrain and visibility. They are often neglected in training.

In the hedgerow country of Normandy, the countryside is a checkerboard of small fields of uneven shape enclosed by hedgerows. One regimental commander ordered his two attacking battalions to advance on an azimuth of 270 degrees. After the attack jumped off, both battalions lost direction. Some time later, one of them was attacking on an azimuth of 180 degrees, the other on an azimuth of zero. This unhappy situation was discovered when each battalion called for an artillery concentration on the position occupied by the other. When these requests reached the fire direction center, the battalion commanders were promptly notified. As a direct result of this occurrence, the advance on that front was delayed by more than 24 hours.

A battalion commander cannot fight his battalion from a command post. He must keep close to his assaulting companies if he is to have coordination. While it is seldom necessary for the battalion commander to be actually in the assault, he must be close enough to reach his assault companies whenever necessary. When a crisis arises or when the battalion halts for the night, the battalion commander must not leave everything in the hands of the leading company commanders. He must go forward to supervise and coordinate their activities.

A battalion commander in France reported that he was pinned to the ground, his battalion stopped. He was ordered to engage his reserve company. He couldn't find the company. He called it by radio; he sent out messengers; finally, he sent out staff officers; to no avail. The reason he could not find his reserve company was that he was too far to the rear. This incident might well be regarded with incredulity. Nevertheless, it did happen. Of course, when his attacking companies bogged down, the battalion commander should have gone forward to them with all possible speed.

In rapidly moving situations, battalions often halt for the night in immediate contact with the enemy. To resume the attack at dawn is a complicated and difficult procedure.

Many things must be done during the night, and at the same time the troops must get the maximum rest possible under the circumstances. This type of situation must be realistically simulated in training and practiced time and again.

Battalions must, above all, be able to attack on time. Enemy prisoners of war, both officers and noncommissioned officers, have commented on the frequent failure of our infantry to follow promptly our splendid artillery fires. A battalion which is 15 or 20 minutes late—and some have been—in crossing the line of departure has already lost its best chance of taking its objective on schedule.

Another fault of some battalion commanders is overcaution. They are afraid of isolating themselves and, if they seem to be moving faster than adjacent units, will go a hundred yards or so and halt. Then, in 15 minutes at the most, the enemy begins to dump mortar shells in their laps.

Many officers do not appreciate the sustaining power of an infantry battalion. If a formation in reasonable depth is adopted, the battalion is very powerful and cannot easily be destroyed. It can protect its flanks and its rear and, even if cut off, can hold out long enough to affect the general situation very favorably. These capabilities justify aggressiveness on the part of battalion commanders. They should vigorously exploit soft spots and never give way to the temptation to stop and wait for an adjacent unit to catch up.

Battalion commanders must learn more about artillery during training. Most of our artillery is accurate and dependable, and is present in ample quantity. The infantry, in general, is slow to take advantage of it. Men must be required to close in on the fires of the artillery—to "lean against" them. When these fires lift, leaders must take their men on the run into the neutralized area. If they do not, the artillery preparation will have been comparatively ineffective.

One very effective type of artillery fire used in France is called a "serenade." It consists of the firing of one or two rounds by every gun in the division artillery, all on a single target area and so timed that the rounds of all guns hit simultaneously. The effect cannot be adequately described.

Battalion commanders must keep themselves informed of the condition of their companies. In a long fight, a skillful battalion commander can often restore a badly mauled company by passing his support into the assault and getting the depleted company out to be calmed, reorganized, and at least to some extent rested.

A battalion in France was ordered to seize a hill mass which afforded the enemy observation not only over the nearby country but clear down to the landing beaches a good many miles away. As the battalion pushed ahead, its commander conferred with the artillery liaison officer. He pointed out his objective, after its capture, to beat off the inevitable counterattacks. The battalion took the objective and stopped the counterattacks that followed.

Later, this battalion, along with others, was required to push down the heavily wooded slope of this hill mass. After fighting its way down the slope and through a series of strongly organized reverse slope positions, the battalion commander

discovered a bridge which he considered a key point. He determined to capture it. The reverse slope positions were captured in the late afternoon. The bridge was taken about dark. The battalion had done an excellent job, and no criticism of the commander could have been offered if he had called an end to the day's work at this point.

However, there was a small village not far from the hill in the direction of the enemy. The battalion commander feared that if the Germans were allowed time during the night to prepare this village for defense he would be faced at daylight with the difficult and expensive task of dislodging the enemy. So he ordered a night attack with a limited objective and took the town.

The determination and forehandedness of this battalion commander were not wasted. Following the capture of the hill objective, the battalion beat off 15 German counterattacks, thanks very largely to the artillery concentrations which had been arranged before the battalion commenced its attack. The entire action was a remarkable demonstration of leadership, involving anticipation, aggressiveness, and tenacity. That kind of battalion commander wins wars.

### Regiments

The overcaution which, as previously noted, is a failing of some battalion commanders, is a shortcoming of regimental

commanders also. They worry about their flanks and try to maintain a linear formation in battle. The desirability of aligning units abreast is a fallacy that lingers on among officers who ought to know better.

During a continuous battle, the regimental staff must be so organized as to permit effective night preparation for the next day's attack. Local security, antitank weapons, food, water, ammunition, evacuation, and timely orders are among the things that must be remembered in order to insure combat effectiveness the following day. A regimental staff that is too worn out in the evening to get anything done at night is not functioning properly.

Regiments have a tendency to overlook the necessity for giving the troops hot food whenever possible. Division commanders should insist that regimental commanders see that this is done whenever the situation permits.

Regimental commanders can help keep their units in good combat condition by judicious rotation of battalions in reserve. Many an able battalion commander who might otherwise have got into serious difficulties has been rescued by a regimental commander wise enough to take the battalion out of action long enough to permit a few hours of undisturbed sleep.

It is doubtful whether any man 48 years of age or older has the physical or nervous strength required of a successful regimental commander in combat. There may be exceptions to the rule, but to gamble on an exception is poor policy.

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## JUNGLE FIGHTING NOTES

American troops learned how to fight the enemy on the tropical islands of the Pacific by a process of trial and error. Since the first of the jungle campaigns, training literature embodying the things they learned has been made available in increasing volume to troops in training, while the training itself has been modified appropriately.

It is, however, difficult to reproduce jungle conditions in most training areas. As a result, most troops in their first experience of jungle fighting find the conditions unnatural. To some extent, they must accustom themselves to jungle conditions by the same process of trial and error earlier units have undergone.

The latest Field Manual 72-20 offers a great deal of advice. The following are some examples:

- Instinctive fear of the jungle is often greater than fear of the enemy. The resultant mental strain, if fear of the jungle is not overcome, will eventually lower combat efficiency. Fear of jungle sounds, for example, can be overcome when troops learn to distinguish those that are natural from those that are man-made.

- Individual equipment should be kept at a minimum, because physical exhaustion comes rapidly in the jungle's hot, humid atmosphere.

- Most jungle terrain is not level. Much of it is broken by sharp elevations and depressions. Heavy equipment is often passed from hand to hand up a steep slope—a method often less exhausting to the men than carrying individual loads.

- All movement in the jungle should be made as silently as possible. The enemy is not frightened by the noise we make; he is merely alerted. Loud conversation, shouted orders, or rattling equipment are invitations to ambush. If there are enemy in the vicinity, talkative soldiers may not live to regret their carelessness.

- Existing good concealment is the rule, rather than the exception, in the jungle, but this fact should not lead to carelessness when an open area is encountered. The enemy's observation is often good, and it is as dangerous for men or vehicles to expose themselves on a skyline in the jungle as it is anywhere else.

- The enemy is adept at concealing himself and is very

patient. He will lie hidden almost indefinitely for a chance of firing at us from the rear. Therefore, troops should not be moved into a new area until it has been combed for lurking enemy.

- Few jungle maps are detailed or reliable. Aerial photographs may be more useful and should be consulted by members of a patrol before commencing their mission. The use of both vertical and oblique photos and the assistance of a trained photo-interpreter are advisable. Each member of the patrol, not merely the patrol leader, should have all possible advance information of the mission and the terrain to be traversed.

- A patrol is not doing its job if it merely passes through an area. It must make a thorough search, as the enemy does not reveal himself until it seems profitable to him to do so. Certain members of a patrol will frequently be assigned particular directions or sectors of observation for which they are responsible.

- Jungle bivouacs, especially of large units, are usually made during daylight in order to eliminate all possible movement above ground after dark. However, a patrol in enemy territory may be under observation when it bivouacs and thereby risks an attack in force at night. A ruse that has been successfully used by patrols in such circumstances is to make a daylight bivouac and, immediately after dark, move to another previously selected location.

- Many soldiers have a tendency to freeze into immobility when fired on in the jungle. But since the enemy's fire quite certainly means that he has located you, it is almost always better either to move to shelter or to advance against him.

- Visibility in the jungle is so limited that it is especially important to preserve contact between units. If this principle is neglected, troops may suddenly find that their flank contact is with the enemy.

- Men caught in a flare at night should move instantly either to cover or away from the area. The chances are that the enemy fired the flare because he detected their presence and needs only to locate them exactly before opening fire.

- The enemy employs many ruses at night to draw fire from our automatic weapons. He may want targets for his mortars, or he may want to locate our flanks. Strict orders as

to which weapons may fire, and under what conditions, are always issued for a night defensive position. Failure to follow these orders may endanger the entire unit.

- Machinegun fire should be kept low. Unless it is close to the ground, the enemy may be able to creep in under it. This is especially important when it is necessary to fire at night, as the enemy will be unobserved until very close to the position.

- Protective wire should be strung tight. Tight wire gives forth a loud, distinctive sound when cut. Loosely strung wire can be cut quietly, and may enable the enemy to pass through it at night undetected.

- Rear area installations located for convenience near important roads or trails are easily spotted by the enemy. Time and effort spent in camouflaging such an installation may be relatively ineffective if the location was poor to begin with.

- The desire to police up rear areas may cause neglect of proper camouflage and concealment. Cleaning out undergrowth, lining up tents and buildings, and widening and improving paths and trails make the installation a conspicuous target for enemy air and artillery.

- The enemy infiltrates our lines skillfully and boldly with patrols as small as two men. No rear area is safe from surprise attack. All installations therefore should be protected by perimeter defenses partially manned at all times. In addition, a 24-hour guard should be maintained on airstrips, motor parks, supply dumps, and so forth.

- Our troops have good air cover and support. Big patrol bombers, usually operating in pairs, are excellent spotters because of their ability to remain over an area for extended periods. They cause enemy artillery to keep silent for fear of revealing its positions and they also locate targets for our own weapons.

- Enemy prisoners are extremely valuable to our intelligence personnel and should be captured and brought in, after being stripped and searched, whenever possible. It is equally important to bring in all documents found on them. Soldiers should acquire the ability to recognize some written enemy characters of military significance and to interpret enemy identification tags.

